

Attitude towards and Perception of Literature in EFL Setting: A Case Study on QU Male Undergraduate Students

Abdullah H. Alfauzan¹ & Abduljabbar G. Hussain¹

¹ College of Arabic & Social Studies, Qassim University, Buraydah, Saudi Arabia

Correspondence: Abdullah H. Alfauzan, College of Arabic & Social Studies, Qassim University, Buraydah, Saudi Arabia PO Box 12308, ZIP51473. Tel: 1-613-947-3592. E-mail: aaf741@gmail.com & abuasad71@gmail.com

Received: October 16, 2016 Accepted: December 5, 2016 Online Published: December 8, 2016

doi: 10.5539/elt.v10n1p1

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5539/elt.v10n1p1>

Abstract

The study attempts to investigate the attitude and perception of Saudi undergraduate students towards English literature courses as a part of their BA English Program at a large public university in KSA. A total of 59 students (25 studying a literature course, 25 linguistics course and nine had already passed at least one literature course) participated in the study. Applying mixed method research design, questionnaires were used to collect quantitative data and retrospective essays were used for qualitative data. A modified version of AMTB developed by Gardner and associates was used to measure students' attitude towards literature courses. The results of study show that the participants have positive attitude towards literature courses. The findings also suggest that learners' social environment (family, friends, classmates, teachers...etc.) significantly contribute in constructing positive attitudes and enhancing their perception towards literature as medium of learning L2. The study has pedagogical implication too. Policy makers (administrator, curriculum developers, and teachers) need to accommodate learners' voices in the selection of teaching material.

Keywords: literature attitude, literature perception, Saudi undergraduate, retrospective essay

1. Introduction

In this post-modern world, English has already obtained the status of international lingua franca (Graddol, 2010; Jenkins, 2006). Crystal (2003) argues "English is the global language". At this moment of time, we can now safely acknowledge this proclamation. This observed role of English in the world and use of English for communicative purposes has now become the norm. Unfortunately, the same is not reflected in teaching practices and educational systems of some countries in Asia and beyond. With strong linguistic, cultural, and religious values, Saudi Arabia is one of those countries where students are not equipped with sufficient language skills to meet national and international challenges. Although most students regard English skills as extremely beneficial as it provides better future prospects for them and contributes considerably to country's economic growth, they only focus on learning English for examination purposes and not for real-life situations. This is a problematic situation especially where educational system has unique feature with two ideologies strongly imbedded in it.

The government of the KSA has been taking different steps to promote English education in the Kingdom. English is now clearly promulgated in the Kingdom's educational system. The objectives of English language teaching and learning are explicitly defined and presented to different stakeholders. We can witness the clear policy about English in this statement from official guidelines developed by the KSA Ministry of Education manual for ESL teaching.

The aim of teaching English in the secondary schools is to have the public attain a standard which will permit them to make ready use of desired materials in English and which enables them to communicate satisfactorily, according to their needs, in both spoken and written forms (Ministry of Education KSA, 2002).

At the same time, local Saudis' beliefs and attitudes have been changing fast toward English in recent years, as evident in changing educational policies to make English a compulsory subject of study at an early age in schools. However, English still mostly follows the grammatical traditions of "standard Englishes" (Mahboob & Elyas, 2014). The authors further argued that, based on evidence from textbooks used in the KSA, English is moving in a new direction as Arab speakers of English are localizing it. This English now clearly reflects local

cultural norms and practices and is more locally oriented.

As we can see from the discussion in the preceding paragraphs, English has obtained a significant role for economic and social purposes in the KSA. It now is going through a process of nativization, and this process accompanies many processes along the way. Literature is one major source in this process of nativizing the foreign language into local settings. English literature produced in local contexts can work wonders to enhance this process and motivate learners to achieve the desired competency in English language.

Conversely, this production of local English literature is not possible without understanding the basics of the English language, linguistics, and literary norms of native English people. EFL learners in the KSA need to acquire competency in language and know the literary traditions to develop localized forms of literature for many different purposes. Nevertheless, research in different Arabic contexts (e.g., Shakfa, 2012; Abu-Malhim, 2009) has demonstrated that EFL learners in these contexts usually have a negative attitude toward and poor perception of English literature. In addition to these negative perceptions, English is usually taught using the grammar translation method, with no or little emphasis on authentic material from literature. Learners are trained from the very beginning stages to rate language and linguistics more highly than literature. Writing in a foreign language serves a dual purpose as the writer can bring a fresh perspective to a local context while also offering a new perspective to native speakers of the target language.

Another way of promoting English literature is by adapting language teaching using literature. Students do not always have to learn a foreign language through inductive methods of grammar and rules. This can be tiring, boring, and complex, which burns learners' motivation to exert the required efforts for becoming a competent speaker in English. Nevertheless, literature offers many motivating stories and contexts where students do not necessarily learn through induction. They can enjoy the literature and learn linguistic complexities through deductive methods. If they have enough practice, they become good at language, and literature serves as an igniting force for keeping second language learners motivated for a long time. Therefore, we believe it is truly important to know learners' attitudes and perceptions toward literature and then move in an appropriate direction to achieve the desired standards of English language set by the Ministry of Education in various documents.

The recent interest in the field of language learning and its relation to literary studies has resulted in more interest among scholars to carry out research investigating the relationship between literature on one hand and the learning of first (L1) and second (L2) languages on the other hand (Paran, 2008; Carter, 2007). The role of literature as a tool to facilitate L2 learning has gained attention, and scholars are researching possible methods to integrate literary courses into L2 learning environments.

2. Literature Review

Many scholars argue that literature offers a cultural background, expands learners' language awareness, provides motivating content material, educates overall personality, and develops interpretative abilities among learners (Carter & Long, 1991; Spack, 1985; Widdowson, 1975). Scholars like Collie and Slater (1987) have argued that literature is a great source for cultural enrichment, authentic material, personal involvement, and—most importantly—language enrichment. Students in different contexts prefer literature to linguistic and methodology courses. Contrary to these beliefs about literature in many Arab contexts and elsewhere in the world, students majoring in English at Qassim University (QU) prefer linguistics courses to literature courses. The number of scholars in language and linguistics, as compared to literature, completing their master's and doctoral studies abroad and financed by the department represents a picture that necessitates a study of this nature. Therefore, the current study hopes to deepen our understanding of phenomenon.

In any field of study that takes into account human behavior and learning, beliefs are considered a central construct (Ajzen, 1988). Piaget, Burner, Socrates, Kelly, and Rogers hold their own myths about learning, and different controversies about the merits and demerits of their myths have veiled the interesting reality that each learner creates a practical myth of his own about learning (Harri-Augstein, 1985).

The kinds of beliefs, perceptions, metacognitive knowledge, and attitudes that accompany learners in the classroom learning environment have been acknowledged as an important factor contributing to the overall learning process and their ultimate success in this process of learning (Breen, 2001). In a good teaching environment, pedagogy has the potential to offer opportunities where students' perspective can have a positive effect on the learning process and might actually help these learners become fully engaged in this language learning process (Breen, 2001; Arnold, 1999).

