

# The Use of Literary Works in EFL Classroom

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**Abstract.** Literary works have been used in language classrooms for many years. The idea stems from the tight relationship between literature and language, which makes educators believe that using literature benefits language learning. The current study investigates students' attitudes toward the use of literary works in English classes and their perception of the benefits. This mixed-method study was conducted in an English Teacher Training Program in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. Seventy-nine students were chosen by convenient sampling in the quantitative data collection and 6 for the qualitative data. Questionnaires were used to see the students' attitudes, and interviews were used to understand students' perceptions. Using a Likert scale of 1-5 to indicate a very strong agreement to a strong disagreement, the study found a mean score of 2.39, which means that the tendency is closer to scale 1. The number means that students favor using literary works in English classes. The study also found that the students perceived that literary works can make learning enjoyable, help improve language aspects, and hone student's imagination. The students' positive acceptance of the use of literary works implies that language educators should consider them as part of all language classrooms and figure out an effective way to make them into effective language learning tools.

**Keywords:** EFL, literary works, students' attitude, students' perception, benefits

## 1 Introduction

Common beliefs say that literature and language have a close connection to one another, in which literature is required to attain language [1][2] and offers actual contexts for language use [1][3]. As a result, it is becoming increasingly popular to teach literary works in English classes. However, its practices are still debatable among applied linguists since they oppose that literary works make EFL students more difficult in acquiring English [4][3][5].

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Despite its controversies, English learning in EFL countries benefits from using literary works in many ways. It is believed that literary works as authentic materials contributed to English classes by honing students' communicative skills, critical thinking, and artistic appreciation [6][3]. Moreover, literary works can be used to teach the four language skills [1][7] as well as language components, especially grammar and vocabulary [1][2], be a good way to foster students' creativity and imagination [8][1], and help students become more aware of other cultures [9][1].

Nevertheless, some challenges emerge in integrating literature in language classroom settings for teachers and students. Teachers need to consider dealing with the selection of literary works since students have differences in preferences, interests, hobbies, linguistic proficiencies, and cultural and literary backgrounds [10][11]. Meanwhile, students respond to them differently based on their respective attitudes. Then, students' attitude is a crucial issue since the success of the teaching and learning process can be determined by students' attitudes [12][13]. In addition, students' attitudes stimulate and promote language, yet they simultaneously discourage students from learning language [12].

Several previous studies about students' attitudes towards literature in ELT have been conducted in secondary education nationally, such as [12] which specifically investigated the benefits of literature in an English class by using questionnaires and interviews in the form of descriptive qualitative research. Next, [13] conducted a qualitative study using interviews to investigate university students' attitudes in an English classroom. Still, in Indonesian college education, [2] accomplished a case study that examined three English lecturers' selection of literary texts, their problems in choosing the texts, and their ways of solving the problems. Meanwhile, some international research has been completed by [11], who surveyed students' attitudes toward literary work using a questionnaire, and [3], who revealed that integrating novels enabled the enhancement of students' writing competence by using quantitative research.

Reviewing prior research, the current researchers found the gap in which a mixed-method that involves qualitative and quantitative studies has not been employed yet in delving into literary work use and university students' attitudes by using questionnaires. Thus, novelty was expected to be provided by the use of rarely used method with the hope that findings would be more thorough and varied to comprehend the phenomenon more. This study also focused on students' perception of the benefits of literary works teaching in the classroom using interviews. To fill the gap, the ultimate objective of this study is *to explore students' attitudes towards literary works usage in English classes and their perception of the benefits*.

## **2 Literature Review**

Literary works are written compositions incorporating aesthetic and artistic components [14]. Literary works have implicit connotations within their texts, elevating them above mere instruments of textual communication [15]. While literary works may sometimes be unfamiliar to learners, they are regarded as appropriate resources for language teaching and learning [16]. Studying through literature can enhance learners' acquisition of descriptive language phrases and captivating characters, so rendering teaching and learning activities more engaging and compelling [17]. [18] contended that it is regrettable if literature is not

utilized in learning English, as literary works are replete with abundant vocabulary. In their study, [19] discovered that incorporating literature into English instruction is a viable approach in the classroom. Literary works can enhance language learners' conversational skills by facilitating exposure to various language components. According to [20], using literary works in teaching can enhance student engagement and interest in the classroom compared to not using literary works. Literary works are regarded as more captivating and contribute to a more dynamic and flexible educational environment [21], hence leaving a more profound impact. Literary works are educational tools for learning English and are part of the instruction in many educational settings. Leveraging literature in the learning process can enhance higher-order thinking skills, as suggested by [22].

