

Incorporating literature in EFL classroom: attitudes and experiences

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Abstract

This study presents findings about first-year undergraduate students' attitudes to and experiences with reading literary texts in an EFL (English as a Foreign Language) context. It also explores the degree of literature integration in EFL lessons in Bosnia and Herzegovina. We conducted the research with ninety-eight students at the International University of Sarajevo (IUS); we examined their attitudes towards different literary genres, difficulties they face while reading literary texts, the type of assistance they prefer while reading, and their general interests concerning literature. The findings indicate that students prefer short stories to other genres and learn best through exploring themes meaningful to them. The results also show that literary texts in EFL classrooms are frequently used for vocabulary purposes. Literature is mainly integrated into EFL classrooms, except for technical high schools and madrasahs.

Keywords: EFL, literature, literary texts, attitudes, experiences, literature integration

Introduction

The landscape of foreign language teaching underwent a transformative shift with the emergence of the Audiolingual Method and the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach. These groundbreaking methodologies revolutionized the learning process by empowering students to use the target language communicatively, both within and outside of the classroom. In this new era, curricula, textbooks, and materials were tailored to emphasize the functional application of language, inadvertently marginalizing literature in English classrooms. Literature was seen as a potential distraction from the primary goal of linguistic functionality, given its perceived linguistic complexity and demanding nature, leading to its exclusion from the curriculum (Stein 1965). However, scholars such as Ragusa (1965), Duff and Maley (1990), Lazar (1993), Ronnqvist and Sell (1994), and Parkinson and Thomas (2000) have argued that literature serves not only to educate and entertain but also to provide delight and enjoyment. They contend that when incorporated through engaging activities, literature can significantly impact crucial language skills such as vocabulary acquisition, reading comprehension, writing proficiency, listening comprehension, pronunciation, and speaking ability.

The context in Bosnia and Herzegovina presents a unique situation, as it was only after the Bosnian war in the 1990s that English assumed the role of the primary foreign language in primary and secondary education. This shift occurred due to the former Yugoslavia's historical preference for the Russian language above all others (Imamović and Džanić 2016). In contemporary English language teaching, educators employ an eclectic approach that combines diverse methodologies to enhance language acquisition. An examination of the available curriculum for English language instruction in Canton Sarajevo gymnasiums since 2018 reveals a pedagogical approach characterized by what Cook (as cited in Takahashi 2015) refers to as "bits of language lifted from their original context" (p. 26). These fragments encompass a range of sources, such as brochures, newspaper articles, magazines, and web pages.

⁶ The research conducted in this paper is based on the author's master's thesis.

Additionally, the curriculum stipulates that students will engage with literary texts, encompassing both original versions and graded readers (Ministarstvo za odgoj i obrazovanje Kantona Sarajevo, 2018). However, the distribution between these two categories remains somewhat ambiguous. Given this context, the primary objective of this research is to investigate the extent to which literature is presently integrated into English as Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms while also exploring students' attitudes and experiences concerning the reading of literary texts. While previous studies have extensively documented the positive impacts of literature on language learning, particularly in EFL contexts, there remains a noticeable dearth of research investigating students' attitudes and experiences when it comes to reading literary works, particularly within these specific regions. As this study progresses, it will become evident that the advantages associated with incorporating literature in EFL classrooms surpass any potential drawbacks. This paper aims to offer insight and answers to these questions:

RQ1: What are freshman undergraduate students' attitudes and preferences regarding reading literature in the EFL context?

RQ2: What are freshman undergraduate students' experiences with reading literary texts in EFL courses?

RQ3: To which degree were freshman undergraduate students exposed to authentic materials, hence literature, in EFL classrooms?

This paper expects to support the following hypotheses:

H1: The attitudes and experiences of freshman undergraduate students towards reading literary texts are mixed.

H2: Freshman undergraduate students hold the belief that utilizing literature has a positive impact on the development of language skills.

H3: The integration of literature in EFL classrooms is limited in scope.

The subsequent sections will explore these research questions and hypotheses in more depth.

Theoretical background

Use of literature in language classrooms throughout history

Throughout the history of language education, literature has experienced varying degrees of importance. The Grammar-Translation Method heavily relied on literary texts for language learning, while later methods like Audiolingual and Communicative approaches marginalized literature in favor of other materials (Stein 1965, Larsen-Freeman and Anderson 2011, Bobkina and Dominguez 2014, Takahashi 2015). However, recent research calls for reevaluating the literature's role, highlighting its potential for cultural understanding and emotional engagement in language learning (Bobkina and Dominguez 2014).