Many different terms have been used for concepts like beliefs and attitudes within research traditions that view these terms from varying theoretical perspectives. Classical research in psychological aspects of learners' beliefs

and perceptions about language learning “opened a whole new Aladdin’s cave of personal beliefs, myths, understandings, and superstitions as they were revealed by the persons’ thoughts and feelings about their learning” (Thomas & Harri-Augustein, 1983). In psychology, these scholars believe that learners’ capacity and internal processes are, in fact, the central forces for understanding learners’ learning performances compared to generally believed myths like measures of intelligence and aptitude. However, in cognitive psychology, learners’ beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions are considered part of the underlying mechanism termed metacognition (Flavell, 1987). Cognitive psychologists have already acknowledged the significant influence of social and personal epistemologies on academic thinking, reasoning, problem solving, and learning (Schommer, 1993) as well as persistence and interpretation of information (Dweck & Leggett, 1988; Ryan, 1984). Likewise, learners’ beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions in language learning are regarded as a significant factor in students’ metacognitive knowledge (Flavell, 1987). Wenden (1999:436) summarized the total makeup of metacognitive knowledge as “a system of related ideas, some accepted without question and other validate by their experience”.

As we can see in the discussion thus far, learners’ internal beliefs are highly significant in the process of learning a foreign or second language. These beliefs are supposed to “act as very strong filters or reality” (Arnold, 1999). There is no doubt that foreign language learning is influenced by many dynamic factors; however, the most facilitating and significant factor is the learner’s positive attitude. In the process of language learning, two non-intelligence factors—namely, attitude and perception— significantly contribute to students’ language development.

2.1 Related Studies in the Arab World and Beyond

Many skills, including social, cognitive, affective, and language skills, can be improved through the employment of stories in EFL classrooms. Britsch (1995) highlighted these benefits by stating that using stories in teaching enhances students’ common sense, improves their reading and writing, helps students make sense of the world around them, strengthens literary and reflective skills, suits a whole language curriculum, and enriches students’ creative and imaginative skills. Moon (2000) argued that literature offers life history in teaching and learning, improves creative writing, stimulates critical thinking, excites students’ involvement and interest, and enlivens the overall teaching process.

In the Arab world, not many studies have been carried out on how literature assists language learning. The authors of the present study, to the best of their knowledge, found only a few relevant studies —namely, Adam and Babiker (2015), Shaaban (2015), Fernandes and Alsaeed (2014), and Shakfa (2012). These studies in the Arabic context often identified a mixed attitude toward literature in Arabic-speaking communities. However, scholars outside the Arab world (Tehan, Yuksel, & Inan, 2015; Babaee & Yahya, 2014; Lakshmi & Jayachandran, 2012; Paesani, 2011; Fogal, 2010; Ghazali et al., 2009; Ögeyik, 2007) have recently and vehemently highlighted the role of literature in language learning and teaching. Literature occupies a central place in language learning.

Educational psychologists have contributed extensively to the field of language learning (Karahan, 2007; Crookes & Schmidt, 1991; Gardner, 1985). Researchers such as Hirvela and Boyle (1988) have investigated the attitude of ESL adult students toward literature courses. The purpose of their study was to explore the kinds of genres that attracted students. Their results explained that students liked prose and fiction the most and disliked poetry. The interpretation of themes appeared to be the most difficult task, followed by linguistic-related points, such as complex syntactic structures and dual meaning of words.

Research in Arab world showed mixed attitude toward use of English literature in EFL classes. Shaaban (2015), for example, explored the effects of different types of stories on learners’ writing skills (N=152). He used four groups of learners, experimented differently throughout semester, and used pre-/post-tests results to suggest that significant differences exist in learners’ writing skills. The experimental groups outperformed the control group learners, thereby defining the impact of literary stories on EFL writing skills.

Adam and Babiker (2015) investigated the role of literature in enhancing learners’ creative writing abilities. The data collected from 50 university teachers in KSA suggests that literature has power to enhance learners’ creative writing skills and improve their language use while writing. These EFL teachers demonstrated a great awareness of using literature for writing skills. “Using literary texts for the tasks of developing language skills is more stimulating than ordinary textbooks” (p. 116). Fernandes and Alsaeed (2014) reviewed ELT practices in KSA and beyond. In their review, the authors clearly argued in favor of using literature to teach language skills in EFL classrooms.

Shakfa (2012) explored the difficulties faced by literature students at the Islamic University of Gaza. His study is relevant to the present work as it showed Arabic-speaking students’ attitudes and perceptions toward English drama. The study reported that students perceived English literature to be difficult because of its complex

syntactic structure in addition to frequent use of metaphors and other literary devices. Students usually feel frustrated during the lengthy process of learning drama, where symbolism, metaphors, similes, and stylistic features create additional problems.

Outside of the Arabic context, a good deal of research has examined the impacts of literature for EFL or ESL learning. Different scholars have strongly argued to use literature to enhance target language learning in various settings. For example, in the Turkish context, Tehan, Yuksel, and Inan (2015) explored the attitudes and beliefs of learners toward the application of literature in the classrooms. Data from quantitative and qualitative sources indicated that students demonstrate a positive attitude (contrary to what authors actually expected) toward the use of literature in EFL classrooms. In the Malaysian context, Babae and Yahya (2014) argued that literature is representational in nature in that it takes learners into consideration as well as their feelings and sensitivities of the real world. The authors stressed that literature is a great source for teaching basic linguistics skills in foreign language classrooms and suits learners with different learning styles. In their review of literature as a source of language teaching, Lakshmi and Jaychandran (2012) presented different ways to teach language through literature. The authors highlighted different techniques that can be of great help for teachers and learners alike. Paesani (2011) reviewed the research on different models that include literature as a necessary part of the curricula. Her review of scholarly studies in the field suggested that language in literature and literature in language courses can lead to a shift toward a multimodal language development.

Fogal (2010) used action research to explore the attitudes of learners towards literary texts and different teaching methodologies that benefit from authentic literature in the Japanese context. The results indicate that learners at an advanced level feel comfortable analyzing literature when material is presented in a teacher-centered manner and this material improves their meta-cognitive awareness, thereby helping students become more actively involved in the process of learning the target language. Ghazali et al. (2009) studied the attitudes of school students toward literary materials in Malaysian schools. Mixed methods data from 110 class five students defined different aspects that motivate learners to develop a positive attitude toward L2 learning. Results have shown that students prefer to read mysteries, adventures, and life experiences. They highlight the need to select suitable materials and texts for learners that meet the needs of various students with different backgrounds and knowledge bases.

In the Turkish setting, Ögeyik (2007) observed the perceptions and attitudes of university-level EFL learners. Students favored literature and language teaching through literature because literary texts offered them cultural competence, enhanced their individual creativity, and encouraged target language enrichment.

