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The Role of Literature in Enhancing Future English Teachers' Competence

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Abstract

This study examined how student-teacher and early-career English language teachers perceive the role of literature in their linguistic, intellectual, and professional competence within EFL teacher education programs. A quantitative survey design was used. A self-designed, 10-item Likert-scale questionnaire, grounded in the literature on language teaching and teacher education, was administered electronically to 46 participants: 19 student-teachers and 27 recent graduates teaching in EFL environments. The questionnaire showed strong internal consistency (Cronbach's α = .858). Both groups responded positively, and the two did not differ significantly in their perceptions of literature's contribution to linguistic and intellectual competence (p = .377). Recent graduates rated literature's educational application higher than pre-service teachers did, a difference that approached but did not reach statistical significance (p = .051). Agreement was highest for literature's cultural value and lowest for its use in grammar teaching. The findings suggest that the practical value of literature is appreciated more fully through classroom experience, pointing to a gap between literature coursework and teaching practice. Recommendations for strengthening the link between the two in teacher education curricula are discussed.

Keywords: literature, teacher education, EFL, pre-service teachers, communicative competence, critical thinking.

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دور الأدب في تعزيز كفاءة معلمي اللغة الإنجليزية المستقبليين

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الملخص:
تناولت هذه الدراسة مدى إدراك الطلاب المعلمين والمعلمين في مستهل مسيرتهم المهنية لدور الأدب في تعزيز كفاءاتهم اللغوية والفكرية والمهنية ضمن برامج إعداد معلّمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية (EFL). أُعتُمد في هذه الدراسة تصميم مسحي كمّي، حيث وُزّعت استبانة إلكترونية صُمّمت خصيصاً لهذا الغرض وتكونت من 10 بنود وفق مقياس "ليكرت"، وذلك استناداً إلى أدبيات تدريس اللغات وإعداد المعلمين. طُبّقت الاستبانة على 46 مشاركاً: 19 من الطلاب المعلمين، و27 من الخريجين الجدد الممارسين لمهنة التدريس في بيئات تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية. أظهرت الاستبانة اتساقاً داخلياً قوياً (معامل كرونباخ ألفا 858. = α). وأبدت المجموعتان استجابة إيجابية، ولم تظهر بينهما فروق ذات دلالة إحصائية في إدراكهما لإسهام الأدب في الكفاءة اللغوية والفكرية (p= .377). وقد قيّم الخريجون الجدد التطبيق التربوي للأدب بدرجة أعلى مقارنة بالطلاب المعلمين (قبل الخدمة) وهو فارق اقترب من مستوى الدلالة الإحصائية دون أن يصل إليها (p =.051). وكان التوافق أعلى ما يكون حول القيمة الثقافية للأدب، بينما سجل أدنى مستوياته فيما يتعلق باستخدامه في تدريس القواعد اللغوية. تُشير النتائج إلى أن القيمة العملية للأدب تُدرَك بشكل أكمل من خلال الخبرة الصفية الفعلية، مما يدل على وجود فجوة بين المقررات الأدبية والممارسة التدريسية. وتختتم الدراسة بتقديم مناقشة لتوصيات تهدف إلى تعزيز الربط بين الجانبين في مناهج إعداد المعلمين.

الكلمات المفتاحية :الأدب، إعداد المعلمين، اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية(EFL) ، المعلمون قبل الخدمة، الكفاءة التواصلية، التفكير الناقد.

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1. Introduction

There is no doubt that literature plays an important role in preparing student-teachers; it offers a rich source of language exposure, cultural education, vocabulary, and linguistic structure and diversity (Collie & Slater, 1987; Lazar, 1993).

Teaching the English language used to be focused on correctness and the mastery of grammatical rules, where teachers primarily delivered vocabulary lists and spent most of their time explaining grammar rules. Like everything else, teaching methods evolved from the sheer transmission of information to communicative and cultural competence, which is the ability to use language not only correctly, but also in socially appropriate ways across diverse contexts (Canale & Swain, 1980; Hymes, 1972).

Literature serves as a vital bridge in this evolution; it offers a rich source of authentic language exposure and contextualization, where words' meanings differ according to emotional and cultural contexts (Van, 2009). Literature also offers the ability to clarify metaphors, similes and different literary tools, which enhance the professional quality of ELT inside the classroom (Hall, 2005).

