

REVISITING THE ROLE OF LITERATURE IN EFL INSTRUCTION: A CASE FOR LINGUISTIC AND AFFECTIVE DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract: This article revisits the role of literature in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction and examines its impact on students' linguistic and affective development. Literature, particularly short stories and poetry, is explored as a pedagogical tool that supports not only vocabulary acquisition and syntactic awareness but also the cultivation of empathy, emotional intelligence, and cultural sensitivity. Using a descriptive-conceptual approach, this study synthesizes findings from key academic literature and reflective language teaching practices to assess the dual impact of literary texts on learners. The analysis reveals that literature remains an underutilized yet powerful medium for fostering holistic language education in EFL contexts. Furthermore, it highlights the limitations of skills-based and purely communicative methodologies that neglect learners' emotional and personal growth. The study argues for a renewed emphasis on literary content in language instruction and presents a case for integrating literature into mainstream EFL pedagogy. The findings contribute to ongoing discussions about humanizing ELT practices and reaffirm the educational value of literature as both a linguistic and affective resource.

Keywords: Literature, EFL Learners, Linguistic Competence, Affective Domain, Short Stories

1. INTRODUCTION

In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction, the integration of literature into language classrooms remains a contested yet increasingly vital pedagogical approach. Literature—encompassing short stories, poetry, and drama—offers both authentic linguistic input and emotional depth, contributing to language acquisition and the holistic development of learners (Gillian Lazar, 1993). Although its benefits have long been acknowledged, literature has often been sidelined by skills-based and communicative methods, especially in instructional environments focused more on quantifiable outcomes than on transformative learning (Lazar, 2000).

A number of studies have explored the pedagogical value of literature in language education. Lazar argues that literature develops linguistic sensitivity, imaginative thinking, and intercultural awareness (Paran, 2008). Paran's empirical survey demonstrates how exposure to literary texts enhances reading comprehension and affective engagement. Ghosn provides evidence from EFL contexts that literature has a positive influence on learners' emotional and moral development (Ghosn, 2002)

Among these contributions, Lazar's theoretical framework has become foundational in ELT literature pedagogy, while Paran's review offers evidence-based validation of literature's value. However, these works present a fragmented narrative: most isolate either the cognitive (linguistic) or affective (emotional, moral) dimensions of literature, without systematically exploring the intersection of both within the classroom. Furthermore, little attention has been paid to how specific literary genres—particularly short stories and poetry—can simultaneously serve as linguistic scaffolds and emotional vessels (McKay, 1982).

This paper seeks to address this gap by offering a dual-focused analysis of the linguistic and affective contributions of literary texts in EFL instruction, which has not yet been cohesively synthesized in prior research.

The central research questions addressed are: (1) In what ways do short stories and poetry enhance language proficiency in EFL classrooms? and (2) How do these texts shape students' emotional involvement, empathy, and cultural awareness?

The novelty of this article lies in its integrated framework—bridging the divide between language skill-building and affective development. It provides an updated conceptual synthesis to reaffirm the role of literature in EFL pedagogy. At a time when curricula are becoming increasingly utilitarian, this paper advocates for pedagogical approaches that not only teach language but also nurture character and cross-cultural sensitivity.

2. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a descriptive-conceptual approach, suitable for synthesizing theoretical insights and practical experiences in teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Rather than relying on field-based empirical data, the methodology draws upon a wide array of peer-reviewed publications, pedagogical handbooks, and reflective teaching case studies that address the integration of literature—particularly short stories and poetry—into language instruction.

Primary data sources include works by Lazar, Paran, Duff & Maley, Krashen, McKay, and other scholars whose contributions frame the linguistic and affective dimensions of literature in ELT. These materials were selected based on relevance to the dual impact theme, publication credibility (preferably Scopus-indexed or major academic presses), and pedagogical applicability.

The data were analyzed using thematic coding, where recurring themes were identified such as vocabulary development, grammar awareness, affective engagement, and empathy. The selected literature was mapped against these themes, allowing for conceptual triangulation between linguistic theory, psychological constructs (such as Krashen's affective filter hypothesis), and observed classroom practice.

To ensure rigor, a layered review strategy was employed: first, surveying meta-analyses and literature reviews; second, examining empirical case studies from various cultural contexts; and third, validating findings against national curriculum frameworks, particularly Indonesia's Kurikulum Merdeka. This multi-pronged review ensures that the conclusions drawn are both theoretically grounded and pedagogically relevant.

Furthermore, ethical considerations were observed by ensuring proper attribution of sources and critical neutrality in interpretation. Although no human subjects were directly involved, the study upholds academic integrity standards through systematic referencing and avoidance of misrepresentation.

