

Educators' Attitudes toward Teaching Western Literature to Saudi University Students

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Abstract

Numerous studies have investigated the issue of teaching in EFL classrooms and the relationship between educators and students; some focus on the pedagogy used to teach English, while others center on students' attitudes. This study fills an existing gap in the literature on educators' attitudes toward teaching Western literature in non-Western settings. It surveys educators' backgrounds and perspectives toward teaching Western cultural, social, and religious issues in Saudi Arabia and identifies which variables influence their attitudes toward teaching Western literature. It examines educators' goals in teaching Western literature within the Saudi context, in line with the progressive Vision 2030 and the ongoing process of globalization. It investigates the present state of teaching Western literature in the English departments of eight Saudi universities through a mixed-methods approach, analyzing data from a questionnaire completed by 99 educators. This study highlights the significance of teaching Western literary texts in Saudi bachelor (BA) teaching programs. The results yield some valuable pedagogical implications on what Western literature can offer English-as-a-foreign-language (EFL) students in Saudi universities. They demonstrate the educators' positive attitudes toward teaching Western literature in EFL classrooms, believing that it can achieve objectives that transcend the boundaries of language and text. These findings are rewarding in a broader sense and particularly so in this globalized era. Accordingly, this study recommends the teaching of Western literature as a means of bridging the East/West divide, a matter of increasing significance in the current era.

Keywords: EFL classrooms, Saudi Arabia, educators' attitudes, Western literature

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Introduction

English functions as the global language of communication due to the number of people who use it as a first or second language and its widespread use in different contexts. It is the primary language of instruction for sciences such as medicine, engineering, and modern technology.

The Ministry of Education in Saudi Arabia has long recognized the importance of teaching English as a foreign language, but attention to English language proficiency has increased in step with the country's development. This process depends on continuous interaction with the outside world. English language education in Saudi Arabia dates back nearly ninety years, beginning in 1927. However, the importance of learning the English language is ever-increasing, and mastery of the language by Saudi students is one of the priorities of the Saudi educational system, attracting significant financial support. Initially, students learned English at intermediate, secondary, and university levels. However, it has recently been introduced for students in the first years of elementary school.

At the university level, English instruction is no longer simply instrumental; its scope has widened to include interests in the English language and in English and American literature. Universities teach foreign literature in the faculties of arts and humanities. Some of these faculties are interested in English literature, others in French literature, and some have gone beyond this to teach European and world literature. However, the prevailing trend is to concentrate on the interest in English literature.

Many studies have investigated teaching English as a foreign language in Saudi Arabia, mainly discussing its problems and obstacles. However, there has been little research into educators' attitudes toward teaching Western literature in English-as-a-foreign-language (EFL) classrooms within an oriental setting, particularly within Saudi Arabia. Therefore, the author has taken the initiative of conducting this study to identify and characterize educators' attitudes toward teaching Western literature in Saudi universities' EFL classrooms and their goals when teaching during the Vision 2030 era.ⁱ This work highlights the significance of teaching Western literary texts in Saudi bachelor degree (BA) programs. This study has three main objectives. The first is to determine how educators' personal and professional backgrounds affect their attitudes toward teaching Western literature to Saudi students. The second is to evaluate educators' attitudes toward how Western literature is taught in the English departments of eight selected universities in Saudi Arabia. Finally, this study highlights educators' goals in teaching Western literature in the contemporary Saudi context. Thus, to identify and characterize educators' attitudes toward teaching Western literature in Saudi universities' EFL classrooms during the Vision 2030 era, as well as their goals when teaching, the author formulated the following research questions:

1. Do educators' personal and professional backgrounds affect their attitudes toward teaching Western literature in a Saudi environment?
2. Do educators believe that teaching Western literature to EFL students in Saudi Arabia is conducive to enhancing language acquisition and improving students' linguistic, cultural, and personal awareness?
3. What are educators' goals in teaching Western literature in the Saudi context, both under the framework of Vision 2030 and in the new era of globalization more generally?

Literature Review

Since the 1980s, EFL educators worldwide have become interested in the debate surrounding teaching literature in EFL contexts (Clandfield & Duncan, 2004). The use of literature as a tool in EFL pedagogy has produced numerous, sometimes controversial studies on the practice. Some researchers highlight the benefits of teaching literature to EFL students; McKay (1982), for instance, claims that it fosters students' reading skills, promotes tolerance, and helps students become creative. McRae (1991) similarly argues that literature motivates students toward personal and dynamic learning. EFL educators interested in literature have typically used it in line with the three models—cultural, language, and

personal growth—proposed by Carter and Long (1991). The cultural model views the literary text as a product, treating it not only as a source of academic information about the target language but also as a means to learn about a country's culture and ideologies. In contrast, the language model is learner-centered and focuses primarily on how language is used. Brumfit and Carter (1986) highlight the role of literature as “an ally of language” as it exposes students to authentic language, whether slang or formal (1). Through their consumption of literature, students encounter and master new meanings while enhancing their general awareness of English grammar, vocabulary, and figures of speech. Many studies like those of Collie and Slater (1990) and Benton and Fox (1985) examine how teaching literature in EFL classrooms motivates students and enhances their learning, particularly in reading and writing—critical skills for language acquisition. Finally, the personal growth model attempts to create a link between the cultural and language models. It focuses on the language of texts while also stimulating students to think about different cultures compared to their own. Many studies seem to suggest that studying literature not only expands students' cultural and linguistic awareness but also helps students to construct their personalities by encouraging interaction and discussion. Raithby and Taylor (2020) explain this as follows:

Through the development of intercultural skills, the reader is invited to adopt a different perspective on the familiar and be receptive to the unfamiliar. Seeing through the eyes of multiple protagonists encourages empathy for different viewpoints [...]. Encouragements to relate the experiences of fictional characters to their own contexts and emotions may also promote greater self-awareness and reflexivity (p. 20).

Clarifying this idea, Bobkina and Dominguez (2014) claim that “students usually get engaged in the plot of the story, commonly feeling close to their favorite characters” and suggest that motivating this form of engagement “creates a positive general effect on the learning process which is at the same time positive for the particular process of language acquisition” (p. 250). This supports the belief that using literature in EFL classrooms can help students to gain intercultural awareness. Doing so enables students “to understand and appreciate cultures and ideologies different from their own in time and space and to come to perceive tradition of thought and feeling and artistic form in those cultures” (Carter & Long, 1991, p. 2). Many studies, such as Parkinson and Thomas's (2000), argue that teaching literature to EFL students can instill cultural knowledge.

Moreover, in a recent study, Khan and Alasmari (2018) highlight “the prospective advantages of using literary text in EFL classrooms” on students' overall learning experience (p. 174). Their study highlights a “comprehensive literature on the benefits of using literary text in EFL classrooms, emphasizing the notion that it promotes authentic materials, helps increase language skills, and extends linguistic knowledge” (p. 167).

While several studies affirm the need for employing literature in EFL classrooms, many others have been critical of the idea that it offers linguistic or cultural benefits (see Spack, 1985; McKay, 2001; Hall, 2003; Lima, 2005). These studies describe the difficulties posed by literary language, arguing that it is irrelevant to the process of learning a foreign language. Hall (2003) argues that teaching literature is not always meaningful for learners despite the enthusiasm it might stir in classrooms. Lima (2005) goes further, stating that the mastery of grammatical forms and graded structures that usually guide EFL teaching “clashes violently with the intentional bending and breaking of grammatical rules that seems to be one of the main features of literature” (p. 186). Consequently, structural linguists argue that literature “should be excluded from the ESL curriculum because of its structural complexity, lack of conformity to standard grammatical rules and remote cultural perspectives” (Spack, 1985, p. 704).

In addition to linguistic disputes, scholars have debated cultural concepts surrounding the teaching of literary texts in EFL classrooms to assess whether “any benefits can arise from examining the cultural assumption of a piece of literature” (McKay, 2001, p. 531). According to McKay (2001), “literature may work to promote a greater tolerance for cultural differences for both the teacher and the student [and it] may increase their understanding of that culture and perhaps spur their own creation of imaginative works” (p. 531). McKay appears to suggest that using literature in EFL classrooms might indeed yield some rewards. Accordingly, literature in EFL classrooms is an internationally controversial issue, generating many sharply conflicting views on this pedagogical approach.

In line with the findings of the majority of the research studies noted above, this study more closely aligns itself with the positive perspective toward using literature in EFL classrooms, agreeing that it helps learners' development linguistically, culturally, and personally. However, the discussion should also focus on EFL educators' attitudes and goals when using Western literature with Saudi students in the period shaped by Vision 2030. Although there have been many studies of EFL teaching in non-Western contexts, little research has considered the teaching of Western literature in Saudi universities. Moskovsky and Picard (2019) have, however, worked to provide a comprehensive review of almost 25 years of academic research into issues relating to EFL teaching and learning in Saudi classrooms. The book presents itself as providing a historical “overview of English and English teaching in Saudi Arabia, including its early ‘Golden Age,’ its virtual disappearance during the ‘Wahhabi Period,’ and its reintroduction and expansion from the ‘Unification’ period to the present.” Generally speaking, it “is concerned with attitudes to English teaching and learning in Saudi Arabia.” In addition, it reflects “issues relating to in-country EFL learning/learners in Saudi Arabia” (pp. 2–3). The book, therefore, does touch upon the EFL learning environment within the Saudi educational system, both historical and present, and highlights the future of English as a foreign language in the country. Despite this, however, it does not give sufficient attention to the teaching of Western literature in Saudi EFL classrooms. Recent studies that address this issue (see Alshammari et al., 2020) tend to center on the challenges faced by educators and students rather than educators' attitudes. Such work typically investigates the reasons—as perceived by educators and instructors—why EFL students might be discouraged from studying English literature. Some recent research has also considered students' attitudes toward using authentic literary material, but this has not included consideration of educators' attitudes (see Hussein & Al-Emami, 2016).