The integration of literature in EFL Teacher Education Programs can not only enhance their language proficiency but also sharpen their global mindset and pedagogical creativity by planning lessons using literary texts and probing questions (Khatib et al., 2011; Paran, 2008). Future EFL teachers learn how to ask questions that stimulate students' critical thinking (Ghosn, 2002).

In spite of its obvious educational benefits in developing proficiency, literature is often minimized in EFL teacher education programs (Akyel & Yalçın, 1990; Paran, 2006). This gap may leave future teachers unprepared to use literary texts effectively in their classrooms, and to develop the full range of teaching capabilities. This can minimize the intellectual originality that is needed to produce capable, professional teachers (Duncan & Paran, 2017). Therefore, developing future ELT teachers is not only about improving their language skills and teaching methods, but also about cultivating their personalities and critical awareness (Brumfit, 1985; Carter & Long, 1991). A highly skilled and intellectually diverse teacher can be prepared to meet any possible challenges of practicing in real-world classrooms in the future.

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Literature is considered a source of authentic language that helps improve various language skills in different ways, such as reading fluency and pronunciation through poetry reading, and writing skills through exposure to various literary texts such as drama, novels, and short stories, and even shorter forms such as puns or riddles (Hişmanoğlu, 2005; Maley, 2001). Furthermore, it meets additional targeted teaching goals for all levels, such as professional language acquisition and collaborative learning (Duff & Maley, 2007).

This paper investigates how the integration of literature in EFL training courses (specifically teaching practice and micro-teaching courses) for student-teachers at the Faculty of Education, University of Tripoli, is vital for building critical thinking. Through exposure to literary narratives, student-teachers become better equipped to encourage their future learners to think deeply and to use language in real contexts, helping them evolve into effective educators suited for today's dynamic classrooms (Parkinson & Thomas, 2000; Savvidou, 2004).

1.1 Objectives of the Study

1- To investigate the role of literature in developing student-teachers' linguistic precision and communicative competence.

2- To explore how engagement with literary texts fosters critical thinking skills among student-teachers.

3- To provide evidence-based recommendations for curriculum designers on integrating literature effectively into EFL teacher education programs to meet contemporary educational standards.

1.2 Research Questions

1- How does the integration of authentic literary texts (e.g. prose, poetry, drama) enhance the linguistic precision and communicative competence of EFL student-teachers?

2- To what extent can the study of literature stimulate intellectual originality and foster critical thinking in future teachers?

3- To what extent do student-teachers perceive literature as empowering them professionally in the classroom?

1.3 Literature Review

Carter and Long (1991) advocate an approach to language study where literature students not only understand literary meanings but

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also understand the textures of English. Carter argues that literature exposes pre-service teachers to authentic language, which is essential to develop their linguistic precision, and that literary texts should be treated as resources for both structural accuracy and functional language use.

The reasons for teaching literature necessarily transcend the particular circumstances, places, and contexts in which literature is taught. Three main reasons for the teaching of literature have been consistently advanced. Each embraces a particular set of learning objectives for the student of literature. These are: the cultural model, the language model, and the personal growth model (Carter & Long, 1991).

In his book *Literature in Language Education*, Geoff Hall builds on the frameworks established by Ronald Carter and Michael N. Long (1991) especially regarding the shift from treating literature as a static academic object to using literature as a dynamic linguistic resource. Geoff Hall's arguments can be regarded as a foundation for this shift. Geoff Hall argues that literary texts are 'linguistically less distinctive and unrepresentative of the language than has traditionally been claimed' (Hall, 2005, p. 48). Hall also notes that literature is commonly claimed to 'give a feel for' the language, among widely repeated but under-examined claims about literature's value.

Consequently, this perspective suggests that literature is not merely a choice in teacher education but a functional necessity for developing the linguistic intuition required in modern EFL classrooms.

While Lazar (1993) focuses on **interpretation** and **vocabulary**, Cook (2000) focuses on language play, arguing that literature, puns, and storytelling are essential tools for linguistic enablement because they engage with language play—behavior that focuses on form and fiction rather than just practical meaning or social utility.

Cook argues that literature proves that focusing on linguistic form and linguistic meaning are not mutually exclusive; rather, the formal patterns of literature are what create its unique meanings.

Cook suggests that instead of only focusing on "real-world" communication, teachers should use literature, puns, and stories to

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draw on the playful, creative side of students' minds, making the language learning process more intrinsically rewarding.

