

Incorporation of Literature in English Language Teaching at the Undergraduate Level: Scopes and Limitations

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ABSTRACT

Teaching literature in the target language offers a valuable perspective on the relationship between language and culture. Not only does it provide insights into people, history, words, and expressions, but it also reveals profound understandings about human nature that go beyond language barriers. Furthermore, including literature in language teaching can enhance students' linguistic skills and their critical thinking abilities. Through exploring the richness of language, imagery, character analysis, and setting in literature, language teachers can increase students' exposure to the target language, leading to better language processing and retention. In recent years, broader access to higher education in Bangladesh has made it essential to meet the ever-changing demands of the local and global job markets. To address this, the UGC (University Grant Commission) of Bangladesh mandated a basic English language course under an Outcome-Based Education (OBE) curriculum at the undergraduate level in all public and private universities to help develop a dynamic workforce. However, these fundamental courses mainly focus on the four language skills, with little or no inclusion of literature. This paper explores the opportunities and limitations of incorporating literature into the current English Fundamental Courses (EFC) at various public and private universities. Additionally, quantitative analysis of data collected from university students and teachers through questionnaires shows positive feedback on including literature in EFC. The paper concludes with practical suggestions for effectively integrating literature into courses that focus solely on language skills.

Introduction

English teachers have diverse materials to improve student learning, with literature playing a crucial role (Wilkins & Urbanovic, 2014). Mason and Krashen (2004) find it more engaging than traditional methods for language teaching. Literature deepens cultural understanding of vocabulary and grammar and fosters critical thinking (Adam, Barratt-Pugh & Haig, 2019). It provides a solid foundation for expanding horizons and gaining cultural insights, especially in ESL/EFL contexts (Levy, 2016), supporting critical thinking development. Critical thinking helps in decision-making, problem-solving, and navigating complex situations. Incorporating literature into English Fundamental Courses (EFC) promotes higher-order thinking skills (HOTS) within an Outcome-Based Education (OBE) framework. Bloom's Taxonomy offers a structure for aligning goals with cognitive development, from recall to analysis and creation (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001). Literature challenges students to engage in higher-level cognitive processes, analyzing texts, interpreting, comparing, and generating insights, aligning with the upper levels of Bloom's hierarchy-analyzing, evaluating, and creating-encouraging deeper understanding and critical thinking. Literature has longstanding educational roots in EFL/ESL contexts, but its role requires reassessment in a rapidly changing environment.

Literature Review

To make English Fundamental Courses more responsive to the goals of Outcome-Based Education (OBE)-particularly the development of critical thinking, global citizenship, and cultural

competence-it is essential to move beyond a purely functional approach to language instruction. Incorporating literature aligns well with Kumaravadivelu's (2003) 'Pedagogy of Possibility', which calls for a transformative educational experience that empowers learners to become critically aware, socially responsible, and culturally literate individuals. Literature's ability to expose students to diverse worldviews and ethical dilemmas makes it a powerful tool in cultivating the kind of holistic learning outcomes OBE envisions at the tertiary level.

Babae and Yahya (2014), in their article, 'Significance of Literature in Foreign Language Teaching', have highlighted that, for the last two decades, literature has been regarded as a powerful instrument in foreign language teaching and curriculum. In this way, studies on the necessity of incorporating English literature in English language teaching have been done from various angles. Calafato (2023) conducted an online questionnaire-based study that "explored the creativity, orientations towards literature, teaching approaches, and beliefs regarding literature of 170 language teachers in Central Asia and how these elements predicted their literary competence". On the other hand, the role of literature in the development of linguistic skills and the ways to make literature more effective in language learning have been focused in the article, "Learning English language through literature: Insights from a survey at university level in Bangladesh" (Ashrafuzzaman et al., 2021). This very article also highlights "the role of different genres of literature (i.e. poetry, short fiction, drama and novel) in the way of language teaching-learning process". Some research has also been conducted on the benefits and challenges of introducing a literary text in language teaching, as Kazi Imran Hossain did one this in 2024. In his article, "Literature-based language learning: Challenges and opportunities for English learners", he analyzes "the potential benefits and challenges associated with integrating literary texts into language teaching practices, emphasizing multimodal approaches, cultural relevance, and the development of language skills." This study has also highlighted the practical approaches for text selection with special emphasis on how to maintain coordination between literary study and the demands of the curriculum. Then, Demir (2021) explored the usefulness of the inclusion of poems as literary texts in vocabulary development.