Hence, the author undertook this study to fill the gap in the existing literature on educators' attitudes toward teaching Western literature to Saudi EFL students, particularly within the context of Vision 2030. It examines whether educators' personal and professional backgrounds influence their approaches to teaching Western literature in Saudi Arabia, while also acknowledging the uniquely conservative environment of non-Western students. Thus, this study gathered information on educators' backgrounds—such as age and personal and professional experiences—and their attitudes toward teaching Western literature, incorporating cultural, social, and religious issues; this served to identify which variables currently influence educators' attitudes. It then builds on this foundation to examine and reformulate Saudi EFL educators' goals when teaching Western literature within the context of the new Saudi Vision 2030. To achieve this, the author asked faculty members from English departments in eight of Saudi Arabia's leading universities to complete a questionnaire and then analyzed their responses.

Method

The study adopted a mixed-methods approach, using SurveyMonkey to distribute a questionnaire online to collect initial data for analysis. This 40-item questionnaire asked educators about their attitudes toward teaching Western literature in Saudi university EFL classrooms. The study also incorporated a qualitative element that drew mainly on responses to open-ended questionnaire items, for which educators provided further explanations of their attitudes and practices.

Participants

The 99 participants in this study all educators teaching Western literature within their respective departments. Of those participants, 7 were teaching assistants, 20 were lecturers, 53 were assistant professors, 14 were associate professors, and 5 were professors. The age of the participants ranged from 22 to 61+, with the majority falling within the brackets of 31–40 (41%) and 41–50 (38%), with the remaining 20% spread across the age brackets 22–30, 51–60, and 61+. The majority of the respondents identified as female (72%) and 27% as male. More questionnaires were completed by educators from Taif University than from any remaining university, due in part to the author's affiliation with that institution.

Instruments

The questionnaire comprised 40 questions, categorized into 11 different themes:

1. Personal information (Q1 to Q7)
2. Professional experience (Q8 to Q14)
3. Attitudes toward teaching Western literature (Q15 to Q17)
4. Attitudes toward literary genres (Q18 and Q19)
5. Attitudes toward course material (Q20 and Q21)
6. Attitudes toward taboo and erotic images/scenes (Q22 to Q27)
7. Attitudes toward literary texts (Q28 to Q32)
8. Attitudes toward the department's objective/s when using literary texts (Q33 to Q35)
9. Personal judgment as an educator (Q36 to Q38)
10. Understanding the perspectives of students while teaching Western literature (Q39, consisting of nine statements evaluated on a five-point Likert scale)
11. Factors affecting Western literature teaching in accordance with the Vision 2030 framework (Q40, consisting of six statements evaluated on a five-point Likert scale)

The Likert scale used in Q39 and Q40 ranged from 1 ("strongly agree") to 5 ("strongly disagree").

Data Analysis

The data obtained from the SurveyMonkey questionnaire was then analyzed using chi-square and Mann–Whitney *U* tests performed with R Project software. The descriptive statistics helped develop answers to the study's primary research questions.

Setting

The author carried out this study during the 2020 academic year in the English departments of Imam Abdulrahman Bin Faisal University, Imam Mohammad Ibn Saud Islamic University, Jeddah University, King Abdulaziz University, King Saud University, Taif University, Umm Al-Qura University, and the University of Princess Nora. In those departments, students in their third and fourth years of EFL undergraduate study were required to take literature courses. Educators teach a broad historical range of prose fiction, drama, poetry, and literary criticism.

Findings

The goal of this study was to investigate educators' attitudes toward the use of Western literature within the EFL classrooms of Saudi universities; as such, the survey considered a range of factors that may influence educators' attitudes, including age, work experience, and personal background. The findings about these attitudes is presented below to demonstrate the results of the data analysis.

Do educators' personal and professional backgrounds affect their attitudes toward teaching Western literature in the Saudi environment?

To address this first research question—whether educators' personal and professional background impacts upon their attitude toward teaching Western literature within the Saudi context—the author analyzed educators' responses to Questions 3, 4, 6, 8, and 10 (see Appendix A). What was immediately apparent is that most respondents had either spent time living in Western countries, had extensive

experience teaching Western literature, or both. However, exploring the impact of this experience on educators' perspectives on teaching Western literature provided some surprising results. The responses to Q4 ('Have you lived in the West?') and Q10 ('How knowledgeable are you regarding Western culture?') show this clearly. The responses suggest no evident, strong correlation between educators having lived in the West and feeling that they are exceptionally knowledgeable about Western culture. This result was confirmed, and its significance tested, using a chi-squared test with the following hypotheses:

H0: Living in the West does not affect how knowledgeable educators about Western culture.

H1: Living in the West affects how knowledgeable educators about Western culture.

The resulting p-value of 0.0549 does not meet the 0.05 level of significance. Therefore, the null hypothesis is accepted: Living in the West *does not* affect how much educators know about Western culture.

Moreover, the author calculated the mean values for the answers given to the Likert items from Question 39 and compared them to the respondents' years of experience (Table 1).

Table 1. *Educators' Perceptions of Student Attitudes to Western Literature Classes*

Statement	1-5 Years	6-15 Years	16-25 Years	26-35 Years	36+ Years	Weighted Average
1. I feel teaching Western (English/American) literature makes me a better/more competent educator than others.	3.90	3.00	2.36	2.14	1.00	2.84
2. From my English literature classes, I feel that students believe Western culture (English or American) is better than other cultures.	3.90	3.42	3.14	3.14	3.00	3.39
3. I think students tend to learn Western literature to understand the Western culture and promote Islam.	3.40	2.95	3.14	2.86	2.00	3.06
4. The students feel that learning Western literature means they are educated, open-minded people.	3.20	2.68	2.14	2.57	2.00	2.61
5. The students sometimes worry about losing their identity and Islamic culture in Western (English/American) literature classes.	3.90	3.32	3.64	3.57	5.00	3.59
6. The students find learning the culture of others is fun and exciting.	1.80	2.37	2.07	1.71	2.00	2.08
7. The students think learning Western literary texts is a waste of time because they believe they are irrelevant to their course.	4.20	3.16	3.43	3.43	3.00	3.47
8. The students think learning Western literature will improve their language skills.	1.90	2.58	2.00	1.86	2.00	2.18

The findings from Question 39 suggest that the amount of work experience each educator had did significantly influence their perception of the impact that teaching Western literature had on their careers. Hence, they have become more inclined to recognize the benefits of teaching Western literature to Saudi students. The responses to Statement 1, for example, indicate a gradual loss of humility, as with an increase in age and work experience, educators were more likely to believe that their instruction made them better or more intelligent than others. This may be partly attributable to generational differences in the perception of the West in Saudi Arabia and a lack of attachment to national identity among younger educators; they do not necessarily attach positive or negative values to Western culture, at least relative to their own, as the responses to Statement 2 indicate. Similarly, older and more experienced educators are

more inclined, in comparison to younger colleagues, to report that they thought that students learned Western literature and culture to promote Islam and Islamic culture (Statement 3). Again, this could be partly attributed to a stronger sense of national pride or belonging among older generations than younger ones raised in an increasingly globalized environment. Nonetheless, the weighted average response to this statement indicates that educators tend to remain ambivalent on this matter. Further, educators agreed that the teaching of Western literature in Saudi universities did not represent a threat to Islamic culture (Statement 5), this notion sharpening with an increase in work experience.

Moreover, older and more experienced educators tended to agree that studying Western literature meant that students felt educated and open-minded, while younger colleagues were ambivalent (Statement 4). Again, the role of globalization is significant here. The results also suggest that less-experienced, younger educators were more likely to have been raised in a more open society and accordingly were less ready to position one culture over another, thus blurring the distinctions between East and West. Educators also believed that students share a common interest in learning about other cultures (Statement 6) and in using Western literature as a tool of language acquisition (Statement 8). In general, as educators become more experienced, they tend to believe less and less that students view learning Western literature as a waste of time (Statement 7).

Question 40 measured the educators' capabilities rather than their perceptions of Islamic and Western culture. The findings in Table 2 demonstrate a broader consensus among age and experience groups that educators' skills and experience (Statement 3), attitudes (Statement 4), and their self-efficacy (Statement 5) strongly affect students' learning experiences and motivation. All felt they were sufficiently knowledgeable to teach Western literature in a manner that could attract students and help them learn more about Western cultures. Table 2 also gives the mean Likert values for respondents from each age category.

Table 2. *Factors Affecting the Teaching of English Literature*

Statement	1–5 Years	6–15 Years	16–25 Years	26–35 Years	36+ Years	Weighted Average
1. Western literature classes in Saudi universities suffer from a sheer lack of both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation.	3.00	2.74	2.93	2.29	3.00	2.78
2. Educators face severe issues with students' aptitude, initial preparedness, and motivation in courses related to Western literature.	3.10	2.58	2.14	2.57	3.00	2.58
3. Educators' skills and expertise, which include language proficiency, content knowledge, teaching skills, contextual knowledge, learner-focused teaching, and professionalism, affect their teaching Western literature.	2.00	2.16	1.36	1.71	2.00	1.86
4. Educators with a positive attitudes toward teaching Western literature usually strive for better performances.	2.10	2.37	1.50	1.71	2.00	2.00
5. The educators' self-efficacy considerably influences instructional practices and classroom behavior, and on students' achievement and motivation.	1.90	2.16	1.79	2.00	2.00	1.98

For Statement 1, the weighted average suggests overall that there is mild disagreement with the idea of a problematic lack of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. It seems that those educators with 1–5 years of experience and those with 36+ years of experience tended to disagree most strongly with the statement (i.e., they were the ones most convinced there was no intrinsic/extrinsic lack of motivation). Except for

those educators with 26–35 years of experience (who did slightly agree with the statement), all the other groups on average disagreed but to a somewhat lesser degree (and the group with 16–25 years of experience more so than the group with 6–15 years of experience).

