

# Students' Attitudes toward Using Literary Works in Learning English in EFL Context

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**Abstract.** Literary texts in learning English have been used worldwide in teaching English in various contexts, i.e., first, second, and foreign languages. However, debates among educators about its effectiveness continuously occur. In this research, we tried to examine the students' attitudes toward using literary works for teaching English. Apart from studies about using literary texts in English teaching, this research was done with a combination of imaginative recreation. The research subjects were the 3<sup>rd</sup>-semester students taking the "Literary Appreciation" English Department at a private university in Semarang in 2020. A hundred and twenty students were involved in this research. Only forty-five students responded to the questionnaires spread to one hundred and twenty. The questionnaires consisted of ten questions concerning the attitude toward using literary texts. The results showed that the overall index of students' attitudes was 3.7, which was classified as a strong attitude toward using literary texts. From the findings, it can be concluded that most students had strong attitudes toward using literary text in English teaching. However, teachers must be attentive to problems that might arise during its implementation.

**Keywords:** Attitude in learning English; Imaginative re-creation; literary appreciation

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## INTRODUCTION

Teachers use literary texts worldwide for teaching English in the contexts of first language (L1), second language (L2), or foreign language (FL). However, there is still a debate on the effective use of literary text in English learning and how best we use it in English language teaching (ELT) (Hirvela, 1996). Teachers agree with using literary texts to develop material in ELT because they believe that literary texts are closely related to language study and can be integrated with English learning (Brumfit & Carter in Latheef, 2012). While those who oppose the idea of using literary text in ELT argue that it can cause learner passivity, reduction of motivational level (discouraging), lack of communicative relevance, and cultural disparity stemming from either inappropriate approaches or unsuitable material adopted (Lazar in Latheef, 2012). Moreover, Carter and Long, as cited by Latheef (2012), support the application of literature in the ELT because it provides "authentic material of communicative, linguistic, and imaginative value conducive to the personal and emotional involvement of learners and contributes to their cultural and linguistic enrichment."

Regardless of the debate on using literary text in ELT, literary text is worth considering to give students various learning experiences. Using literary text as an authentic language source in

teaching English enables students to create communicative events and meaning-making of the text. Through this event, the four language skills can be taught, or grammar can be learned in context (Agustien, 2016). The word 'authentic' is mainly understood as text that is not intentionally made for pedagogical purposes or teaching material. Thus, literary text can be included in authentic material since it is made for delivering a specific message to the readers (Lee, 1995) in general, including non-English learners and native or non-native speakers of the language in which it is written (Takahashi, 2015). However, as cited by Lee (1995), according to Alderson, the use of authentic material since many implementations in the classroom seem to neglect the appropriate application of what is so-called authentic from the learners' point of view (Alderson in Lee, 1995). The authentic materials used by the teacher must be motivating, enjoyable, and not stressful for the learners.

On the contrary, the learning process will never happen if the text (learning material) is too far beyond the learner's linguistic competence (Alderson in Lee, 1995). Consequently, the learner will be shocked and will not learn anything. Furthermore, she points out that the teacher needs to find an appropriate material to be more authentic to meet the learners' competence, i.e., the material whose difficulty is not far

beyond the learners' linguistic competence. For example, using Shakespeare's poems for beginners does not meet the learners' needs because they are too difficult for them, and the poems are not authentic anymore for their level (Lee, 1995). Using popular literary text that has attracted people's attention worldwide (Yuliasri & Allen, 2019), such as Harry Potter, can also attract the students' interest and motivate them to read.

Literary texts are used not only for the teaching of Literature per se but also for language learning. Besides using literary text for literary appreciation and analysis, literary text can also be used for teaching language skills. In using the literary text in the EFL/ ESL context, the teacher has to select the appropriate text so that the gap between the learners' existing language competence and the learning objective is not too far. Another important thing the teachers should do is to determine the kinds of learning activities to exploit the text (Lazar, 2015), covering pre-reading, while-reading, and post-reading activities.

One of the important agents in the learning process is the learner. Teachers should not put aside their existence. The learners' needs have to be understood to gain maximum learning achievement. They will be successful in learning if they have a good or strong attitude toward the lesson. This attitude will influence their learning motivation. In turn, their learning achievement will be better. Many studies on learner motivation, such as Syahrozi et al. (1991), Choubsaz & Choubsaz (Choubsaz & Choubsaz, 2014), Erten (2014), McDonald (2010), Masgoret

& Gardner (2003) have been conducted and show a positive effect on learning achievements.