Henry Giroux (1988) argues that teachers should be viewed as transformative intellectuals rather than mere technicians whose role is limited to following scripts, textbooks, or predetermined curriculum packages.

Giroux asserts that all human activity involves some form of thinking, and therefore teacher work should be understood as a form of intellectual labor. He believes teachers must be reflective thinkers who take active responsibility for raising serious questions about what they teach and how they teach.

Henry Giroux views literature and text-based resources not as static containers of information to be memorized, but as essential tools for critical reflection, historical consciousness, and the development of agency. To become a transformative intellectual, a teacher must use literature to move beyond the rigid, mechanical application of standard textbooks. Teachers can use literature to fulfill their role as intellectuals, distinguishing between standard textbooks and literature that invites critique, using literature to make knowledge challenging and to encourage students to question common-sense assumptions.

It is agreed that literature is far more than an aesthetic addition to the classroom; it is a fundamental pillar of teacher development. It fosters the intellectual originality and linguistic precision required for modern educators.

Unlike earlier studies, which mostly examined literature in general EFL classrooms, the present study compares pre-service and recently graduated EFL teachers at the University of Tripoli, linking literature coursework directly to perceived teaching competence.

2. Methodology

To investigate the research problem, a structured methodology was applied. The following sections present the research design, sampling methods, and data collection instruments, followed by an explanation of the analytical framework and the ethical guidelines established to ensure valid and credible outcomes.

2.1 Research Design

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A Likert-scale questionnaire was employed for the systematic collection of quantitative data regarding participants' self-perceived competence. Incorporating both pre-service teachers undertaking micro-teaching and practicing graduate teachers enables a holistic examination of literature's role in EFL education, reflecting insights from both early instructional training and post-graduation teaching experience.

2.2 Participants and Sampling

The study involved 46 participants from the Faculty of Education at the University of Tripoli, selected to provide informed insights into the role of literature in EFL teacher education. Participants were categorized into two distinct cohorts: Group A (n = 19) consisted of final-year undergraduate student-teachers enrolled in the micro-teaching practicum who had completed all required literature coursework. Group B (n = 27) comprised recent university graduates currently working as EFL instructors in various contexts, including private language institutes and secondary schools, with up to three years of professional teaching experience. Across both cohorts, participants' ages ranged from 20 to 25 years.

2.3 Instruments

Data collection was primarily conducted using a self-designed, structured questionnaire administered electronically via Google Forms. Developed specifically for this study, the survey aimed to gather quantitative data regarding how both student-teachers and early-career teachers perceive their professional competence resulting from engagement with literary texts. The instrument is divided into three distinct sections:

1. Demographics: Identifying the participant's status (pre-service student or recent graduate).
2. Linguistic and Intellectual Competence: items measuring how literature improved participants' language and thinking skills.
3. Educational Application: items measuring how literature is utilized within teaching practice or classroom instruction.

Each item was rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree). The complete questionnaire is provided in Appendix A.

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2.4 Instrument Development and Rationale

The survey questions are based on the impact of literature on English teaching competence — the balance between studying literature, like poetry, plot, and theme, and knowing how to teach, such as lesson delivery and text selection, rather than treating literature only as an academic subject. This balance reflects ideas already discussed in the Literature Review: Carter and Long (1991) and Hall (2005) focus on literature as a source of authentic language, while Giroux (1988) argues that teachers should engage with content critically, not just deliver it. The questionnaire items were written to reflect both sides of this balance — some items focus on language and understanding, and others focus on how literature is actually used in teaching. For instance, item 9 ("literature is essential for teaching the cultural aspects of the English language") reflects Carter and Long's cultural model of literature teaching, while item 4 ("developed my critical thinking and intellectual originality") reflects Giroux's concept of transformative intellectuals.

2.5 Validity and Reliability

Content validity was supported through the alignment of questionnaire items with theoretical constructs identified in the Literature Review, as described above. In addition, the instrument was reviewed by a colleague holding a Master's degree in Literature, who also teaches within the field, three weeks prior to distribution, providing further support for the appropriateness of the survey items. The instrument was also piloted on a small sample prior to full distribution to identify and resolve any issues with item clarity.

Reliability was assessed through Cronbach's alpha, calculated after data collection. The full 10-item instrument demonstrated strong internal consistency ($\alpha = .858$). Reliability was also strong within each section individually (Linguistic and Intellectual Competence, $\alpha = .816$; Educational Application, $\alpha = .714$).