The general conclusion regarding students' attitude towards using literary works tends to lead to a positive direction. Several studies found that both students and teachers perceived positively the use of literary works inside and outside the classroom and felt that they could benefit from it in a way both in learning and teaching, for they are less boring and fun [23][24][25].

### **1.1 Recognized advantages of Incorporating Literary Works in English Classrooms**

Each literary form, including poems, short stories, dramas, and novels, has a distinct purpose and enhances reading comprehension.

As an artistic medium for interpreting experiences, events, and people, poetry offers valuable learning resources, such as the diverse applications of metaphorical terms [26]. [26] added that poetry facilitates the acquisition and honing of essential linguistic abilities in students. A prominent correlation between learning and poetry is the utilization of metaphor. Poetry offers a significant educational experience as it commonly employs metaphor as a key strategy, intentionally or unintentionally. Poetry encompasses the creative rendering of personal encounters, occurrences, and individuals. A poet employs innovative and imaginative language, prioritizing the impact of word arrangement on the reader over grammatical structure. The poet contemplates the phonetics of words, the melodic quality of each phrase, and the cohesion of the words. In addition, poetry can be the place for students' self-expression of feelings, emotions, and self-awareness [27], which might correlate to their enjoyment in the class activities.

Short stories in English are another genre of literary work. When incorporating short stories into the classroom, it is important to consider cultural characteristics since they may also be utilized to enhance comprehension of culture [27]. An advantage of utilizing short stories is their versatility in catering to different levels of language proficiency, age groups, and educational environments [28]. Drama is frequently employed as a pedagogical tool, alongside short stories, for educational purposes. Due to its brevity, it streamlines the reading assignment for both students and the teacher's coverage, incorporating short stories into the curriculum can benefit EFL students by helping them develop into well-rounded professionals and individuals [29]. Short tales impart more than just the skills required to function in the target language. According to [22], short stories aid in developing literary, cultural, and higher-order thinking skills. The utilization of a short tale in English class aims to stimulate pupils to employ the knowledge they have acquired thus far. When choosing a piece of literature to enhance students' cultural comprehension, it is important to consider

the cultural elements present in the text [30]. Short stories cater to a diverse array of interests and inclinations. Moreover, short stories can be utilized with students of varying proficiency levels, ranging from novice to expert, across distinct age groups, from toddlers to adults, and in diverse classroom settings, including morning, afternoon, or evening classes [28].

Meanwhile, drama is an effective educational technique that can be used in a classroom focusing on communication skills, with a particular emphasis on student engagement, language knowledge such as verbal and non-verbal language, functional phrases, and contextual expressions [31]. [32] asserted that the examination of grammatical forms in various settings and the utilization of language for self-expression can be conducted by analysing a theatrical performance. In line with this, [31] stated that theatre effectively facilitates English language learning in student-centred foreign language training that emphasizes communication. [31] added that drama can utilize authentic situations to enhance students' comprehension of the spoken and unspoken aspects of the target language they are studying. Drama incorporates conversations, feelings, emotions, functional phrases, and contextualized expressions. [32] asserted that EFL students have the potential to acquire a comprehensive understanding of different grammatical structures within a range of situations and develop their ability to communicate through the analysis of dramatic texts effectively.

Finally, novels are frequently utilized as literary works in English lessons. Novels are beneficial for analysing linguistic structure [31]. Novels are popular among individuals of different age groups due to their inclusion of well-developed characters and detailed narratives [33]. Novels offer exceptional prospects for thorough reading. Additionally, it serves as an excellent method for honing reading abilities, including skimming, scanning, and identifying crucial details [34]. However, it is indisputable that literature acquires pupils with grammatical rules and other aspects of language structure [35]. Using a book is a highly effective approach to gaining proficiency in the grammatical structure and authenticity of the target language [31]. Novels are user-friendly as they rapidly gain popularity among both adults and youngsters. A novel possesses intricate and unforgettable characters accompanied by a meticulously depicted sequence of events [33]. Novels provide an exceptional opportunity for thorough reading. Additionally, it is an aesthetically pleasing method to enhance proficiency in reading sub-skills such as skimming, scanning, and identifying crucial information [34]. However, it is undeniable that students are exposed to grammatical rules and other language structure principles through literary materials [35].

## **2 Methodology**

This methodology part explains the study's design, the setting where the study took place, data collection techniques, instruments, and analysis.

### **2.1 Research Design**

The current study is a mixed-method study where quantitative and qualitative data were collected. The rationale for using the approach is to make a better conclusion from both data types. To answer the first research question, namely "How is the EFL students' attitude towards the use of literary works in English classes?" a quantitative method was used. Quantitative data would be able to give a more generalizable result so that researchers could

see the common attitude of the respondents. The second research question, "How did the EFL students perceive the use of literary works in English classes?" was hoped to explain the attitude in answering the first research question.