Studies have also been carried on the role of positive and negative perceptions towards learning a language. In one study, Block (1994) claimed that a difference existed between the teachers' and students' perceptions in how they describe and attribute purposes to tasks. Block argued that the students were aware of what happened in the class; therefore, teachers must cater to their needs in light of students' perceptions.. Another study (Nunan, 1989) determined that students prefer traditional learning activities to communicative learning activities.

3. Research Methodology

The discussion in previous section suggests that literature and literary texts have potential to promote language learning in EFL settings. On the other hand, it apparently seems that Saudi undergraduate students show little interest in literary courses as evident in the choice of masters and PhDs study fields and students' unwillingness to talk about literature. So the current research seeks to fill this void by focusing on learners' voices in the process and their beliefs about the implementation of literature for EFL teaching in Saudi Arabia. To this end, the study focuses on addressing the following questions:

- 1) What are EFL students' attitudes and perceptions toward English literature courses and texts in the English Department at QU?
- 2) To what extent do students studying literature and linguistics courses differ in their attitudes and perceptions of literature courses in the department?
- 3) What are the fluctuations in students' attitudes and perceptions during and after course completion? Are these positive or negative?

The current study was designed to be a mixed methods research and follows the guidelines suggested by Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011) for language- and linguistics-related research. The plurality of tools signifies the authors' concerns for reliability and validity. The design also provides an opportunity for having a more nuanced and subtle picture of the phenomenon under investigation. Therefore, it combines quantitative data from two different questionnaires—the Literature Attitude Questionnaire (LAQ) and Mood Perception Questionnaire

(MPQ)—and qualitative data collected through retrospective essays. Considering the complex and dynamic nature of human attitudes, this study was designed to be longitudinal (one semester long), where learners' moods and attitudes were observed at different stages. This selection of the method sounds natural because it appears to be the default approach for scrutinizing the fluctuations in dynamic processes. Dörnyei (2007) suggested that mixed methods are suitable for multilevel and complex phenomena.

3.1 Instruments

This research work focused on exploring the perceptions and attitudes of Saudi EFL students toward literature courses. To this end, three research tools were used to collect data: the LAQ for understanding learners' attitudes, the MPQ for observing changes in learners' perceptions toward literature, and retrospective essays to develop an in-depth understanding of learners' attitudes and perceptions. The LAQ was developed using a modified version of an established scale called the attitude motivation test battery (AMTB) by Gardner and associates (Gardner, Mosgoret, & Bernaus, 2001; Gardner & McIntyre, 1993). Some scholars (e.g., Rapley, 2015) suggested the MPQ as an alternative qualitative data collection tool. Learners' perceptions change quickly, and they feel differently at different stages of a course. Conversely, retrospection was considered a useful tool for exploring the perception and changes that occur at different stages in the learning process. Different methods can be used to collect qualitative data in introspective ways, like daily journals, think-aloud sessions, and diary writing. However, retrospective essays are good for collecting data after the actual event, and they suited our purpose of exploring the attitudes in beginning, during, and after the course completion stages.

3.2 Participants

The population of this study comprised all undergraduate students in an English department who were enrolled in literature courses at different campuses. The participants who completed the LAQ were 50 undergraduate students from the department of English at the College of Arabic and Social Sciences at QU. These participants were selected using stratified random sampling; 25 students were selected from linguistics courses, and 25 participants from literature courses. To provide data about their perceptions, the 25 literature students responded to the MPQ at three different stages throughout the semester (2nd week, 9th week, and 16th week).

Table 1. Biographical information of participants for LAQ

Total	Literature	Linguistics	Age	
			Mean	SD
50	25	25	20.23	1.77

Table 2. Biographical information of participants for MPQ

Total	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3	Age	
				Mean	SD
45	15	15	15	20.19	1.79

For the retrospective essays, a convenience sampling method was used, and participants' willingness to participate was considered. 11 participants who had graduated from QU's department of English were contacted, and they agreed to participate in the research. They were informed about the procedure and purposes of the research and completed an agreement form. An example retrospective essay and instructions for writing one were provided to them. Only 9 of them ultimately responded; 2 never replied to our mail or contact efforts. Participants were given the option to write the essay in English or Arabic. The 7 responding participants chose to write in Arabic while 2 respondents provided their essays in English. Participants were contacted in the first teaching week of the 2015–2016 fall semester. They were asked to complete the essays in three weeks. 2 of them handed over their essays (hard copies only) in the 5th week. 7 took two more weeks and they emailed their essays in weeks 7 and 8.

3.3 Procedures

Data were collected during the 2015 fall semester. After obtaining permission and fulfilling ethical codes of research, students were informed about the purpose of research and were clearly informed that their identity

would not be disclosed under any circumstances. They were also assured that data collected through this questionnaire would be used for research purposes only. Students were allowed to ask any questions they had. Once they felt satisfied, the LAQ was administered to them (8th week); it took them approximately 20 minutes to complete it (same procedure for both linguistics and literature participants).

For the MPQ, participants from the literature course were informed about the purpose of the research and asked to participate in this semester-long process. 25 students were in the class; however, on different occasions, 10 students were absent on the days the questionnaire was administered. Therefore, valid data from 15 participants were gathered and included for analysis and evaluation.

3.4 Data Analysis

After the data collection, the researchers imported quantitative data from the LAQ and MPQ into SPSS 21 for Windows. Descriptive and inferential analyses were carried out to find answers posed for this research. For the qualitative part, a thematic analysis technique was applied to understand the data. Following Ritchie and Spencer (2002), the researchers coded data through a five-step framework. After the transcription/translation of data, a thematic framework was identified and it was used to analyze data and, checked for inter-coder reliability. Finally, an external researcher helped us with member checking. The thematic framework used to understand the data is presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Thematic framework to code qualitative data

Thematic Category	Example
Social Injustices	English literature reflects what happens around us, like cruelty, hatred, and injustices.
Understanding of Human Nature and Values	Reading English literature helps me see the world around me with a better understanding.
Cultural Clashes	I do not like English literature because it is different from our culture, habits, and religion.
Impact of Environment	I like English literature because my sister studied in the English department and always talked about novels and plays.
Difficult and Insignificant	English literature is very difficult; it has no role in language learning.

4. Results and Discussion

The internal consistency of LAQ was measured using SPSS 20 for Windows; the overall consistency of items in the questionnaire was good. The Cronbach's alpha value was over .60, which is normally good for large-scale studies (Dörnyei & Taugchi, 2010). Table 4 presents the reliability analysis for the LAQ scale.

Table 4. Internal consistency of scale used in LAQ

Scale	Alpha
Attitude toward English Literature (30 Items)	.91

The good level of consistency means that results of this study measure what they are supposed to measure. Items for this scale were adopted from established scales in the field of attitude research toward second languages; these items have been verified in many contexts across the globe. Therefore, these items offer dependency and were suitable for our local context. The high alpha value indicated that almost all participants would understand these items well and this scale was good for attitude research.

