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## Integrating literature into language teaching to build a motivated education environment and enhance skills development

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### Abstract

*The purpose of this study was to find out how English majors view the significance of integrating literature into language instruction as well as how well literature instruction fosters a stimulating education environment and skill development. 43 students from a Vietnamese higher education institution who were enrolling an English literature course participated in the study. A qualitative approach with the instrument of in-depth interviews was used to conduct the study. The results showed that the majority of students acknowledged the importance of literature in achieving the objectives of learning English. The findings also show that literature influences students' learning motivation and skill improvement. Additionally, students had to face some challenges and use a variety of strategies to increase their language proficiency throughout the course of studying English literature. There are some helpful suggestions made for teachers and students on how to improve the caliber of foreign language learning in English literature classrooms.*

**Keywords:** literature, language teaching, motivated education environment, skills development

### Introduction

At the core of learning a foreign language is the ability to connect and communicate with others, which may be developed through understanding and interacting with people (Choudhury, 2001; Clanfield & Duncan, 2005). The following elements make up Dan Douglas's intriguing framework for language proficiency (2000): grammatical knowledge, textual knowledge, functional knowledge, and sociolinguistic knowledge. Students must be able to grasp and

use languages in specific contexts in addition to understanding them as part of the language communication process.

Literature is a reflection of life. It is the written chronicle of human history, feelings, and desires as well as the human lives (Long, 1989). Literature provides possibilities for critical thinking, exposure to real language, and cultural insights, making it an

invaluable tool for language learning. Students have the opportunity to practice language and develop their skills through the literary works. (Cubukcu, 2001). According to Cumming (2007), encouraging children's natural creativity through poetry and fostering their interest in learning English through literature are thought to be two of the best strategies to improve a student's second language ability. With an emphasis on pedagogical strategies and advantages unique to non-native English speakers, this article explores the importance of incorporating literature into EFL training. The main goal of the study is to investigate how students evaluate the influence of English literature on inspiring a motivated educational environment and enhancing skills development in foreign language acquisition. More precisely, the purpose of this investigation is to find the answers to the following research questions:

1. How effective is the integration of literature into language instruction for skills development?
2. How do students evaluate the influence of literature in fostering a motivated educational environment?

## Literature Review

One common definition of literature that refers to literary writing is the achievement of aesthetic and moral merit, such as that found in canon or the great tradition. Otherwise, writing is regarded as creative and imaginative written production (Floris, 2004; Lima, 2010).

In recent years, the incorporation of literature into English language instruction has attracted a lot of attention. Literature has a significant impact on learners' linguistic proficiency, critical thinking, and cultural understanding in addition to its conventional use (Kaşhoğlu & Ersin, 2018). The study explores current viewpoints and empirical research that highlight the educational advantages of using literature in English language training. Kumar (2022) acknowledges that reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills are all enhanced by literature's exposure to a wide range of vocabulary, sentence structures, and discourse styles. Through meaningful involvement, literary works reinforce grammar and syntax while providing context for learning new words and idioms. By exposing pupils to a wide range of vocabulary, intricate sentence patterns, and linguistic idioms, literary books act as genuine resources that enhance language learning (Lazar, 1993).

Reading literature gives students the opportunity to experience language in context, which enhances comprehension and memory. Additionally, literature strengthens students' receptive and productive language skills by encouraging them to discern meanings, evaluate stories, and articulate personal reactions (Lima, 2010; Nasr, 2001)

Literature may pique students' interest in learning a language, offer rich and colorful resources, and give the impression that students are fully immersed in the process of acquiring vocabulary, grammar, and linguistic sense. The development of language production skills occurs concurrently with the acquisition of comprehension skills. Language proficiency grows from basic comprehension and expression to profound comprehension and literary expression as literary literacy improves. Students' language proficiency is significantly enhanced by studying English literature and language (Weixiang Liu & Peng Yang, 2017). By encouraging students to examine themes, characters, and narrative devices, literary works help them develop higher-order thinking skills.

Inferencing, appraisal, and synthesis are necessary for literary interpretation and support general cognitive growth (Brumfit & Carter, 1986; Khatib & Rahimi, 2012).

Students are exposed to a variety of cultural viewpoints through literature, which fosters empathy and cross-cultural comprehension (Duff & Maley, 1990). Literary books expose students to a variety of customs, ideologies, and social concerns, deepening their understanding of other cultures. This makes it a great instrument for addressing both the English language and English culture, as Begum and Burgess (2019) have shown. A window into many civilizations, customs, and viewpoints can be found in literature. Students learn about the ideals and social conventions of many communities through plays, poems, and stories. Students' worldviews are expanded and empathy is fostered by this cultural immersion, two qualities that are crucial in our increasingly globalized society.

## Methodology

### Research design

The ability to explain people's experiences, opinions, and attitudes is a benefit of the qualitative research approach. With the use of semi-structured in-depth interviews and qualitative research techniques, the study also investigated students' opinions and thoughts regarding the value of teaching literature in creating an inspiring learning environment and developing students' skills. The chosen interview type is semi-structured, which is a qualitative research method that combines open-ended questions that rely on interviewees' answers with pre-written, preset questions.

