



International Journal of Languages' Education and Teaching
Volume 6, Issue 2, June 2018, p. 138-148

Received	Reviewed	Published	Doi Number
25.02.2018	28.03.2018	30.06.2018	10.18298/ijlet.2629

**Views of Pre-Service English Teachers
on the Role of Literature in EFL Classes**

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ABSTRACT

As the reflection of the target culture, literature has an important role in foreign language teaching process. However language teachers do not use it in their classes and students do not pay attention to it because they both think that it is difficult to study. Literature and Language Teaching courses in the curriculum of ELT departments aim at students' developing awareness in the field of literature and improving skills how to use literature to teach English. During the terms, students are exposed to literary texts from different genres and they are wanted both to study and to teach these texts in EFL classes. In this qualitative study, the data were collected through an open ended- questionnaire conducted to 16 pre-service English teachers who have taken literature and language teaching classes in ELT. The aim of this research is to learn if pre-service teachers at ELT department recognize the importance of literature use in EFL and to learn their views on literature. According to the result of the study, it is clearly seen that pre-service English teachers are aware of the importance of literature use in the process of teaching a foreign language and they plan to use literary texts as teaching materials in their classes in the future.

Key Words: Teaching literature in EFL, literature teaching, foreign language teaching, teacher training, student's self-development.

1. Introduction

Literature has an important place in foreign language teaching. As it is the real reflection of the target culture, it gives the teacher a chance to use good examples of authentic materials. It has numerous benefits in terms of improving the instruction and developing students' understanding and learning. The main aim of using literature in EFL classes is to promote learner's all language skills (Lazar, 2008; Collie & Slater, 1998; Carter & Long, 1991; Mc Kay, 1982). Reading literary texts enables students to process and interpret a new language as they present meaningful and memorable contexts in real language (Lazar, 1993). It helps students learn the language better because by reading literary texts, students face complex themes and different uses of language (Lazar, 1993). Literary texts contain a variety of examples of the language used in real life which cannot be found in course books. Mc Kay (1982) points out that literature is the ideal way to develop an awareness of the target language use. Savvidou (2004, p.1) says that 'Literature is language and language can indeed be literary'. That is,

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language and literature are so intermingled that they cannot be separated from each other. Furthermore, English is accepted as a global language in today's world so it is possible to reach a large diversity of cultures with the help of literary texts written in English (Lazar, 1993). Students can get information about other cultures beside the culture of English speaking countries when they find examples of literature of other languages in English. By reading literature, students get the opportunity to examine universal human experiences in different places and that makes them more tolerant (Nasr, 2001). Students make a connection through their feelings with a world which they do not live in (Oster, 1989). Literature encourages sensitivity, self-awareness and understanding of the world around people and in this way, it supports personal development and growth (Carter & Long, 1991). Nasr (2001, p.348) states 'Literature widens the intellectual horizons and helps the learners appreciate the aesthetics of artistic creation'. Nasirahmadi, Madarsara and Aghdam (2014) claim literature can develop students' intercultural competence if the materials are chosen appropriately. As can be seen, literature is a very efficient course material which supports students in many aspects but the materials should appeal to students.

Although there are a lot of advantages of teaching literature in EFL classes, it is observed that neither teachers nor students want to use it. The reasons why literature is not included in the EFL syllabuses can be summarised by Mc Kay (1982) as in the following:

1. As it reflects complex structures and a variety of language use, it does not help to teach the grammar of the language.
2. It does not meet the students' academic and occupational needs.
3. The cultural perspective it includes can be difficult for the students to understand.

Agreeing with the idea, Khatib, Derakhshan and Rezaei (2011) state that literature is neglected in EFL classes, because of its complex features. Lazar (1994) summarizes the difficulties of using literature as follows: Students do not know the meaning of rhetorical or literary devices. Therefore they can find it difficult to understand the literary texts. As students' level of literary competence is not high enough to get accurate interpretations, they get bored rather than developing appreciation for literature. Besides, teachers have limited time and a full syllabus. Under these circumstances, teachers find teaching literature time-consuming and unnecessary. Hirvela and Boyle (1988) believe that students are afraid of studying literature because they do not know anything about it. In their survey, Akyel and Yalçın (1990) found out that there is a link between students' language level and their attitudes towards literature; the higher the language level is, the more appreciation the students show.

