

Exploring Vietnamese EFL Students' Perceptions of Literature Courses in the English Studies Program

Nguyen Thi Tuyet-Nhung^{1*}

¹ School of Foreign Languages, Tra Vinh University, Vietnam

*Corresponding author's email: nttuyetnhung@tvu.edu.vn

*  <https://orcid.org/0009-0002-6799-6132>

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ABSTRACT

Keywords:

Vietnamese EFL learners; Literature courses; Perceptions; Benefits; Challenges

This study aimed to identify Vietnamese EFL students' perceptions of literature courses in the English Studies Program at a university in the Mekong Delta. A total of 77 English-majored learners who were in their final year participated in the study. The researcher employed a quantitative research design and collected the data using a survey questionnaire. The questionnaire asked participants to select the importance, benefits, and challenges when they enrolled in different literature courses. The results indicated that literature provided a volume of grammatical structures and vocabulary, knowledge of culture, and fostered students' personal skills development. The participants also perceived the length of works and the complexity of different literary devices as their most significant challenges when participating in literature courses. Learners generally experienced more benefits than challenges during their literature learning process. The study suggested that stakeholders might take into consideration integrating more literature courses in the English Studies program.

Introduction

There is a growing interest in the role of literature in language education. Several studies have documented the advantages of incorporating literature courses in English as a foreign language (EFL) classroom (Liaw, 2001; Alemi, 2011; Khan & Alasmari, 2018). Particularly, literature is a valuable resource for developing language structures, reading ability, vocabulary, language proficiency, critical thinking, and cultural understanding. Previous studies have also suggested that literature can enhance the psycholinguistic aspect of language learning by improving vocabulary expansion, reading skills, form and discourse processing skills (Ali & Ahmed, 2015; Mart, 2018; Guetatlia & Hamane, 2022). Literature can serve as a source of linguistic input, stimulate learners' self-expression, enhance learner motivation, and offer authentic materials for EFL classrooms (Shtokhman, 2022; Ugoji, 2016). Overall, literature can be a useful tool for language learning and can help learners improve their language skills, cultural awareness, and personal development.

Literature has been integrated into many language curricula worldwide, including the English Studies Program in Vietnam. Pham (2022) found that explicitly teaching literary devices could improve EFL learners' reading comprehension, literary analysis skills, and critical thinking. Tran (2023) reported that integrating literary texts into a writing course could enhance learners' linguistic and literary competencies and their appreciation of cultural diversity. Han et al. (2022) discovered that Vietnamese EFL learners hold positive attitudes toward reading literature, considering it useful for language learning, cultural awareness, and critical thinking development. Amalyah (2021) explored the integration of literature into EFL pre-service teacher education programs, stating that it could help in developing Vietnamese EFL pre-service teachers' language competencies, pedagogical skills, and professional identities. These studies provide valuable insights into the importance of literature in EFL teaching and learning and highlight some of the challenges involved in the implementation of literary pedagogy.

However, some of the challenges in implementing literature in EFL teaching and learning were mentioned in the studies by Pham (2022), Tran (2023), and Amalyah (2021). According to Pham (2022), one of the challenges is motivating EFL learners to read and analyze unfamiliar literary texts. Tran (2023) also pointed out cultural and linguistic barriers that may limit learners' comprehension and appreciation of literary texts. Moreover, Amalyah (2021) suggested that teachers' lack of confidence in teaching literature, as well as the perception that literature courses are less important than other language courses, could also act as significant barriers. These challenges can hamper the effective implementation of literary pedagogy and reduce its potential benefits. Consequently, developing strategies and approaches to overcome these obstacles in EFL literature instruction is essential.

Literature courses have been found to be useful in learning English as a foreign language. However, learners in the English Studies program at a university in the Mekong Delta seem to favour other courses instead of literature courses. Also, there is a lack of research on Vietnamese EFL learners' perceptions of literature courses. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by investigating Vietnamese EFL learners' perceptions of literature courses in English studies programs, especially in the context of a university in the Mekong Delta.