For Statement 2, the weighted average suggests a slight overall tendency amongst the respondents to disagree with what was said (2.58 is more significant than 2.50). Again, groups with 1–5 and 36+ years of experience were the groups that, on average, most vigorously disagreed (with the 1–5 years of experience cohort marginally stronger in their dispute). Once more, only one group—the group with 16–25 years of experience (2.14)—displayed a degree of general agreement. It appears that educators at the start (the first 15 years) and later stages (26+ years) of their careers typically feel as though they do not face severe issues with students' aptitude and motivation, whereas those in the middle of their careers (broadly speaking, those with 16–25 years of experience) tend to believe that there are indeed issues in that regard.

For Statements 3, 4, and 5, there is a general tendency to agree with the claim that educators' skills and expertise affect their way of teaching Western literature, regardless of experience. This indicates that educators of all levels of experience consider their professional skills to have a positive impact on the way they teach. They believe they are sufficiently knowledgeable to teach Western literature in a manner that can both attract students and impart knowledge of Western cultures. Finally, regardless of their level of experience, respondents tended to agree that educators' self-efficacy is essential to improve classroom behavior and students' motivation.

Do educators believe that teaching Western literature to EFL students in Saudi Arabia is conducive to enhancing language acquisition and improving students' level of linguistic, cultural, and personal awareness?

The findings that address this second research question are relatively consistent with several earlier studies that claim the use of literature in EFL classrooms has a positive impact (see Benton & Fox, 1985; Sage, 1987; Collie & Slater, 1990; Carter & Long, 1991; Bobkina & Elena, 2014). The responses to Questions 12, 13, and 14 demonstrate that the majority of the respondents have a positive attitude toward teaching Western literature to EFL students in Saudi Arabia regarding linguistic, cultural, and personal outcomes, respectively, as demonstrated in Table 3:

Table 3. *Educators' Perceptions of the Impact of Teaching Western Literature on Student Outcomes*

How would you rate the effect of an academic course, such as the novel, on students' linguistic outcomes?		How would you rate the effect of an academic course, such as the novel, on students' cultural awareness outcomes?		How would you rate the effect of an academic course, such as the novel, on students' personal growth?	
Excellent	5	Excellent	12	Excellent	11
Very good	25	Very good	23	Very good	25
Good	25	Good	23	Good	23
Fair	14	Fair	11	Fair	10

The purpose of these three questions was both to evaluate respondents' attitudes toward using literary texts like novels as a method of teaching from different perspectives and to see which outcome educators deemed to be more critical. Most respondents rated the use of literary texts to impact students' learning outcomes as "Very good" or "Good," with very similar responses to Questions 13 and 14 (see Figure 1).

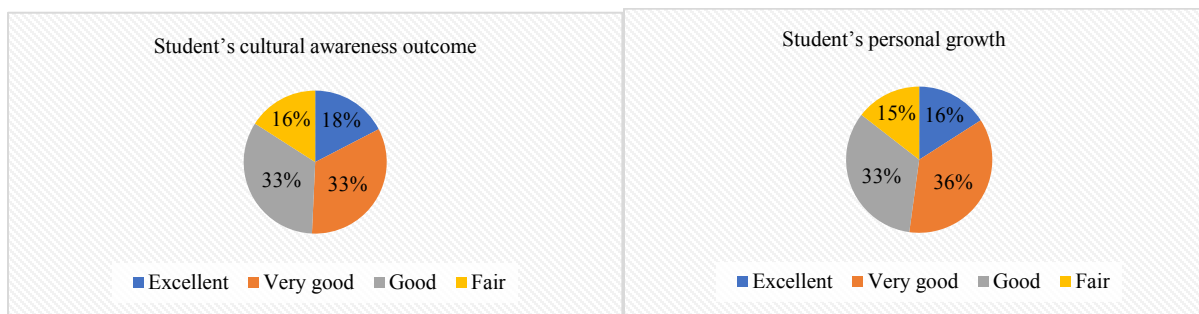


Figure 1. Educators' Perceptions of the Impact of Studying Literary Texts

The author used a Mann–Whitney *U* test to check whether a literary text had the same effect on students' cultural awareness and personal growth according to the educators, using the following hypotheses:

H0: According to the educators' responses, a literary text, such as a novel, has the same effect on the cultural awareness outcome and the personal growth of students.

H1: According to the educators' responses, a literary text, such as a novel, does not have the same effect on the cultural awareness outcome and the personal growth of students.

The p-value of 0.9219 is greater than the significance level $\alpha = 0.05$, and the null hypothesis is accepted. According to the educators, therefore, a literary text *does have the same effect* on students' cultural awareness and personal growth. These results show that incorporating academic courses within EFL classrooms positively affects students' language learning and enhances students' linguistic, cultural, and personal awareness. The majority of respondents answered "Very good" and "Good," which indicates positive attitudes toward the use of literary texts.

The responses to Question 14 highlight a noticeable relationship between work experience and the evaluation of literary texts as pedagogical tools. While educators with 1–5 and 26–35 years of experience tended to choose "Good," mid-career respondents with 6 to 25 years of experience selected "Very good," and educators with more than 35 years of experience typically said "Excellent" (see Figure 2). Again, the author used a chi-squared test to determine whether there was a correlation between variables in this question:

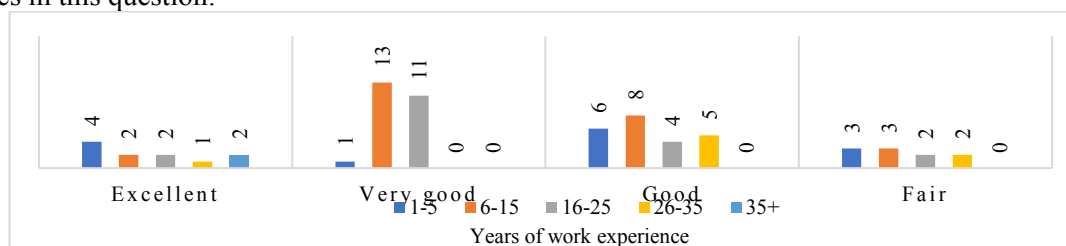


Figure 2 Educators' Ratings of the Impact of Literary Content on Students' Personal Growth

The author tested the following hypotheses:

H0: Work experience does not affect the rating of a literary text, such as a novel, regarding its impact on students' personal growth.

H1: Work experience affects the rating of a literary text, such as a novel, regarding its impact on students' personal growth.

With a p-value of 0.0045, the null hypothesis was rejected. Therefore, the data suggests that work experience does affect how educators rate an academic course based on a literary text, such as a novel, in terms of its impact on students' personal development. In short, most of the educators surveyed believed that teaching Western literature in Saudi universities can support and facilitate EFL learning.

However, the responses to Question 11 also indicated that most respondents (64%) consider both the linguistic and cultural content of the literary texts they teach. This contrasts with the 30% of respondents who indicated that they considered only cultural content, the 2% who considered only linguistic content, and the 4% who claimed not to consider anything. This issue raises the question of whether work experience influences educators' attitudes toward selecting course material. An examination of the responses to Question 11 by years of work experience indicates that there appears to be little discernible impact (see Figure 3).

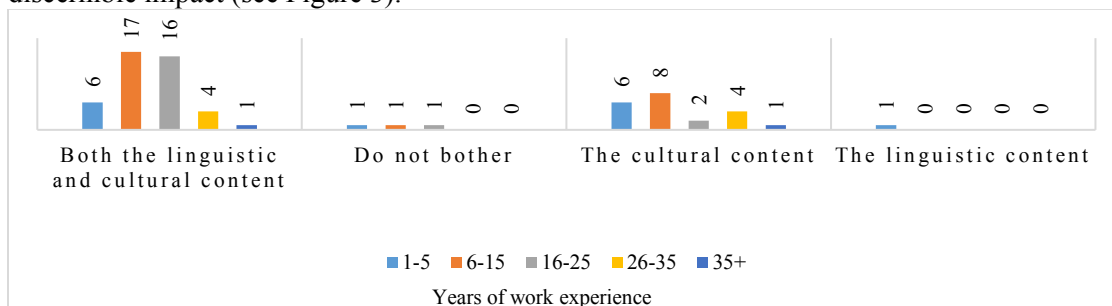


Figure 3. Educators' Concerns When Assigning New Literary Texts by Years of Work Experience

The author conducted a chi-squared test with the following hypotheses:

H0: Work experience does not affect the primary concern when assigning a new text for students.

H1: Work experience affects the primary concern when assigning a new text for students.

The p-value for these results was 0.4038, so the null hypothesis was accepted. Thus, work experience does not significantly determine educators' primary concern when assigning students a new text. It may be the case that respondents who claimed to mainly believe the cultural context of their academic course did so due to Saudi Arabia's traditional and religious environment. This matter also raises further questions regarding educators' attitudes toward some of the sensitive issues tackled in Western literature, such as erotic content and discussions that are deemed taboo in Saudi Arabia. In short, are educators open to teaching a range of potentially "indecent" or taboo themes while operating in a conservative environment?

Questions 22, 23, 24, 25, and 27 (see Appendix B), which address these more controversial topics, suggest that educators maintain a conservative attitude toward introducing such material. This issue was particularly evident in the responses to Question 22 (see Figure 4).