Like most of young people, students at ELT departments do not enjoy reading literary texts. In literature classes, it is observed students do not participate in the course willingly at initial stages. Thinking that literature is something complex and unnecessary, they refuse to read their assignments at home. They do not like conducting literary analysis of the texts as it is done in literature departments. Indeed, analysing the texts in this way is not the main aim of teaching literature in ELT departments. Language teachers should only learn how to use literary texts to teach the language, in other words, literature is a vehicle to teach the language. Therefore, the students should foster only awareness of literary features and gain appreciation for literature. Surprisingly, it is seen that students who do not like literature at the beginning start to enjoy it during the teaching process. They observe the sample lessons based on literary texts which have interesting topics, and they recognise what they

are doing in class is not difficult at all so their attitudes towards literature start to change. They read, study and teach literature themselves in class or observe their friends teaching literature with the help of different activities. They may recognise that the more they get involved in the literary texts, the more they like them. This may increase their motivation and as a result of this motivation they may continue the course eagerly and finish it successfully. Observing the change in students, the researcher would like to learn what pre- service teachers think about literature and literature teaching in EFL classes.

1.1. Problem

What do pre-service English teachers think about literature and its role in EFL?

1.2. Research Questions

1. Do pre- service English teachers like literature?
2. How do pre-service English teachers evaluate themselves in terms of their interest in literature?
3. What should be done to improve the literary competence according to pre-service English teachers?
4. What do pre-service English teachers think about the role of literature in EFL?
5. What are the problems of using literature in EFL classes according to pre- service English teachers?
6. What are the contributions of literature of other cultures to the self- improvement of pre-service English teachers?
7. What kind of feelings does literature evoke in pre-service English teachers?
8. What are the metaphors that pre-service English teachers use for literature?
9. Do pre-service English teachers believe that a language teacher should be good at literature?
10. Do pre-service English teachers plan to use literature in their classes when they are language teachers

2. Method

To learn the views of pre-service teachers about literature in detail and to describe the situation better, qualitative method was adopted for the study. Marshall and Rossman (2006, p. 33) state “many qualitative studies are descriptive and exploratory”. Yıldırım and Şimşek (2013) support this idea by indicating that one of the most important aims of qualitative research is to reflect the perceptions and ideas of the participants. As the first step of the study, a questionnaire consisting of 10 open ended questions were prepared and it was controlled by the experts in the field. Then the questions were tested with some other pre-service teachers in order to find out if they can be understood correctly. After these steps, the questionnaire was given to 16 pre-service teachers in the senior year of Foreign Language Teaching Department of a state university who have taken Literature and Language Teaching classes and who are volunteers to participate in the survey. These courses are given as three hours a week and in the content of the course, teaching the genres in literature such as short story,

novel, drama and poetry is exemplified. Students are expected to develop literary awareness and skills how to teach literature. The research group was chosen among the volunteers but having equal number of participants from both genders and having pre-service teachers expressing different attitudes towards literature classes were taken into consideration. The survey was conducted with 8 female and 8 male participants. As the research is a 16- participant -qualitative one, it is a limited study. The main aim of the study is to demonstrate the situation of pre-service English teachers. At the end of the research, the answers were examined through descriptive analysis.

3. Findings and Discussion

The participants were asked questions and their answers were examined and interpreted through descriptive analysis. The first question was if the participants like literature. In their answers, they reflected their ideas about literature and their interest in it (Table 1). Six of the female participants who responded to the survey told that they like literature. Only two of them stated that they do not like literature and therefore they do not pay attention to it. The ratio is the same for the male participants, with six literature lovers. When they talked about their interests, the result is different for both genders. Two of the females and four of the males did not show any interest in literature while one female and two male participants said that they are interested in it a little.