2.6 Data Collection Procedures

This study used a quantitative method, a Google Forms questionnaire, which was distributed electronically through official WhatsApp and Telegram groups used by the faculty to communicate with student-teachers and to follow up with graduates regarding

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their progress and job search. The survey link remained open for a period of two weeks to allow sufficient time for participants to respond. Before beginning the survey, participants were presented with a consent statement outlining the purpose of the study and confirming that their participation was voluntary, that they could withdraw at any time without penalty, and that their responses would remain anonymous.

2.7 Data Analysis

The data of this study were analyzed based on participants' responses using Google Sheets. For each section of the questionnaire — Linguistic and Intellectual Competence, and Educational Application — mean scores were calculated separately for Group A and Group B.

2.8 Ethical Considerations

Several ethical safeguards were followed in conducting this research. Before beginning the survey, participants were presented with a consent statement outlining the purpose of the study and confirming that participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time without penalty. No identifying information, such as names or contact details, was collected, ensuring participant anonymity. Survey responses were stored securely and were accessible only to the researcher. As this study was conducted as part of the researcher's regular academic responsibilities within the Faculty of Education, formal institutional ethics approval was not required. Nevertheless, the study was conducted with the knowledge of the researcher's department, in accordance with standard academic research practices at the Faculty of Education.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Results

Distribution of responses with verbal analysis (N = 46)

Figures 1–11 present pie charts showing the number and percentage of participants who chose each response option. The numbers in the charts are the same figures quoted in the analysis beneath them. Responses were rated on a 5-point scale: Strongly disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree, Strongly agree.

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3.1.1 Participant Profile

Current status

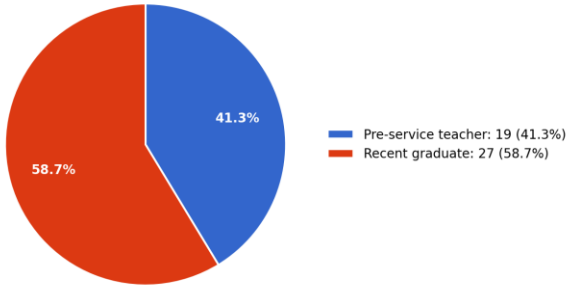


Figure 1. Distribution of participants by current status

As Figure 1 shows, of the 46 respondents, 19 (41.3%) were pre-service teachers and 27 (58.7%) were recent graduates, so graduates made up a slight majority of the sample.

3.1.2 Linguistic and Intellectual Competence

Q1. Studying literature has expanded my vocabulary beyond the limits of standard textbooks.

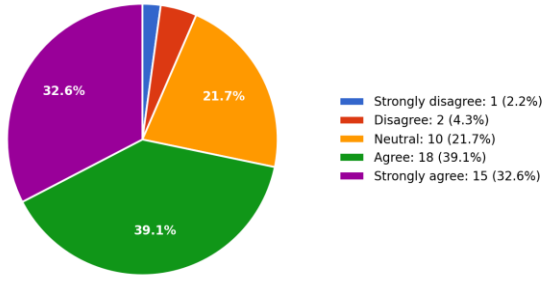


Figure 2. Distribution of responses to Q1

As Figure 2 shows, most participants felt that studying literature had widened their vocabulary beyond what standard textbooks offer. In total, 33 of 46 (71.7%) agreed (18, 39.1%) or strongly agreed (15, 32.6%). Ten participants (21.7%) were neutral, and only three (6.5%) disagreed.

Q2. Analyzing literary texts (poetry/prose) has improved my understanding of complex English grammar in context.

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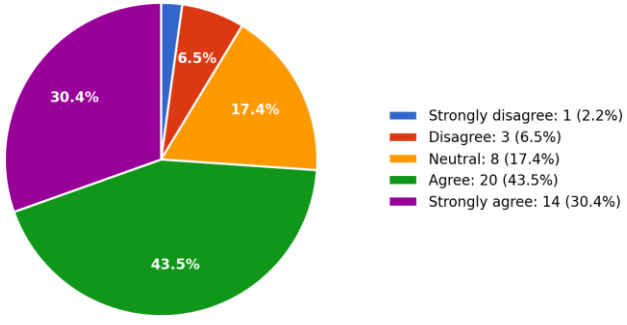


Figure 3. Distribution of responses to Q2

As Figure 3 shows, agreement was slightly higher here, with 34 participants (73.9%) agreeing (20, 43.5%) or strongly agreeing (14, 30.4%) that analyzing literary texts improved their understanding of complex grammar in context. Eight (17.4%) were neutral and four (8.7%) disagreed.