Advantages of integrating literature in EFL Classroom

Ragusa (1965) contends that literary texts in foreign language classrooms function as a mechanism to elevate students' language proficiency. By utilizing poems, students can more easily grasp the sounds and rhythms of a foreign language. Complex grammatical structures become more comprehensible when presented in a meaningful text. However, literature encompasses more than rhythms, sounds, vocabulary, idioms, and syntactic forms. It holds intrinsic artistic value and enables students to broaden their horizons by gaining insights into other cultures, history, customs, and habits. She emphasizes that literary texts foster language sensitivity and an appreciation for art.

Tevdovska (2016) investigates the substantial role of literature in foreign language education through her study titled "Students' Attitudes and Preferences towards Literary Texts in an ELT Setting." She highlights the pedagogical benefits of reading literature; she contends that incorporating literature into

the curriculum offers numerous advantages, such as motivation through engaging texts, exposure to authentic materials, and cultural knowledge acquisition.

Parkinson and Thomas (2000) outline ten benefits of integrating literature into EFL classrooms: linguistic modeling, fostering linguistic competence, enriching cultural understanding, providing authenticity, mental stimulation, enhanced memorability, utilization of rhythmic resources, motivational content, openness to interpretation, and practicality.

According to Van (2009), incorporating literature into language teaching aligns harmoniously with the principles of Communicative Language Teaching. Thoughtfully introducing literary texts ensures student enjoyment and fosters critical thinking skills. Literature also provides opportunities for collaborative work among peers. Van argues that literature empowers students to form opinions and construct individual meanings, leading them to initiate and sustain activities centered around literary themes. Engaging in such active participation within the classroom fosters self-directed or autonomous learning. Teachers must understand literary works well enough to select the most suitable texts for their students and design engaging activities.

Zoreda and Vivaldo-Lima (2008) advocate for integrating literature in EFL classrooms to overcome negative attitudes towards the target culture.

Stern (1985) maintains that reading influences writing and significantly fosters creativity. Literary works are rich with diverse language devices that serve as a wellspring of inspiration for readers to develop their writing skills. After encountering a memorable piece, readers often strive to emulate the “narrative essence” while injecting their own originality.

Integrating literature in EFL classrooms offers manifold advantages, exposing students to varied language styles, vocabulary, and grammar, while providing cultural enrichment and expanding horizons. Literary texts motivate students, spark critical thinking, and nurture creativity. Overall, literature enhances language skills and provides a well-rounded education.

Drawbacks of integrating literature in EFL classrooms

The challenges associated with incorporating literature in EFL classrooms extend beyond students' reading and comprehension abilities. It begins with the preparedness and qualifications of teachers to teach literature. Teachers often need more autonomy in selecting literary works, as external authorities typically predetermine the choices.

Duncan and Paran (2018) highlight the scarcity of empirical classroom-based research and emphasize the need for verifiable evidence of classroom practice. Although there has been an increase in empirical research, it remains insufficient and infrequent. The authors address this gap by conducting qualitative interviews with teachers to uncover the challenges they face. Teachers expressed that literary texts are intimidating for secondary education students due to linguistic and conceptual demands. Teachers also voiced concerns about the time-consuming nature of reading and analyzing literary texts, which may detract from other classroom priorities.

McKay (1982) notes that literary language significantly differs from Standard English, often posing challenges for students in terms of vocabulary and sentence structures. One main obstacle in reading literary texts within EFL classrooms relates to their cultural context.

Lazar (1993) cautions that culturally enriched literary works can sometimes mislead readers, as they may mistakenly assume that a novel portrays a picture of an entire society while it reflects a specific milieu during a particular historical period.

Another potential drawback of incorporating literature in EFL classrooms is the limited availability of authentic and engaging literary materials that cater to learners' language learning needs and interests. This lack of suitable resources can hinder the effectiveness of incorporating literature into language learning and may lead to disengagement or frustration among students.

Selecting appropriate literary texts for EFL learning

Including literature in foreign language classrooms has raised questions about the type of literature to incorporate. McRae (1991) distinguishes between "literature with a capital L," referring to canonical works, and "literature with a small l," encompassing popular fiction. While classical literature is often considered necessary, it can be linguistically challenging and intimidating for students. Students are more likely to engage with texts that resonate with their interests and experiences (Rosenblatt, 2005). Ortells (2020) suggests that introducing canonical authors through works specifically written for children can strike a balance. However, the selection of literature should be aligned with students' needs, experiences, and maturity levels (Lesesne et al. 1997). Young adult literature offers relatable themes, characters, and language, making it more appealing to young readers (Reed 1994, Wilder and Teasley 2000). Despite its advantages, there is resistance to incorporating young adult literature in classrooms due to the perceived lack of literary value (Hays 2016). Thorough research and careful selection can ensure that students are exposed to enjoyable and meaningful literary works.

