

Evaluating students' perceptions of literature courses in English education: Implications for curriculum development

Ira Maisarah^{*1}; Mega Fitri Wulandari²; Seth Soy³

¹Universitas Bengkulu, Indonesia

²Politeknik Negeri Manado, Indonesia

³Techo Hun Sen Kalaom Phluk High School, Battambang Province, Cambodia

*Corresponding Author. E-mail: iramaisarah@unib.ac.id

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ABSTRACT

The concerns of this study were the literature used in English classrooms and students' views on how it assists them in developing academically and professionally. Thus, its purpose was to evaluate the importance attached to literature courses in the curriculum of English Education programs. The study employed a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design. Quantitatively, a questionnaire instrument was used, which was completed by 107 students of the English Education Study Program at Universitas Bengkulu, regarding their perceptions of the implementation of literary courses, administered through Google Forms. Qualitatively, unstructured interviews provided more profound insights into the role of literature in students' language proficiency. The results indicate that the majority of students (86%) are interested in studying literature, and they are highly engaged in their work. Those students felt that their grammar competence, vocabulary, and language skills had increased. Furthermore, 91% specifically claimed that literature enhanced their ability for critical thinking and intellectual enrichment, while 77% derived confidence in engaging with literary texts, thereby fostering further collaboration, empathy, and cultural sensitivity in their day-to-day offline routine. Thirty-five per cent of students were also encouraged to read literature. Yet, students encountered constraints such as insufficient time for studying, linguistic complexity, and exposure to unfamiliar cultural scenes. Students value literary education and the use of literature in preparing for future demands. Pedagogically, the curriculum development literature should be systematically integrated with odd in English Education, particularly instructional routines that value active learning, situated interpretation, and imaginative interaction with texts.

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INTRODUCTION

Curriculum plays an integral role in delivering superior educational programs and support (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2018). As stated by Safarudin and Rusman (2021), a curriculum offers students to organize their education in the future. Hence, the creation of a new curriculum and the ideal theoretical development process must be in line with the educational purposes. The curriculum that educational institutions put forward must be a way to solve the challenges in the classrooms and the content to be taught by the educators. That is why the curriculum is called a key element in guaranteeing fruitful and impactful higher education. To maintain the quality of education, the curriculum evaluation must be carried out periodically as dictated by the educational institution. For example, universities frequently propose a program spanning five years, marked by ongoing review and changes, though this may differ across universities. The

creation of a curriculum might span a period of three months or less, contingent on the scale of the institution. Over a five-year span, a curriculum undergoes planning, implementation, and assessment.

The English Education Study Program at Universitas Bengkulu has various literary studies, i.e., *Literature for Educational Purposes*, *Drama in Language Education*, and *Prose in Language Education*. Literature is categorized as a mandatory subject that becomes a part of the curriculum structure in the study program. These courses are designed to enhance students' competencies in both linguistic and pedagogical skills for effective teaching of literature in the future. According to [Pasaribu et al. \(2020\)](#), the English curriculum for secondary schools in Indonesia encompasses various literary genres, including narrative texts. It proves that the students in Indonesia become familiar with literary and textual analysis before entering higher education. Studying literature holds significant value in academic discussions, particularly in higher education, especially in English Language Education programs.

The literature is recognized to be one of the essential components in the field of English language teaching. It provides real language immersion, physical world cultural experiences, and mitigated skills of sort-of critical thinking while promoting important values such as creativity, empathy, and analytical thought. Literary works have also been used to increase vocabulary, strengthen sentence structure, or accelerate language development ([Sömen, 2021](#)). However, with some stylistic details ([Barzani et al., 2024](#)), language becomes a pedagogical resource in the study of literature ([Khan & Law, 2015](#); [Ramolula, 2024](#); [Ramolula & Nkoane, 2024](#); [Soy et al., 2023](#)). According to [Lina and Arshad \(2024\)](#), literature is a mirror of society and culture, thus helping students in fostering cultural awareness, empathy & self-reflection. This perspective is also held by [Saka \(2018\)](#), who calls attention to the fact that literature provides a gateway for students to delve into global human emotions and societal issues in order to facilitate growth, both personal as well as intellectual.