Even though literary texts have been widely used in English teaching, students' attitudes should be explored more. This research investigates the student's attitude toward using literary text (i.e., short stories) in learning English. This research aims to find out the students' attitudes toward using literary works (i.e., short stories) in an English as a foreign language class.

Hopefully, the research findings will be beneficial for teachers in considering literary texts in their English classes to improve the learners' language competence.

## METHODS

This research is a quantitative single case study. It is quantitative because the study investigated the respondents' attitudes. The data were collected using questionnaires after the course was accomplished. The questionnaires were composed using the Lickert scale consisting of the choices from "strongly disagree" up to "strongly agree" with intervals from 1 to 5.

There were only 45 respondents responded to the questionnaires. The questionnaire is attached at the end of this document. The respondents were 3<sup>rd</sup>-semester English Department students taking a Literary Appreciation Course at a private university in Semarang. The data were then analyzed by using descriptive statistics.

The responses to each statement were indexed by using the following formula (Kostoulas, 2013):

$$I = \frac{(S_1 \times f_1) + (S_2 \times f_2) + (S_3 \times f_3) + (S_4 \times f_4) + (S_5 \times f_5)}{N}$$

**Figure 1.** Index/ Mean Formula

Where: *I* : Index (obtained from the mean of the spread numbers)

*S<sub>n</sub>* : Scale point

*N* : Number of respondents

The index intervals were classified then into five categories to draw conclusions, i.e.,

Very weak : 0 – less than 1.8

Weak : 1.8 – less than 2.6

Average : 2.6 – less than 3.6

Strong : 3.6 – less than 4.2

Very strong : 4.2 – 5

Several steps were taken in this research as the following:

1. Determining short stories appropriate for the student's level.
2. Giving assignments to students to read the chosen literary texts
3. Discussing the selected short stories
4. Giving students assignments to respond to the short stories by composing imaginative re-creation.
5. Spreading the questionnaires and asking the students to fill out the questionnaires to get data about their attitudes toward using literary text in the English class activities.
6. Analyzing the data

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The researchers used ten indicators in the survey to obtain the respondents' perception of the literary works used in the EFL class. The participants' responses were then counted to get the perception toward each indicator. The indexes were then calculated using the formula presented in Figure 1. Each scale score was multiplied by the number of responses to the scale. Then, all the results were summed up and divided by the number of respondents. The categories were classified into five, i.e., very weak, weak, average, strong, and very strong. These categories

were set based on the five category intervals—the highest score minus the lowest score and then divided by the number of categories. The counting will result in 0.8. This figure was used to calculate the interval from the lowest scale to the largest scale. The category results were 0 to less than 1.8 (very weak), 1.8 to less than 2.6 (weak), 2.6 to less than 3.4 (average), 3.4 to less than 4.2 (strong), and 4.2 to 5 (strong). These categories were used to conclude the participants' attitudes toward the imaginative re-creation implementation

The results obtained from the survey questionnaires are presented below.

Table: Results of Attitude Index

No	Indicator	Scale					Index	Conclusions	Num of Respondents
		1	2	3	4	5			
1	X1	16	13	8	4	4	2.3	Weak	45
2	X2	2	5	19	17	2	3.3	Average	45
3	X3	1	2	16	16	10	3.7	Strong	45
4	X4	1	7	16	14	7	3.4	Strong	45
5	X5	0	0	3	18	24	4.5	Very Strong	45
6	X6	0	0	7	18	20	4.3	Very Strong	45
7	X7	0	0	7	16	22	4.3	Very Strong	45
8	X8	7	3	13	14	8	3.3	Average	45
9	X9	3	10	16	11	5	3.1	Average	45
10	X10	0	0	4	12	29	4.6	Very Strong	45
General conclusion							3.7	Strong	

Notes:

Index intervals for conclusion drawing:

- Very weak : 0 – less than 1.8
- Weak : 1.8 – less than 2.6
- Average : 2.6 – less than 3.6
- Strong : 3.6 – less than 4.2
- Very strong : 4.2 – 5

Response options:

- 1 : Strongly disagree
- 2 : Disagree
- 3 : Neutral/ Average
- 4 : Agree
- 5 : Strongly disagree

Indicators for measuring attitudes/ statements:

- X1. It is my first time reading English literary texts.
- X2. It is easy to read and understand the assigned literary texts in terms of vocabulary, sentence structure, and language style.
- X3. I am interested in literature (reading).
- X4. I will likely read English literary works (short stories) even though the teacher

does not assign me to read.