Exploring diverse literary genres in EFL classrooms: Enriching language learning

Each genre presents unique benefits and considerations for effective EFL instruction. Incorporating short stories in the EFL classroom offers several advantages. They can be read and analyzed within a few classes, making them less time-consuming and encouraging for students (Collie and Slater 1987). The brevity of short stories enables students to complete them more quickly, fostering a sense of accomplishment upon finishing their readings. Additionally, teachers can select short stories with diverse themes and concepts, enhancing the likelihood that each student will encounter a story aligned with their interests. While longer and more complex, novels can build vocabulary, develop reading comprehension skills, and foster intercultural communicative competence. Poetry, though challenging, brings culturally and linguistically enriched content, allowing learners to experience the power of language and promoting creative expression (Collie and Slater 1987). Graded readers, simplified versions of original works, assist in understanding texts, but they may lose critical sociocultural connotations and linguistic sophistication (Kara 2019, Rönnqvist and Sell 1994).

Understanding students' reading preferences and experiences with literature

The American Psychological Association defines attitude as a persistent evaluation of an object or concept influenced by beliefs, emotions, and past behaviors. At the same time, experience refers to conscious events or stimuli that result in learning. Research suggests that students show interest in protagonists of the same gender, prefer contemporary settings, and are drawn to characters slightly older than themselves (Johnson, McClanahan, and Mertz 1999, Garland 1998, Reed 1994). A study with undergraduate students revealed a preference for short stories and novels, while poetry was perceived as challenging (Tevdovska 2016). Graded readers were well-received, although archaic and complex language posed comprehension difficulties. Students expressed a desire for background information on a storyline's social, cultural, and historical aspects (Tevdovska 2016). Other studies demonstrated positive attitudes toward literature in EFL settings (Alfauzan and Hussain 2016). The forthcoming sections of this paper will provide insights into the attitudes and experiences of Bosnian students regarding reading literature in the EFL context.

Methodology

Research design

The present study adopts a quantitative research framework and utilizes a survey designed in a Likert scale format. The survey draws heavily from Tevdovska's (2016) research which "examines students'

attitudes towards the criteria for text selection in EFL contexts, including the most appropriate genre and text type, the language used of literary texts, the relevance of literary texts and the impact on students' beliefs and personal life, as well as representations of culture presented in literary texts" (Tevdovska 2016, 161). The survey instrument was extended and modified to specifically address the research questions of this study (see Appendix A). Data collection spanned over one year, commencing in November 2020. While the initial distribution of the survey yielded an insufficient number of responses, it was during October and November 2021 that the sample size was increased.

Participants

The participants in this study comprised freshman undergraduate students enrolled at the International University of Sarajevo (IUS). The research encompassed students from five distinct faculties at IUS, all enrolled in the Academic English and Effective Communication (ELIT100) course. The motive for selecting this particular group was their recent completion of secondary education and their diverse geographical backgrounds across Bosnia and Herzegovina. By including students from various educational backgrounds, the study sought to provide a comprehensive understanding of the incorporation of literature and the experiences and attitudes towards literature from different regions and schools. A total of ninety-eight students actively participated in the research.

Research instrument

As previously mentioned, this survey was structured using a Likert scale, comprising 40 items, with the initial nine items on demographics (see Appendix B). All items were rated on a scale from 1 to 5 (1=strongly disagree; 2=disagree; 3=neutral; 4=agree; 5=strongly agree). The data collected was analyzed through the SPSS program, using the descriptive tools available on the software.

Results and discussion

Respondent student profile

Table 1. Nationality

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Bosnian	83	84.7	84.7	84.7
	Syrian	1	1.0	1.0	85.7
	Turkish	10	10.2	10.2	95.9
	Croatian	1	1.0	1.0	96.9
	American	1	1.0	1.0	98.0
	British	1	1.0	1.0	99.0
	Canadian	1	1.0	1.0	100.0
	Total	98	100.0	100.0	

One of the aims of this survey is to examine the extent of literature integration in EFL classrooms, encompassing both Bosnia and Herzegovina and other regions. To achieve this, freshman undergraduate students at IUS were targeted, comprising both Bosnian and international students. The inclusion of international students was intended to offer a more comprehensive outlook on the use of literature in EFL classrooms beyond Bosnia and Herzegovina. However, it is noteworthy that the majority of

respondents (84.7%) were of Bosnian nationality. Consequently, while all respondents' answers will be considered in measuring general attitudes and experiences, the focus on examining the incorporation of literature in EFL classrooms in Bosnia and Herzegovina will primarily rely on the responses of Bosnian participants due to the limited representation of other nationalities in the survey.