Although teaching literature in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) has many benefits, it also presents certain challenges, such as students sometimes being unfamiliar with literary texts and genres. Some students find it difficult to interpret the figurative language that exists in the text. Furthermore, they lack a comprehensive understanding of historical references and the analysis of intricate literary issues. Therefore, when the students prioritise interpersonal ability over textual analysis, then they will regard literature as less important to their acquisition of language targets.

Engaging activities such as reading circles, role-playing, as well as creative writing exercises can help enhance students' motivation and comprehension, thereby addressing these challenges. Educators can incorporate innovative pedagogical practices to enhance the accessibility of literary studies. Furthermore, integrating multimodal materials, such as movies, audiobooks, and electronic narratives, can offer additional methods for engaging with literary texts.

Although literature is technically included in the English Education curriculum, there is still a lack of awareness among students about its relevance to their language learning and teaching abilities. The evaluation of curriculum in the past commonly focused on the opinions or perspectives of lecturers or leaders. Mostly, the evaluation was leaving out the perspective from the students' side. It becomes an important thing to disclose how literary subjects help, or fail to support, students in developing their essential academic and pedagogical skills. As a result, this study not only describes students' perceptions but also evaluates how well the literature component of the English Education program accomplishes its intended learning objectives. Due to this gap, the research question is proposed as follows: *What are the students' perceptions of literary subjects in the English Language Education curriculum?* The purposes of this study were to identify students' attitudes toward literary studies, to examine the challenges they face in studying literature, and to enhance the effectiveness of literature instruction in English Language Education.

METHOD

Research Design

A sequential explanatory mixed-method approach was used in this investigation (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Tashakkori et al., 2020). The study was divided into two phases: a quantitative survey to identify general trends in students' impressions of literary studies, and qualitative interviews to explain and expound on those patterns. This design is important for educational purposes since it allows for the collection of data from certain demographic groups (Adhikari & Sharma, 2024) and provides insights into a wide range of topics, like as people's qualities, opinions, attitudes, and previous experiences.

Population and Samples

The sample selected accurately represents a segment of the larger population being researched. The study concentrates on students who are most qualified to offer insightful information about the subject. Based on this indicator, the samples of this study were 107 students. They were chosen as a total sampling. Thus, every student enrolled in the literary class was required to fill out the questionnaire. Then, from 107 participants, twenty students were chosen by using a purposive random sampling technique for semi-structured interviews. Its function is to give more information related to the survey results. This number was deemed adequate for acquiring various viewpoints from students and identifying a substantial quantity of repeating ideas. This phase looked at several aspects of potential individuals, such as their connection to the group being studied, any special qualities they have, and any remarkable events they have gone through.

Instrument

To confirm the dimensions of context, resources, procedures, and outcomes based on the evaluation elements (context, input, process, and product), the instrument was adapted from Al-Saggaf et al. (2021). The survey contains 25 questions, each of which uses a Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5, with 1 indicating "completely disagree" and 5 indicating "completely agree". The survey measures the level of engagement with literary works, the perceived enhancements in linguistic and cognitive skills, and the assessed efficacy of the employed pedagogical approaches. The individual questions were created using a conceptual framework that combined the intellectual, emotional, and behavioural aspects of students' views on literature.

Before the respondent filled out the questionnaire, a trial was conducted on thirty students to measure the questionnaire quality. Based on the analysis of the Pearson Product-Moment formula to determine the validity of each item in the questionnaire, it was found that $r = 0.523$ with a significance level of $p = 0.000$, which falls under the benchmark of 0.05. Because the correlation coefficient is 0.523, and remarkably significant $p < 0.005$, and the required level is $r = 0.361$, $df = 28$, $\alpha = 0.05$, so the items of questions are effective and meaningful. Then, reliability was measured using Cronbach's Alpha analysis to measure the consistency across its items. The result of a score of $\alpha = 0.929$ is bigger than the consistency score of Cronbach's Alpha = 0.60 (Siregar, 2014). This result confirms that the questionnaire's items consistently evaluate the same concept.