Table 1. Like for literature and interest in literature

	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5	F6	F7	F8	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5	M6	M7	M8
Like for Literature	X	√	√	√	√	√	√	X	X	X	√	√	√	√	√	√
Interest in Literature	X	√	√	√	√	√	A little	X	X	X	X	A little	A little	√	√	√

When they were asked if they are good at understanding a literary text, two females and three males explained that they were very bad. Three females and three males confessed that level of their literary understanding is not high enough. The reason why their levels are so low can be the general perception that literature is difficult, complex and unmanageable (Or, 1995) and therefore they do not pay much attention to it. Only one male and three female participants believed that they are quite good at literary understanding.

Table 2. The level of participants in literature

Level of Literary Understanding	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5	F6	F	F8	M1	M2	M3	M	M	M6	M7	M8
Quite high		√			√	√									√	
Enough														√		
Not enough			√	√			√					√	√			√
Very bad	√							√	√	√	√					

As most of the participants confirmed that they are not competent enough in literary understanding, they felt that they need to improve their literary competence. They answered the question about what should be done to improve their literary understanding as in the following table: The most popular answer given by nine participants is to read more. They knew that they should read more in order to be literary competent, but they did not mention any genres. While 6 of the participants who gave this answer are females, 3 of them are males. What comes next to improve the literary competence is both to read classical novels, and to search about literature. This result is opposite to what Tseng (2010) says in his research in which 28 senior high school students participated. While they prefer contemporary literature, the participants in this research would like to read classical novels, thinking that they will develop their literary competence.

Table 3. The ways how to improve the level in literature

	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5	F6	F7	F8	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5	M6	M7	M8
Reading more		√		√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√					
Reading classical novels	√													√	√	√
Searching about literature						√						√		√		√
Studying authors	√												√	√		
Studying literary terms			√										√			
Discussing books with friends						√										

The next question was asked to learn what the role of literature in foreign language teaching is according to pre-service English teachers. Different answers they gave are shown in Table 4. When the answers are examined, it can be seen that the alternatives 'makes the lesson enjoyable' and 'helps to teach culture' have the most frequency. F3 considered literature as the basis of the language. F5 believed that literature is an important source that reflects people's lives, feelings and thoughts to new generations. She also added that it enables students to express their feelings and thoughts. In F2's opinion, literature gives a chance to students to improve themselves in various ways. M1 believed that the lesson can be more creative, thanks to literature. According to M2, literature develops students' perspectives. Emphasizing students' different interpretations for the literary texts during the discussions, Khatip and Rahimi (2012) support the idea of M2. M5 accepted literature as the reflection of the language. It seems that pre-service teachers are aware of the importance of literature use in EFL classes and most of the ideas here are compatible with those of Ghosh (2002), who thinks using literature is motivating and contributes to language learning, develops academic literacy and thinking skills and fosters emotional development of the child.

Table 4. The place of literature in foreign language teaching

	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5	F6	F7	F8	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5	M6	M7	M8
makes lesson enjoyable	√	√						√	√		√					
teaches culture		√	√					√			√			√		
reflects people's lives, feelings, thoughts					√										√	√
makes language learning easier						√						√	√			
feeds students' soul				√												√
exemplifies correct language in contexts				√											√	
helps students express their thoughts					√										√	
develops students' language competence		√									√					
enables students to love the foreign language							√									
enables students to think about universal values		√														

The participants were asked what the difficulties of teaching literature in EFL classes are and they explained their ideas as in Table 5: All the participants agreed that literature teaching can be a problem for language learners. Although the reasons vary from person to person, the answer 'low language level' has the highest frequency. That is, students cannot understand the language. For many participants, students' low language level can be one of the reasons why they have found literary texts difficult. This result is similar to the students' reactions to text selection in the research of Akyel and Yalçın (1990) in which average- language level- students found literary texts used in class too long, boring and too hard. The second popular reason for the difficulty is unknown vocabulary in the literary texts. Lack of literary competence follows vocabulary problem with the frequency of 5. As lack of literary competence causes students to have difficulties in interpreting the text accurately, they cannot understand the text and develop appreciation for literature. Vincent and Carter (2000) believe that the difficulty level of the texts in terms of linguistic and cultural bases can be an important factor for students to benefit from literature. Four participants thought that the difficulties in literature result from the fact that they do not like it.