X5. I can learn many things like culture, characters' personalities, other's life, etc., through reading literature.

X6. For me, literature is valuable.

X7. I can see literary work as a reflection of human life.

X8. If reading literature is an optional subject in the curriculum, I'd better not take it.

X9. I read literary works (short stories) in my leisure time.

X10. Reading English literary works can improve my reading skill.

The table was composed of the recapitulations of 45 questionnaire responses. Each respondent's answer was scored. There were ten indicators to measure the respondents' attitudes toward using literary text. The indicators were labeled X1 to X10. The choice of responses started from 1 to 5, indicating the scales of attitudes beginning from "Strongly disagree," "Disagree," "Neutral," "Agree," and "Strongly agree." Then, the frequency of all scales was calculated to find the mean/ index by the index formula shown in

Figure 1. Each indicator was indexed to conclude, i.e., "Very weak," "Weak," "Average," "Strong," and "Very Strong" with the intervals shown above. The conclusions of indicators spread from "Weak," "Average," "Strong," and "Very strong," and none indicated "Very Weak." The only indicator, X1, showed "Weak." Three indicators, i.e., X2, X8, and X9, were "Average," while "Strong" attitudes were indicated in two indicators, i.e., X3 and X4. The rests were "Very Strong" attitudes found in 4 indicators, i.e., X5, X6, X7, and X10. Finally, the general conclusion was a "Strong" attitude with a 3.8 index. The indicators are broken down and elaborated below.

**Indicator/ Statement 1.** It is my first time reading English literary texts.

This indicator is the only one that indicates a weak attitude. It can be seen from the table that only eight respondents did not agree with the statement, while the rest of the 42 respondents agreed with the statement. Since the statement sense is negative for the student's attitude, the scores were read invertedly. It means the more the respondents agree with this statement, the lower/ the weaker the attitude is, and vice versa. The respondents with a strong attitude to the literary text frequently read the literary texts and should disagree with the statement. The disagreement responses to the first statement were lower than that of agreement. Only a few respondents had a positive attitude. In response to the statement, "It is my first time reading English literary texts," indicated that most respondents have not been well exposed to literary texts. In other words, most of them are unfamiliar with reading literary works. It can be concluded that they have a weak/ negative attitude toward literary texts. It was proven by the mean/ index of 2.3, which was classified as a weak attitude.

**Indicator/ Statement 2.** It is easy to read and understand the assigned literary texts in terms of vocabulary, sentence structure, and language style.

In response to the second statement, the index was 3.3, classified as an "Average" attitude. Opinion seems to be divided concerning the statement, "It is easy to read and understand the assigned literary texts in terms of vocabulary, sentence structure, and language style." Many respondents (N=26, 58%) expressed strong disagreement, disagreement, and neutral, indicating a low/ weak attitude toward the statement. The "average" attitude meant that the respondents did not have a clear and definitive

attitude toward the statement. "Average" attitude tended to be negative and could be classified into weak/ low attitude. It is understandable because sometimes literary works are hard to understand. It can be concluded that they have a negative attitude in terms of language.

**Indicator/ Statement 3.** I am interested in literature (reading).

The third statement scores indicated that the index was 3.7 and categorized into strong attitude. Many respondents (N=26, 58%) agreed with the statement that they were interested in literary texts. The score was a bit higher compared to the negative attitude score of 42% (N=19), so it can be said that they were interested in reading literary texts. They have a positive attitude even though the data disparity is not too far.

**Indicator/ Statement 4.** I will likely read English literary works (short stories) even though the teacher does not assign me to read.

In responding to the fourth statement, most respondents have a negative attitude (N=24, 53%) compared to a positive attitude, and another 47 % have a positive attitude to the statement. Although the index showed 3.4 (Strong), if it was carefully inspected, the index score was borderline between low (average/ weak) and strong attitudes. In other words, they read literary works because their teacher assigned them and not because of their initiative. Opinions seem to be divided concerning their initiatives in reading literary texts, although this index indicates a positive attitude.

**Indicator/ Statement 5.** I can learn many things like culture, characters' personalities, other's life, etc., through reading literature.

This statement was responded to positively with a high index of 4.5 points. A percentage of forty-two respondents (91.3%) undoubtedly answered this statement. The portion is close to the maximum rate. With an index of 4.5 points, it can be concluded that the respondents had a very strong attitude toward the literature. Almost all of them agreed that they could learn many things through literature, culture, people's personalities, and life.