Additionally, to evaluate the clarity, relevance, and contextual appropriateness of the questionnaire and interview methodology, a pilot interview was done with 15 students not involved in the questionnaire pilot. The feedback from this step was applied to enhance comprehension and wording. The primary study did not include any data from pilot interviews. The instruments' quality and reliability were confirmed by the outcomes of both pilot phases, suggesting that they are prepared for use in the sequential explanatory mixed-method design of the study. Some examples of questions for the interview were 'how do you enjoy studying literature in the classroom', 'in what way learning literature can improve your competence in English?', 'what are the challenges in studying literature?' and 'what is your purpose of studying literature for your future?'

Procedure and Data Analysis

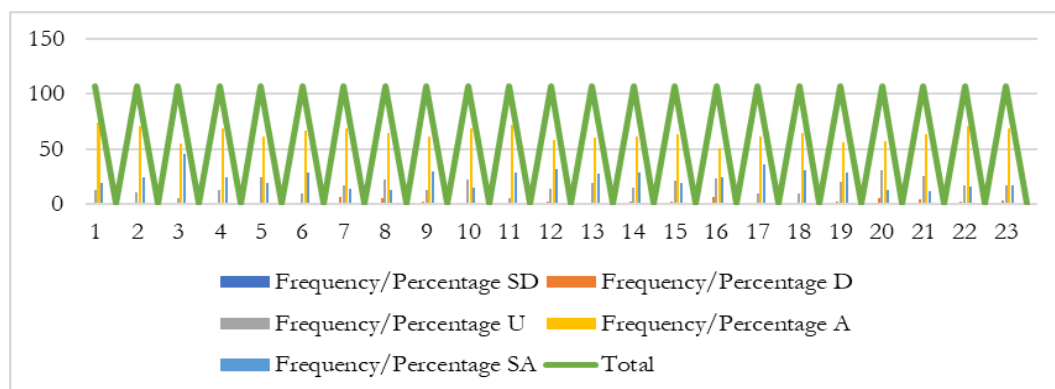
Quantitative data were collected through a Google Forms survey. Since the data collection method was a questionnaire, the analysis employed descriptive statistics, including frequency, percentage, and mean. Its function is to identify general trends in students' perceptions of literature courses, because the study did not compare groups but sought to reveal overall tendencies among participants. Additionally, the qualitative data followed the interactive model proposed by Miles et al. (2014). It was used to analyse the results of semi-structured interviews. The model has four concurrent components: data collection, data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. During data condensation, interview transcripts were coded, categorised, and grouped into emerging themes related to students' experiences and attitudes. The findings were verified through member checking, peer debriefing, and triangulation to ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the results.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

Students' Feelings and Thoughts About Literature Courses

There are twenty-three statements to gather the students' feelings and thoughts about the literature course. The data show that students had a generally positive impression of literature courses, with more than 60% responding positively to all questionnaire items. This indicates that students enjoy literary courses, and they play a significant role in their academic and personal development. Besides, the data identifies five major areas where students see significant improvements. The descriptions are illustrated in Figure 1.



*(1) My enthusiasm in learning English language grows as I study literature, (2) The work completed in literary classes has enhanced my grammatical knowledge and usage, (3) English literature helps me expand my vocabulary in the English language, (4) Literature classes enable me to readily comprehend the symbols and meanings of English writings, (5) The work completed in literary classes has helped me become a good writer, (6) My reading ability has improved after the work done in literature classes, (7) My speaking ability has improved after the work done in literature classes, (8) My listening ability has improved after the work done in literature classes, (9) Literature grows my intellectual abilities, (10) I am able to interpret and comment on literary writings based on my own comprehension of the text, (11) Literature classes assist in the development of my critical thinking skills, (12) Literature makes me participate in class discussions, group projects, and presentations, (13) Literature teaches me about people and their experiences that are similar to mine, (14) Literature assists me to understand more about life, (15) Literature helps me grow personally, (16) Literature teaches me about emotions, (17) Literature lessons assist me in learning the English culture (values, beliefs, and basic assumptions), (18) Literature lessons assist me in learning the difference and similarities between values, beliefs, and basic assumptions in English culture and my own culture, (19) The literary materials in the classroom are engaging, (20) The literary materials meet my expectations, (21) The literary materials meet my needs, (22) The literary materials meet my interests, and (23) I like the literary topic presented during the course.