Q3. Literature has enhanced my ability to understand and explain metaphors and idiomatic expressions.

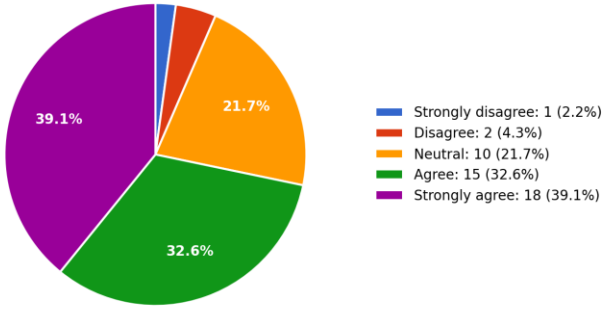


Figure 4. Distribution of responses to Q3

As Figure 4 shows, thirty-three participants (71.7%) agreed that literature helped them understand and explain metaphors and idioms. This item had the strongest intensity in the section: 18 participants (39.1%) strongly agreed, more than the 15 (32.6%) who simply agreed. Ten (21.7%) were neutral and three (6.5%) disagreed.

Q4. Engaging with diverse literary themes has developed my critical thinking and "intellectual originality."

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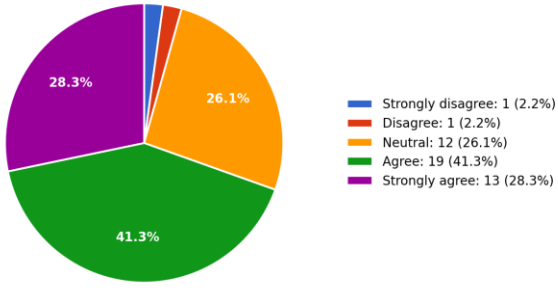


Figure 5. Distribution of responses to Q4

As Figure 5 shows, thirty-two participants (69.6%) agreed (19, 41.3%) or strongly agreed (13, 28.3%) that literary themes developed their critical thinking and intellectual originality. This item had the largest neutral group in the section (12 participants, 26.1%), and only two (4.3%) disagreed. Respondents seem positive about this benefit but less certain than for the language-related items.

Q5. Exposure to literature has increased my confidence in using "authentic" language in the classroom.

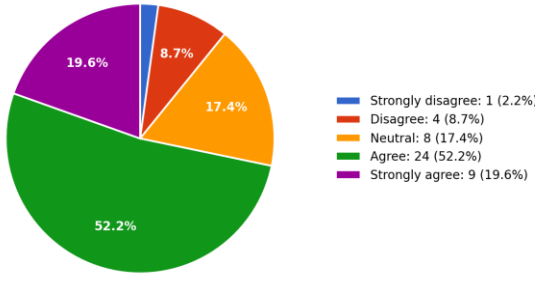


Figure 6. Distribution of responses to Q5

As Figure 6 shows, thirty-three participants (71.7%) reported greater confidence in using authentic language in the classroom. Most of them chose "agree" (24, 52.2%) rather than "strongly agree" (9, 19.6%), so the agreement is real but moderate in strength. Eight (17.4%) were neutral and five (10.9%) disagreed, the highest disagreement in this section.

3.1.3 Educational Application

Q6. I use (or plan to use) literary stories to make my grammar lessons more engaging for students.

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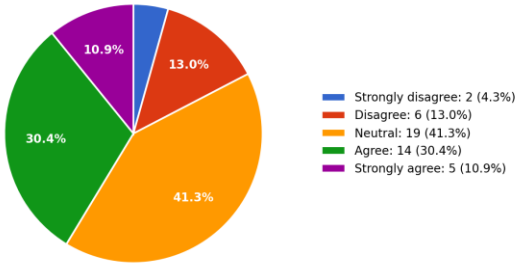


Figure 7. Distribution of responses to Q6

As Figure 7 shows, this was the weakest item. Only 19 participants (41.3%) agreed (14, 30.4%) or strongly agreed (5, 10.9%) that they use, or plan to use, literary stories to make grammar lessons more engaging. An equal number (19, 41.3%) were neutral, and eight (17.4%) disagreed. Many participants appear unsure about this practice, which may reflect limited experience of using literature to teach grammar. The group means support this: 3.00 for pre-service teachers against 3.52 for graduates.