4.1 Quantitative Data (LAQ)

To answer research question (Q1), table 5 presents the results (LAQ) of the descriptive analysis for literature

course students.

As Table 5 below indicates, most students demonstrated a positive attitude toward literature course. 21 (84%) students showed an average score of 3 or above. Only 4 (16%) students had an average score of less than 3. This highlights the importance of literature for language teaching.

These positive attitudes by our learners are in line with research in other contexts, where learners have exhibited highly positive attitude toward literature (e.g., Yuksel & Inan, 2015). In this scenario, it is no surprise that EFL learners at QU think highly of literature and literature courses:

Table 5. Average score for literature course participants

Student	Mean	Student	Mean
S1	3.67	S14	2.23
S2	2.07	S15	3
S3	3.13	S16	3.5
S4	2.53	S17	4.23
S5	3.43	S18	2.53
S6	3.53	S19	4.07
S7	4.2	S20	3.93
S8	3.83	S21	3.83
S9	3.13	S22	3.94
S10	4.13	S23	3.63
S11	3.5	S24	3.1
S12	3.3	S25	3.17
S13	3.1	S= Student	

Table 6. Average score for linguistics course participants

Student	Mean	Student	Mean
S1	3.53	S14	3.73
S2	3.57	S15	3.23
S3	3.67	S16	3
S4	3.8	S17	3.9
S5	3.8	S18	3
S6	3.43	S19	3.9
S7	2.54	S20	3.1
S8	4.13	S21	3.5
S9	4.3	S22	2.63
S10	3.4	S23	4.17
S11	3.47	S24	4.3
S12	3.4	S25	3.4
S13	3.57	S= Student	

The participants in linguistic courses showed similar results as the literature course students (see Table 6). As Table 6 indicates, no participant depicted any negative attitude toward English literature or literary texts. 23 (92%) of the 25 participants showed a positive attitude toward literature courses. Among these learners, 14 (56%)

demonstrated a highly positive attitude with a score of 3.5 or above. Only 2 (8%) of all linguistics participants showed slightly below average scores and negative scores compared to other participants. These moderately negative attitudes from some participants in linguistic and literature courses might be due to some individual factors (not social or educational perhaps), which will be explained later using qualitative data from retrospective essays.

A cursory look at Tables 5 and 6 explains the attitudes of learners toward English literature at QU. All students seem to like literature and exhibit a preference for learning language through literature. These attitudes are not novel to our research as foreign language teaching through literature and literary texts has become the norm in many settings (Adam & Babiker, 2015; Shaaban, 2015; Yuksel & Inan, 2015). Results of the current study suggest that teaching language through literature is a viable option, and teachers can use learners' positive attitudes toward literary texts to enhance their motivation and achievement in foreign language learning. We believe that it would be a good idea to change our teaching practices and materials from deductive learning to inductive learning. In this way, students can choose materials that suit their needs and keep their motivation for a long time to meet the demands of foreign language learning across the Kingdom.

As previously discussed, most participants demonstrated an overall positive attitude toward English literature at QU. However, to address our second research question, we now present a comparison of literature and linguistics course students. Table 7 offers a descriptive analysis (mean and standard deviation) for different groups of participants in this research.

Table 7. Comparison of literature and linguistics participants

Group	Mean	SD
Overall	3.46	0.54
Literature	3.39	0.59
Linguistics	3.53	0.48

Overall, all the students demonstrated positive attitudes toward learning language through literature. Both groups showed similar trends for literature and literary texts, and no significant differences emerged. Literature course students scored 3.39, which is only 0.07 lower the average of all participants. Linguistics course participants scored 3.53, which again is not much higher than the average (just 0.07 higher). Thus, learners' attitudes are almost unanimous, and literature or linguistics classes do not make much difference for attitudes of learners toward English literature. The subtle difference (only 0.14) can be accounted for by learners' individual differences.

Based on results discussed herein, we can safely assume that our learners have a positive attitude toward English literature, and we need to be aware of these attitudes. Understanding learners and their preferences for different types of classroom materials is vital. We cannot ignore the role of positive attitudes in learning a target or foreign language. All stakeholders—teachers, university administration, policymakers, and parents—should pay attention to the central figure of the teaching/learning process (i.e., students).

4.2 Quantitative Data (MPQ)

To answer question 3, MPQ was used to understand fluctuations in students' attitudes and perceptions at the beginning, in the mid and at the end of semester. Learners' perceptions are presented in Figure 1 below.

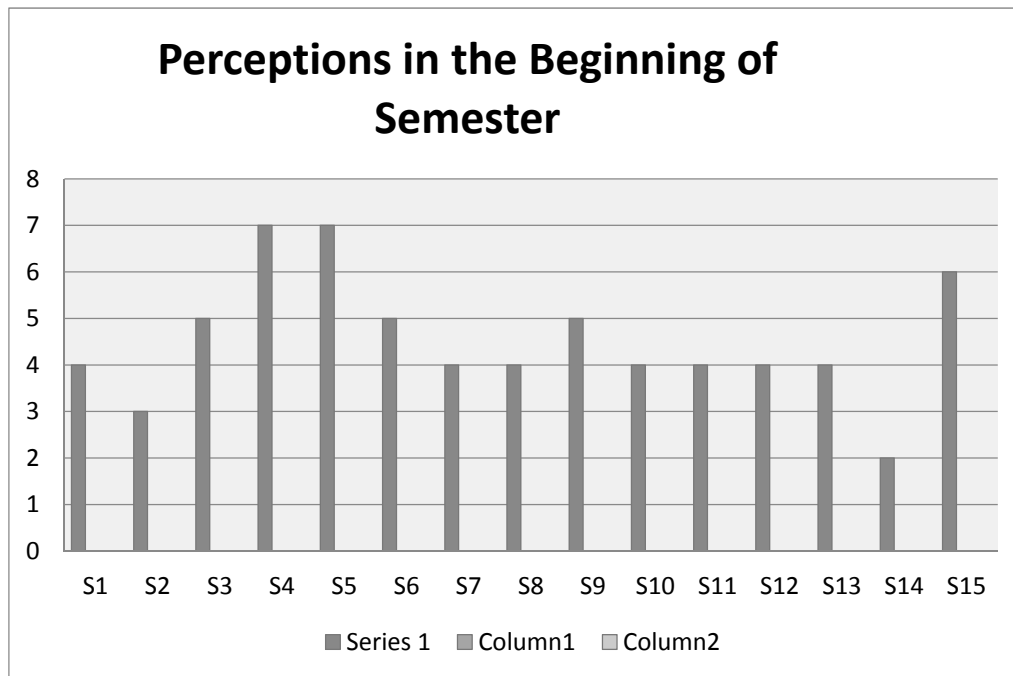


Figure 1. Perceptions of learners at the beginning of semester

As Figure 1 demonstrates, learners exhibit highly positive perceptions about English literature and literary texts at the beginning of the semester. Among the 15 participants, 2 even felt overwhelmingly happy and opted for the highest level of happiness or satisfaction (in this case, 7) at the start of the literature course in their EFL classroom. 6 of the 15 students showed highly positive perceptions by opting for satisfaction levels of 5 or above (on a seven-point scale). 7 students opted for level four, which is also considerably satisfied and welcoming. Therefore, we can safely assume that, at the beginning of the semester, 13 students were really looking forward to studying literature. Only 2 students did not really like the idea of studying literature to understand language. Student 2 and Student 14 opted for levels three and two, respectively, indicating feelings of anger and dissatisfaction. These students might have had some negative experiences with English literature in the past or they developed their perceptions based on common beliefs about English literature.

