

Unveiling the multifaceted impact of literature in the EFL classroom: a comparative study on cognitive and affective benefits

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Katarína Devečková

Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra, Slovakia; katarina.deveckova@ukf.sk

Abstract

This article conducts a thorough comparative analysis of recent scholarly publications, authored by educators from diverse geographical origins, highlighting the advantages of incorporating literature into the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom. Commencing with a concise historical survey of literature's role in EFL education, the paper systematically explores its multifaceted benefits, including language knowledge, cultural awareness, and critical thinking development. The analysis delves into the affective impact of literature on EFL students, emphasizing its role in fostering emotional resonance and a profound connection with language and culture. By scrutinizing the pedagogical activities employed in selected articles, the paper provides insights into practical implementations. The synthesized outcomes, presented in a nuanced discussion with geographic representation, offer clarity on diverse approaches and insights across regions. This comparative exploration contributes to understanding literature's transformative potential in EFL classrooms, emphasizing both pedagogical benefits and its profound affective impact on language learners within a concise framework.

Keywords: *literature, EFL classroom, language knowledge, cultural awareness, critical thinking development, affective impact*

Introduction

Immersing oneself in the realm of literature is akin to unlocking a portal to a new world, where the reader's perceptions blend harmoniously between the tapestry of personal imagination and the author's crafted narratives. The imperative lies in championing the cause of literature and advocating its inclusion in the pedagogical landscape of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms. Within the domain of second language acquisition, literary texts emerge as multifaceted language models, not only expanding lexicons but also providing scaffolding for sentence structure, paragraph organization, and the nuanced application of stylistic devices.

Moreover, the affective impact of literature on EFL students is an essential facet that permeates every layer of the learning experience. Beyond the linguistic realm, literature stands as a venerated vehicle, revered for its capacity to widen individual horizons, nurture imaginative faculties, and offer profound insights into the diverse facets of the human condition. The emotional resonance of literary works plays a pivotal role in shaping the affective domain of language learners, fostering a connection that transcends mere linguistic competence.

Furthermore, the study of literature in a foreign language unfurls a unique window affording learners a panoramic view into different cultures. These merits underscore the compelling need for extensive reading, particularly of culturally authentic texts, within the EFL classroom, echoing the sentiment that *"the study of literature is a must as it exposes students to meaningful contexts rich in descriptive language and interesting characters"* (Bobkina & Domingues 2014: 248).

This article embarks on a comparative exploration by delving into recent research articles that scrutinize activities fostering the manifold benefits of integrating literature into EFL classrooms.

Authored by researchers from diverse countries, these articles collectively serve as a canvas depicting varied approaches. They span different age groups and intricately explore the cognitive and affective impact on students, adding rich dimensions to our understanding of the subject. Our primary focus is on dissecting selected activities to discern their influence on language knowledge, cultural awareness, and the development of critical thinking skills. Within the crucible of this comparative analysis, we aim to unravel the intricacies and nuances characterizing the pedagogical landscape. This contribution aims to enhance the ongoing discourse on the efficacies of incorporating literature into EFL education.

Historical background of using literature in EFL classroom

Tracing the historical trajectory of incorporating literature into EFL classrooms reveals a dynamic evolution marked by transformative shifts in methodologies and outcomes. In the early 20th century, the prevalent Grammar Translation Method employed literature merely as a conduit for illustrating grammatical rules, relegating its significance to a tool for mastering structures and vocabulary (Bobkina & Domingues 2014: 249). The inefficiency of this approach became apparent, leading to notable disappearance of literary texts from language curricula until the early 1960s.

The turning point materialized in 1963 at the King's College conference on education in Cambridge, where literature was acknowledged as an asset in second language learning. However, dissenting voices emerged, advocating for the exclusion of literature from the EFL curriculum due to perceived communicative shortcomings and structural complexities (Topping 1968: 97).

Subsequent changes were instigated by the dual imperative: introducing students to basic literary texts and equipping them with the necessary strategies for navigating the demanding reading requirements of tertiary-level courses, since Brumfit (1983: 27) claims that the need to introduce students to basic literary texts occurred as much as *"to teach the necessary strategies and study habits to enable them to undergo highly demanding reading requirements in most tertiary level courses."* This pivotal juncture established a clear demarcation between the study of literature and its utilization on EFL classrooms. In the EFL contexts, literature came to be perceived not merely as an academic pursuit but as an authentic cultural text, embodying language in practical use.

Moreover, the affective impact of literature on EFL students emerged as a crucial dimension during this evolutionary process. Presently, ongoing research endeavors aims to redefine the role of literature in EFL classrooms, systematically addressing the benefits and challenges associated with its integration. Scholars are actively engaged in delineating optimal activities, resulting in the evolution of diverse approaches.

This scholarly inquiry manifests not only in theoretical frameworks but also in tangible educational outcomes, including the development of innovative teaching materials, syllabi, and curricula. Furthermore, researchers delve into the nuanced *"affective nature of the interaction between the language learner and the literature of the target language"* (Bobkina & Domingues 2014: 249), unraveling the emotional and attitudinal dimensions that underscore the dynamic interplay between language learners and literary materials. This continuous exploration contributes to the ongoing narrative of refining the role and impact of literature in the dynamic landscape of EFL education.