Q7. My teacher training was more effective because I could use literary texts to design creative lesson plans.

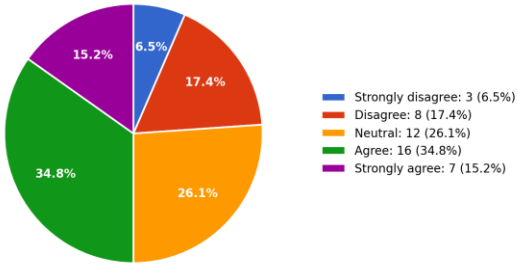


Figure 8. Distribution of responses to Q7

As Figure 8 shows, opinion was divided. Exactly half the sample (23, 50.0%) agreed (16, 34.8%) or strongly agreed (7, 15.2%) that their teacher training was more effective because they could use literary texts for creative lesson plans. Twelve (26.1%) were neutral. Eleven (23.9%) disagreed, the highest level of disagreement on any item. Again, graduates (mean 3.56) were more positive than pre-service teachers (3.05).

Q8. Literature helps me facilitate "critical discussions" rather than just delivering information.

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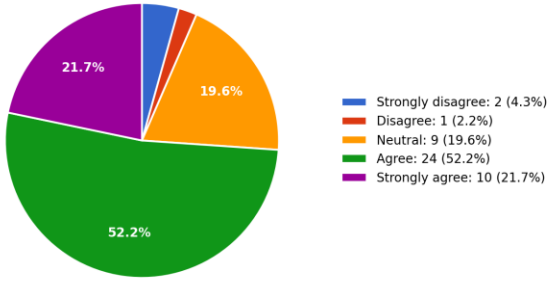


Figure 9. Distribution of responses to Q8

As Figure 9 shows, thirty-four participants (73.9%) agreed (24, 52.2%) or strongly agreed (10, 21.7%) that literature helps them facilitate critical discussions rather than only deliver information. Nine (19.6%) were neutral and three (6.5%) disagreed. This is among the strongest items in the educational application section.

Q9. I feel literature is essential for teaching the "cultural" aspects of the English language.

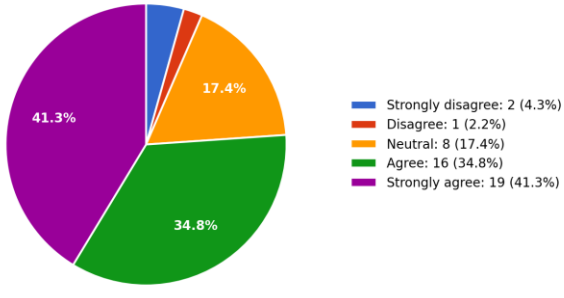


Figure 10. Distribution of responses to Q9

As Figure 10 shows, this item received the highest agreement overall: 35 participants (76.1%) agreed (16, 34.8%) or strongly agreed (19, 41.3%) that literature is essential for teaching the cultural aspects of English. Strongly agree was the single most common answer. Eight (17.4%) were neutral and three (6.5%) disagreed. This is consistent with the cultural model of literature teaching discussed in the Literature Review.

Q10. Overall, literature has made me a more "transformative" and capable teacher.

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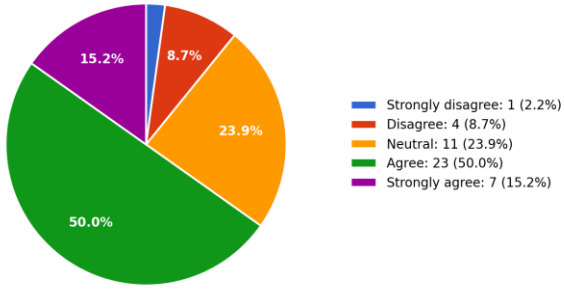


Figure 11. Distribution of responses to Q10

As Figure 11 shows, thirty participants (65.2%) agreed (23, 50.0%) or strongly agreed (7, 15.2%) that literature has made them more transformative and capable teachers. Eleven (23.9%) were neutral and five (10.9%) disagreed. The result is positive but less emphatic than for most other items, since few participants chose "strongly agree".

3.1.4 Overall Pattern

The five Linguistic and Intellectual Competence items were consistently positive, with 69.6% to 73.9% agreement. The Educational Application items varied much more, from 41.3% (Q6) to 76.1% (Q9). Participants were most convinced of literature's cultural and discussion-building value, and least convinced of its role in grammar teaching and in making their training more effective.