The data collected in the middle of the semester exhibited a great deal of variations in their perceptions about literature and literary texts. The significant level of change in their perceptions was actually shocking as some participants indicated totally contradicting perceptions compared to the beginning of the semester. These sudden changes in perceptions are alarming and create a challenging situation for all stakeholders in the process, especially teachers and material developers for these learners. Figure 2 presents the data from the middle of the semester for the MPQ.

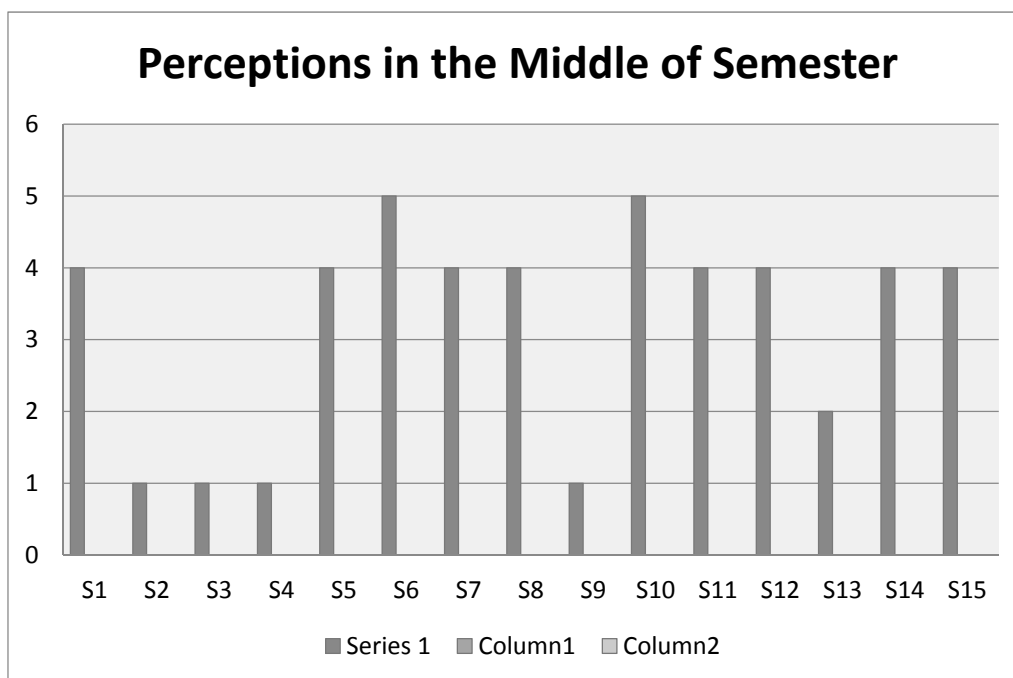


Figure 2. Perceptions of the learners at the middle of semester

At this stage in the learning process, not a single student had a very strong perception of the literature to enhance their language and linguistic skills in the target language. Only 2 of 15 students had a positive perception about literature at this stage, compared to 6 students at the beginning of the semester. 8 of the 15 learners indicated being fairly satisfied with literature, although that is not a highly welcoming scenario. The remaining 5 participants had clearly negative perceptions toward literature and literary texts, opting for the lowest possible level of satisfaction with the literature course.

Yet these results are not surprising in the Arabic-speaking world, where many learners find dramatic texts difficult and demotivating. Modern day literature has become complex, with strong loadings of imagery, symbols, metaphors, impressionism, absurdist views, and contextualized diction. These factors can cause serious problems for novice learners. As teachers, we need to understand this problem seriously and explore the causes behind this negative change in learners' perceptions. If we do not understand the factors that demotivate our learners, we will not be able to engage them for positive changes.

In order to further advance our understanding of changes in students' perceptions, the MPQ data were collected at the end of the semester as well. Collecting data over time is a useful method for exploring the complexities of learners' perceptions in L2 learning within or outside the classroom. Establishing opinions based on data from any given stage about the language learning process does not really offer us a complete and real picture. Data collected at a single point in time can be deceptive and provide insufficient information about learners' existing beliefs for the difficult task of foreign or second language learning.

In order to further advance our understanding of students' perception, data was collected at the end of semester and results suggest that different changes occur in the learners' perceptions. As in the middle of the semester, no student provided a strong perception about literature and literary texts, which is unlike the first stage of data collection in the beginning of the semester. Compared to 6 students at the first stage and 2 at the second stage, only 3 students showed a slightly positive level of perception about literature in the EFL classroom at the end of the semester. This is in stark comparison to the first two stages, and the number of students with fair or positive perceptions decreased by more than half.