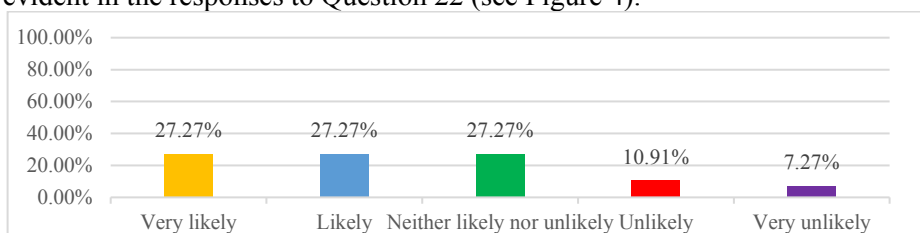


Figure 4. Likelihood of Educators Recommending Avoidance of Taboo or Erotic Subject Matter

Educators seem to have a different perspective toward answering students' questions on erotic or taboo themes. This difference is evident in the responses to Question 26: "How well do you answer students' embarrassing questions (e.g., sexual, traditional, or religious)?" Educators tended to feel that they answered such questions "very well" (47%), "somewhat well" (30%), or "extremely well" (14%). These responses highlight educators' willingness to engage with complex topics and again raise the question of whether age or work experience correlates with open-mindedness toward discussing sensitive matters. To an extent, this question also tests the validity of the old stereotype that the older the educator, the more traditional and less open-minded they are. The results ultimately showed, however, not only that the stereotype is incorrect but that there was no significant correlation between age, experience, and conservative teaching practices. The author performed chi-squared tests on the responses provided to Question 22, accounting first for age and then years of work experience (see Figures 5 and 6).

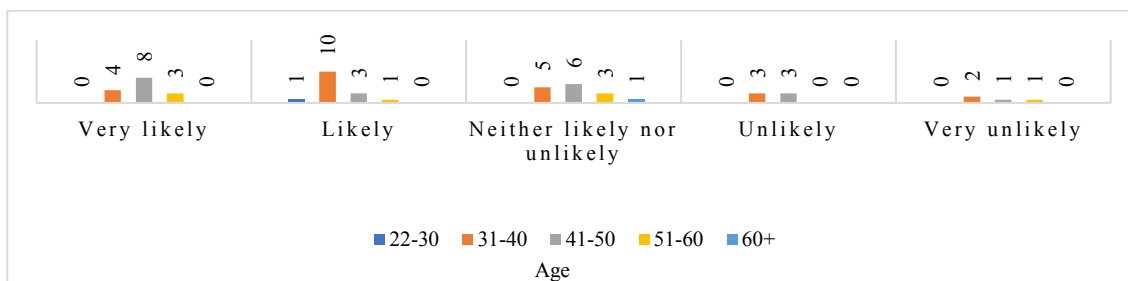


Figure 5. Likelihood of Recommendation to Skip Taboo or Erotic Images by Age

The null and alternative hypotheses regarding the influence of age were as follows:

H0: Age does not affect the likelihood of recommendations to skip taboo or erotic images and scenes.

H1: Age affects the likelihood of recommendations to skip taboo or erotic images and scenes.

The p-value of 0.625 is not statistically significant, and the null hypothesis is accepted. Therefore, age does not affect the likelihood of recommendations to skip taboo or erotic images and scenes.

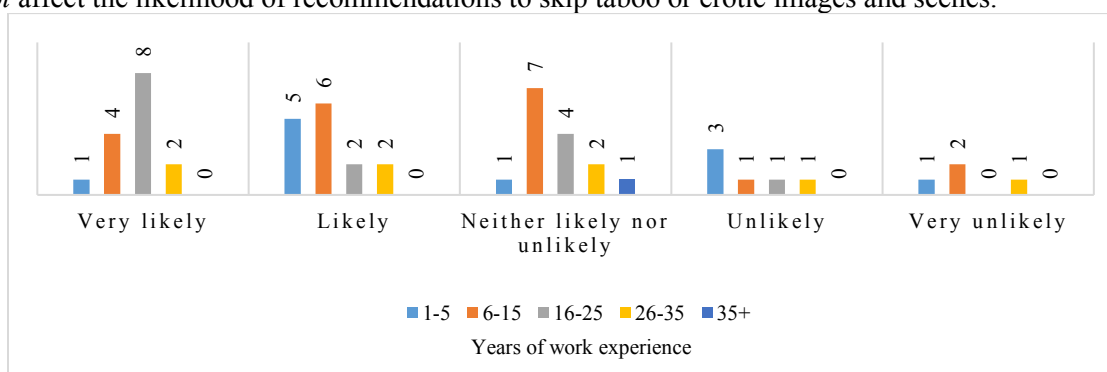


Figure 6. Likelihood of Recommendation to Skip Taboo or Erotic Images by Level of Work Experience

For the potential influence of work experience, the null and alternative hypotheses were as follows:

H0: Work experience does not affect how likely educators recommend skipping taboo or erotic images and scenes.

H1: Work experience affects how likely educators recommend skipping taboo or erotic images and scenes.

The p-value in this instance was 0.3498, which is greater than the significance level of 0.05. The null hypothesis is therefore accepted as it appears that work experience does not affect the likelihood of educators to recommend skipping taboo or erotic images and scenes.

Thus, this survey has demonstrated that neither age nor extent of work experience affects educators' attitudes toward teaching such issues. Further research is required to determine whether religion or tradition informs these attitudes, although the general line of inquiry that this finding has opened is explored by the final research question addressed here.

What are educators' goals in teaching Western literature in the Saudi context, both under the framework of Vision 2030 and in the new era of globalization more generally?

Considering both the responses to Questions 15 and 16 and the objectives that educators believe to be achievable, it is evident that the survey respondents appreciate the value of teaching Western literature in EFL classrooms within Saudi universities (see Figure 7):

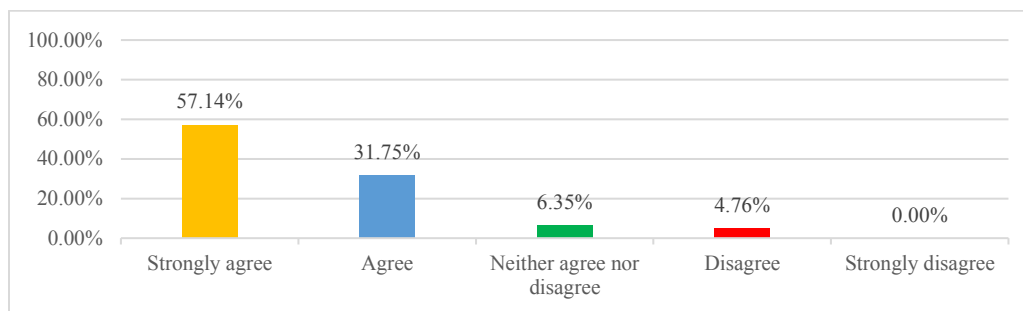


Figure 7. Responses to Proposition that Teaching Western Literature Can be Used as a Means to Connect Worlds (East and West) in this New Era of Globalization

Question 15 asked educators to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed that the teaching of Western literature could help to connect different cultures and worldviews within an era defined by globalization. Most respondents either “strongly agreed” (57%) or “agreed” (32%) with the above statement. This indicates a generally positive attitude toward teaching Western literature in Saudi EFL classrooms. The author collected educators’ points of view through the open-ended Question 16, which asked respondents to explain their answers; their attitudes display a notable homogeneity. The following samples highlight the similarities:

Art is a window to other cultures.

Literature has always helped people see the world beyond their cultural and linguistic context.

Knowing about a different culture, especially through its arts and literature, makes you able to confidently connect and communicate on a deeper level with the people of that culture. Literature records their histories, stories, and ambitions. It also sheds light on their misfortunes and disappointments, whether personally or politically. Most importantly, it gives an overview of their ways of thinking, reasoning, and their cultural attitudes toward others.

Literature provides an insight into the “other” culture. Although students are exposed to Western culture via other mediums, literature provides them with a holistic view by providing them with different contexts of interpretation. They can also present their view of the East to the West through writing back to explain their views.

The attitudes expressed in those statements resonate with the earlier claim of a correlation between teaching students’ literature and students possessing greater levels of cultural awareness. The responses to Questions 29, 30, 31, and 32 (see Appendix C) also reinforce this notion. Educators have recognized that students better understand Western culture through the department’s assigned curriculums and course material.

It was essential to ask, however, whether a department’s assigned literary text had any clear or direct relevance to students’ majors and lives, and Questions Q20 and Q21 addressed this (see Figures 8 & 9):

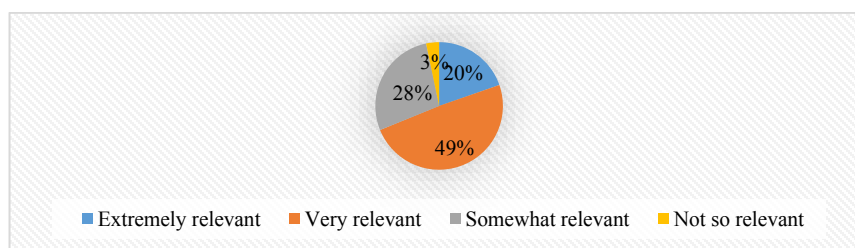


Figure 8. Perceived Relevance of Literary Content to Students’ Majors

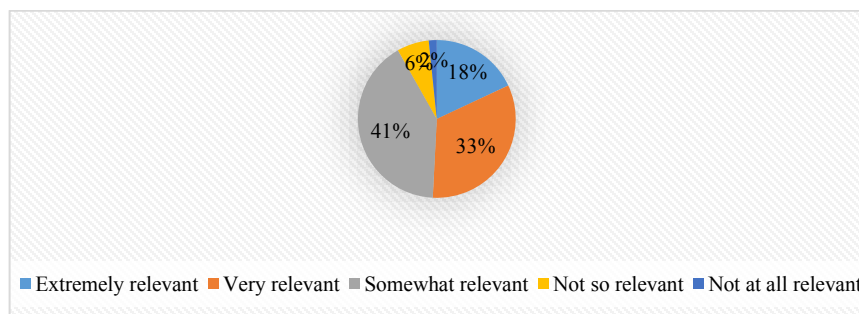


Figure 9. Perceived Relevance of Literary Content to Saudi Students' Lives

Nearly half the educators surveyed felt that the literary content of novels was at least 'very relevant,' if not more so, to students' majors. Most educators also responded that they felt that the course material was either "somewhat relevant" or "very relevant" to students' lives. To check the significance of that distribution, the results were cross-compared with educators' work experience. The survey results show that respondents with 1–5, 6–15, and 26–35 years of experience typically answered "Somewhat relevant," while most educators with 16–25 years of work experience answered "Very relevant." Educators with over 35 years of work experience considered course materials "extremely relevant" to students' lives (see Figure 15). The author used a chi-squared test to determine whether there was any significant correlation between the amount of experience that educators had and their opinions about the relevance of Western literature to Saudi life.