Attitudes

This section answers the first research question: What are freshman undergraduate students' attitudes and preferences regarding reading literature in the EFL context?

Attitudes towards reading literary texts

Table 2. General attitudes towards literary genre

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
1. I enjoy reading novels in English.	98	1	5	3.74	1.00
2. I enjoy reading short stories in English.	98	1	5	4.27	.81
3. I enjoy reading poems in English.	98	1	5	3.37	1.23
4. I enjoy reading plays in English.	98	1	5	3.11	1.06
5. I enjoy reading graded readers and simplified texts in English.	98	1	5	3.35	1.02

In summarizing the scale assessing attitudes toward specific literary genres, it can be inferred that the short story emerges as the most favored genre among the respondents. This aligns with the findings of Collie and Slatter (1987), who note that short stories are an effective means of introducing literature to students. They highlight that the concise nature of short stories allows for them to be read and analyzed within a few class sessions, making them less time-consuming and potentially discouraging for readers. It is noteworthy to mention that the present survey builds upon the work of Tevdovska (2016), with this particular set of questions remaining unaltered. The original survey yielded similar findings, indicating a shared appreciation for short stories and novels among the participants in both studies. The novel in this survey follows as the second most popular genre, with the primary differentiating factor possibly being its length, which may contribute to its slightly lower popularity compared to the short story. Poems and graded readers exhibit a similar average response, with average responses of 3.37 and 3.35, respectively, positioning them as less popular genres by participants in both surveys. Lastly, plays receive the least favorable response among the genres, with an average response of 3.11.

Facing difficulties and challenges while reading literary texts

Table 3. Difficulties

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
6. I experience difficulties	98	1	5	2.43	1.12

when reading poetry in English.						
7. I experience difficulties when reading prose in English.	98	1	5	2.14	1.05	
8. I experience difficulties reading English literary texts due to a lack of time for reading.	98	1	5	2.64	1.20	
9. I experience difficulties reading English literary texts due to a lack of willingness to read.	98	1	5	2.62	1.24	
10. I face difficulties while reading English literary texts due to the complex cultural aspects described in the texts (beliefs, relationships, values, traditions).	98	1	5	2.06	1.10	
11. I face difficulties while reading English literary texts due to the length of the literary texts.	98	1	5	2.50	1.18	
12. I face difficulties while reading English literary texts due to the complex and archaic (old) language used in the text.	98	1	5	2.97	1.27	

The objective of this section was to gather insights into the potential difficulties students might face while reading literary texts in English, with a particular emphasis on the genres of poetry and prose. The results revealed that students perceive poetry as more challenging to read than prose, corroborating earlier findings highlighting poetry's complexity and linguistic richness. Additionally, the survey explored two factors contributing to reading difficulties: a lack of time and willingness to read. Interestingly, students reported facing more problems due to a lack of motivation rather than time constraints, indicating that motivation plays a significant role in their engagement with literary texts.

Exploring different and complex cultural elements and settings in literary works poses fewer difficulties, as 71.4% of students do not find it challenging, suggesting a certain level of cultural openness and receptiveness among the participants (see Appendix A). These findings contradict some literature review sources that suggested cultural complexities as potential barriers to understanding literary texts in an EFL context (Lazar 1993. Hussein and Al-Emami 2016).

Additionally, over half of the respondents (56.1%) do not encounter issues with the length of literary texts. In comparison, 25% perceive text length as a hindrance to their reading experience, providing a

possible explanation for their preference for shorter genres such as short stories (see Appendix A). Students often struggle with reading novels in a foreign language, with length being a contributing factor.

Lastly, students exhibit the least comfort with reading literary texts that employ archaic language, a finding consistent with expectations, as such language is not commonly encountered in everyday speech. Additionally, 41.8% of students find reading literary texts containing archaic language challenging (see Appendix A). McKey (1982) and Khatib, Rezaei, and Derakhshan (2011) also support this notion, emphasizing the linguistic distance between literary language and standard English, including outdated vocabulary and semantic shifts.

These findings shed light on the specific difficulties that students encounter when reading literary texts in an EFL context. Understanding these challenges can inform instructional approaches, curriculum design, and the selection of appropriate texts to support students' comprehension and engagement with literature.

Student preferences for assistance

Table 4. Help preferences

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
13. It helps me when my English teacher provides background information (culture, history, politics, and author) related to the text.	98	2	5	4.09	.81
14. It helps me when my English teacher introduces different language activities, group work, and pair work when working on the literary text.	98	1	5	3.47	1.00
15. It helps me when my English teacher provides information related to the topic, theme, plot and characters in the literary text.	98	2	5	4.02	.81
16. It helps me when the topics in the literary texts are related to and relevant for my personal life.	98	1	5	3.92	.91
17. It helps me when the literary text introduces cultural aspects which are	98	2	5	3.78	.78

familiar to me.