The theoretical background of the benefits of using literature in EFL classroom

Exploring the theoretical foundations of integrating literature into EFL classrooms reveals diverse research approaches. This comparative study examines articles from various countries, emphasizing nuanced perspectives and methodologies. The focus is on categorizing benefits into language knowledge, cultural awareness, and critical thinking development. This systematic lens enables analysis and comparison, contributing to the discourse on global diversity in approaching literature integration's impact on EFL education.

Language knowledge

Within the realm of language knowledge acquisition, literature stands as an authentic conduit, encapsulating real language that not only enriches linguistic input but also offers diverse perspectives within the classroom setting. In the context of second language learning, literature serves as a pivotal material, not merely for linguistic proficiency but as a vehicle to enhance students' awareness of the learned language. This goes beyond the superficial acquisition of vocabulary and delves into a profound understanding of the underlying systems, norms, and intricate nuances of language, bolstering not only lexical but also grammatical knowledge.

The term "language systems," encompassing both lexical and grammatical dimensions, assumes paramount importance in the integration of literature into the EFL classroom. As students engage with literary texts, the acquired vocabulary becomes intricately entwined with emotions and feelings, fostering a natural and effortless progression in their passive vocabulary. Strategic involvement in communicative activities facilitates the seamless transition from passive to active vocabulary usage. Additionally, this emotional entanglement enhances the affective side of language learning, creating a deeper connection to the language and its cultural context.

Moreover, the contextual and meaningful nature of grammatical structures within literary texts contributes significantly to the acquisition of grammatical knowledge. Unlike rote learning, the application of grammar in a contextual and meaningful manner, as advocated by Chalikendy (2015), emphasizes the precedence of meaning over form. This approach, grounded in literary contexts, augments students' comprehension and application of grammatical structures within a broader communicative framework.

The integration of literature extends beyond the confines of linguistic proficiency, permeating into the realm of communication skills development. Meaningful and stimulating activities, as proponents like Povey (1967) argue, are integral components that heighten language skills. The interplay of information and linguistic structures intertwined with emotions and personal feelings in cultural contexts fortifies students' communicative competence. Povey (1967: 40) claims that the use of literature in EFL classroom *"will increase all the language skills because it will extend linguistic knowledge by giving evidence of extensive and subtle vocabulary usage, a complex and exact syntax."* Chalikendy (2015: 226) supports this statement with the idea that students *"learn discourse function of vocabulary and language structures occur in meaningful context, which helps them to develop communicative competence."* The encompassing term "communication skills" spans the domains of reading, listening, speaking, and writing, all of which find a nexus within the rich tapestry of literary texts.

McKay (2001) posits literature as an ideal reading context for EFL students, seamlessly integrating language skills and fostering close reading. Extensive reading, characterized by increased student engagement with literature, not only bolsters reading interest but also lays the foundation for enhanced critical reading skills. The inherent complexity of literary texts, within multiple layers of meaning, provides a fertile ground for the development of critical thinking abilities. Lazar's assertion (1993) that literature stimulates students' abilities to infer meaning encourages an active engagement in teasing out implicit implications and assumptions, fostering interactive discussions and genuine exchange of ideas. Lazar (1993: 19) claims that *"literature is a particularly good source for developing students' abilities to infer meaning, and demand that the reader/student is actively involved in 'teasing out' the unstated implications and assumptions of the text."*

The multifaceted nature of literary texts, spanning a spectrum of subjects, themes, and topics, amplifies their utility in developing diverse reading skills – predicting, skimming, scanning, in-depth reading, and critical reading. The introduction of varied dialects, registers, and idiolects within literary

texts not only broadens students' exposure but also provides ample opportunities to enhance listening and speaking skills. Literature's richness in multiple meanings augments students' awareness of communicative resources, paving the way for the development of different listening skills, including top-down, bottom-up, and analytic approaches. Widdowson (1975: 80) states that the use of literature in the EFL classroom promotes communication because it is rich in multiple meanings and develops "*a sharper awareness of the communicative resources of the language being learned.*"

Furthermore, literary texts become a versatile tool for designing diverse tasks aimed at honing speaking skills, such as role-play, real play, simulation, information gap activities, opinion gap activities, and class discussion. Their varied themes, encompassing all domains of life, contribute significantly to the development of writing skills. Collie and Slater (1987) highlight that literature, through its contextualized content, aids students in understanding written language characteristics, learning sentence structures, connectors, transitional words, and diverse types of academic writing.

In essence, the integration of literature into EFL classrooms transcends linguistic boundaries, fostering a holistic development encompassing vocabulary enrichment, grammatical understanding, communication skills, critical reading abilities, and proficiency in various aspects of writing. Through a nuanced engagement with literary texts, students embark on a comprehensive language learning journey that extends far beyond the traditional confines of language acquisition.

Cultural awareness

Delving into the intricate relationship between language and culture reveals a profound symbiosis where each language becomes a vessel carrying the rich tapestry of its corresponding culture. Kaplan's assertion (1986) that language serves as the bearer of a group's culture underscores the inseparability, independence, and interactive intertwinement of language and culture. This dynamic interaction manifests as a matrix or reflection, emphasizing their interconnected nature within the broader sociocultural context.

As the world undergoes unprecedented globalization, cultural boundaries blur, and diverse cultures meld into a mosaic of shared needs and wants, transcending individualistic pursuits. This era of interconnectedness accentuates the importance of cultivating communicative competence and refining teaching techniques within the realm of EFL instruction. In this context, educators are tasked with acquiring a thorough and profound grasp of both language and culture.