## **2.2 Research Setting**

The study was conducted in an English Teacher Training Program in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. Most of the classes in this program used English as the medium of instruction, even though Indonesian was also highly used. The program taught student teachers, and therefore, the English lessons were not only aimed at teaching language skills but also the skills and theories of its pedagogy. Among the lessons offered, some classes have used literary works as parts of the teaching medium and materials. The literary works used novels, short stories, drama plays, and poetry.

## **2.3 Data Collection Technique**

To gain the quantitative data, a convenience sampling technique was used. The technique was considered suitable because the researchers could not access all students in the target population and the exact number of population is unknown for several administrative reasons. The researchers focused on the students who had attended a minimum of four semesters in the study program to ensure adequate experiences in attending the classes offered. As many as 79 students participated to answer the first research question. In the meantime, six students were chosen to answer the second research question.

The quantitative data were collected using a questionnaire adapted from the Literature Questionnaire created by [11] available publicly in their published research. Even though the questionnaire had 27 items, this study only used ten items related to the students' attitudes towards using literary works in English classes. The rest of the items were considered irrelevant to the current study context. Of the ten items, Items 1 and 2 focused on looking at the attitude toward studying English literature, and items 3 to 10 focused on the attitude towards the English literature instruction, including the students' attitude towards reading four types of literary works, namely, novels, short stories, plays, and poems. The items used a Likert Scale ranging from 5 (Totally Disagree) to 1 (Totally Agree). After a validity test measure using Microsoft Excel, it was determined that all ten items were valid, or in other words, had measured what they were intended to measure. In addition, a Cronbach Alpha test was also conducted, and the result was  $\alpha = 0.873$ , which is  $>0.7$ , which means that the items also had a good internal consistency.

The questionnaire was distributed through a Google form to students via their WhatsApp account. The data were analysed descriptively by looking into the average score (mean) of the total response of the respondents. If the Mean score was close to 5, the attitude was concluded as negative, and if it was close to 1, the attitude was considered positive. The data were measured using the Microsoft Excel application.

The qualitative data were taken from a semi-structured interview to see the participants' perception of using literary works in English classes. An interview guideline was developed to ensure that the interview was on track but allowed the participants to elaborate on their responses. The interviews were done face-to-face and were recorded and transcribed. Using the thematic analysis, the transcript of the interview was then coded using open, axial, and

analytical coding. The extraction of data by coding was conducted by highlighting the statements that showed participants' perception on the benefits of literary works in English classrooms. The next step in axial coding, similar statements from different participants were combined and categorized. Lastly, in the analytical coding, the categories were analysed and compared to previous studies.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the data, transcripts of the interviews were given to the participants before they were coded. All participants agreed that they would not change anything and approved that the transcripts were as they expressed in the interview. An external audit has also been done to the qualitative data by two experts in the field of EFL to give external insight of how the data were coded and analysed. The two experts also gave input and constructive feedback on the analysis.

### **3 Findings and Discussions**

The current study tried to find answers to what attitudes EFL students had toward the use of literary works in EFL classes and how they perceived the benefits of literary works in EFL classes. To meet both objectives, two types of data collection had been conducted, namely quantitative and qualitative data.

#### **3.1 The attitude towards the use of literary works in English classes**

The first research question concerns students' attitudes toward using literary works in English classes. The data to answer the question were taken from the questionnaire filled by 79 students. The results are presented here in the form of mean score and percentage of the two variables, namely the attitude towards studying literature in English and the attitude towards English literature instruction. From the data gathered, the mean value was found as follows:

**Table 1.** Mean Value of Questionnaire Items

<b>Items</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>
1	2.24	1.03
2	2.22	0.97
3	2.28	1.11
4	2.34	0.97
5	2.73	0.98
6	2.86	0.92
7	2.52	1.16
8	2.01	1.12
9	2.16	0.99

10	2.53	1.21
<b>Total</b>	<b>2.39</b>	<b>1.05</b>

It can be seen from the table that total mean value is 2.39, with 1.05 as Standard Deviation, which means that the number is closer to 1 rather than closer to 5. The number means that the respondents, on average, had a positive attitude towards using literary works in English classes.