Overall, this methodological approach is deemed fit for exploring the multidimensional role of literature in EFL and offers a flexible yet robust framework for further empirical investigation.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section explores the dual contributions of literature to English language teaching, focusing on two interrelated dimensions: linguistic and affective

development. Drawing from both theoretical insights and empirical studies, the discussion highlights how literary texts can enrich the language learning experience in formal EFL settings. Each subsection elaborates on a specific aspect of impact, followed by pedagogical implications and challenges relevant to teachers, learners, and policymakers.

3.1. Linguistic Contributions

Short stories and poetry provide authentic and rich language input that exposes learners to various registers, genres, and structures. Their contextually embedded vocabulary supports more meaningful lexical acquisition. According to Schmitt, vocabulary learned through context and repetition is more likely to be retained (Schmitt, 2000). Poetry, with its use of rhythm and phonological features, enhances learners' pronunciation and auditory discrimination.

Literary texts also present complex grammatical forms and cohesive devices that learners encounter less frequently in typical ELT materials. For instance, narrative past tense and embedded clauses are naturally featured in stories. These structures help develop syntactic awareness and intuitive grammatical competence.

Moreover, literature promotes metalinguistic awareness by allowing learners to compare formal and informal registers, understand figurative language, and explore sociolinguistic variation. Students encountering idiomatic expressions, metaphors, and stylistic choices begin to appreciate the aesthetic dimension of language. Such exposure, when followed by explicit discussion, strengthens both receptive and productive competencies.

Empirical studies show that learners who engage with literature regularly demonstrate greater syntactic complexity and lexical diversity in their writing. In one classroom-based study by Khatib and Rezaei (2013), EFL students who read short stories weekly for one semester significantly outperformed a control group in grammar and vocabulary post-tests. These findings suggest that sustained literary input can complement explicit instruction and grammar drills.

In addition, collaborative interpretation of literary texts fosters discourse competence, as learners negotiate meaning, share insights, and build arguments. This interactional dimension strengthens pragmatic use of language in context, an area often underdeveloped in traditional ELT materials.

3.2. Affective Impact

Literature invites emotional responses and personal engagement, which can lower affective filters in the classroom. McKay notes that learners connect better with materials that stimulate imagination and reflect life experiences (McKay, 1982). Literature fosters empathy by encouraging learners to inhabit perspectives different from their own. This is particularly crucial in multilingual and multicultural classrooms.

Moreover, by engaging with emotionally resonant texts, learners become more motivated, which leads to increased participation and retention. Norton & Toohy argue that identity and emotional investment in content are key drivers of language acquisition (Norton, et. Al, 2004).

Affective engagement through literature has also been linked to increased learner autonomy and resilience. When students relate to characters' struggles or emotional journeys, they reflect on their own values and motivations. This

internalization of content creates meaningful associations that enhance long-term memory.

Research by (Boulton and Cobb, 2017) on literature circles in EFL settings revealed that learners felt more empowered and less anxious when participating in group discussions around short fiction. Such experiences not only foster confidence but also support emotional regulation—critical components for sustained language learning.

Furthermore, the thematic depth of literary texts enables educators to address sensitive topics—such as identity, loss, injustice, or belonging—in a mediated and thoughtful way. When handled with care, these discussions provide a safe space for learners to express opinions, challenge assumptions, and develop emotional literacy in the target language.

3.3. Challenges and Strategies

Despite its benefits, integrating literature in EFL classrooms faces several hurdles. Teachers often perceive literature as too difficult linguistically or culturally inaccessible. Collie & Slater emphasize the need for careful text selection that matches learners' proficiency and cultural background (Collie, 1987).

Other challenges include limited class time and curriculum pressure focused on testing. To overcome these, strategies such as literature circles, reader-response journals, and performance-based activities can be employed. Hill recommends using graded readers and scaffolded tasks to ease students into literary appreciation (Hill, 2008).

A notable challenge lies in the availability of contextually appropriate literary texts that resonate with learners' lived experiences. Teachers in non-Western contexts often struggle to locate texts that reflect local cultures while maintaining linguistic richness. As an alternative, educators can employ translated short stories or culturally adapted poetry to preserve both relevance and complexity. Incorporating local literary forms—such as Indonesian pantun or folklore—can also increase engagement and identity investment in learning.

Technology-assisted teaching can also mitigate some barriers. Digital storytelling platforms, audio-visual poetry performances, and online discussion boards facilitate broader access and multimodal engagement. Empirical studies by (Al-Mahrooqi and Roscoe, 2018) show that digital literature teaching increases learner confidence and linguistic interaction in EFL settings.

Additionally, teacher training and institutional support play critical roles in successfully implementing literature-based pedagogy. Pre-service teacher programs must include literature instruction methodology, equipping educators with strategies for text selection, scaffolding, and cross-cultural discussion. Without proper support, literature risks becoming ornamental rather than instrumental in language learning.