Within the pedagogical landscape, literature emerges as a potent tool, offering a culturally authentic lens through which students can explore and comprehend diverse cultural nuances. The utilization of literature in the EFL classroom becomes pivotal in fostering students' cultural and intercultural awareness. Meyer's (1991) notion of intercultural competence as an integral component of foreign language proficiency emphasizes the adaptability required when navigating actions, attitudes, and expectations within foreign cultural realms. He claims that "*intercultural competence, as part of a broader foreign speaker competence, identifies the ability of a person to behave adequately and in a flexible manner when confronted with actions, attitudes and expectations of representatives of foreign cultures. Adequacy and flexibility imply an awareness of the cultural differences between one's own and the foreign culture and the ability to handle cross-cultural problems which result from these differences*" (Meyer 1991: 137).

The intrinsic connection between literature and cultural awareness becomes increasingly evident in the classroom. Literature serves as a conduit to universal concepts, transcending linguistic and cultural barriers. Globalization's call for collaboration extends beyond economic and political realms into language-related fields like EFL teaching. Literary texts, steeped in universal themes such as love, hatred, death, and nature, resonate across language and cultures, becoming bridges that facilitate a nuanced understanding of the world.

In the EFL classroom, literature serves as a dynamic vehicle for promoting cultural awareness among students. The richness of literary narratives lies in their ability to navigate the intricate tapestry of cultural nuances, providing insights into shared human experiences. By immersing students in universal concepts, literature becomes a catalyst for fostering empathy, understanding, and appreciation for the similarities and differences that define diverse cultures and languages. Moreover, the affective side of language learning comes to the forefront as students emotionally engage with characters, situations, and cultural perspectives presented in literary texts, creating a more profound connection to the content.

The incorporation of literature into EFL classrooms transcends linguistic boundaries, extending its influence into the realm of cultural awareness. As educators navigate the evolving landscape of language instruction, the culturally authentic nature of literature emerges as an indispensable tool in shaping students' holistic understanding of language and culture within the broader global context.

Critical thinking development

In the dynamic landscape of education, critical thinking emerges as an inseparable skill, especially in the current era of globalization. The ability to think critically is acknowledged as a fundamental goal of education, intimately linked with language learning. It becomes imperative to impart critical thinking skills to students, equipping them to navigate societal complexities, make informed judgments, and undertake decision in both personal and professional realms.

Within the framework of EFL classrooms and the incorporation of literature, scholars emphasize the pivotal role of literary texts as catalyst for stimulating critical thinking among students expressing themselves in a non-native language. Stefanova, Bobkina and Pérez (2017: 253) claim that a literary text is *"an effective stimulus for students to think critically and express their feelings and ideas in a non-native language."* Lazar's (1993: 3) assertion that literature, as an academic subject, *"can come closest to encompassing the full range of mental traits currently considered to comprise critical thinking."* Therefore, literature comes closest to encapsulating the array of mental traits integral to critical thinking, underscores the transformative potential.

Literary texts wield the power to engage students in questioning and exploring the multifaceted world around them, unlocking *"horizons of possibility, allowing students to question, interpret, connect, and explore"* (Langer 1997: 607). The transformative impact of literary texts extends to students' attitudes, fostering reflection on their lives, learning, and language. A meticulous reading of literary works facilitates the development of skills essential for critical thinking, enabling students to unravel hidden meanings, reconstruct images from details, distinguish facts from opinions, scrutinize phenomena from diverse perspectives, and apply acquired knowledge to various facets of their daily lives.

The process of close reading intrinsic to literary exploration integrates numerous skills integral to the critical thinking process, encompassing language use, reasoning, problem-solving, intercultural awareness, critical awareness, self-reflection, and the interpretation of the world. This holistic engagement with literary texts not only enhances language proficiency but also nurtures the higher-order cognitive abilities that are indispensable in fostering critical thinking.

Amidst the discourse on critical thinking, it is paramount to underscore the pivotal role of educators in cultivating these higher-order thinking skills. In contemporary education, critical thinking stands as a cornerstone, particularly in advanced levels of instruction. The teacher assumes a significant role in guiding students to question assumptions, unravel the subtleties of literary texts, and develop the intellectual acumen required to navigate the intricate layers of meaning embedded within the written word.

The interplay between cultural awareness and critical thinking development emerges as a symbiotic relationship within the realm of literature in EFL classrooms. As educators harness the transformative

potential of literary texts, they not only enhance language proficiency but also mold students into critical thinkers poised to navigate the complexities of the globalized world. The affective side of language learning becomes apparent as students emotionally engage with the complexities presented in literary texts, fostering a deeper connection to the content and enhancing their critical thinking skills.

Methodology

Our study is anchored in exploring the positive impact of integrating literature into EFL classrooms, with a specific focus on language knowledge, cultural awareness, and critical thinking development. To ensure a contemporary perspective, we meticulously selected seven recent articles published within the last 10 years. Geographical diversity was a paramount consideration, ensuring a global perspective on integration of literature in EFL education.

- **Data collection:** Our comprehensive data collection strategy involves a thorough review of selected articles, utilizing both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Specifically, we employ a percentage scale to assess the alignment of activities outlined in each article with the identified benefits – language knowledge, cultural awareness, and critical thinking development. Additionally, we consider factors such as the age groups of students involved in the research to provide a nuanced understanding of the impacts.

This mixed-methods approach allows for a systematic evaluation of the extent to which the chosen studies address the multifaceted impacts of integrating literature into EFL classrooms. Findings derived from this analysis, including age-related considerations and other relevant factors, are visually presented in Figure 1 for ease of comprehension.