Figure 1. Students' Perspective on Learning Literature

This result indicated that the students have strong positive attitudes towards course access, and over 60% of students accept all 23 items in the questionnaire. For example, classic literature fosters personal and intellectual development, in addition to linguistic aptitude. Even more, 86% of students wished to go on with their literature study. The highest motivation can be found in this population. Furthermore, 88% report that they have improved their grammar and language use, and 83% indicate that they have expanded their vocabulary. Increases were also noticed for reading (88%), speaking (78%), and listening (76%). This alignment further supports the process component in the evaluation component, with student engagement and learning activities as curriculum effectiveness indicators.

Intellectually, 84% of students thought literature had helped them develop their analytical skills, and 91% felt they had developed critical thinking. This reinforces the idea that literature nurtures higher-order cognitive abilities, which are indeed based on curriculum assessment and particularly in the process and product dimensions. From a personal growth perspective, 83% would include those who were more participatory in group work and/or discussions, while another 80% gain a better understanding of people as well as society itself. Likewise, 89% admitted learning a better cultural awareness by reading literary texts. These results suggest that literature classes contribute to affective as well as social learning, and echo the principles of learner-centered and culturally responsive curriculum.

Respondent 1:

I feel free when I practice drama in the classroom. Even though I sometimes forget the specific dialogue, I can still express my feelings and thoughts in different ways without losing the context of the drama.

These trends were supported by interviews with pilot students. The students' interest in taking literature courses was identified and suggested because literature provides a foundation in language and culture, despite its relatively smaller credits being distributed throughout the curriculum.

From a curriculum evaluation perspective, the integration of literature within the English education program can be examined by focusing on context, input, process, and product, which emphasize relevance, implementation, and learner outcomes. Likewise, the learner-centred design theory underpins this study by viewing students as active participants in constructing linguistic and cultural meaning through literary texts.

Literature and English Language should be connected due to their shared use of raw materials. In the English education program, literature has long been regarded as an essential component of language acquisition. In the curriculum, it serves several purposes, including fostering linguistic growth, promoting cultural exposure, and enhancing critical thinking abilities. Literature has long been considered an important component of language acquisition in English education programs. Literary works provide authentic linguistic input, exposing students to a wide range of vocabulary, complicated sentence patterns, and contextualised language use. Reading literature allows pupils to develop their linguistic ability while also learning about the cultural and historical settings in which the language operates.

More details are provided in the following findings, which reveal the students' perspectives on literature courses as part of their Bachelor's degree mandatory curriculum, their experiences in these courses, the obstacles they encounter, and the significance of literary studies to their future goals.

Students' Views on the Future Role of Literature

Literature classes are not only valuable in the current academic context, but they also help students shape their futures. When asked about their motivations for studying literature, students provided several reasons, as described in [Figure 2](#).