This section aimed to investigate students' preferences regarding the assistance provided by their teachers when reading literary texts. Considering the concerns expressed by authors regarding the integration of literature in language classrooms (McKay 1982, Lazar 1993, Hoque 2007, Ducan and Paran 2018), this subscale sought to emphasize the significance of effective guidance and support from teachers in overcoming potential obstacles and maximizing students' reading and comprehension abilities.

The survey findings indicate that students generally hold positive attitudes towards receiving assistance and guidance from their teachers while exploring literary texts. Comprising five items, this subscale revealed two key areas where students identified substantial teacher input as particularly helpful. The items "It helps me when my English teacher provides background information (culture, history, politics, and author) related to the text," and "It helps me when my English teacher provides information related to the topic, theme, plot, and characters in the literary text," received the highest number of positive responses, with average ratings of 4.09 and 4.02, respectively. Only a small percentage of respondents (5.1%), indicated that they did not find this type of support helpful (see Appendix A).

Another item, "It helps me when the topics in the literary texts are related to and relevant to my personal life," garnered a significant number of positive responses, with an average rating of 3.92. This finding aligns with the insights of researchers such as Bushman and Bushman (1997), Rosenblatt (2005), and Lee and Sprately (2009), who emphasize the importance of relatable storylines to enhance student motivation and engagement with literature.

Additionally, respondents exhibit a positive attitude towards encountering familiar cultural aspects within the literary texts, as reflected by an average response of 3.78.

The item "It helps me when my English teacher introduces different language activities, group work, and pair work when working on the literary text," received the least number of positive responses, with an average rating of 3.47. A considerable proportion of students, approximately 33%, remained neutral in their responses, while 51% agreed with the statement (see Appendix A). This suggests that the type of language activity may be a secondary concern for students as long as they receive valuable information and engage with relatable content.

Overall, these findings underscore the importance of adequate teacher support and guidance in facilitating students' engagement with literary texts, providing relevant background information, and connecting the texts to students' personal experiences. By addressing students' specific needs and interests, teachers can enhance their reading experiences and foster a deeper understanding and appreciation of literature in the EFL classroom.

Personal interests and reading preferences

Table 5. Interests and preferences

		Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
18. I am interested in literary texts which introduce topics and cultural aspects which differ from my own values and culture.	98	2	5	3.93	.82

19. Watching a film or video related to the literary text helps me understand the text better.	98	1	5	3.90	.96
20. Reading for pleasure in English has improved my English skills.	98	1	5	4.26	.93
21. Reading children's literature when I was a child enhanced my love for literature.	98	1	5	3.35	1.27
22. I find contemporary works of literature more engaging than canonical works (canonical: Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Dickens, Kafka...)	98	1	5	2.95	1.06

This subscale aimed to gain insights into students' general interests and preferences regarding reading literary texts. Comprising five items, it sought to explore their openness to diverse cultural aspects, the potential benefits of related films or videos, the impact of reading for pleasure on their English skills, the influence of children's literature on their love for literature, and their engagement with contemporary versus canonical works.

Regarding the general interests and preferences of the students, it can be observed that reading for pleasure, which recorded the highest number of positive responses in this subscale (4.26), is widely recognized as having a positive impact on their language skills. This finding echoes the ideas of Krashen (2004), who highlights the significant impact of reading for pleasure on language acquisition, emphasizing that learners can continue to improve their language skills even outside formal educational settings. Parkinson and Thomas (2000), Duff and Maley (1990), and Lazar (1993) further support this notion, stressing the motivational power of reading meaningful texts and relatable storylines. The strong correlation between reading for pleasure and improved English skills underscores the importance of providing students with opportunities to engage with literature that resonates with their interests and preferences.

Furthermore, students exhibit open-mindedness towards engaging with literary texts that introduce diverse cultural aspects and values, as indicated by the average response of 3.93. This finding aligns with the insights of scholars such as Ragusa (1965), Parkinson and Thomas (2000), Bobkina and Dominguez (2014), and Lazar (1993), who emphasize that literature broadens students' horizons, fosters cultural understanding, and helps overcome negative attitudes toward unfamiliar cultures.

The item exploring the helpfulness of watching a movie related to the literary text also received a generally positive average response of 3.90. They recognized the value of visual aids in enhancing their comprehension of the literary text. However, it is essential to note Agulló's (2003) cautionary view that using films should not replace the necessary combination of reading and watching but rather complement and extend the input reception beyond the classroom.