The graphical representation aims to offer a clear overview of the distribution of activities across the identified benefits while considering variations related to student age and other pertinent factors. This presentation provides insights into the emphasis placed on language knowledge, cultural awareness, and critical thinking development in each of the selected articles within the context of diverse student demographic.

- **Discussion:** In the discussion section, our analysis goes beyond numerical assessments. We delve into a qualitative exploration of the results, aiming to illuminate variations, identify commonalities, and highlight trends in methodologies employed across diverse geographical and cultural contexts. Specifically, we address the affective impact of literature on EFL students, considering emotional engagement, attitudes, and the nuanced interaction between language learners and literary materials.

By contextualizing and interpreting our findings, we contribute to a nuanced understanding of effective language education strategies. Our study goes beyond a mere comparison of activities and benefits, exploring the practical approaches used globally in integrating literature into EFL classrooms. The inclusion of the affective impact aspect enriches the discussion, offering insights into the emotional and attitudinal dimensions that underscore the dynamic interplay between language learners and literary materials. Ultimately, our research aims to inform and guide educators in adopting effective strategies that not only enhance language proficiency but also foster a holistic development of EFL students.

The practical implication of the benefits of using literature in EFL classroom

The incorporation of literature into EFL classrooms has been a subject of extensive research and exploration, with scholars investigating its multifaceted benefits. The presented studies offer a comprehensive overview of various approaches and models applied by educators to leverage literature as a pedagogical tool. As we delve into the analysis of the studies, it becomes evident that literature

serves as a dynamic and versatile resource, transcending traditional language instruction to encompass educational objectives.

1. **Chalikendy's pedagogical tapestry:**

Chalikendy, M. A. (2015). Literature: A Natural Source for Teaching English in ESL/EFL Classrooms. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics and English Literature*, 4(6): 224-234.

Chalikendy's (2015) study unfolds a rich tapestry of activities and tasks designed for B1 – C2 level students at a university in Oman. Grounded in Robert Frost's poem *Mending Wall*, which explores the ritualistic rebuilding of a stonewall between neighbors each spring, the activities span various language skills and systems.

The pedagogical journey begins with a warming-up activity fostering pair discussions, setting the stage for engagement. Subsequent reading activities (2-4) aim at developing predicting and skimming, scanning, and jigsaw reading skills. Vocabulary knowledge takes center stage in activities (5-7), challenging students to decipher meanings, guess word meanings, and complete diagrams associated with the word "farm".

Moving forward, group work (8) prompts students to transmute part of the poem into prose, enhancing collaborative learning. The subsequent speaking activity (9), a role-play in pairs, enriches oral proficiency. Grammatical knowledge takes precedence in activities (10-13), catering to a holistic language learning experience.

Transitioning to writing (14), students engage in individual work, composing a comparison essay about the characters, enhancing their writing skills. Speaking activities (15-17) follow, incorporating real play, discussion, and simulation to further stimulate critical thinking, with a notable focus on activity 16 – a discussion on the proverb 'Good fences make good neighbors.'

Chalikendy's research findings, as delineated in the conclusion, underscore the allure of literature in the EFL classroom. He contends that literature, with its imaginative power and emotional resonance, captivates students, making it invaluable tool for language teaching. Emphasizing that literature is a means, not an end, Chalikendy (2015: 233) positions it as a dynamic resource for English language teaching, fostering native-like competence and nurturing creative, critical, and analytical language learners. Literature, in his view, serves as a gateway to cultural familiarity, fostering personal involvement and enriching the EFL learning experience.

2. **Critical thinking in focus:**

Stefanova, S., Bobkina, J. (2016). Literature and Critical Literacy Pedagogy in the EFL Classroom: Towards a Model of Teaching Critical Thinking Skills. *Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching*, 6(4): 677-696.

Stefanova, S., Bobkina, J., Pérez, F. J. S.-V. (2017). The Effectiveness of Teaching Critical Thinking Skills through Literature in EFL Context: A Case Study in Spain. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics and English Literature*, 6(6): 252-266.

Stefanova, Bobkina, and Pérez (2017) undertook a comprehensive case study to delve into the perceptions of students and their teacher regarding the efficacy of a critical thinking skills teaching model in enhancing foreign language proficiency. The study, conducted at a bilingual state school in Spain with 21 Administration and Finance Degree students, aimed to explore the multifaceted dimensions of literature in the EFL classroom. Their choice of Caryl Phillips' novel, *The Lost Child*, as the basis for activities was meticulously justified based on its structural suitability and thematic relevance.

The novel's division into short fragments facilitated a structured approach to activities, allowing students to engage deeply with the narrative. The thematic exploration, anchored in the experiences of the older brother, Ben, witnessing his mother's struggle with depression and his younger brother's humiliation, added a layer of real-life connection to the literary text. This approach sought to transcend

the conventional boundaries of language learning, infusing critical thinking skills development into the curriculum.

The four-stage procedure, unfolding over four weeks, provided a systematic framework for students' engagement. In the initial week, the introduction of critical thinking skills set the stage for their importance, laying the groundwork for subsequent activities. Transitioning to the Situated Practice stage in the second week, students delved into the chapter *Childhood*, undertaking activities that not only enhanced language knowledge but also honed critical thinking skills. The third week, dedicated to Overt Instruction, showcased a nuanced approach as students not only answered comprehension questions but also analyzed language details and their impact on meaning construction. This focus on language intricacies aimed at fostering a holistic understanding of the text. Moving into the third week, the Critical Framing stage zeroed in on the core of critical thinking. Students critically analyzed the language used by the author, drawing connections with social contexts that touched on themes of exclusion, discrimination, and bullying. This stage aimed to instill a deeper understanding of the socio-cultural dimensions embedded in the narrative, enhancing both language and critical thinking competencies. The concluding week, divided into two sessions, shifted to Transformed Practice. Here, students applied their acquired knowledge by crafting two separate texts, demonstrating a practical application of the critical thinking skills cultivated throughout the study.