3.4. Practical Applications in EFL Classrooms

Drawing from international and local classroom experiences, practical strategies for integrating literature include collaborative reading circles, thematic interpretation workshops, and creative production activities such as dramatization and rewriting endings. These approaches not only deepen comprehension but also enhance oral and written proficiency.

For example, in a secondary school in Makassar, Indonesia, learners engaged in role-playing scenes from translated short stories. Teachers reported notable improvements in both pronunciation accuracy and student confidence. Meanwhile, guided poetry writing exercises allowed students to express personal emotions while experimenting with syntactic structures.

Formative assessments such as reflection journals and portfolio-based evaluation were found to be effective in tracking both linguistic and affective growth. These assessment tools provide a richer, more humane alternative to standard multiple-choice testing in gauging literature's educational impact.

International frameworks like the CEFR can also be adapted to include affective descriptors alongside traditional linguistic indicators, thereby legitimizing the role of emotional engagement in curriculum planning.

Moreover, classroom literature projects involving the reinterpretation of cultural myths, legends, and traditional poems have been reported to foster deep learner engagement. According to (Huang and Hwang, 2020), integrating literary elements with project-based learning encourages collaboration and critical thinking in EFL environments.

In terms of lesson planning, teachers can use pre-reading schema activation, guided analysis during reading, and post-reading reflective discussions to maximize learning outcomes. Repeated exposure to thematically linked stories across different cultures can help students develop intercultural literacy alongside linguistic skills. For example, comparing folk tales like "The Tortoise and the Hare" across various global versions prompts critical comparison while building vocabulary and comprehension.

3.5. Literature and Curriculum Policy Alignment

Beyond classroom practice, the successful integration of literature in ELT also depends on broader curriculum policy alignment. In many national contexts, literature remains optional or marginalized within language syllabi. This is partly due to assessment systems that prioritize measurable grammar and vocabulary outcomes over interpretative or affective competencies.

Indonesia's Kurikulum Merdeka offers a timely opportunity to reposition literature as a core resource for developing not only linguistic skills but also Pancasila-based character education. Literature can align with profile pelajar Pancasila values, such as critical thinking, empathy, and global-mindedness, through the use of local and global texts that reflect moral dilemmas, identity struggles, and intercultural encounters.

A comparative policy study by (Lee, 2019) on EFL curricula in Southeast Asia reveals that countries with explicit inclusion of literary objectives—such as Singapore and the Philippines—demonstrate higher student engagement and retention rates in secondary language programs. This suggests that formal inclusion of literature at the curricular level can translate into meaningful pedagogical innovation.

To support such policy alignment, stakeholders including teacher educators, textbook authors, and policymakers must collaborate to produce culturally relevant literary anthologies and develop assessment models that validate affective and interpretative learning outcomes. National exams can include literary passages not just for comprehension but also for inference, emotional response, and critical appraisal.

Without such policy integration, literature risks being treated as supplementary or extracurricular, rather than integral to ELT. Therefore, institutional support and curriculum reform are necessary to ensure sustainable and equitable access to literature-based instruction.

4. CONCLUSION

This article affirms the dual-function potential of literature in language education: as a linguistic scaffold and as a medium for affective development. Through a synthesis of prior literature and reflective pedagogical analysis, the study has shown that literary texts—particularly short stories and poetry—offer context-rich linguistic input while also fostering emotional engagement, empathy, and cultural sensitivity.

By addressing both linguistic and affective dimensions, this paper fills a gap in previous literature that often examined these outcomes in isolation. The study presents a novel conceptual framework that situates literature not as ancillary, but as central to transformative language learning. This aligns with global pedagogical shifts that emphasize not only communicative competence but also intercultural awareness and character education.

The practical implications of this research suggest that literature should be repositioned within mainstream ELT curricula. Educators are encouraged to utilize literature strategically, drawing from local and global texts to enhance learner motivation, linguistic skill, and emotional depth. Institutions and policymakers must also recognize the need for systemic support, including training, material development, and assessment reform.

The academic contribution of this study lies in reconceptualizing literary texts as dual-purpose instruments—enhancing both language proficiency and emotional intelligence—within a unified pedagogical model. This framework can inform future curriculum design, teaching practices, and research agendas.

Future research should examine longitudinal classroom-based applications of literature-focused pedagogy, particularly its differential effects on learners across age groups, cultural backgrounds, and proficiency levels. Additionally, empirical validation through mixed-method approaches could enrich understanding of literature's multidimensional impact.

Ultimately, this study calls for a renewed commitment to humanizing language education through the enduring power of literary texts—making space not only for better language learners, but also for more thoughtful, empathetic global citizens.

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