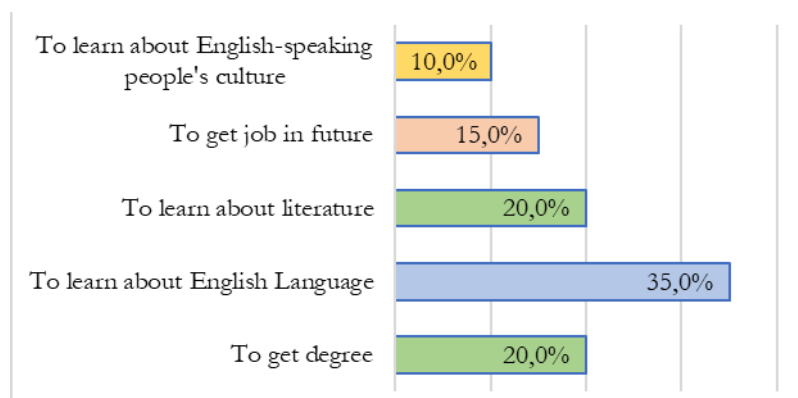


Figure 2. The Rationale of Studying Literature

Figure 2 shows that students' motives for reading literature are presented. The primary reasons for taking the class were to develop language skills (35%), fulfill an academic requirement (20%), personal interest (20%), relevance to a future career (15%) and cultivate cultural understanding of peoples from other parts of the world via contact with them in their own languages, outside media translation filters, etc. This diversity is an indication of the fact that literature can serve various curriculum goals and may contribute to students' language acquisition as well as their professional competencies and intercultural skills. Findings are consistent with a learner-centred curriculum approach regarding relevance, autonomy, and authentic learning.

When motivational tendencies are consistent with the student-centred perspective on curriculum, they can emphasise the importance of relevance and autonomy for engagement and deep learning. The students' awareness towards learning outcomes beyond linguistic proficiency is due to the acknowledgement that literature contributes to personal and professional competency. Besides, many students recognise the academic importance of literature and perceive a significant percentage of its practical benefits in their future jobs. In the future, literary studies are hoped to become a bridge for students to develop personally and intellectually. By exposing them to a variety of perspectives and enhancing their capacity to analyse complex human situations, literature's function can foster empathy, cultural awareness, and critical thinking abilities. It is useful in preparing students for real-world interactions and professional opportunities.

Respondent 4:

When I study prose, I learn new vocabulary. Moreover, through classical prose, I gain insight into the culture of the past and learn how people lived in a certain era in their native countries.

Literature serves as an instrument and source for teaching the target language because it provides learners with real-world linguistic, sociolinguistic, and cultural content. Furthermore, literary pieces teach students about the culture of the target language in which the literature is written. These nuances are necessary for the development of ESL learners' sociolinguistic and pragmatic skills. Furthermore, literature can be used in ESL lessons to promote learners' culture and advocate for their cultural understanding and consciousness. As a result of the interview, in which the students stated that they could improve their English language skills, they also developed their competence through reading novels and short stories. Additionally, they watched movies with English subtitles, as movies are considered representations of drama.

Overall, these findings demonstrate that literature courses function effectively as both linguistic and affective components within the English curriculum. In line with the curriculum evaluation component, the courses appear to achieve intended learning outcomes by fostering not only language proficiency but also intellectual and cultural competencies. Such alignment between curriculum objectives and learner experiences highlights the pedagogical value of maintaining literary studies as a core component of language education.

Challenges Faced by Students in Studying Literature

Students also face challenges in learning literature. The study identified the following primary difficulties as seen in Figure 3.