Table 5. The Reasons for the Difficulties in Literature

	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5	F6	F7	F8	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5	M6	M7	M8
Low language level	√	√	√			√		√	√	√	√					
Unknown vocabulary				√					√	√		√		√	√	√
Lack of literary competence	√		√		√		√								√	

Not enjoying literature					√						√	√	√			
Lack of importance given to native literature											√		√			√
Cultural differences								√								

Although participants gave different answers for the question that asks the benefits of studying literature, it is seen in Table 6 that the highest frequency is for its contribution to teaching the target culture. Most participants agreed that reading literature changes points of view. Three participants told that it improves general knowledge of the students while three others suggested that studying literature improves their literary competence. Similarly, Vural (2013) found in his research that literature made numerous contributions to students' motivation, their writing and reading performance, their vocabulary knowledge and their autonomy in learning.

Table. 6 Benefits of Studying Literature

	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5	F6	F7	F8	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5	M6	M7	M8
gives information about culture	√		√		√	√	√		√		√		√	√		
changes point of view		√		√			√	√			√	√	√			
improves general knowledge								√				√		√		
develops literary competence							√			√		√				
shows different vocabulary and structures									√							√
improves language										√						
develops imagination													√			
reflects different feelings															√	
shows other people in different cultures																√

The question about what kind of feelings literature evokes in participants was answered differently: The highest frequency for the answers is for peace and excitement. Curiosity and feeling nice follow them with 3 answers. And two participants chose enthusiasm for the feeling they have when they think about literature. Others mention different feelings such as beauty, purity, boredom, shyness, happiness, complexity, imagination, creativity and authenticity. Although most of the participants use positive adjectives, two of them talked about boredom and shyness, which have negative meanings.

Table 7. Feelings Literature Evokes in the Pre-Service Teachers

	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5	F6	F7	F8	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5	M6	M7	M8
peace		√				√					√				√	
excitement			√	√				√	√							
curiosity				√					√					√		
feeling nice							√				√	√				

beauty						√										
enthusiasm							√				√					
purity				√												
boredom	√															
shyness										√						
happiness										√						
complexity											√					
imagination												√				
creativity												√				
authenticity																√

In order to learn if participants have developed an appropriate idea about literature, they were asked to find a metaphor for literature and to explain it. They answered this question as in the following: F1 thought that literature is like the sky. All people like looking at it but mostly they ignore that it is always over us. F2 resembled literature to a mirror in which we can find something that belongs to us and recognise that it reflects us. According to F3, literature is a box full of many things inside, like jewellery or private letters. However, it is only a box from outside and you cannot see the inside without reading. For F4, literature is like an artist's canvas on which the artist paints her picture freely and others try to interpret it by examining it. F5 resembled literature to a plane whose fuel never finishes. It takes you to different places and to different people. Your travel is very nice. In F6's opinion, literature is a light which is always on and lightens everybody. F7 found a resemblance between the clouds in the sky and literature. Like clouds, it is pure and beautiful. When people look at the clouds, they feel ease and happiness and in the same way, if you read, literature beautifies your soul. F8 resembled literature to water. She said that if you like it, it is a glass of cold water you would like to drink in a hot summer day and it gives you pleasure but if you do not like it, it is too hot to drink.

When it comes to male participants, they also resembled literature to concrete objects as in the following: M1 could not express literature with a concrete object as he thought that it is related to emotions. M2 thought it as a ladder which we carry everywhere and when we cannot reach a place we use it. M3 resembled literature to a human being. When he reads, he feels as if somebody were talking to him about his/ her experiences. For M4, literature is play dough which we can use, and we get different things as a result. M5 believed that literature is the rain which falls into people's soul and awakens deepest feelings. Like the soil, human beings feel thirsty for literature, otherwise they get dry. To make our souls alive, we need literature. M6 found a similarity between the universe and literature. Although the universe is very big, it still continues to develop. Literature is the same; there are a lot of literary works, but people still create new ones. M7 believed language is a chain and literature is one of its rings. If there is no literature in language teaching, the chain means nothing. M8 resembled literature to songs and novels. They are literary values that give language life and make beliefs, values, culture, people and lives immortal. As it can be recognised from the metaphors they use for literature, pre- service English teachers are aware of what literature means. They found so good metaphors to describe literature that they focused different aspects of it.