Additionally, the frequency and percentage were also measured to see the students' attitudes toward the use of literary works in English classes (see Appendix A). The results are presented in two parts. The first part of the questionnaire relates to the attitude toward studying literature in English. The data showed that students strongly agreed that studying literature is self-rewarding and that students in the English Department are encouraged to take literary courses. When responding to the item "I find studying literature in English personally rewarding," 27% chose scale 1, and 37% chose scale 2, which was close to a total agreement. Most, or 64% of the 79 students, agreed with this notion, while the rest were either unsure or disagreed. Meanwhile, the response to the item, "Pre-service teachers in the Department of English should be encouraged to take literature course." shows that 66% of the respondents strongly agree.

Although slightly different in the percentage, the study by [11] showed the same conclusive result, namely, the majority of respondents showed strong agreement or positive attitude towards the two statements above. This tendency to have a positive attitude towards using literary works in English learning is likely due to students' notion that academic materials are not enough to help them make the most of their learning [36]. Students showed positive attitude is comprehensible since literary works in different forms seem to cater to individuality, such as personal encounters [26] and self-expression [27], and can be used for students of different ages and language levels [28].

The next part of the attitude investigated is the student's attitude toward English literature instruction. In the questionnaire, this was seen from items 3 to 10. Items 3, 4, and 5 sought what makes literature enjoyable for the students. The result showed that 63% of the respondents chose numbers 1 and 2, agreeing that they enjoyed reading English literature if they were expressing their opinions. In addition, 64% showed that they enjoyed reading English literature if they were looking for the underlying meaning. However, only 43% read English literature for pleasure, and only 34% liked to read literary works. This result showed that a certain purpose for reading English literature was needed in order for the respondents to read or enjoy the literary works. Finally, the data demonstrated that 75% of the respondents like to read short stories, 66% like to read plays, and 55% like to read poems and novels. The study showed that short stories are the literary works the participants enjoy the most. The study by [37] also found short stories preferable to be put into the curriculum. Short stories are attractive to students because they can accommodate students' curiosity about the ending of the story [36], and they are concise [29]. The aspect of culture shown in the short story [28] can also be something attracting students. Short stories triumphed against their counterparts are likely due to the use of metaphor in poetry [26], the complex grammar and vocabulary in novels [38] along with their length, and the theatrical performance aspect in the use of drama [32] that might be pretty challenging for



many students. It is important to note that the finding also shows that students' opinion matters in using literary works, which means that personal aspects and students' agency need to be considered in the decision made by teachers.

### **3.2 The students' perception of the use of literary works in English classes**

The second research question sought to further elaborate on how the students perceived the use of literary works in English classes to understand the answer to the first research question. The questions focused on how students perceived the benefits or the use of literary works they encountered in the classes they had attended. As many as six students were interviewed, addressed here in pseudonyms: Eka, Dwi, Tri, Catur, Panca, and Satya. The findings shed light on how the students tended to have a positive attitude toward using literary works in English classes.

#### **3.2.1 *Literary works make English classes more enjoyable.***

Students are expected to perceive that literary works make learning more enjoyable in various ways, depending on the types of the works. The participants had different reasons why they found literary work enjoyable based on its types.

Eka, Dwi, Catur, and Panca considered drama the form of literary work that makes class most enjoyable. Eka said, "For example, [with] drama, I enjoyed the class more." Dwi reasoned that what makes drama enjoyable is its storyline, and Catur perceived it as the most exciting because she worked in groups with her friends. Meanwhile, Panca had experience in filmmaking in high school, so she was excited when she found a class using a drama script. She added that the excitement was also due to the challenge of working with the drama script in English.

In the meantime, some participants liked poems more. For example, Tri said poems could be soothing because of their reminiscing aspect. In addition, Panca stated why poems are exciting for her. She said, "It is hard to translate [a poem], right? [We] need to think, so it became more challenging and felt more exciting when studying the poem. [I] could experience it fully, and it was also short, not as long as the other [literary works]." Dwi echoed this sentiment. Meanwhile, Catur perceived a poem as interesting because of its aesthetics and deep meaning. She later suggested that lecturers should use poems more in classes.

Other literary works that participants found enjoyable were short stories and novels. Dwi found short stories interesting because they have a storyline. Meanwhile, Satya stated that she loved reading novels, so she would always find a class enjoyable with novels involved. She stated, "In any aspect, novels are absolutely great."

The fun aspect of literary works is the number one aspect that students, teachers, and scholars think of when they discuss why literary works should be incorporated in a language class. Only reading the academic materials is considered boring by students [36]. When teachers decide to use literary works, they also tend to choose the ones they consider interesting for their students besides the level of language complexity that is matched to



students' level [38]. When students did not find the literary works as too difficult, they will enjoy them more.