The culmination of the study involved administering questionnaires – the Critical Thinking Assessment Criteria Grid for students and the Teacher Assessment Checklist for teacher. These instruments not only gauged the students' critical thinking processes but also provided valuable insights into the teacher's assessment of each student. The systematic documentation of results in tables added a quantitative layer to the qualitative exploration.

In the conclusion, the authors underscored the need for further research in exploring this approach to literature in EFL classrooms. While acknowledging the intentional focus on critical thinking development, they emphasized the meticulous preparation and positive outcomes of the activities. The seamless integration of critical thinking into literature not only enriched language learning but also underscored the multifaceted benefits that literature can offer in terms of language knowledge, cultural awareness, and most importantly, critical thinking development.

Transitioning to their 2016 study, the same authors intentionally chose a different literary form – a poem by Rudyard Kipling titled *If*. The four-stage procedure mirrored the thematic progression of the case study, encompassing pre-reading and post-reading activities, understanding the poem's general message and language analysis, connecting language with social context, and culminating in diverse writing activities. This intentional choice allowed for a nuanced comparison, offering insights into the varied pedagogical approaches and outcomes across different literary forms. In both studies, the emphasis on critical thinking persisted, providing a robust foundation for students' interpretive skills, reflective learning styles, and the nuanced exploration of language, culture, and critical thinking development in an EFL context. The deliberate juxtaposition of these two studies adds depth to the exploration of literature's impact on language education, emphasizing the versatility of literary forms in fostering critical thinking skills in students.

3. Uddin's linguistic and cultural model

Uddin, M. (2019). Acquiring English in EFL Classroom: Role of Literature. *English Language and Literature Studies*, 9(1): 17-23.

In his insightful exploration, Uddin (2019) puts forth a compelling example of integrating literature into the EFL classroom, shedding light on the role of literary pieces in language acquisition. The focal point of his study is a poem by Robert Louis Stevenson titled *The Cow*, which served as the teaching material for 5th and 6th graders at an elementary school in Bangladesh. Uddin's deliberate choice of the

poem for young learners introduces an intriguing dimension to the intersection of literature and language acquisition.

The pedagogical approach employed by Uddin encompasses two distinct sets of activities, each tailored to specific educational objectives. The initial set is meticulously designed to enhance language knowledge, concentrating on the development of vocabulary. Uddin delineates three activities crafted to foster a nuanced understanding of lexical intricacies. This deliberate focus on vocabulary aligns with the broader discourse on the significance of language enrichment in the early stages of language learning.

The subsequent set of activities takes a fascinating turn, delving into the realm of cultural awareness. Uddin presents a list of questions strategically crafted to prompt students' reflections on cultural aspects embedded in the literary piece. This deliberate shift from language-specific exercises to culturally oriented inquiries adds a layer of depth to the pedagogical framework. By encouraging students to engage with cultural nuances, Uddin advocates for a holistic approach to language learning – one that transcends mere linguistic competence to encompass a richer understanding of the cultural contexts within which the language operates.

Uddin further bolsters his argument by introducing a linguistic and cultural model, underlining the dynamic interplay between literature and language acquisition. His intention is not only to facilitate language learning but also to provide students with a profound understanding of the socio-cultural semantic codes inherent in the language. By immersing students in literary pieces written in the target language, Uddin contends that learners can experience a sense of belonging among native speakers. This immersive exposure allows students to observe not only what native speakers say but also how they express themselves, fostering a more authentic and representative grasp of language use.

The inherent authenticity of literature is a cornerstone of Uddin's argument. He posits that literature serves as a repository of genuine language samples, enabling students to glean speech acts and communication nuances directly from these authentic sources. This authenticity, Uddin suggests, plays a pivotal role in bridging the gap between language learners and native speakers, providing students with a valuable tool for acquiring language in a manner closely aligned with native language users.

Uddin's exploration unveils a nuanced and multifaceted role for literature in the EFL classroom. By strategically employing a poem in a structured set of activities, he not only addresses language knowledge development but also advocates for the integral role of cultural awareness in language acquisition. The linguistic and cultural model he proposes underscores the potential of literature to serve as a gateway to authentic language use, fostering a deeper connection between language learners and the socio-cultural contexts of the target language. Uddin's work adds a valuable perspective to the ongoing discourse on the pedagogical benefits of integrating literature into language education, emphasizing its potential to shape well-rounded and culturally attuned language learners.

4. **Armstrong's visual aid and short stories**

Armstrong, M. (2015). Using Literature in an EFL Context to Teach Language and Culture. *The Journal of Literature in Language Teaching*, 4(2): 7-24.

In his comprehensive exploration, Armstrong (2015) introduces a novel model for incorporating literature into the EFL classroom, drawing from his experiences at a university in Japan. His innovative approach revolves around the creation of a visual aid, meticulously designed to elucidate the course's structure and expectations for students. This model, as described by Armstrong, serves as an invaluable tool in navigating the intricate landscape of language and culture education within the EFL context.