All participants said that teachers should be well- equipped with literature to be a good teacher of English. F2 thought that thanks to literature, a teacher can cover most of the details about the target culture. F3 said that the more a teacher knows literature of that country, the more he/ she knows the language. F4 stated that interest in literature supports the teacher in many ways, such as artistic perspective, different point of view, his/ her expressions and the use of the language and this will form a fully- equipped language teacher. According to F6, a good language teacher should know equally the language, culture and literature. F7 thought that to provide an enjoyable and different atmosphere in class, a language teacher should know and use literature in class. In F8's opinion, the more a language teacher understands literature, the better he/she will teach the language. M1 said that a literature lover teacher should be creative, active and full of interesting ideas. M3 believed that teachers take the attention of students into the lesson with the help of literature. For M4, knowing literature changes the way of teaching of the teacher. All male participants emphasized that a language reflects the lives of the people, their culture, their art, their customs and their life style.

When they were asked if they will use it in their classes in the future, they all gave positive answers. They would like to use literature and try to make students understand and appreciate it. Five of them will use it as a different material. While three participants would like to develop their students in every field, three other participants would like to develop their students in every field, three other participants want to develop their students' cultural understanding. Three others plan to use literature to awaken the students' curiosity towards fine arts. The rest of the group believed individually that they can improve their language skills, develop different points of view, develop awareness towards the language or get an interesting atmosphere in class.

Table. 8. Why the students will use literature in class

	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5	F6	F7	F8	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5	M6	M7	M8
to use as a different material	√			√			√						√			√
to develop our students in every field		√							√		√					
to develop their understanding of culture			√			√									√	
to awaken their curiosity towards fine arts				√			√									√
to make students love literature		√				√										
to develop different points of view				√								√				
to improve their language skills				√	√											
to develop awareness towards the language					√			√								
to get an interesting atmosphere in class							√						√			
to help them understand people						√										
to show language differences							√									

4. Conclusion

The present study finds out that pre- service English teachers do not know literary features much and therefore they do not feel literary competent to use literature in class. They are all aware of the benefits of literature and would like to improve their literary competence by reading it. They believe that reading literature makes them more competent both in the language and in literature and also change their viewpoints. It is recognised that they have developed an appreciation for literature, thanks to the exposure to literature in the literature courses. They say it supports language teaching, makes teaching more active and effective, develops language skills, changes the perspectives of students, develops critical thinking, creates a communicative atmosphere in class, teaches cultures, broadens students' horizons and motivates students.

They also agree that it improves personal understanding. According to them, learning about different people can change their ideas, attitudes and behaviours and as a result, they promote tolerance especially for foreigners. When they discuss the feeling that literature evokes in them, they focus on different aspects of literature. They emphasize everything in life can take place in literature as well. They are aware of the fact that they share the same experience in life with other people they do not know. They find interesting to see the same event from different perspectives which they have never seen before. While reading they show empathy for the characters. They believe that in literary texts, they can find all the feelings that they cannot express themselves. They state that literature takes them from the place where they are to the places they do not know. They accept that it is vital for the life of the soul and mind.

All the participants suggest that language teachers should appreciate literature and use it in class. They would like to improve themselves in terms of literature and use it themselves as well.

The results of what the pre-service English teachers have said are very encouraging. All of them are aware of the fact that literature is an important factor that should be integrated into the foreign language curriculum. However, the research group was composed of adults over 18, who have literary background somehow and life experience. All these factors may have affected their answers. In this respect, this is a limited study. Quantitative studies should be carried out in foreign language classes at different levels and it should be tested if the similar results can be obtained with different research groups. Nevertheless, this study is important as it reflects that pre-service English teachers have developed an awareness and understanding for the importance of literature in foreign language teaching.

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