### Participants

The research participants were selected using the purposive sampling technique. They are HLU seniors majoring in English. They belonged to the 46th course, which had 43 students overall. The appropriateness of their academic levels serves as one justification for choosing the target audience. To clarify, these students have taken and passed final exams of the prerequisite subjects, had been exposed to English literature, and had finished this course to be able to provide the comprehensive evaluations. In order to get useful information about the study's topic, the researcher asked students who were willing to participate in interviews in the classroom.

### Research instruments

Regarding the in-depth interviews, semi-structured questions were developed to investigate how the students felt about the significance of literature instruction in creating an engaging learning environment and fostering the development of abilities. Students' experiences and perceptions of the effectiveness of literature instruction in terms of motivation and skill development were disclosed.

### Procedures of data collection

In-depth interviews with pertinent questions were used to get the data. The researcher gave a brief summary of the present study at the beginning of each interview before asking the participants to be sincere throughout the entire process in order to get the desired result. The researcher clarified the queries by offering explanations and directions. Guidelines were implemented as needed to guarantee that every student could provide their responses. These responses were gathered, recorded, and stored in files. The information was kept confidential.

## Data Analysis Method

The three procedures listed below can be used to analyze qualitative data: coding, theme identification, and data synthesis. Data categorization is one way to describe coding. A word or brief phrase that expresses a subject or a concept can be considered a "code." Every code must have a relevant title attached to it. It is possible to code a vast array of non-quantifiable elements, including events, behaviors, activities, meanings, etc.

A collection of methods can be used to find recurring themes, patterns, and connections in sample group members' responses to the codes that were established in the earlier step: repetitions of words and phrases, comparisons of primary and secondary data, Look for any information that is missing. Analogies and metaphors that summarize the information.

## Findings and discussion

### *Students' evaluation about the influence of literature in language skills development*

This section included a thorough analysis of the data collected from the in-depth interviews. In the educational program, students discover the intimate connection between the study of literature and the development of competencies. Most significantly, though, literature also facilitates vocabulary and grammar learning. Reading literary works can help students memorize grammar and deduce word meanings from context. It can also help them feel more attuned to the language since they will be able to perceive that words have a certain weight and quality.

The acquisition of language and literature are closely related. Reading, writing, speaking, listening, and cultural knowledge are all enhanced by literature's exposure to a wide range of language, sentence structures, and discourse styles "We are exposed to a range of materials that help us strengthen our grammar and intricate sentence structures while expanding our vocabulary and linguistic expressions. The literary writings also provide genuine resources about the lives of characters in many contexts, enhancing intercultural communication skills and cultural awareness (K.L.). In addition to factual information, it fosters a greater understanding of language usage. " The language of literature is the authentic and adaptable language of life. It gives us an excellent opportunity to study and practice our subject in order to develop our knowledge and abilities." (M.H.)

The intricacy of different works' concepts, personalities, or cultural difficulty is shown by the courses. Through higher education, a significant amount of linguistic and literary knowledge is acquired using this way. "By analyzing the texts and comprehending the ideas presented in each poem and story, learning English through literary works helps me develop my comprehension skills and expand my vocabulary." (P.T.) Furthermore, open-ended questions allow students to practice critical thinking, and idea-brainstorming exercises and lesson exploration following each class help them improve their writing abilities "By studying literature, we can effectively assimilate the different concepts and learn a foreign language. Reading is essential for expanding our knowledge and creating a real learning environment in which we may participate".

Therefore, we feel comfortable communicating and presenting ideas in the other language. Through a range of imaginative exercises, children develop skills beyond language comprehension. Many students wrote their own poems and stories in addition to comprehending the literary merits and content of the works. This encourages us to be creative in our learning and strengthens our

abilities. Learning became simpler and more efficient when we freely transformed our ideas into literary works. These findings are consistent with Lima (2010) and Nasr (2001). Peng Yang and Weixiang Liu (2017). Reading literature gives students the chance to encounter language in context, which improves comprehension and memory. It also motivates children to evaluate stories, interpret meanings, and respond personally, all of which improve receptive and productive language abilities.

The ability to produce language develops along with the ability to comprehend. As literary literacy improves, so does language proficiency, moving from simple comprehension and expression to profound comprehension and literary expression. The improvement of students' language proficiency is significantly influenced by their study of English literature and language.

In order to understand and teach English at the university level, literature is essential. During the five weeks of the semester, students must participate in this mandatory course. The humanizing power of literature study enables students to examine many viewpoints, hone their critical thinking abilities, and see the world more fully. Students benefit from increased critical thinking, creativity, and cultural knowledge in addition to improved language ability. Students can investigate many literary genres, styles, and eras while learning about the historical, social, and cultural settings in which they were produced by studying English literature.

English literature is taught in Vietnam, as it is in other nations, for a variety of reasons. The most popular ones are that it makes content materials and cultural context easily accessible, aids in language learning, increases students' linguistic awareness, and helps them develop their interpretive abilities. Regarding the significance of English literature in EFL, students believe it to be an essential element that has significantly influenced their ability to advance both their language proficiency and cultural awareness. Furthermore, people who had a favorable attitude toward learning a language through literature were able to learn more effectively than those who didn't.