Central to Armstrong's model is a deliberate emphasis on literary elements, encompassing critical facets such as setting, characterization, plot, theme, and narrator's point of view. Grounded in the use of short stories, the model is underpinned by a set of carefully curated criteria. These criteria, ranging from the authenticity of material to its creative use of language, from a realistic portrayal of cultural and

historical situations to a limited number of characters, converge to create a framework that aims to foster critical thinking, enhance communicative skills, and heighten language awareness.

The selection of short stories is a pivotal aspect of Armstrong's model, guided by a nuanced understanding of the genre's potential in an EFL setting. Each chosen narrative adheres to a set of criteria ensuring its suitability for pedagogical purposes. This strategic selection not only serves to make the material more accessible for students but also provides a solid foundation for delving into the intricacies of literary analysis. The criteria, spanning diverse aspects, collectively contribute to an immersive learning experience, ensuring that students engage with texts that not only enrich their language skills but also broaden their cultural horizons.

A noteworthy feature of Armstrong's model is the incorporation of group presentations as a pedagogical tool. These presentations, a culmination of students' engagement with the selected short stories, serve as a tangible demonstration of their understanding of critical elements within the narratives. The group discussions, orchestrated through defined roles – moderator, summarizer, dictionary, collector, and connector – add a layer of collaborative learning, fostering an environment where students actively contribute to the exploration of literary themes.

The duration of the course, spanning 14 weeks, underscores the depth and deliberation embedded in Armstrong's approach. This extended timeframe allows for a sustained and immersive engagement with literary texts, affording students the opportunity for thorough comprehension and critical analysis.

Armstrong's research yields a compelling conclusion: the integration of literature into the EFL classroom is firmly grounded in pedagogical principles. It emerges as a potent tool for the development of language knowledge and the cultivation of critical thinking skills. However, Armstrong acknowledges the potential challenges posed by unmodified language texts, recognizing that they may be demanding for both students and teachers lacking familiarity with this genre or lacking the necessary background knowledge.

A key takeaway from Armstrong's research is the demonstrated ability of short stories to transcend mere language instruction. They emerge as dynamic instruments that facilitate language knowledge, cultural awareness, and critical thinking development simultaneously. This trifecta of educational outcomes emerges as a compelling argument for the pervasive inclusion of literature in EFL classrooms.

Moreover, Armstrong's findings challenge preconceived notions about students' interests, asserting that even those with limited interest in reading for pleasure can acquire basic literacy skills and actively engage in discussions. His research paints a picture of literature as more than a collection of characters and plots; it is a realm where profound meanings lie in wait, inviting exploration and uncovering. This realization, as Armstrong aptly puts it, emphasizes that *"stories are more than just characters and a plot, but rather a world where there is deep-seated meaning waiting to be uncovered"* (Armstrong, 2015, p.24). In essence, literature becomes a conduit for unlocking the rich tapestry of language, culture, and critical thought within the EFL classroom.

5. Students' perspectives

Blaemert, J., Paran, A., Jansen, E., Van De Grift, W. (2017). Students' Perspectives on the Benefits of EFL Literature Education. *The Language Learning Journal*, 4(3): 371-384.

In their comprehensive exploration, Blaemert, Paran, Jansen, and van de Grift (2017) delved into the valuable realm of students' perspectives on the advantages derived from literature education within the EFL classroom. Understanding the viewpoints of students is pivotal in assessing the true impact of literature on their language learning journey. This study, conducted in the Netherlands, sought to glean insights directly from the students, aiming to inform and enhance EFL literature teaching practices.

The primary objective of this research was to unravel the perceived benefits of EFL literature education according to Dutch secondary school students, with an intriguing additional layer – investigating potential variations in perspectives across different schools. The researchers posed a

single, fundamental question to students in the selected schools: “What do you think are the benefits of EFL literature lessons?” A nuanced analysis of the responses revealed a multifaceted tapestry of perceived benefits. At the forefront of student perceptions was language knowledge, cited by a substantial 74% of respondents. Following closely were cultural awareness, acknowledged by 56% of students, and critical thinking development, recognized by 33%. The divergence in their recognition of these benefits unveiled the varied lenses through which students approached the enriching landscape of EFL literature education.

Breaking down the categories further, language knowledge emerged as a comprehensive facet encompassing a spectrum of linguistic dimensions. This included a general language approach, English grammar and syntax, English vocabulary and idioms, as well as honing English language skills in reading, listening, speaking, and writing. Additionally, an intriguing dimension surfaced – the historical development of the English language – highlighting the interconnectedness of language and its evolution over time.

Cultural awareness, as perceived by the students, manifested through a context approach. This encompassed a broad array of elements, including a general context approach, biographical information, historical, cultural, and social context, as well as exploration of English literary periods and history. The incorporation of a general reader approach underscored the holistic nature of cultural awareness, emphasizing the importance of a comprehensive understanding of context.

The critical thinking development dimension, categorized under a reader approach, delved into the personal realm of students’ experiences. It encompassed personal reading experiences, the cultivation of literary tastes, the development of critical thinking skills, and, significantly, personal development – a testament to the transformative potential of literature on an individual level.

While the researchers included an additional category, text approach, focused on the knowledge of the literary piece (themes, plots, characters, etc.), this dimension was deemed irrelevant for the comparative analysis at hand.