Despite growing research on the pedagogical benefits of literary texts, there's a significant gap in studies on their inclusion in Bangladesh's EFCs within the OBE curriculum. EFCs are mandatory for students across disciplines (excluding English majors) in both public and private universities (UGC, 2021). OBE emphasizes clear learning outcomes like language skills, cultural competence, and critical thinking, aligned with Bloom's Taxonomy (Bloom, 1956). Literature offers a dynamic platform for engaging students in cognitive domains-from vocabulary to analyzing characters and themes-enabling nuanced interpretations. Incorporating literature in EFCs enhances language skills and promotes higher-order thinking skills (HOTS) such as analysis, synthesis, and evaluation.

This study analyzes the importance of integrating literature in the EFC curriculum and teaching. It assesses literature's role in developing linguistic skills, cultural understanding, and critical thinking. It focuses on both teachers and students, the main stakeholders in outcome-based education (OBE). Views from teachers and students at public and private universities has been collected via two questionnaires. A preliminary guideline for selecting literary texts will be proposed, ensuring relevance and alignment with outcome-based goals.

Research Methodology

This evaluative study aims to determine the extent of including literature in EFC courses and to recommend suitable measures for ongoing innovation (Burns, 2010). Additionally, Creswell and Plano Clark (2017) support using quantitative data collection and analysis to gain a comprehensive understanding of research problems. This study employed a survey methodology utilizing a Likert Scale (Google Forms) because Kumar (2011) states that survey methodology is a popular research design for efficiently collecting large amounts of data from sizable populations. The participants in this focused study included 25 teachers with diverse experience in teaching English and students from both public and private universities across various regions of Bangladesh.

Analysis of Teachers' and Students' Feedback

The 4-part questionnaires have been designed to gather views from both teachers and learners on the effects of using literature in EFC course. The questionnaires were distributed online and collected data on literature's role in improving these points:¹ linguistic skills, cultural awareness, learners' critical faculties and real-life communicative competence.

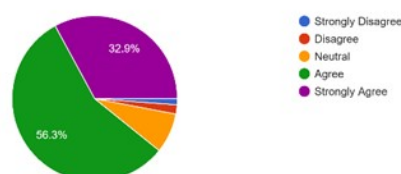
Selective graphs from these sections are analyzed below, showing teachers' responses on the left and the students' on the right.

Section A: Literature's Role in Enhancing Learners' Linguistic Skills

2. Literary texts offer rich input that promotes language retention and fluency.
25 responses



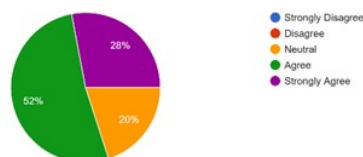
2. Literature improves my understanding of English grammar in real-life contexts.
167 responses



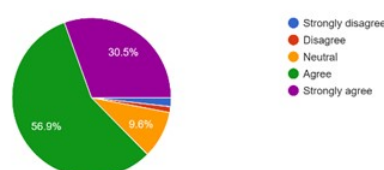
In graph 2, feedback from both teachers and students indicates that including literary texts in language teaching significantly motivates learners to expand their vocabulary, which is beneficial in real-life situations. Thus, the analysis of feedback from both teachers and students in Section A confirms that integrating literature into language learning leads to substantial improvements in all linguistic skills.

Section B: Literature's Role in Creating Cultural Awareness

4. Literary texts foster empathy and global awareness in learners.
25 responses



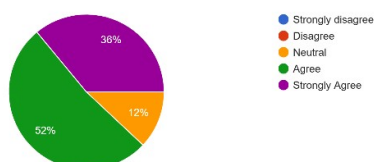
4. Studying literature has increased my respect for cultural diversity.
167 responses



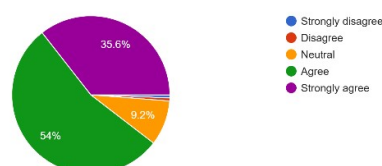
The analysis of graph 4 shows that reading literature helps understanding different cultures and encourages comparison with one's own. Therefore, literature is key to fostering empathy and inclusion in a divided world. Understanding culture is vital for effective language use, and including literature in the curriculum can greatly help.