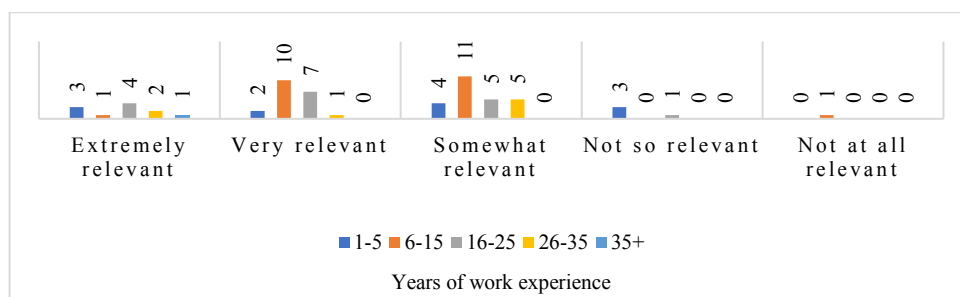


Figure 10. Perceived Level of Relevance of Novels such as Jane Eyre to Students' Lives by Years of Work Experience

The following hypotheses were tested:

H0: Work experience does not affect perceptions of the relevance of the literary content of novels such as Jane Eyre to the lives of Saudi students.

H1: Work experience affects perceptions of the relevance of the literary content of novels such as Jane Eyre to the lives of Saudi students.

A p-value of 0.1099 indicates that work experience *does not* affect how relevant literary text material is perceived to be to the lives of Saudi students. This result illustrates and emphasizes both the relevance of academic texts to students' lives and the compatibility of respondents' replies. Further research could test whether such responses and attitudes are attributable to the respondents living in a globalized era. The author recommends more research in this area.

The survey results from Question 17 and Question 29 also indicated that the respondents believed literary course materials were relevant and beneficial to students' academic and cultural development (see Figures 11 & 12).

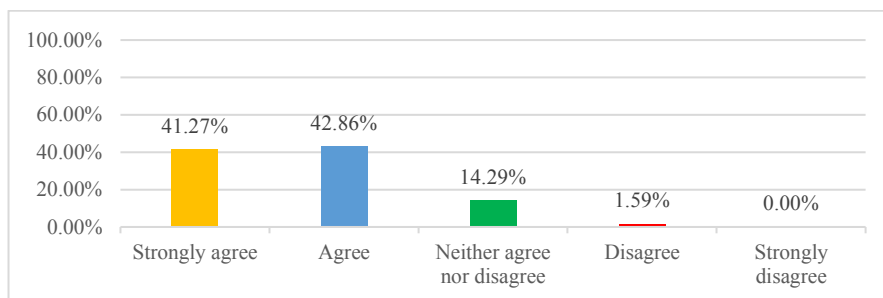


Figure 11. Level of Educators' Agreement to Proposition that Literature Motivates Students Because of its Connection to the Real World

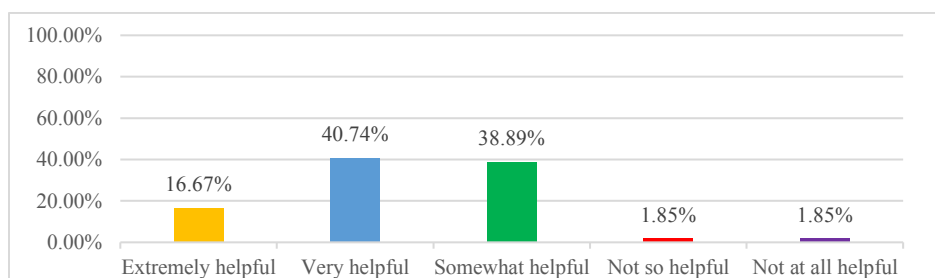


Figure 12. Educators' Perceptions of Helpfulness of the Literature Curriculum to Students' Understanding of Western Culture

Both questions elicited positive responses from most respondents, who seemed to consider Western literature an essential pedagogical tool to motivate EFL students and enhance their understanding of Western culture. Consequently, these results prompted further analysis to test respondents' attitudes toward the objectives of their respective English departments' academic courses, assessed by Questions 33, 34, and 35 (see Figures 13, 14, & 15).

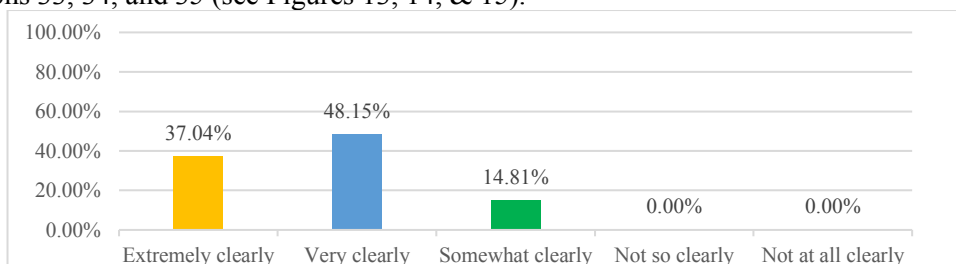


Figure 13. Educators' Perceptions of Clarity of Explanation Given to Students About the Objectives of Literary Courses

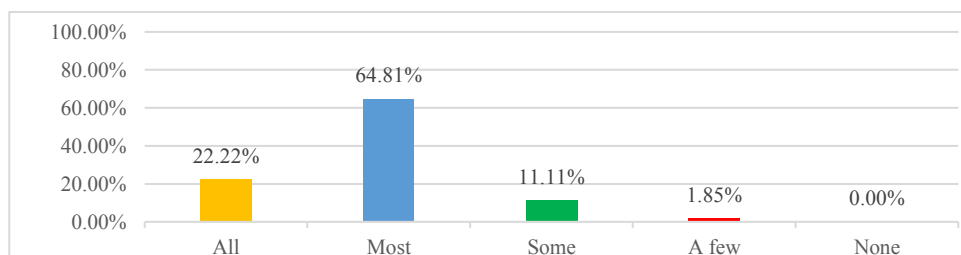


Figure 14. Educators' Estimation of Number of Course Objectives Met

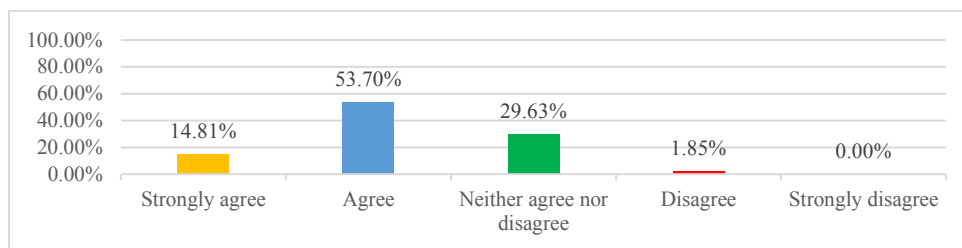


Figure 15. Educators' Perceptions of Colleagues' Agreement with Departmental Objectives

The above results for Questions 33 to 35 show that most respondents had a positive attitude toward the objectives of their departments' academic courses and were satisfied by students' achievements. However, it is still necessary to consider educators' attitudes toward a particular national, rather than institutional, objective, namely, the new Saudi Vision 2030 and the drive to build bridges between East and West. The author targeted this issue in Question 37, which asked respondents whether they believed it to be their duty as educators of Western literature to help Saudi students negotiate the divide between East and West (see Figure 16):

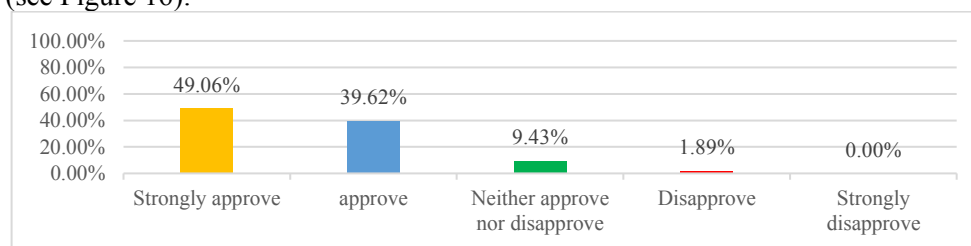


Figure 16. Educators' Approval of the Proposition that They Must Help Saudi Students Bridge the Gap Between East and West

The finding here is notable. Almost 90% of the participants responded to this question positively ("strongly approve" or "approve"). This demonstrates great potential for teaching Western literature in Saudi universities in the future. This attitude and the use of literature challenge not only academic issues but also social and political ones; these represent another critical area that merits further research.