**Indicator/ Statement 6.** For me, literature is valuable.

The responses to the sixth statement indicated that respondents had very strong attitudes since the

index was 4.3 points. The number of respondents who agreed and strongly agreed is 38 or 84%, while the other was seven respondents or only 16%. It can be stated that they significantly agreed with the statement that literature is valuable. It may be because they realize the values in literary works, such as fairness, faith, friendship, loyalty, humanity, and culture.

**Indicator/ Statement 7.** I can see literary work as a reflection of human life.

In line with the sixth indicator, the responses to the seventh statement also indicated that the respondents had high positive attitudes, with N=38 (84%) agreeing. They thought that literature as a reflection of human life and learned the bad and good sides of the characters' lives. It can be concluded that the respondents had a very strong attitude, with 4.3 points to the use of literature.

**Indicator/ Statement 8.** If reading literature is an optional subject in the curriculum, I'd better not take it.

The responses to the eighth statement showed a 3.3 index classified into "average" attitude. The opinion seems to be split concerning whether they had to take the literary reading if it was optional in the curriculum. Many respondents (N=22, 49%) showed agreement and strong agreement, while the others (N=23, 51%) had strong disagreement, disagreement, and neutral. Even though this indicator had a 3.3 index with the average attitude, it should be carefully treated as it was a split opinion between weak and strong attitudes toward using literature. The percentage of respondents' agreement (49%) is lower than that of disagreement (51%). In other words, most students agreed that taking an elective literary reading course is their preference.

**Indicator/ Statement 9.** I read literary works (short stories) in my leisure time.

The number of respondents who disagreed with the ninth statement is 64% (N=16). The percentage of respondents who agree with the statement is lower than the number of respondents who disagree. Most respondents do not read literary texts in their leisure time. It is consistent with the respondents' responses to the fourth statement. They mostly read literature for the assignment. It can be concluded that they have a negative attitude in responding to this statement even though the index was 3.1, which was even lower than the previous eighth indicator.

**Indicator/ Statement 10.** Reading English literary works can improve my reading skill.

The percentage of the respondents who agreed with the statement is very high, with N=41

(91.1%) and an index of 4.6 with a very strong attitude toward using literary texts in English learning. This figure indicates that they perceived literary texts could improve their reading skills. In other words, the figure shows a good attitude toward using literary text in English class.

To sum up, among the ten statements used in determining the students' attitudes, it is found that students have positive (strong) attitudes toward using literary text with an index of 3.7. This result supports the studies conducted by several researchers in English language learning, such as Damuri (2021), Afdian & Wahyuni (2020), Karakaya & Kahraman (2013), and Dwaik et al. (2015). However, there are some items not mentioned in their research that need to pay attention to. These findings must be handled carefully by teachers interested in this field. Since those previous researchers did not say the items, these items will be the novelty of this research.

Firstly, most respondents admitted that they did not read before the class (X1). They were not familiar with reading literary texts. Secondly, Most of them still perceived that literary texts were not easy to understand in terms the vocabulary, sentence structure, and language style (X2). Thirdly, they prefer not to read literary texts outside the classroom if their teachers do not assign them (X8). Finally, they prefer not to read literary texts in their leisure time (X9). However, besides the negative attitude, the students could also see some advantages of literature, such as their interests, benefits, value, human life reflection, alternative reading, and improved English.

This research benefits English teachers using literary text for their learning material. They have to consider several things, such as adjusting the text difficulty level to avoid students' frustration that can damage their learning motivation.

## CONCLUSION

This study has proven that students have positive/ strong attitudes toward using literary text in English learning. This conclusion can be seen from the above discussion and also supported by the counting of the participants' responses presented in the table. One indicator (X1) showed weak attitude showing the participants' low habit in reading literary works. Another three indicators showed average attitude, i.e. X2, X8, and X9. These indicators deal with the participants' difficulty in reading literary work, preference of using literary works, and their habits in reading literary works. Teachers must

carefully pay attention to these three indicators as they can damage their students' attention in learning English. On the contrary, the rest of the indicators showed the strong attitude of the participants toward the use of literary texts. They believe that literary texts can benefit them in improving their English proficiency. Some aspects of literature, such as human life reflection, values, humanity, and cultural diversity around the world, can also be exciting sides of literature. Besides, teachers must pay serious attention to the potentially harmful sides that can decrease learning achievements.

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