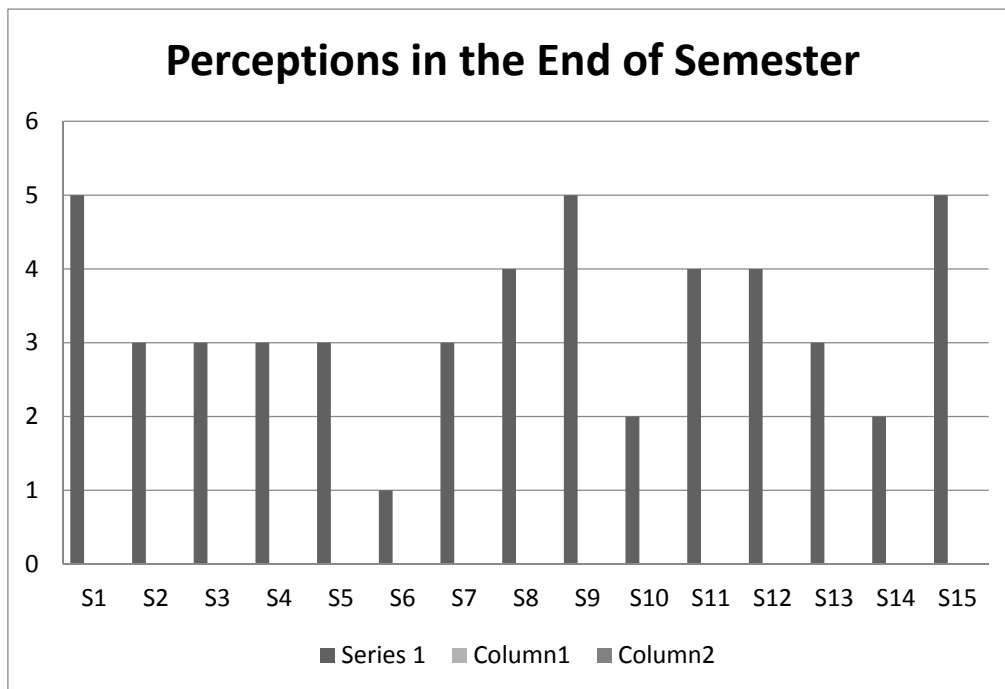


Figure 3. Perceptions of the learners at the end of semester

The most significant result, however, is the strongly negative perceptions by most of the learners in the third stage. More than half of learners (8 students, 54%) exhibited a negative perception—a significant change in their perceptions. Students had comparatively positive perceptions in the beginning and middle of the semester. Nevertheless, these perceptions changed in a negative direction. Some individual, social, psychological, and/or environmental factors must have triggered this change. As teachers, we need to understand the reasons behind these negative changes and work to provide better learning environments that encourage students to use their positive perceptions in achieving the desired level of proficiency in target language learning. Thus far, we have discussed the results of the MPQ data at three different stages in our study and figure 4 below represents MPQ's results at different stages.

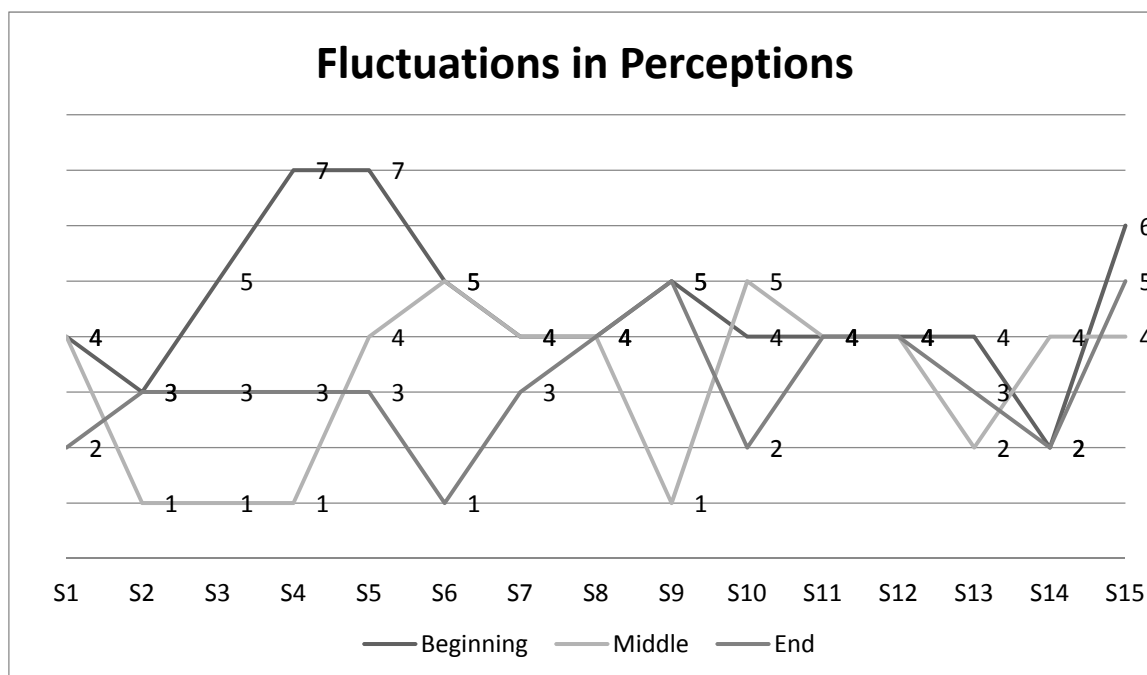


Figure 4. Fluctuations in perceptions of learners at different stages

4.3 Results of Qualitative Data

Within the changing frontiers of research in the modern age, a thorough analysis of any phenomenon is considered incomplete without a qualitative data analysis. The qualitative research method is effective for understanding issues that provide very little information of existing scenarios (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Based on these beliefs, we collected qualitative data using retrospective essays from different participants. Participants explained different factors that help them understand English literature in a better way. This can also help us explain the makeup of learners' attitudes and perceptions toward English literature and literary texts at QU and elsewhere in the Kingdom. Using thematic analysis techniques, the following themes emerged as prominent in learners' personal writings.

4.3.1 Reaction of Social Injustices

6 participants found English literature to be an important tool to reflect the social injustices prevailing in different societies. Literature is a reflection of reality, and these participants believe this to be a fact representing all humanity through literature. In fact, these ESL learners' attitudes and perceptions suggest that literature is a reaction of prevalent social injustices in our societies. These attitudes and perceptions are clearly illustrated in the retrospective essays. For example, participant 3 explained this when he wrote:

Some English writers such as Charles Dickens and George Orwell have impressed me. I like them because they increased my level of understanding toward social injustices and refined my taste of English.

This theme is clearly evident when participant 8 wrote:

English literature reflects what happens around us like cruelty, hatred, and injustices.

Another excerpt from participant 9 can clarify this theme in a better way:

Literature tells us about bad things because most human beings hate violence, cruelty, and injustices.

One strong comment about social injustices came from participant 8, who used the example of an English novel to convey his point:

When I see what happens in the Arab world, I think of the movie "Animal Farm" as this novel talks about injustices and cruelty.

These three excerpts visibly explain the attitudes and perceptions of learners toward English literature. Our participants portrayed an image of positive attitudes toward English literature and optimistic perceptions about these texts. If they liked it, they could learn the language through literature in an attractive and enjoyable fashion.

Therefore, we believe carefully selected literature can enhance EFL learning in the KSA.

4.3.2 Understanding of Human Nature and Values

Literature talks about humans (ideal and real) and their values (imaginary and realistic) living in a social world. Seven of our participants believe that literature expresses universal human nature. For these learners, English literature serves as a revelation to judge people around themselves and people around the world..

Our participants' attitudes and perceptions about English literature and literary texts supported the idea of recognizing unknown human nature as well as values, as evident from the following lines written by participant 5:

During my study of English literature, I came to know about the feelings of jealousy and love, violence and selfishness; it raised my awareness about such values in all communities, and literature truly echoes the voice of community.

Participant 6 wrote:

English literature is like a beautiful sky above that covers the whole world.

Participant 9 explained the role of literature and wrote

English literature gives us awareness about what is good and what is bad around us. Some values are universal, such as respect for those who serve humanity.

Participant 9 again signified the role of literature when he wrote:

Reading English literature helps me see the world around me with a better understanding.

Another beautiful excerpt from participant 4 illustrates the prominent role of literature in positively changing attitudes and perceptions of learners:

Reading literature widened my gaze and let my thinking travel abroad.