This positive attitude is also demonstrated in the respondents' satisfaction with their duty as educators of Western literature. This is illustrated by their responses to the same question, "How satisfied are you with your work as an educator of Western literature?", asked in Question 9 at the beginning of the survey and in Question 38 at the end. Most respondents answered these two questions positively; educators who responded with either "Extremely satisfied" or "Very satisfied" to Question 38 had answered similarly in Question 9. Again, those who chose "Satisfied" in Question 9 typically responded "Satisfied" to Question 38. There is therefore an apparent relationship between these two questions. Educators appear to be consistent in their opinions regarding their satisfaction with their work as educators of Western literature. This consistency in their views indicates a strong correlation between educators' positive attitudes toward teaching literature and their appreciation of literature.

Discussion

This research attempted to uncover educators' attitudes toward teaching Western literature and the significance of teaching that literature. The results yield some valuable pedagogical implications regarding what Western literature can offer EFL students in Saudi universities. They have demonstrated a positive attitude on the part of educators and an encouraging belief that teaching Western literature can achieve objectives that transcend the boundaries of language and text. This paper has shown that teaching Western literature to EFL students can be an effective instrument for developing target language skills. Thus, such practice and positive attitudes toward it are compatible with the three models proposed earlier by Carter and Long (1991). Accordingly, the results tend not to support the stance of those scholars, such as Edmondson (1997), who argue against the use of literature as an instrument for language teaching.

To conclude, the results prove that teaching Western literature in Saudi universities as a significant part of EFL programs has provided undeniable benefits, including:

- Improving and expanding students' language, personal and cultural awareness
- Adding to students' knowledge of the broader, globalizing world, as some literary texts can be seen as authentic material
- Helping students understand and respect the 'Other'
- Helping students develop their appreciation of the literature of the 'Other'
- Promoting tolerance of cultural differences
- Helping to bridge the divide between East and West

These findings are rewarding in a broader sense and particularly so in light of the processes of globalization and the Vision 2030 agenda.

Conclusion

In sum, this study will contribute to teaching Western literature in EFL classrooms in Saudi Arabia. It reaffirms that integrating Western literature in EFL programs in Saudi universities both involves and results in more than merely the teaching of language and linguistic skills or providing education about literature solely as an art form in aesthetic terms. That the teaching of Western literature is more meaningful and purposeful manifests itself in the educators' positive attitudes toward its use in EFL classrooms. This study is distinct since it explains how teaching Western literary texts can enrich EFL students' overall learning experience in Saudi Arabia.

Recommendations

Since this study focused on educators and the teaching of Western literature to EFL students in a Saudi environment, future studies could examine the effects of such pedagogy on Saudi students from the students' perspective.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the participants for their generosity in contributing to this study. I would also like to thank my colleagues in EFL teaching, Dr. Abdullah Al-Ghamdi, Dr. Haifa A. Al-Nofaie, and Dr. Reem S. Alkhamash, who advised me on instrumental validity and reliability before collecting data.

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Endnotes

[1] Vision 2030 is a bold yet achievable blueprint for an ambitious nation. It expresses, as The Royal Highness Prince Mohammad Bin Salman declares, "our long-term goals and expectations and it is built upon our country's unique strengths and capabilities. It guides our aspirations towards a new phase of development – to create a vibrant society in which all citizens can fulfill their dreams, hopes, and ambitions to succeed in a thriving economy." Quoted in <https://www.vision2030.gov.sa/en>

² See survey: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/FG3NPT5>

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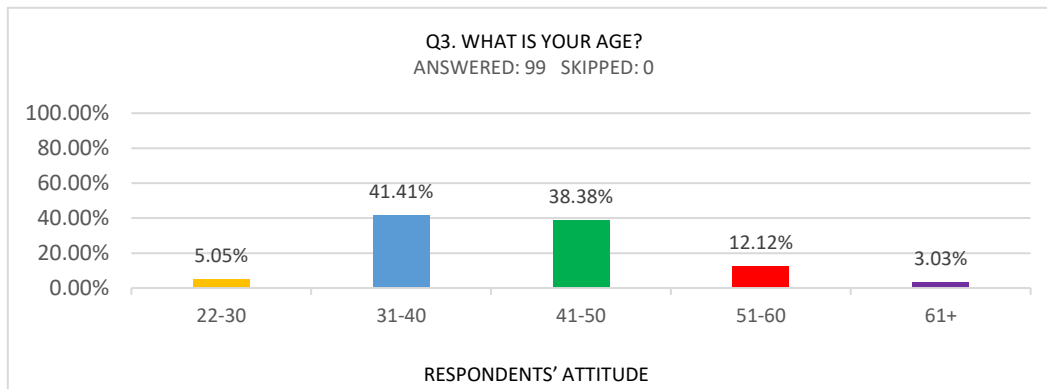
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Appendices