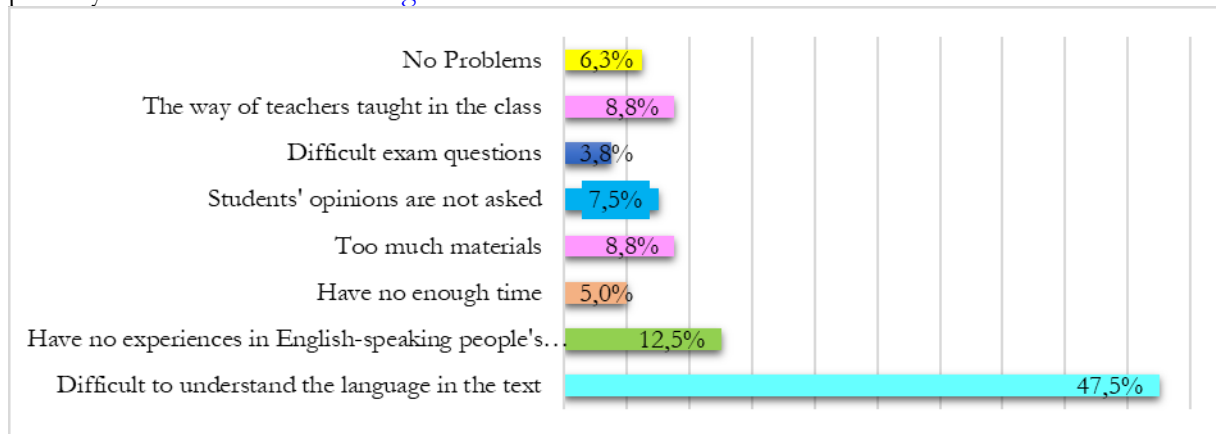


Figure 3. Pedagogical Challenges of Studying Literature

As seen in Figure 3, students faced difficulties like time limits, language obstacles, and a lack of cultural understanding of English-speaking environments. These results highlight the significance of pedagogical scaffolding since literary texts are more accessible in EFL classrooms. A programme such as curriculum training will affect the curriculum improvement. These challenges underline the need for efficient teaching methods in literature courses. Through focusing on language assistance, the students' literary proficiency can be significantly enhanced by addressing their difficulties.

Respondent 7:

The most challenging thing for me in studying literature is interpreting the meaning that exists in literary works, such as poems. Sometimes I'm in doubt about the correct interpretation of certain things.

The English Education Study Program's literary instruction for ESL students has been particularly difficult for a number of reasons, including the amount of time and preparation required. It is necessary to plan an effective strategy, come up with a strong strategy, and create a solid approach to implementing a beneficial, relevant, and interesting methodology. should be thoroughly examined to meet the lesson's intended learning goals. Additionally, a meticulous arrangement of activities is essential to support and enforce the teaching strategies employed by the instructors. Based on the evaluation context, the input and process stages need improvement. For example, contextual support, scaffolding, and differentiated instruction for overcoming linguistic and cultural hurdles are consistent with the principles of communicative language teaching. It is caused by the existence of meaningful interaction and understandable input. Therefore, improving curriculum design and teacher preparation in these fields would improve the overall effectiveness of literature education.

Discussion

These findings emphasise the process and product aspects from the standpoint of curriculum evaluation. Literature classes are effective at fostering linguistic, cognitive, and cultural growth. In addition, the potential lies in how they are integrated into the curriculum. To guarantee linguistic proficiency, a systematic analysis of teaching strategies, resources, and evaluation techniques is necessary to ensure that linguistic proficiency, cultural understanding, and critical thinking (the desired learning outcomes) are consistently attained throughout all classes.

For improving language abilities as well as terms of style and theme development, literature is a core. By studying and creatively adapting the structure, ideas, and stylistic elements of literary works, students can demonstrate their knowledge. This approach helps pupils to grasp linguistic patterns and hone their critical thinking skills. Moreover, literary works encompass a wide range of subjects, providing inspiration, direction, and increased mental engagement. Students understand that literature presents many facets of life, such as giving emotional impact and transcending their own knowledge (Ahmad et al., 2024).

For enhancing language abilities, as well as terms of style and theme development, literature is somewhat crucial. By study and creative adaptation, students can show their knowledge by replicating the form, ideas, and stylistic aspects of literary creations. This approach helps students to improve their critical thinking skills and grasp linguistic patterns (Samat et al., 2021). This is because students come from different backgrounds and speak different languages. Therefore, developing literature is a process that needs time and effort (Mercado, 2025). Learning literature involves more than just reading words set in the form of poetry, fiction, or drama, but also a mirror of society in the past, and profound thinking. Therefore, one cannot immediately grasp and value literary works. Studying literature takes time for several reasons, one of which is that every work has its own particular historical setting and societal background. Understanding a classic novel, for instance, requires readers to be conscious of the political and social circumstances prevailing during the period the book was published. Literature is still an oversight in research that investigates their perspectives on the subject, since students are the major consumers of literary instruction. The literary works that were chosen by curriculum planners, educators, or content creators, and put into a curriculum, may not always reflect students' interests or levels of involvement (Nelson et al., 2019). To address this issue, students' literary preferences must be more carefully considered in order to optimise their learning experience.