3.2 Discussion

Overall, both groups rated literature positively across all items (overall mean across all 46 participants and 10 items = 3.79 out of 5). The clearest difference between groups emerged in the Educational Application section, where recent graduates — who are actively applying literature in real classrooms — rated its practical teaching value higher than pre-service teachers still completing their coursework.

The findings point to a contrast between what participants gain from literature and what they feel able to do with it. Both groups credited literature with strengthening their language and thinking, and they did not differ significantly on this dimension ($p = .377$).

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This suggests that these benefits are recognized through engagement with the texts themselves, without needing classroom experience to become visible, although a non-significant result cannot show that the two groups' views are identical. Critical thinking and intellectual originality drew somewhat more neutral answers than the language items (Q4), which may reflect that this benefit is harder to attribute to literature alone.

The picture changes when literature is applied to teaching. Recent graduates rated its practical value higher than pre-service teachers, a difference that approached significance ($p = .051$). Recent graduates may have scored differently in this section because they have already spent time teaching in real classrooms. In contrast to pre-service teachers, whose exposure to literature is confined to an academic framework, recent graduates have actually put this knowledge into practice in real classrooms. Therefore, lower scores in this section likely highlight a lack of exposure to real-world teaching rather than a rejection of the value of literature. Ultimately, because pre-service teachers have not yet tested their knowledge in a real classroom, their views of literature's practical value may not yet be fully formed.

The pattern across items adds to this. Literature's cultural value drew the highest agreement (Q9, 76.1%), while using literary stories in grammar lessons drew the lowest (Q6, 41.3%). Participants may therefore value literature more as a cultural and discussion resource than as a tool for teaching grammar, which points to a gap between literature coursework and teaching methodology.

The high agreement on the language-related items is consistent with Lazar's (1993) view that literary texts supply rich, memorable language input beyond the restricted input of standard classroom materials, and with Carter and Long's (1991) language model. Hall (2005, p. 48) cautions, however, that claims about literature's value are often repeated without being examined, and because the present data are self-reported, they show perceived rather than measured benefit. The strong endorsement of literature's cultural value matches Carter and Long's cultural model, yet the weaker agreement on grammar teaching suggests that participants may not yet connect the language model to their own lessons. Giroux's (1988) view of teachers as transformative intellectuals who reflect on what and how

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they teach offers a way to understand the application gap: the practical value of literature, like the reflective stance Giroux describes, may emerge more fully once teachers are practicing rather than during pre-service training alone.

3.3 Recommendations

The finding that student-teachers rate literature's practical classroom value lower than recent graduates suggests a gap between literature coursework and actual teaching practice within current ELT programs. To address this gap, teacher education curricula could incorporate more hands-on opportunities for pre-service teachers to apply literary texts within real or simulated classroom settings — for example, through practicum placements that specifically require literature-based lesson planning, or peer-teaching exercises built around literary materials, rather than literature study remaining a purely academic exercise separate from teaching practice. Bringing practical application into literature coursework earlier may help pre-service teachers develop the same appreciation for literature's classroom value that recent graduates report, before they enter the profession rather than after.

Future studies should build on these findings in several ways. A longitudinal design following the same cohort of teachers from pre-service training into their early teaching careers would allow researchers to track how perceptions of literature's practical value change over time within the same individuals, rather than comparing two separate groups. Incorporating classroom observation or lesson artifacts alongside self-reported data would also help verify whether perceived competence translates into actual teaching practice. Finally, replicating this study across a larger and more diverse sample, potentially spanning multiple institutions, would help determine whether these findings generalize beyond a single Faculty of Education.

4. Conclusions

This study examined the role of literature in enhancing the competence of pre-service and early-career English language teachers, comparing the perceptions of two groups through a quantitative, theoretically grounded questionnaire. While both

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groups shared similar views regarding literature's role in linguistic and intellectual development, recent graduates rated its practical classroom value more highly than pre-service teachers, a difference that approached statistical significance. These findings suggest that literature's value as a teaching tool becomes more fully appreciated through actual classroom practice, pointing to a potential gap between literature coursework and applied teaching experience within current teacher education programs. Addressing this gap through more hands-on, classroom-oriented literature instruction may better prepare future teachers to recognize and use literature's full potential from the earliest stages of their careers.

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