In essence, Blaemert et al.’s research not only sheds light on the multifaceted benefits perceived by students but also unveils the diverse lenses through which they view the impact of literature on their language learning journey. By acknowledging the intricate interplay of language, culture, and critical thinking in their responses, students paint a vivid picture of the profound impact of EFL literature education on their cognitive and personal development.

6. Insight into teacher approaches

Parojenog, R. C. (2020). Approaches to Teaching Literature Employed by Senior High School Teachers. *IOER International Multidisciplinary Research Journal*, 2(2): 52-58.

Finally, in an insightful exploration, Parojenog (2020) conducted a compelling study, delving into the perspectives of senior high school EFL teachers in the Philippines regarding their approaches to teaching literature. This research aimed to unravel the rich tapestry of techniques employed by educators, shedding light on different approaches, determining frequently utilized techniques reflective of these approaches, identifying the driving factors behind teacher’s choices, assessing the level of usage of these approaches, and, notably, designing a literature module aligned with a specific approach.

The study conducted against the backdrop of the vibrant educational landscape in the Philippines, sought to provide a nuanced understanding of the pedagogical strategies employed by EFL teachers. The overarching objective was not only to recognize the diverse techniques in play but also to glean insights into the intricacies of the decision-making process and factors influencing the selection of specific approaches.

Unveiling the results in six distinct categories, the study illuminated the prevalent utilization of language knowledge as the foremost technique, underscoring the paramount importance placed by EFL teachers on fostering linguistic proficiency. Following closely were cultural awareness and critical

thinking development, suggesting a multifaceted approach to literature education that extends beyond language acquisition.

The researcher’s astute analysis of these findings led to a compelling conclusion – the predominant focus of EFL teachers revolves around enhancing students’ language knowledge. However, the noteworthy inclusion of cultural awareness and critical thinking development in the frequently used techniques implies a broader pedagogical landscape where educators strive to instill a holistic understanding of literature.

Beyond a mere exploration of current practices, Parojenog’s study positioned itself as a catalyst for pedagogical innovation. By recognizing the potential of various approaches to stimulate critical thinking about literary texts, the study hinted at the untapped possibilities within the EFL classroom. In response to these findings, the researcher took a proactive step by designing a comprehensive literary module. This module, crafted with a keen understanding of the identified approaches, serves as a valuable resource for teachers, offering a structured framework to align their practices with the nuanced goals of language knowledge enrichment, cultural awareness, and critical thinking development.

Parojenog’s research, therefore, not only contributes to the ongoing dialogue on effective literature education but also provides tangible tools for educators to navigate the dynamic landscape of EFL teaching. By bridging the gap between theoretical insights and practical application, the study emerges as a beacon guiding teachers toward a more holistic and impactful approach to teaching literature in senior high school classrooms.

Collectively, these studies not only accentuate the pedagogical benefits of integrating literature into EFL classrooms but also shed light on its affective impact. Literature emerges as a catalyst for fostering language proficiency, cultural awareness, critical thinking, and, importantly, a deeper connection between learners and the rich socio-cultural contexts of the target language.

Results and discussion

The detailed examination of selected studies has cast a revealing spotlight on the multifaceted benefits of incorporating literature into EFL classroom, shedding light on the nuanced approaches undertaken by researchers and the activities employed to unlock these advantages. In this comparative study, the focal points were distinctly delineated: language knowledge, cultural awareness, and critical thinking development. A meticulous analysis of reach activity, set against the backdrop of these primary benefits, employed a percentage scale to qualify their impact. The cumulative percentages for activities within the purview of each researcher’s work were amalgamated to present a comprehensive overview, as encapsulated in Figure 1.

Figure 1: The benefits of using literature in EFL classroom according to the researchers from different countries.

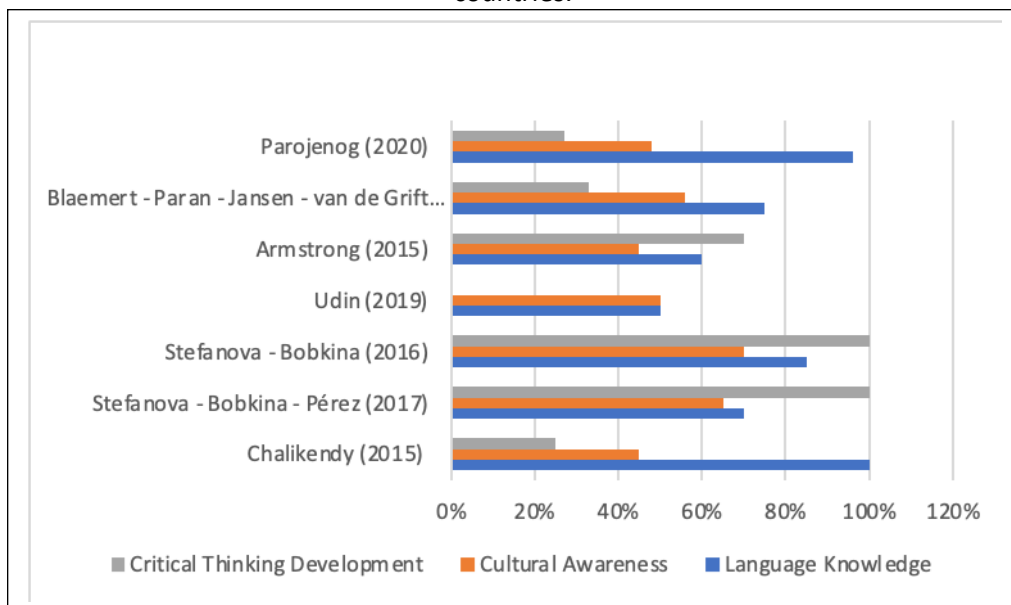


Figure 1 unveils the intricate tapestry of these studies, with particular emphasis on the comprehensive examinations conducted by Stefanova and Bobkina (2016) and Stefanova, Bobkina and Pérez (2017). Notably, their work developed deeply into critical thinking development, a facet that, while receiving less attention from other researchers, emerged as a central theme. Armstrong (2015) mirrored this emphasis on critical thinking in his activities, thereby contributing a unique perspective to the landscape of literature in the EFL classroom. Conversely, Uddin (2019) directed his activities toward elementary school students, tailoring his approach to their age and proficiency level, resulting in a discernible absence of critical thinking development focus.