These quoted excerpts from different participants strongly demonstrate the feelings, attitudes, and perceptions of our learners toward English literature and literary texts. Literature can have a strong influence on learners' thinking and motivations, and this influence can be used to achieve the desired English language proficiencies at different levels.

4.3.3 Cultural Clashes

4 participants believe that English literature clashes with their cultural and religious identities. Participant 1 and 7 did not like it and never wanted to study it; they opted to study it because it was a compulsory course in the department. We can observe these feelings in following excerpts:

I do not like literature in general and especially English literature because it is different from our culture, habits, and religion. (Participant 1)

I never like English literature because it clashes with mine. (Participant 7)

Other participants believe that English literature has clashes with their cultural and religious beliefs. However, they want to study it for a simple reason of unity in diversity. If all human beings are the same, it would be a dull and boring life and we would not be able to enjoy differences or appreciate our own beliefs and values. This is clear when participant 2 wrote:

English literature is different from our culture and religion, but still writers can summarize general feelings about human beings.

This is also evident when participant 3 explained:

Though English culture and literature are different from my culture and religion, I still feel here a lot of things similar about humanity.

These learners' different opinions about significance of cultural clashes in English literature make it more important to select materials and literary texts very carefully. Policymakers and teachers should always consider this fact and select (sometimes even develop) materials that are culturally sensitive and religiously acceptable.

4.3.4 Impact of Environment

Living in a country like Saudi Arabia, where strong religious and family traditions exist, it is difficult to ignore the impact of environment or milieu on learners. Parents, siblings, peers, friends, teachers, and colleagues all leave their impact on makings of our personalities.

In our study, 3 learners reported that they had little or no interest in English language and literature at the beginning of the course. However, they developed their taste for English literature because they have people around them who had studied English literature before; these people helped them transform the way they looked at literature. As participant 5 opined:

I did not study English literature in government school, so I did not really like it. However, I started loving English literature because my brother graduated from the English department and he talked about Charles Dickens all the time.

The influence of his sister is evident when participant 3 wrote:

I like English literature because my sister studied literature in the English department and she always talked about novels and plays.

These quotations clearly demonstrate role of teachers, family, and friends and how this role can be used to motivate unmotivated learners to reach a desired level in target language learning through literature.

4.3.5 Difficult and Insignificant

The beauty of qualitative data is that we can notice every individualistic opinion and voices of all learners can be included in the analysis of any situation. 7 learners agreed that English literature somehow helped them learn the language. They favored the use of English literature and literary texts to enhance their proficiency in English. However, 2 participants indicated very different opinions, stating that English literature is difficult to learn and is useless for learning the English language. Indeed, participant 1 wrote:

Because it is based on fiction, English literature is very difficult and it has no role in language learning.

This theme is again discernable when participant 7 explained:

I enrolled in the English literature course just to complete my graduation. I have no interest in it at all because it does not help in language learning.

Although such an attitude and perception might seem disastrous, it is similar to the opinion held by some English language learners in the Arab world who find literature difficult and irrelevant (Shakfa, 2012). Such beliefs again bring us to the point of selecting materials carefully. Easy-to-understand texts should be selected or developed to suit the needs of learners at the local level in order to help learners like literature and learn the English language in an enjoyable fashion.

5. Conclusion

The discussion of our results provides us with sufficient and novel evidence to answer the research questions posed. Based on these results, we can safely assume that most learners at QU have positive attitudes and perceptions of English literature, and this can be true for other EFL learners across the Kingdom. Most learners enjoy literature and are in favor of learning language through literature. No major differences emerged between linguistics and literature course students. Although students' attitudes and perceptions fluctuate and change during the learning process, we think that factors like teaching methodology, materials used for teaching, classroom environment, and other socio-psychological factors can minimize such fluctuations.

Qualitative data helped us explain the changing nature of learners' attitudes and perceptions. Like other affective factors involved in second language acquisition, learners' attitudes and perceptions are both complex and dynamic. We have to consider the changing nature of these individual variables in the learning process and use them to improve teaching and learning conditions in our classrooms.

We believe this research is one of the very few studies of its nature in the Kingdom, and all stakeholders can benefit from it to advance English language learning and teaching policies. Using mixed methods data, we provide sufficient evidence to generate some policy changes at QU and elsewhere in the Kingdom. Learners' enjoyment of the learning experience (Dörnyei, 2009) is a critical factor in the learning process and can facilitate a teacher's job to guide learners in achieving the desired goal of communicative competence in English language use. Moreover, the research can be considered novel and unique in the Kingdom as it explored these factors from a longitudinal perspective and provided an in-depth analysis of the existing situation at QU and elsewhere in the KSA. Most scholars focus on contextual data to develop understandings of social phenomenon, which is not highly appreciated by complexity theorists like Larsen-Freeman and Ellis (2008). Therefore, future researchers should explore data from various perspectives and through different methods.

Our research has some limitations: It does not include data from female participants, and it came from only one department at QU. Future research can focus on more individualistic, qualitative, and longitudinal research to

understand the existing nature of attitudes and perceptions among learners. This, in turn, can be used to enhance EFL proficiency level of Saudi students at different levels. Ultimately, this research is a beginning; further studies are required from different perspectives to make informed policy and planning decisions at all levels.