Appendix A: Responses to Questions 3, 4, 6, 8 and 10

Figure 17: Age of Respondents

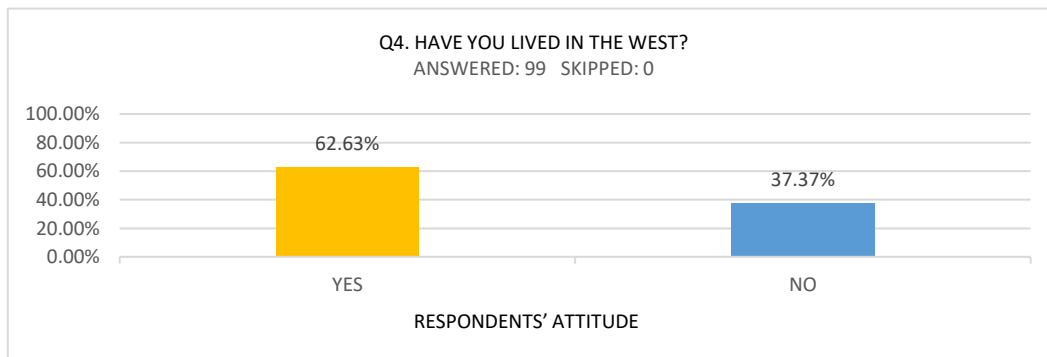


Figure 18: Respondents' Experience of the West

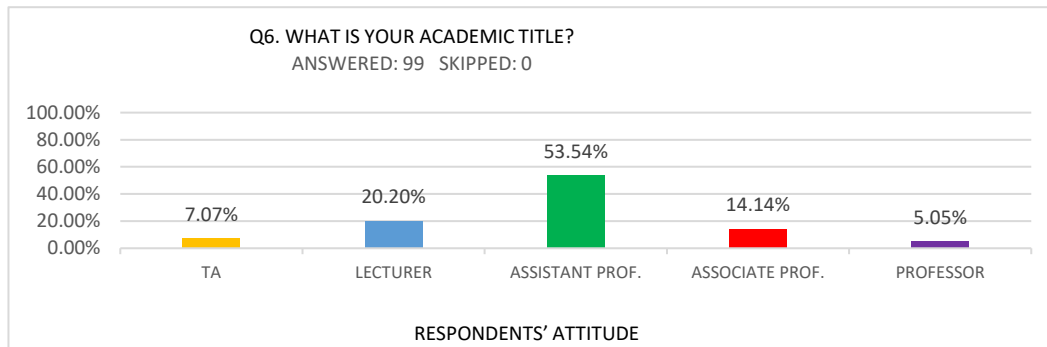


Figure 19: Distribution of Respondents by Academic Title

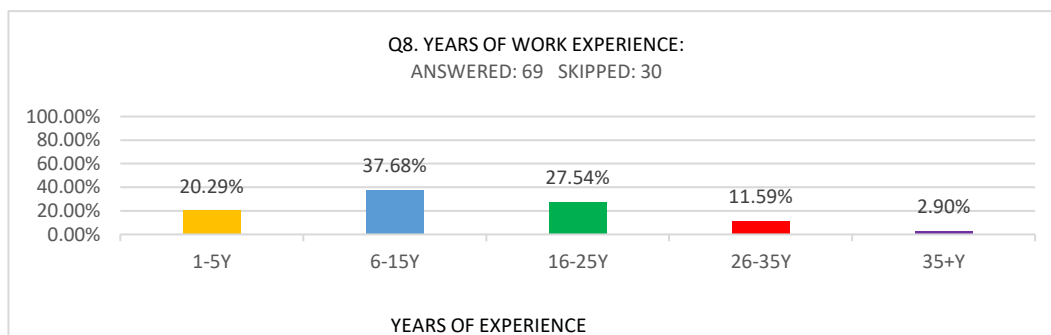


Figure 20: Respondents by Years of Work Experience

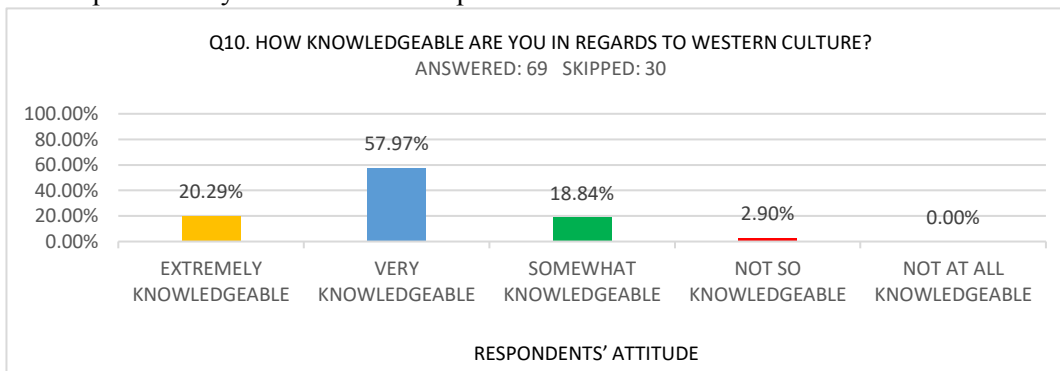


Figure 21: Educators' Perceptions of Familiarity with Western Culture

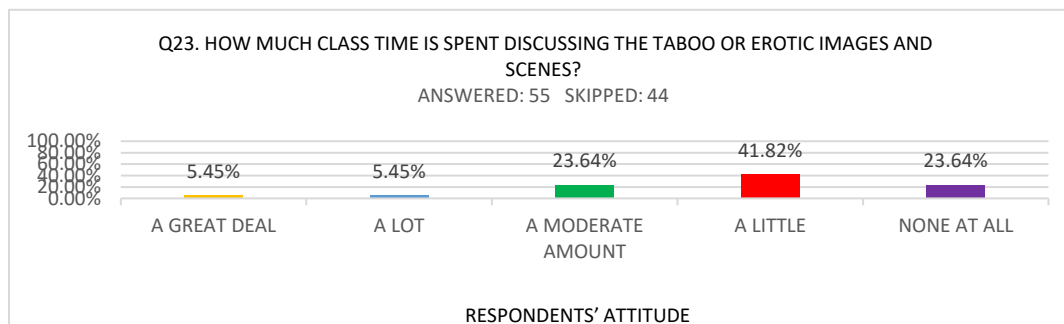


Figure 22: Time Spent on Discussion Taboo and Erotic Elements

Appendix B: Responses to Questions 23, 24, 25 and 27

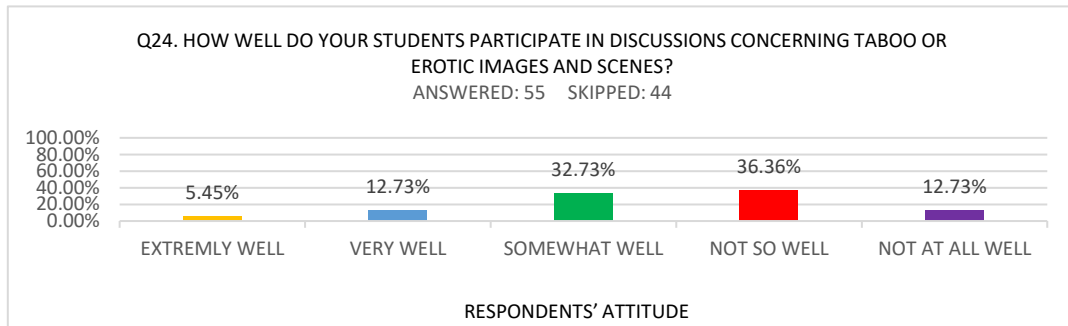


Figure 23: Participation of Students in Discussions Concerning Taboo and Erotic Elements

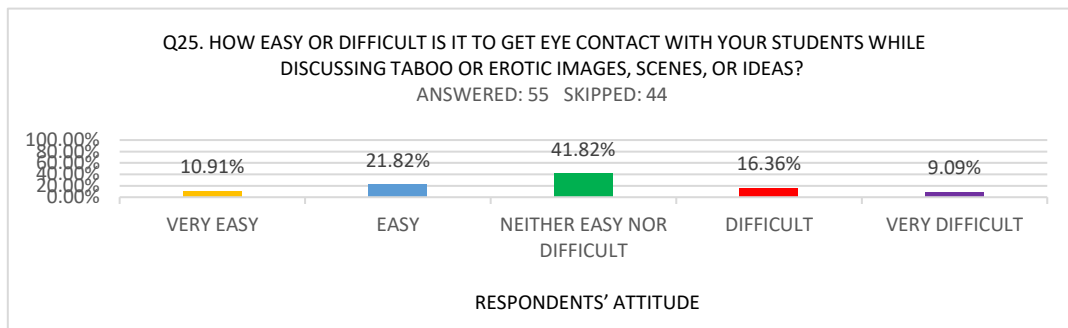


Figure 24: Difficulty of Eye Contact with Students While Discussing Taboo and Erotic Elements

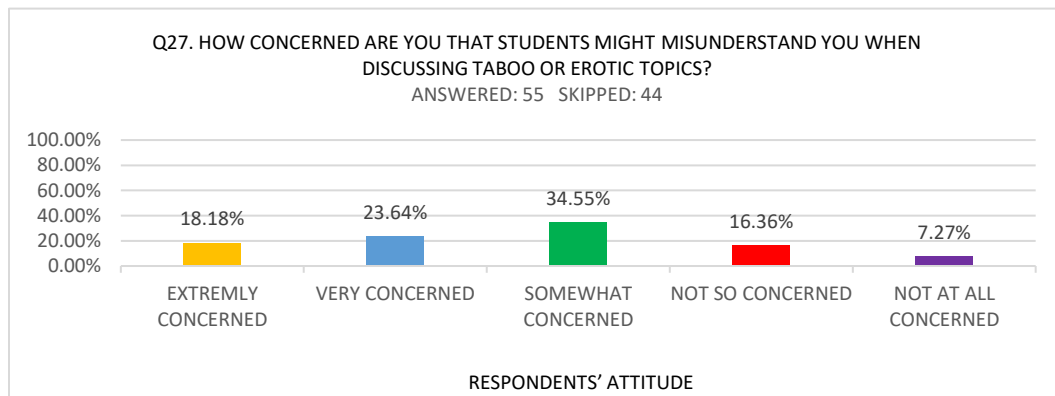


Figure 25: Educators' Level of Concern about Being Misunderstood when Discussing Taboo and Erotic Elements

Appendix C: Responses to Questions 29, 30, 31, and 32

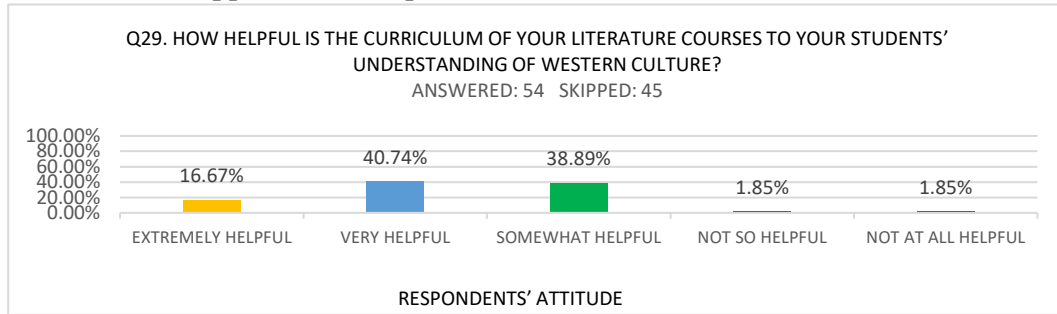


Figure 26: Educators' Perceptions of Helpfulness of the Curriculum to Students' Understanding of Western Culture

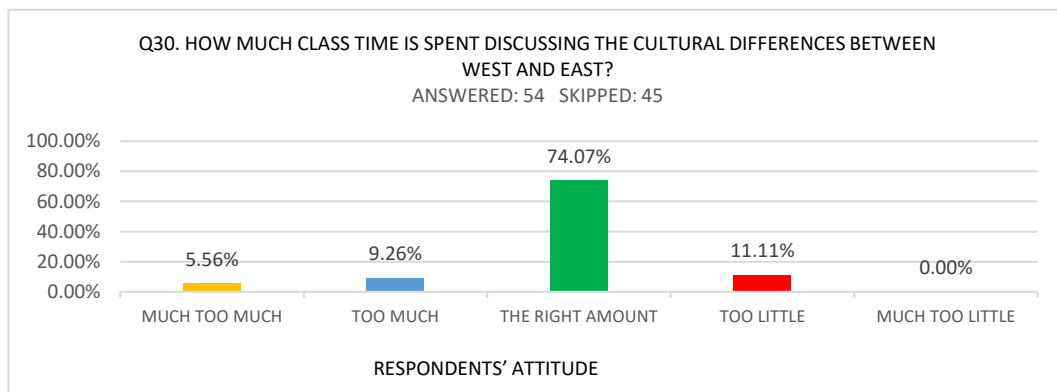


Figure 27: Time Spent Discussing Cultural Differences between East and West

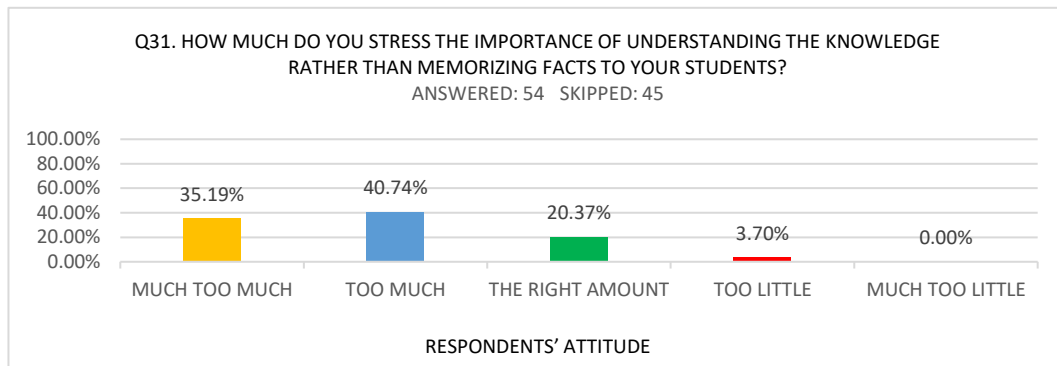


Figure 28: Educators Perceptions of the Amount of Stress Given to Understanding Rather Than Memorizing