The paucity of emphasis on critical thinking development across these studies underscores a compelling argument for increased research in this domain. In a society besieged by misinformation, the ability to discern truth from falsehood assumes unprecedented importance. As such, future inquiries into the EFL classroom should heed this call and lend greater attention to the cultivation of critical thinking skills.

Language knowledge, unsurprisingly, claimed a significant share of the spotlight, particularly in studies where literature was seamlessly woven into the EFL curriculum. Chalikendy (2015) spearheaded this emphasis, employing activities that, in their simplicity, epitomized effective strategies for developing language proficiency through literary engagement. This preoccupation with language knowledge underscores the researchers' commitment to showcasing how activities post-literary engagement can significantly bolster language acquisition.

Cultural awareness emerged as a pivotal thread woven into the fabric of each researcher's pursuits, with an average focus of 60%. Intriguingly, the means to foster cultural awareness often manifested through discussions – whether in pairs, groups, or the entire class. These discussions not only contributed to cultural awareness but invariably became conduits for the concurrent development of language knowledge.

An intriguing revelation surfaced during this exploration: activities centered on cultural awareness or critical thinking development inevitably intertwined with language knowledge. This symbiosis suggests that EFL educators venturing into the realm of literature could strategically leverage models that concurrently nurture cultural awareness or critical thinking, thereby amplifying the efficacy of their pedagogical endeavors.

The affective impact of literature on EFL students adds a distinctive layer to this discussion. Across the studies, literature consistently emerges not just as an academic tool but as a catalyst for emotional resonance and personal connection. Chalikendy (2015) contends that literature, with its imaginative power and emotional resonance, captivates students, making it an invaluable tool for language teaching. Uddin (2019) emphasizes the authenticity of literature as a cornerstone of his argument, positing that literature serves as a repository of genuine language samples, enabling students to glean speech acts and communication nuances directly from these authentic sources. The affective impact becomes a gateway to cultural familiarity, fostering personal involvement and enriching the EFL learning experience.

The academic landscape in this domain extends beyond the purview of researchers, encompassing the perceptions and priorities of both teachers and students. A more comprehensive understanding of the viewpoints of these pivotal actors could enrich the discourse, providing valuable insights into what aspects they deem significant and which benefits resonate most profoundly with their educational experiences. The congruence of these research findings with previous comparative analyses underscores the robustness and consistency of these emerging trends, creating a compelling narrative for the continued exploration of literature's role in EFL classrooms.

Conclusion

In the realm of EFL education, the triumph in language acquisition hinges on a confluence of factors, with student engagement, activity endurance, and sustained focus and enjoyment serving as pivotal determinants. For educators navigating this intricate landscape, the challenge lies in orchestrating an environment that cultivates student interest and enthusiasm. A potent ally in surmounting this challenge is the strategic integration of literature with tailored activities. The manifold benefits espoused by literature in EFL classrooms have been a focal point in contemporary research, with numerous studies extolling its virtues.

This paper delves into seven recently penned articles, embarking on a comparative journey that scrutinizes the varied activities employed by authors. The overarching aim is to elucidate how literature, when woven into the fabric of EFL classrooms, emerges as a catalyst for enhancing students' language knowledge, cultural awareness, and critical thinking development. The theoretical underpinning begins with a comprehensive exploration of these benefits, supported by poignant quotations from the chosen researchers, thereby encapsulating the theoretical panorama.

The subsequent traverse through the selected articles unveils a meticulous dissection of the activities curated by researchers to probe the chosen benefits. Each activity undergoes scrutiny, meticulously placed on a percentage scale to unravel the nuanced tapestry of benefits interwoven into the selected articles. As the intricate layers unfold, it becomes evident that the spotlight is primarily trained on language knowledge, with cultural awareness and critical thinking development following closely in its wake. Notably, articles with a primary focus on critical thinking emerge as the most detailed and elaborately articulated, offering a profound exploration into this essential facet of the EFL landscape.

In summation, the findings gleaned from this comparative odyssey underscore the predilection of researchers toward the augmentation of language knowledge, intertwined with commendable attention to cultural awareness and critical thinking. Despite this, a salient observation surfaces: articles primarily centered on critical thinking development exhibit unparalleled depth and intricacy.

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As the curtain descends on this discourse, a resounding declaration emerges – literature's pivotal role in the EFL classroom is indisputable, fostering language proficiency, cultural acumen, and critical thinking prowess. However, despite the compelling evidence presented by these research endeavors, the broader EFL teaching community is yet to fully appreciate the pedagogical potential of literature. These studies, and their ilk, stand as beacons illuminating the manifold benefits that literature unfurls for students, inviting EFL educators to recalibrate their teaching practices in acknowledgement of this rich instructional tapestry.

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