References

- Abu-Melhim, A-R. (2009). Attitude of Jordanian College Students towards Learning English as a Foreign Language. *College Student Journal*, 43(2), 682.
- Adam, A. A. S., & Babiker, Y. O. (2015). The Role of Literature in Enhancing Creative Writing from Teachers' Perspective. *English Language and Literature Studies*, 5(1), 109-118. <https://doi.org/10.5539/ells.v5n1p109>
- Ajzen, I. (1988). *Attitudes, Personality and Behaviour*. Chicago: Dorsey.
- Arnold, J. (1999). *Affect in language learning*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Babae, B., & Yahya, W. R. W. (2014). Significance of Literature in Foreign Language Teaching. *International Education Studies*, 7(4), 80-85. <https://doi.org/10.5539/ies.v7n4p80>
- Block, D. (1994). A day in the life of a class: Teacher/learner perceptions of task purpose in conflict. *System*, 22(4), 473-486. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0346-251X\(94\)90004-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/0346-251X(94)90004-3)
- Breen, M. P. (Ed.). (2001). *Learner contributions to language learning: New directions in research*. Harlow, Essex: Pearson Education Limited.
- Britsch, S. J. (1995). The researcher as teacher: Construction one's place in the story of events of preschoolers. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 8(3), 297-309. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0951839950080307>
- Carter, R. (2007). Literature and Language teaching 1986-2006: a review. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 17(1), 3-13. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1473-4192.2007.00130.x>
- Carter, R., & Long, M. N. (1991). *Teaching Literature*. New York, NY: Longman.
- Coolie, L., & Slater, S. (1987). *Literature in language classroom*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Crookes, G., & Schmidt, R. (1991). Motivation: Reopening the research agenda. *Language Learning*, 41(4), 469-512. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-1770.1991.tb00690.x>
- Crystal, D. (2003). *English as a global language* (2nd ed). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511486999>
- Dörnyei, Z. (2007). *Research Methods in Applied Linguistics: Quantitative, Qualitative and Mixed Methodologies*. Oxford University Press, NY, USA
- Dörnyei, Z., & Taguchi, T. (2010). *Questionnaires in Second Language Research: Construction, Administration, and Processing* (2nd ed.). New York: Routledge.
- Dörnyei, Z., & Ushioda, E. (2011). *Teaching and Researching Motivation*. Pearson Education Limited, Harlow: Longman.
- Dweck, C. S., & Leggett, E. L. (1988). A social-cognitive approach to motivation and personality. *Psychological Review*, 95, 256-273. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295X.95.2.256>
- Fernandes, L., & Alsaed, N. H. Q. (2014). Using English Literature for the Teaching of English. *International Journal of English Language and Literature Studies*, 3(2), 126-133.
- Flavell, J. H. (1987). Speculation about the nature and development of metacognition. In F. E. Weinert, & R. H. Kluwe, (Eds.), *Metacognition, motivation and understanding* (pp. 1-29). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Fogal, G. G. (2010). EFL Literature Studies: Student Feedback on Teaching Methodology. *Asian EFL Journal*, 12(4), 61-76.
- Gardner, R. C. (1985). *Social Psychology and Second Language Learning: The Role of Attitudes and Motivation*. London: Edward Arnold.
- Gardner, R. C., & MacIntyre, P. D. (1993). On the measurement of affective variables in second language learning. *Language Learning*, 43(2), 157-194. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-1770.1992.tb00714.x>
- Gardner, R. C., Masgoret, A. M., & Bernaus, M. (2001). Examining the role of attitudes and motivation outside of the formal classroom: A test of the mini-AMTB for children. In Z. Drnyei, & R. Schmidt (Eds.), *Motivation and second language acquisition*. Honolulu, HI: Second Language Teaching & Curriculum

Center University of Hawaii at Manoa.

- Ghazali, S. N., Setia, P., Muthusamy, C., & Jusoff, K. (2009). ESL Students' Attitudes towards Texts and Teaching Methods used in Literature Classes. *English Language Teaching*, 2(4), 51-56. <https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v2n4p51>
- Graddol, D. (2010). *English Next India: The Future of English in India*. British Council: India.
- Harri-Augstein, E. S. (1985). Learning to learn language: New perspectives for the personal observer. In D. Bannister (Ed.), *Issues and approaches in personal construct theory* (pp. 47-65). London Academic Press.
- Hirvela, A., & Boyle, J. (1988). Literature courses and student attitudes. *ELT Journal*, 42(3), 179-184. <https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/42.3.179>
- Jenkins, J. (2006). Current perspectives on teaching world Englishes and English as a lingua franca. *TESOL Quarterly*, 40(1), 157-81. <https://doi.org/10.2307/40264515>
- Karahan, F. (2007). Language attitudes of Turkish students towards the English language and its use in Turkish context. *Journal of Arts and Sciences*, 7, 73-87.
- Lakshmi, J., & Jayachandran, J. (2012). Literature: an effective tool in language learning. *Language in India*, 12(2), 319-326.
- Larsen-Freeman, D., & Cameron, L. (2008). *Complex Systems and Applied Linguistics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Mahboob, A., & Elyas, T. (2014). English in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. *World Englishes*, 33(1), 128-142. <https://doi.org/10.1111/weng.12073>
- Ministry of Education (MoE). 2002. *General directorate of curricula (2002): English for Saudi Arabia*. Jeddah: Almadina Almunawara Press.
- MLA Ad Hoc Committee on Foreign Languages. (2007). Foreign languages and higher education: New structures for a changed world. Retrieved from http://www.mla.org/pdf/forlang_news_pdf.pdf
- Moon, J. (2010). *Using Story in Higher Education and Professional Development*, Routledge Taylor & Francis Group: London.
- Nunan, D. (1989). *Designing tasks for the communicative classroom*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- ÖGEYİK, M. C. (2007). Attitudes of the Students in English Language Teaching Programs towards Literature Teaching. *Eurasian Journal of Educational Research*, 27.
- Paesani, K. (2011). Research in Language-Literature Instruction: Meeting the Call for Change. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 31, 161-181. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0267190511000043>
- Paran, A. (2008). The role of literature in instructed foreign language learning and teaching: An evidence-based survey. *Language Teaching*, 41(4), 465-496. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S026144480800520X>
- Rapley, D. (2015). Longitudinal Research: Data Collection Techniques. Paper presented at 21st TESOL Arabia Conference, Hayat Regency Hotel, Dubai, 12-14 March.
- Ritchie, J., and Spencer, L. (2002). Qualitative data analysis for applied policy research. In A. M. Huberman, & M. B. Miles, (Eds.), *the qualitative researcher's companion* (pp. 305-329). London: Sage.
- Ryan, M. P. (1984). Monitoring text comprehension: Individual differences in epistemological standards. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 76(2), 248-258. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-0663.76.2.248>
- Schommer, M. (1993). Epistemological development and academic performance. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 85(3), 406-411. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-0663.85.3.406>
- Shaaban, S. S. A. (2015). The Effects of Digital Storytelling, Storytelling and Story Reading on Enhancing Palestinian Ninth Graders' Paragraph Writing Skills. *European Journal of Educational Studies*, 7(1), 23-34.
- Shakfa, M. D. A. (2012). Difficulties students face in understanding Drama in English literature at the Islamic university of Gaza. *English Language Teaching*, 5(9), 95-103.
- Spack, R. (1985). Literature, reading and writing, and ESL. Bridging the gaps. *TESOL Quarterly*, 19(4), 703-725. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3586672>
- Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1998). *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

- Tehan, P., Yuksel, D., & Inan, B. (2015). The place of literature in an English language teaching program: What do students think about it? *The Reading Matrix*, 15(2), 45-52.
- Thomas, L. F., & Harri-Augstein, E. S. (1983). The evaluation of an intelligent learning system, learning-to-learn and the CAL-Skills Trainer. Final Report, Center for the Study of Human Learning. Brunel University, Uxbridge, Middlesex.
- Wenden, A. (1999). An introduction to metacognitive knowledge and beliefs in language learning: Beyond the basics. *System*, 27, 435-441. [http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0346-251X\(99\)00043-3](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0346-251X(99)00043-3)
- Wenden, A. (2001). Metacognitive knowledge. In Breen, M.P. (Ed.), *Learner contributions to language learning. New Directions in Research* (pp. 44-64). Harlow, Essex: Pearson Education Limited.
- Widdowson, H. G. (1975). *Stylistics and the teaching of literature*. Essex: Longman.

Copyrights

Copyright for this article is retained by the author(s), with first publication rights granted to the journal.

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).