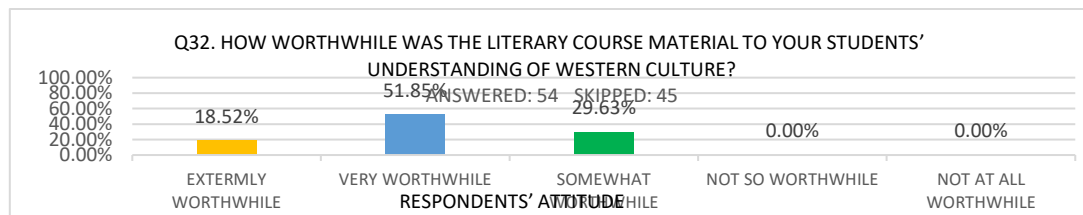


Figure 29: Educator's Perceptions of Value of Literary Course Material to Students' Understanding of Western Culture

Appendix D: Educators' Questionnaire**Educators' Attitudes toward Teaching Western Literature to Saudi University Students****Part 1: Personal Information**

This questionnaire is for data collection in connection with a research work titled "Educators' Attitudes toward Teaching Western Literature to Saudi University Students." This study aims to gather information on educators' background and attitudes toward teaching Western literature, which includes not only language skills but also cultural, social, and religious issues. Hence, this paper examines how educators' backgrounds play an important role in influencing their attitude toward teaching Western literature to Saudi students. This data will be used only for the intended purpose and shall not be shared with anyone else.

*** 1. What is your nationality?**

.....

*** 2. What is your gender?**

Female

Male

*** 3. What is your age?**

22–30

31–40

41–50

51–60

61+

4. Have you lived in the West?

Yes

No

5. If yes, indicate where and for how long:

.....

*** 6. What is your academic title?**

TA

Lecturer

Assistant Prof.

Associate Prof.

Professor

7. Name of affiliation:

Imam Abdulrahman Bin Faisal University

Imam Mohammad Ibn Saud Islamic University

Jeddah University

King Abdulaziz University

King Saud University

Taif University

Umm Al-Qura University

University of Princess Nora

Part 2: Professional Experience

*** 8. Years of work experience:**

1–5

6–15

16–25

26–35

36+

*** 9. How satisfied are you with your work as a educator of Western literature?**

Very satisfied

Satisfied

Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied

Dissatisfied

Very dissatisfied

*** 10. How knowledgeable are you in regards to Western culture?**

Extremely knowledgeable

Very knowledgeable

Somewhat knowledgeable

Not so knowledgeable

Not at all knowledgeable

*** 11. When you consider assigning a new text (e.g., a novel) for your students, what is your primary concern?**

The linguistic content

The cultural content

Both the linguistic and cultural content

Do not bother

*** 12. Overall, how would you rate an academic course, such as a novel, regarding the student's linguistic outcome?**

Excellent

Very good

Good

Fair

Poor

*** 13. Overall, how would you rate an academic course, such as a novel, regarding to the student's cultural awareness outcome?**

- Excellent
- Very good
- Good
- Fair
- Poor

*** 14. Overall, how would you rate an academic course, such as novel, regarding to the student's personal growth?**

- Excellent
- Very good
- Good
- Fair
- Poor

Part 3: Attitude toward Teaching Western Literature:

*** 15. Do you agree that teaching Western literature can be used to connect worlds (East and West) in this new era of globalization?**

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

*** 16. Please provide a reason for your answer.**

.....
*** 17. Do you agree that literature motivates EFL students because of its natural and authentic connection to the real world?**

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Part 4: Attitude toward Literary Genres:

*** 18. If you had the choice to choose an academic course, which of the following would you choose?**

- Drama
- Poetry
- Short Story
- Novel

Literary Criticism

* 19. How likely do you recommend teaching novels which includes erotic scenes, as a course, to a colleague?

- Very likely
- Likely
- Neither likely nor unlikely
- Unlikely
- Very unlikely

Part 5: Attitude toward the Course Material:

* 20. How relevant is the literary course material of novels such as *Jane Eyre* to the students' major?

- Extremely relevant
- Very relevant
- Somewhat relevant
- Not so relevant
- Not at all relevant

* 21. How suitable is the academic course material of the novels such as *Jane Eyre* to the Saudi student's life?

- Extremely relevant
- Very relevant
- Somewhat relevant
- Not so relevant
- Not at all relevant

Part 6: Attitude toward Taboo or Erotic Images/Scenes:

* 22. How likely are you to recommend skipping taboo or erotic images and scenes?

- Very likely
- Likely
- Neither likely nor unlikely
- Unlikely
- Very unlikely

* 23. How much class time is spent discussing the taboo or erotic images and scenes?

- A great deal
- A lot
- A moderate amount
- A little
- None at all

* 24. How well do your students participate in discussions concerning taboo or erotic images and scenes?

- Extremely well
- Very well
- Somewhat well
- Not so well
- Not at all well

*** 25. How easy or difficult is it to get eye contact with your students while discussing taboo or erotic images, scenes, or ideas?**

- Very easy
- Easy
- Neither easy nor difficult
- Difficult
- Very difficult

*** 26. How well do you answer students' embarrassing questions (e.g., sexual, traditional, or religious)?**

- Extremely well
- Very well
- Somewhat well
- Not so well
- Not at all well

*** 27. How concerned are you that students might misunderstand you when discussing taboo or erotic topics?**

- Extremely concerned
- Very concerned
- Somewhat concerned
- Not so concerned
- Not at all concerned

Part 7: Attitude toward Literary Texts:

*** 28. If you were asked to teach *Pride and Prejudice* or *The Scarlet Letter*, which one would you choose and why?**

.....
*** 29. How helpful is the curriculum of your literature courses to your students' understanding of Western culture?**

- Extremely helpful
- Very helpful
- Somewhat helpful
- Not so helpful
- Not at all helpful

*** 30. How much class time is spent discussing the cultural differences between West and East?**

- Much too much
- Too much
- The right amount
- Too little
- Much too little

*** 31. How much do you stress the importance of understanding the knowledge rather than memorizing facts to your students?**

- Much too much
- Too much
- The right amount
- Too little
- Much too little

*** 32. How worthwhile was the literary course material to your students' understanding of Western culture?**

- Extremely worthwhile
- Very worthwhile
- Somewhat worthwhile
- Not so worthwhile
- Not at all worthwhile

Part 8: Attitude toward the Objective of the Literary Text:

*** 33. How clearly do you explain the objective of the academic course to your students?**

- Extremely clear
- Very clear
- Somewhat clear
- Not so clear
- Not at all clear

*** 34. How many of the course objectives do you meet?**

- All
- Most
- Some
- A few
- None

*** 35. How well do you say your colleagues who teach academic courses agree with the department's goals of the study?**

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Part 9: Personal Judgement as Educator:

*** 36. Do you think the credit hours given to your academic course are:**

- Too much
- Enough
- Not enough

*** 37. In this new era of the 2030 vision, do you think it is your duty as an educator of Western literature to help Saudi students bridge the gap between the West and East?**

- Strongly approve
- Approve
- Neither approve nor disapprove
- Disapprove
- Strongly disapprove

*** 38. How satisfied are you with your work as an educator of Western literature?**

- Extremely satisfied
- Very satisfied
- Satisfied
- Not so satisfied
- Not at all satisfied

Part 10: Understanding the Attitude of Students while Teaching Western Literature

On a scale of 1–5, please indicate the degree to which you agree to the statements given below based on your experience. (1 = Strongly Agree, 2 = Agree, 3 = Neither Agree nor Disagree, 4 = Disagree, 5 = Strongly Disagree)

*** 39. Indicate the degree to which you agree to the statements given below based on your experience.**

1. I feel teaching Western (English/American) literature makes me a better/more competent educator than others. 1 2 3 4 5
2. From my English literature classes, I feel that students believe Western culture (English or American) is better than other cultures. 1 2 3 4 5
3. I think students tend to learn Western literature to understand the Western culture to promote Islam. 1 2 3 4 5
4. The students feel that learning Western literature means they are educated, open-minded people. 1 2 3 4 5
5. The students sometimes worry about losing their identity and Islamic culture in Western (English/American) literature class. 1 2 3 4 5
6. The students find learning the culture of the other is fun and exciting. 1 2 3 4 5
7. The students think learning Western literature is a wastage of time as they believe they are irrelevant to their course. 1 2 3 4 5
8. The students think learning Western literature will improve their language skills. 1 2 3 4 5

Part 11: Factors Affecting Western Literature Teaching in Accordance to the New Vision of 2030

On a scale of 1–5, please indicate the degree to which you agree to the statements given below based on your experience. (1 = Strongly Agree, 2 = Agree, 3 = Neither Agree nor Disagree, 4 = Disagree, 5 = Strongly Disagree)

*** 40. Indicate the degree to which you agree to the statements given below based on your experience.**

1. Western literature classes in Saudi Universities suffer from a sheer lack of both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. 1 2 3 4 5
 2. Educators face severe issues with students' aptitude, initial preparedness, and motivation toward learning Western literature. 1 2 3 4 5
 3. The educators' skills and expertise, which include; language proficiency, content knowledge, teaching skills, contextual knowledge, learner-focused teaching, and professionalism, affect their way of teaching Western literature. 1 2 3 4 5
 4. Educators with a positive attitude toward teaching Western literature usually strive for better performances. 1 2 3 4 5
 5. The educators' self-efficacy have a considerable influence on instructional practices and classroom behavior and students' achievement and motivation. 1 2 3 4 5
 6. Social, cultural, and religious sensitivities are related to both students' and educators' performances. 1 2 3 4 5
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