The most vivid and accessible source of information on a country's temperament, social dynamics, cultural traits, customs, and psychological states is its literature. When reading a literary work, the reader appears to enter the author's world, which is based on actual life, and experience how various languages are used in various contexts. Learning is more than just mastering grammar and vocabulary. Learners can acquire and master English more effectively by immersing themselves in the target language. The development of language production skills occurs concurrently with the acquisition of comprehension skills. Language proficiency grows from basic comprehension and expression to profound comprehension and literary expression as literary literacy improves. Studying English literature and language has a significant impact on pupils' language proficiency.

### *The influence of teaching literature in fostering a motivated educational environment*

Literature has the power to increase learning's intrinsic drive. Literary works can inspire students to engage and think, transforming their learning states from passive to active, while also reflecting the wide world and complicated individuals. Personal language skills will also be enhanced by the study and collection of literary works as well as the development of literary literacy. There are endless linguistic resources in literary works. Amazing

language materials are available for drawing in the literary work library, which is also the language library. The rich and poignant literature gives the language a specific context and aids with comprehension

Reading literature helps increase enthusiasm in learning English. We feel honored to create the works because of the diverse and rich vocabulary, expression, and amazing messages found in literary works, which present "The literary works are the nutrition to nourish the mind and the heart of the reader they serve as the reader's mental and emotional sustenance." (T.N.)

Teachers use a variety of strategies to engage students and support their learning when teaching English literature. They urge students to examine and understand a variety of texts, such as plays, films, novels, and poems, using feminist, postcolonial, and psychoanalytic perspectives. Teachers frequently use group projects, debates, and discussions to assist students develop their critical viewpoints and strengthen their communication and analytical abilities "When literature is incorporated into the curriculum, it becomes more successful for learning foreign languages since it is humorous and intimate, whereas traditionally, students just learn grammar and technicalities" (D.A).

Using literature in language classrooms can increase student motivation and engagement. Authentic and relatable narratives capture learners' interest, making language learning enjoyable and meaningful "We get the impression that we are participating in the lives of the characters through the lively activities on stage in the role plays. It is truly great and inspires us." (H.N.). Literature has the power to pique students' interest in learning a language, offer them rich and colorful resources, and make them feel as though they are immersed in the process of acquiring vocabulary, grammar, and language sense without even realizing it "Learning literature has allowed me to use basic words to engage with actual issues. They facilitate my understanding of and immersion in the characters' real-life communication. This is the most effective method for language learning." (N.L.). Engaging students can be greatly increased by using material that represents their interests and experiences. In order to make literature more approachable and engaging for students, current debates support curriculum that incorporate inclusive and varied storylines. A persistent interest in language acquisition and active involvement are encouraged by such relevance "Diversifying activities in learning literature brings about the challenges to develop students' mindset and reasoning method. This made me more interested and involved in the lessons to push myself as a result" (T.T.)

Additionally, it is a legitimate resource for language acquisition since it fosters social interaction between students and has educational value "We collaborate to finish the duties, particularly the group projects. This encourages us to gather and share the experience of significance." (L.P.) These findings are consistent with the investigations by Clanfield & Duncan (2005), Dymešová (2006), Weixiang Liu & Peng Yang (2017), and Ashrafuzzaman et al. (2021) that incorporating literature that reflects students' experiences and interests can significantly boost engagement. Contemporary discussions advocate for curricula that include inclusive and diverse stories, making literature more relatable and stimulating for learners. Such relevance encourages active participation and a sustained interest in language learning. Literature may inspire students' passion in learning a language, explore the new messages from the old stories, build up the various

perspectives, and give the impression that students are fully immersed.

## Conclusion and recommendations

The study showed that the majority of students acknowledged the importance of literature in building motivated English learning environment and develop language proficiency including variety skills such as reading, writing, vocabulary, grammar, intercultural communication skills, and critical thinking ability. The findings show that literature influences students' learning motivation and skill improvement positively. The activities in learning literature foster their inspiration, engagement, and cooperation. Additionally, students had to face some challenges and use a variety of strategies to increase their language proficiency throughout the course of studying English literature. There are some helpful suggestions made for teachers and students on how to improve the caliber of foreign language learning in English literature classrooms. Teachers can use a variety of tactics to successfully include literature into EFL instruction. It is important to select the appropriate materials and diverse text-book resources in which students are easy to approach the literary works to guarantee accessibility and engagement. These literary works must be compatible with students' language competence and meet the students' interests. Secondly, teachers should diversify the teaching approaches to align with students' learning styles, materials, and the objectives of the course. Interactive activities including role-plays, stimulations, on-stage drama performance, composing poems should be applied to motivate students to actively investigate the value of the literary works and enhance their ability. Additionally, teacher should provide more supportive extra knowledge relevant to the content of the lesson such as culture or history to navigate students understand and analyse the text effectively.

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