### *3.2.2 Literary works support the development of some language aspects.*

All participants mentioned developing certain language aspects as one they could benefit from literary works. The aspects include vocabulary, idiomatic expressions, pronunciation, and grammar.

All participants mentioned that they experienced vocabulary building when using literary works in class. Dwi argued that her vocabulary developed because she needed to translate some words to Bahasa Indonesia. Therefore, she knew the meaning of the new words. Tri also shared this conduct. He explained, "Say, for example, there were short stories, novels, or drama. I would like to read them first; if there were a vocabulary that is foreign [to me], I would highlight it again. Say, looking for its definition and meaning." The dialogue in a drama also provided a new vocabulary, as experienced by Panca. She added that the new vocabulary also came from the shared stories between students in the same drama group. Not only can the standard meaning of vocabulary be learned, but Panca mentioned that in learning English using poetry, students also learn to make the meaning of a word based on their perception. Among the new vocabulary, Dwi and Satya also mentioned new idiomatic expressions as the ones they can learn from literary works, especially from short stories and novels.

Regarding vocabulary, pronunciation is also the language aspect the participants believed to improve. It is expected that the form of literary work perceived to help learn pronunciation is drama because it involves oral performance. Panca argued that learning the pronunciation in a dialogue could help understand the role of a drama and play it professionally. Similarly, Satya stated that pronunciation and intonation can be learned from a drama. She explained further, "English has stressed words, right? It is where [the intonation] has to be stressed. Drama can help us know a word's pronunciation, stress, and intonation."

The next aspect of language perceived to be learned using literary works is grammar. Dwi mentioned that she learned grammar a lot from short stories. Satya stated that grammar is learned a lot in a novel. She further explained, "English structure is complex, complicated, long, and has many rules. From novels, [we] can know the good and right structure that the readers can understand." She added that short stories became the starting point before using the novels. On a slightly different point of view, one student self-reflected on her language knowledge from dealing with literary works in class. Dwi admitted that she did not like reading English literary works at first because she was accustomed to reading Indonesian ones. However, after being required to read and do assignments using English literary works, she started to enjoy it and felt an improvement in her ability. Further she said, "I got a new insight that apparently I was not yet that good in English." The statement showed that the literary works benefit her language improvement by giving her the challenge to comprehend them.

Language improvement is expected when students enjoy what they read or learn. Although none of the participants mentioned some proof that their language has improved, they perceived it that way. Similarly, a previous study of four teachers using novels for reading

activities [38] found that teachers mostly focus on language aspects such as vocabulary and grammar. This sentiment seems to be shared with the students.

### **3.2.3** *Literary works encourage imagination.*

Two participants mentioned that literary works helped with their imagination. Interestingly, only two participants mentioned this regardless of the fictional sense of literary works. Panca stated, "[I] can hone my imagination. For example, a novel can give us the picture of what we are thinking, which then we put into writing." Besides novels, Tri mentioned that short stories and drama hone the students' imagination. He added that drama encouraged imagination in the making, and short stories and novels can hone imagination while reading them. Possibly, not all participants could relate imagination to something helpful in their learning even though imagination leads to creativity, which is an important aspect in language learning. Creativity can be honed in different ways depending on the aspects learned through the literary works used. In his study, for example, [39] found that learning figure of speech helped students feel that their creativity improved. The study further found that students expected the teacher to be a person who also showed their creativity and understanding of the literary works in order to benefit the most from the classroom activities.

## **4 Conclusion, Limitation, and Recommendation**

To sum up, EFL students have shown some positive attitude toward literary works, particularly in the study setting. First of all, the quantitative data showed that the students generally had a positive attitude towards the use of literary works in English classrooms. The data also showed that students agreed that studying literature is self-rewarding and taking the literature class is recommended. In addition, they agreed that they enjoyed reading English literature when they expressed their opinion and when they sought for underlying meaning. However, despite the positive tendency, a smaller percentage of students read the literary works for pleasure and a fewer students liked to do it. Lastly, short story was found to be the type of literary work enjoyed the most.

In the meantime, the qualitative data showed that the students believed that literary works can make learning more enjoyable, help improve language aspects such as vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar, and hone students' imaginative thinking. This implies that using literary works should not only be limited to literature-focused courses but also to any English or any language course. This study is limited to investigating the students' attitudes and perceptions. This shows that the result is subject to the students' subjective point of view and not necessarily facts. In addition, most of the findings are similar to what the previous studies have found. One novel finding that needs more exploration is how the literary works use in English learning inside a classroom differ from the ones used outside the classrooms since one of the finding indicate that students tend to enjoy it because they were already exposed to it in classroom and not because they personally like to do it without being assigned.

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