However, in comparison to the aforementioned items that garnered more positive attitudes, the item pertaining to children's literature records a slightly lower average response of 3.35. Lastly, the item

examining preferences of contemporary over canonical literature yields an average response of 2.95, with many respondents expressing a neutral stance in their answers.

Previous experiences with reading literary texts

This section provides answers to the second research question: What are freshman undergraduate students' experiences with reading literary texts in EFL courses?

Table 6. Experiences

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
23. My previous English teachers designed translation activities with literary texts.	98	1	5	3.14	1.13
24. Literary texts which were utilized in my previous English classes have improved my English skills.	98	1	5	3.57	1.10
25. My previous English teachers always tended to design speaking rather than reading activities.	98	1	5	3.28	1.02
26. Literary texts in my previous English classes were analysed for grammar purposes.	98	1	5	3.18	1.12
27. Literary texts in my previous English classes were analysed for vocabulary purposes.	98	1	5	3.92	.82
28. Literary texts in my previous English classes were analysed for critical thinking purposes.	98	1	5	3.42	1.07

Among the six items in this scale, the item with the highest level of agreeableness among students was "Literary texts in my previous English classes were analyzed for vocabulary purposes," with 82.7% of students confirming this usage (see Appendix A). Scholars such as Belcher and Hirvela (2000) and Duff and Maley (1990) assert that incorporating literary texts in EFL classrooms exposes students to different registers, thereby enriching their vocabulary. Unfamiliar vocabulary can pose a challenge in understanding the text, but it also serves as a valuable source for acquiring new vocabulary, hence the predominant focus on vocabulary purposes.

Students also acknowledged the utilization of literary texts for fostering critical thinking skills, with an average response of 3.42. Van (2009) and Duff and Maley (1990) endorse the idea that reading literature has a beneficial impact on critical thinking abilities, as it enables students to develop their capacity to think critically, form their own opinions, and engage in meaningful discussions with their peers. Using literature for critical thinking purposes adds versatile content to the classroom environment.

Activities related to translation and grammar practice received less emphasis. For the item "Literary texts in my previous English classes were analyzed for grammar purposes," 49% of students reported this usage, and for the item "My previous English teachers designed translation activities with literary texts," 48% of respondents provided a positive response (see Appendix A). Scholars such as Parkinson and Thomas (2000) and Lazar (1993) acknowledge the potential of reading literary texts in EFL classrooms for developing linguistic competence. However, these activities are often associated with the outdated grammar-translation method. In the current post-method era, an eclectic approach allows teachers to draw on the strengths of various methods.

In terms of whether their previous English teachers focused more on designing speaking activities rather than reading activities, a significant number of students maintained a neutral stance, resulting in an average response of 3.28. While various activities related to literature were present in English classrooms, the primary emphasis seemed to be on vocabulary skill development.

The final item in the scale, "Literary texts that were utilized in my previous English classes have improved my English skills," received an average response of 3.57, which differs from the average response for "Reading for pleasure in English has improved my English skills," where the recorded average response was 4.26 (see Table 5).

Literature in EFL classrooms is primarily employed for vocabulary purposes, but its benefits extend beyond that. Translation activities facilitate comparisons between native and target languages while performing scenes from plays or acting out scenes from short stories can be engaging and provide opportunities for practicing pronunciation, listening, and vocabulary skills. Engaging in discussions around literature is a valuable means to foster critical thinking skills, allowing students to explore diverse topics and exchange their opinions with peers. By reading literary texts, students gain insights into the world around them, cultivating attitudes and broadening their perspectives.

Integration levels of literature in EFL classrooms

This section answers the third research question: To which degree were freshman undergraduate students exposed to authentic materials, hence literature, in EFL classrooms?

Table 7. Integrating literature

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Nationality: BandH	83				
29. My previous English teachers utilized literary texts (novels, poems, plays, short stories) in English classes.	83	1	5	3.66	1.10
30. Reading literary texts in my English classes was mandatory.	83	1	5	3.59	1.14
31. Literary texts in my previous English classes were barely discussed.	83	1	5	2.19	1.09
Valid N (listwise)	83				

As English is the primary foreign language in Bosnia and Herzegovina, this research question aimed to explore the incorporation of literature in the curriculum and EFL classrooms within this context.