Section C: Literature's Role in Developing the Critical Faculty of the Learners

3. Discussions around literature promote problem-solving and reflective thinking.
25 responses



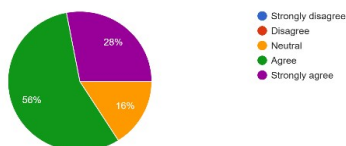
3. Literature encourages me to ask questions and explore different points of view.
163 responses



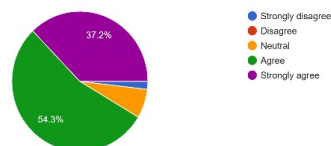
Both teachers and learners believe literature greatly enhances an individual's inner self, affecting language use, imagination, and creativity. Recent times demand more than linguistic skills; true communicative competence involves applying critical thinking to solve challenges. Incorporating literature into language learning boosts cognitive abilities.

Section D: Literature's Role in Improving Communicative Competence of Learners in Real-Life Scenarios

3. The inclusion of literature can improve students' academic and professional readiness.
25 responses



3. A combination of language skills and literature would prepare me better for real-life situations.
164 responses



Graph 3 highlights teachers' role in selecting and using literature in the classroom to boost learning. Responses show that even basic literature use positively impacts students' motivation and participation. The graphs also emphasize literature's role in developing linguistic and real-world skills. Most teachers and students believe literature-based tasks are essential in language courses, aiding learners in applying skills to real life.

Findings and Comments

As supported by Lazar (1993), literary texts “convey their message by paying considerable attention to language, which is rich and multi-layered”. Thus, it opens a gateway to critical thinking by presenting different possible ways of interpreting reality. The responses from both teachers and students in the graph analysis section indicate that they recognize the importance of incorporating literature into EFC courses within the OBE curriculum, as this approach has a positive impact on learners' linguistic, analytical, and decision-making skills. The study has also focused on the role of literature in enhancing the learners' linguistic skills, cultural awareness, and evaluative thinking power of the target language. In support of these findings, Hişmanoğlu (2005) emphasizes the use of literature as a well-known strategy for teaching both basic language skills (i.e., reading, writing, listening, and speaking) and language areas (i.e., vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation). Moreover, in Butler's (2006) view, literature can improve L2 learners' cognitive competence, a vital component for academic success. Additionally, “Literature provides a rich medium” that enhances contextual understanding of cultural nuances that are crucial for exercising Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) (Hossain, 2024).

Augmented by the ever-evolving world of technology, we now live in a rapidly changing world where the ability to communicate effectively in English reigns supreme. To compete in the global arena and devise innovative, sustainable solutions to emerging challenges, linguistic competence complemented by cultural awareness and critical thinking is essential, given the intimate relationship between language and literature (Violetta-Irene, 2015). Hence, the inclusion of literature in English language teaching demands a reevaluation. According to Brumfit and Ronald (1986), literature is ‘an ally of language’. In general, the English Fundamental Courses at the tertiary level aim to improve students' linguistic skills, but they also have the potential to act as a gateway to enhance students' cultural awareness and critical thinking skills. As explained by Mason and Krashen (2004), literature is a ‘more interesting medium’ than traditional methods in teaching language.

Krashen's Input Hypothesis (1982) supports using literary elements, advocating exposure to language at an appropriate challenge level, or ‘comprehensible input,’ slightly above learners' current understanding ($i+1$). Literary texts serve as platforms for linguistic richness and foster cultural awareness and critical thinking. Teachers should select a mix of classic, contemporary, fiction, and non-fiction works to meet students' diverse interests and backgrounds (Hossain, 2024). Considering all findings, OBE curriculum designers should consider including literary texts in English Fundamental courses in Bangladesh. The student's level is key in selecting texts, with teachers guiding this process. Teachers must choose texts suited to learners' levels as classroom materials. Future research could explore how literary texts align with the needs of university learners from various disciplines.

Conclusion

Integrating literature into Bangladesh's English Fundamental Courses can enhance linguistic, cognitive, cultural, and emotional skills (Lazar, 1993; Maley, 2001). While curricula focus on measurable language outcomes (UGC, 2021), literature adds a vital dimension for developing reflective, global individuals (Kramsch, 1993). Student and faculty feedback shows a desire for deeper engagement with language, which literary texts facilitate (Collie & Slater, 1987). Instead of making literature optional, educators should recognize its transformative potential (Carter & Long, 1991). A balanced approach, using selected literary works within skills-based courses, can improve education, critical thinking, and relate language to human experiences (Kramsch, 1993; Lazar, 1993). Including literature in EFL teaching is a progressive step toward holistic, interconnected education.

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