For many years, English literature has been recognised as a strong medium for learning other languages (Dio & Estremera, 2023; Hamimed, 2021). Learning a language has several benefits, particularly in improving reading, writing, speaking, and listening (Rosario, 2022). Aside from their language acquisition, literature helps students to develop their cognitive, self-awareness, and intercultural abilities when correctly included in the curriculum. Through meeting many different people and hearing their stories, kids develop empathy and broaden their viewpoints, which helps them accept diverse cultural ideas. Furthermore, by introducing pupils to a broad range of grammatical structures and stylistic elements, literature helps to improve language ability (Moussa, 2022). Boosting the critical thinking skills of students can be achieved by grammatical patterns and literary analysis, as well as creative interpretation (Widiastuti & Syamsi, 2023). Literature allows students to connect with shared human experiences. Some students put up with literature solely for exam preparation and limit their long-term appreciation of literary texts (Naser & Aziz, 2017). Thus, the educator must consider and select the materials that align with students' interests and language proficiency to create engagement and meaningful learning experiences. Giving various reading stories in literature helps students see things from multiple points of view and be more open-minded, especially towards individuals from other cultures.

According to Bloemert et al. (2019), incorporating literature into language classrooms raises fundamental questions about its role in the curriculum, the intended learning outcomes, the assessment of literary comprehension and interpretation, and its relationship to language and culture. When curricula are constructed around academic frameworks, their effectiveness is determined by how they are implemented in the classroom Pak et al. (2020). Curriculum implementation is successful when theoretical guidelines are aligned with practical classroom application (Baharuddin et al., 2022).

Integrating literary resources into the English curriculum can boost students' engagement and learning outcomes (Mardiningrum et al., 2024). Increasing emotional engagement, raising cultural awareness, developing critical thinking, and encouraging creativity and respect for literary traditions are some benefits of teaching literature. Literary texts have inherent textual validity

because they were initially created to transmit artistic and cultural narratives rather than instructional aims (Calafato & Gudim, 2022; Julia & Jeyanthi, 2024). The educator must apply a variety of instructional methodologies that are appropriate for students' linguistic abilities and cognitive development to maximise the educational benefits of literature. Literary resources are being used in English courses, with a variety of genres, including memoirs, biographies, epics, legends, travelogues, diaries, short tales, essays, letters, proverbs, poetry, and drama, being utilized as instructional materials (Moussa, 2022).

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, it can be concluded that literature should be strategically embedded in English teaching curricula. It is not only an add-on activity but also a staple medium for developing learners' communicative competence, intercultural awareness, and critical thinking. Reread and restate the course objectives of the curriculum. All of these measures would promote the congruence of the design curriculum with the evaluative dimensions, so that context, input, process, and product or literary education could be mutually supportive for student learning and involvement. The implications for the teaching practice are also suggested by the study outcomes. Differentiated instruction, collaborative activities, and multimedia should be used by teachers to develop not only linguistic skills but also intellectual, emotional, and cultural competencies. Additionally, the use of students' preferences and feedback in material selection can increase engagement and motivation, which is in line with learner-centred curriculum principles.

Literature has significant potential to enrich language education, and strategic curriculum design, informed by both theoretical frameworks and students' needs, can maximize its pedagogical value. By addressing challenges and aligning instruction with evaluation-based standards, educators can ensure that literature courses contribute meaningfully to students' academic and personal development, preparing them for both higher education and future professional contexts.

However, this study has several limitations. The data were collected from a single cohort at one university, limiting the generalizability of the findings. In addition, the reliance on self-reported measures may introduce bias, as students' perceptions may not fully reflect actual learning outcomes. Future research could address these limitations by conducting comparative studies across multiple institutions or employing experimental designs to measure the direct impact of literature-based interventions on language proficiency and cognitive development. Longitudinal studies could also examine the lasting effects of literature courses on students' professional skills, cultural awareness, and personal growth.

DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

The authors declare that no conflicts of interest exist.

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ETHICS APPROVAL

This study complied with relevant ethical and data protection standards, with all research data handled securely and kept confidential.

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