The first item in the scale, "My previous English teachers utilized literary texts (novels, poems, plays, short stories) in English classes," received an average response of 3.66, indicating that 67.5% of students acknowledged the use of literary texts by their previous English teachers in the EFL classroom (see Appendix A). However, when considering the second item, "Reading literary texts in my English classes was mandatory," 61.4% of respondents stated that reading literary texts was compulsory in their previous education (see Appendix A). Interestingly, although a majority of students reported the mandatory nature of reading literary texts, the percentage of students who affirmed the utilization of literature by their teachers remained the same at 67.5% (see Appendix A). It is worth noting that earlier analysis of students' backgrounds and previous education revealed that those who responded negatively to these items typically came from technical high schools and madrasahs.

The findings indicate that a significant proportion of students experienced the utilization of literary texts in their previous English classes, despite the varying degrees of mandatory reading requirements. However, challenges and concerns surrounding the incorporation of literature in EFL classrooms persist, including teachers' perceptions of its complexity and potential time constraints. The availability of pre-existing textbooks and the need to adhere to curriculum objectives also contribute to the limited integration of literature. Further examination and dialogue among educators and curriculum developers may be necessary to address these challenges and find effective ways to integrate literature in EFL classrooms in a balanced and meaningful manner.

Conclusion

Evaluation of research questions and hypotheses

RQ1: The first research question examined freshman undergraduate students' attitudes toward reading literary texts in the EFL context. The findings revealed that students expressed positive attitudes towards reading short stories, which were the most well-received genre among respondents. Students also encountered difficulties with poetry but expressed a willingness to explore different cultural aspects presented in literary texts. Students appreciated teacher guidance, particularly in providing background information and explaining themes and plots. Reading for pleasure was also seen as beneficial for improving language skills.

RQ2: The second research question explored students' experiences with reading literary texts in the EFL context. The results indicated that literature was primarily utilized for vocabulary development in students' previous English classes. Students also believed that reading literary texts positively impacted their English skills, although reading for pleasure was perceived as having a more significant effect.

H1: The hypothesis stated that freshman undergraduate students' attitudes and experiences with reading literary texts would be mixed. The findings confirmed this hypothesis, as students displayed a range of attitudes towards literature, with positive responses related to personal interests, guidance from teachers, and reading for pleasure.

H2: The hypothesis proposed that freshman undergraduate students believed that the use of literature positively affected language skill development. The results supported this hypothesis, as students acknowledged improving their language skills through reading literary texts in class and reading for pleasure. However, there was a notable difference in the perceived impact, with reading for pleasure receiving higher recognition.

RQ3: The third research question examined the extent to which freshman undergraduate students were exposed to authentic materials, including literature, in the EFL classroom. The findings indicated that a significant proportion of students reported the use of literary texts by their previous English teachers. However, the mandatory nature of reading literary texts varied among students, and there was

a correlation between the absence of literature in classrooms and students from technical high schools and madrasahs.

H3: The hypothesis suggested that literature was integrated into EFL classrooms to a limited extent. The findings supported this hypothesis, highlighting possible challenges such as time constraints and teachers' perceptions of linguistic and conceptual demands associated with literary texts. However, it was observed that literature integration was more prevalent in gymnasiums.

Recommendations

Based on the analysis of genre preferences and potential difficulties with reading literary texts, several suggestions can be made regarding text selection in EFL classrooms. The survey results, along with previous research, indicate that students have a strong preference for short stories as a literary genre. Therefore, it may be beneficial for teachers to prioritize short stories as the primary genre in their curriculum. Texts that pose significant linguistic challenges or contain archaic language should be approached with caution, as they may hinder students' understanding and engagement.

When selecting texts, it is essential to consider students' interests and cultural awareness. Students have demonstrated an open-mindedness toward reading about different cultural aspects, and providing them with relevant background information is important. This includes explanations of unfamiliar cultural elements, historical references, as well as information related to themes, settings, and characters. Texts should introduce relatable and exciting themes to stimulate meaningful discussions in the classroom. To ensure text selection aligns with students' interests, engaging students in discussions or surveys to gauge their preferences and incorporate their input may be beneficial.

While this study provided valuable insights into students' attitudes and experiences, it is descriptive in nature and does not explain the underlying reasons behind the observed phenomena. To further enhance the research, a qualitative approach could be employed. Conducting interviews with teachers and students would provide deeper insights into the degree of literature incorporation in EFL classrooms, the balance between authentic and "inauthentic" materials, and the decision-making processes involved. Experienced teachers could share their observations on the impact of literature on language skill development, shedding light on its benefits and drawbacks. Follow-up interviews with students would allow for a more in-depth exploration of their attitudes, preferences, and the topics that facilitate their learning effectively.

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Appendix A

Survey Questionnaire and Responses

Table A1

Question	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
1. I enjoy reading novels in English.	3.1%	8.2%	23.5%	41.8%	23.5%
2. I enjoy reading short stories in English.	1.0%	2.0%	11.2%	40.8%	44.9%
3. I enjoy reading poems in English.	8.2%	17.3%	26.5%	25.5%	22.4%
4. I enjoy reading plays in English.	8.2%	18.4%	35.7%	29.6%	8.2%
5. I enjoy reading graded readers and simplified texts in English.	4.1%	15.3%	35.7%	31.6%	13.3%
6. I experience difficulties when reading poetry in English.	22.4%	35.7%	22.4%	15.3%	4.1%
7. I experience difficulties when reading prose in English.	33.7%	32.7%	20.4%	12.2%	1.0%
8. I experience difficulties reading English literary texts due a to lack of time for reading.	20.4%	28.6%	23.5%	21.4%	6.1%
9. I experience difficulties reading English literary texts due to a lack of willingness to read.	22.4%	27.6%	22.4%	20.4%	7.1%
10. I face difficulties while reading English literary texts due to the complex cultural aspects described in the texts described in the texts (beliefs, relationships, values, traditions).	37.8%	33.7%	17.3%	7.1%	4.1%
11. I face difficulties while reading English literary texts due to the length of the literary texts.	23.5%	32.7%	18.4%	21.4%	4,1%
12. I face difficulties while reading English literary texts due to the complex and archaic (old) language used in the text.	16.3%	22.4%	19.4%	31.6%	10.2%

13. It helps me when my English teacher provides background information (culture, history, politics, and author) related to the text.	-	5.1%	13.3%	49.0%	32.7%
14. It helps me when my English teacher introduces different language activities, group work, and pair work, when working on the literary text.	4.1%	11.2%	32.7%	37.8%	14.3%
15. It helps me when my English teacher provides information related to the topic, theme, plot and characters in the literary text.	-	5.1%	16.3%	50.0%	28.6%
16. It helps me when the topics in the literary texts are related to and relevant for my personal life.	2.0%	3.1%	24.5%	41.8%	28.6%
17. It helps me when the literary text introduces cultural aspects, which are familiar to me.	-	3.1%	34.7%	43.9%	18.4%
18. I am interested in literary texts, which introduce topics, and cultural aspects, which differ from my own values and culture.	-	5.1%	22.4%	46.9%	25.5%
19. Watching a film or video related to the literary text helps me understand the text better.	1.0%	8.2%	21.4%	38.8%	30.6%
20. Reading for pleasure in English has improved my English skills	3.1%	-	15.3%	31.6%	50.0%
21. Reading children's literature when I was a child enhanced my love for literature.	10.2%	15.3%	27.6%	23.5%	23.5%
22. I find contemporary works of literature more engaging than canonical works: (canonical: Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Dickens, Kafka...)	12.2%	16.3%	41.8%	23.5%	6.1%
23. My previous English teacher designed translation activities with literary texts.	7.1%	27.6%	17.3%	39.8%	8.2%
24. Literary texts, which were utilized in my previous English classes, have improved my English skills.	7.1%	9.2%	20.4%	45.9%	17.3%
25. My previous English teachers always tended to design speaking rather than reading activities.	4.1%	16.3%	40.8%	25.5%	13.3%
26. Literary texts in my previous English classes were analyzed for grammar purposes.	8.2%	22.4%	20.4%	40.8%	8.2%
27. Literary texts in my previous English classes were analyzed for vocabulary purposes.	2.0%	5.1%	10.2%	64.3%	18.4%
28. Literary texts in my previous English classes were analyzed for critical thinking purposes.	4.1%	18.4%	23.5%	39.8%	14.3%
29. My previous English teachers utilized literary texts (novels, poems, plays, short stories) in English classes.	4.8%	13.3%	14.5%	45.8%	21.7%

30. Reading literary texts in my English classes was mandatory.	4.8%	15.7%	18.1%	38.6%	22.9%
31. Literary texts in my previous English classes were barely discussed.	31.3%	36.1%	16.9%	13.3%	2.4%

Appendix B

Demographic information

The initial section of the survey aimed to gather demographic information about the participants. These details provide valuable insights for analyzing potential differences in attitudes and experiences with literature based on gender, academic background, and educational history.

Table B1

SQ1: Gender: male/ female.
SQ2: Nationality?
SQ3: Age: 18-19/ 20-21/ 22-25/ 25+
SQ4: Year of study: 1st/ 2nd/ 3rd/ 4th.
SQ5: Faculty: FENS/ FASS/ FBA/ FEDU/ FLW.
SQ6: Department?
SQ7: I started learning English in: elementary school/ high school/ university.
SQ8: I attended English Language School (ELS) at IUS: yes/no
SQ9: Which high school did you attend and in which city?