The current study aims to explore the perceptions of Vietnamese English-major students towards literature courses at one university in the south of Vietnam. Based on the findings, the researcher proposes recommendations for improving literature courses' curriculum design to better meet students' needs. Therefore, this study is significant for teaching and learning English through literature in the Vietnamese context and for researchers and curriculum development experts in other contexts.

Literature review

Roles of literature in language learning

Literature functions as a portal to the globe. It forms a combination of cultural knowledge that enables students to acquire insights into the target language's history, beliefs, traditions, and customs, alongside its linguistic characteristics (Carter & Long, 1991). In a study conducted by McRae (1991), literature is fundamentally considered a study of language which allows

students to unconsciously enhance their overall language competence. Moreover, according to Wijaya and Rahman (2021), literature can be understood as being associated with either artistic or aesthetic forms of writing, which creatively and imaginatively express ideas, emotions, and experiences. Literary texts can be written in various forms (novels, short stories, essays, and plays) with a wide range of genres, including poetry, drama, fiction, and non-fiction (Wijaya & Rahman, 2021). In the present study, literature can be described as written or spoken works with aesthetic worth that employ language in a creative and inventive way to portray ideas, feelings, and experiences, which can also be used for communication and to connect people from different cultures.

In the field of language education, literary texts have been found to significantly impact EFL learners' learning. In particular, using literary texts in EFL classrooms can help to extend linguistic knowledge, enhance communicative competence, raise cultural awareness, generate motivation, and foster personal development among learners (Chalikendy, 2015; Khan & Alasmari, 2018; Rogti, 2019).

According to some researchers, literature courses can help learners improve their language proficiency, especially in areas such as vocabulary, grammar, and syntax (DiCerbo et al., 2014; Hişmanoğlu, 2005). Thanks to the rich input of literature, learners may be exposed to a wide range of vocabulary items, which are often contextually embedded. This can help learners understand the meaning and use of new words more effectively than if they are simply learning them through a vocabulary list. Additionally, by analyzing literary texts, learners can identify and understand the use of grammatical structures and their functions. Through close reading and analysis, learners can also identify and appreciate different sentence structures and the impact they have on the text's meaning and effect. Shtokhman (2022), for instance, contends that literature can be used to teach the English language since grammar and vocabulary activities can be presented and promoted through different literary texts. In other words, literature can also be used as a meaningful source for fostering the English language in general and developing the four language skills, grammar, and vocabulary through communicative tasks and activities in particular. One of the reasons is that literature can provide examples of language use in context, which is essential in EFL contexts where learners rarely use English in their daily conversation (Karakaya & Kahraman, 2013; Zakarneh & Mahmoud, 2021). Literature can also be used as an effective tool for learning English and enhancing the four main language skills (Rahayu, 2011; Ugoji, 2016; Shtokhman, 2022). Moreover, reading literary works encourages learners to develop their understanding and analyzing ability, which is one of the main goals of teaching English (Karatay, 2017). In order to reach that goal, learners are required to apply a variety of potential strategies to build a thorough understanding of the text and its themes. Therefore, their four English skills - reading, writing, speaking, and listening - can all be enhanced in EFL classes through the use of literary texts.

When exploring the impacts of literature in the language classroom, it can be said that learners' personal development is significantly outstanding. It was observed that taking literature courses can have several benefits for EFL learners in terms of cognitive growth and cultural understanding. First, literature may enhance students' reading abilities, encourage tolerance, and stimulate creativity (Sternberg, 2007). Additionally, Sternberg stated that literature may be

employed as a motivational tool to increase students' interest in studying and increase their efficacy. Likewise, it has been discovered that literary texts are able to foster EFL tertiary students' learning passion through lively debates about the contents of the works on their own (Ilyas & Afzal, 2021). Similar findings were made by Verhovtsova et al. (2022), who discovered that using analytical reading texts similar to literary works in foreign language learning can boost motivation to learn the language. According to Al-Saeed and Alenezi's research from 2021, students' emotional reactions to fictional characters are influenced by the dialogic interaction between the author and reader in texts, which also improves their understanding when they read closely.

Literary texts may also aid in the development of intercultural competency and critical thinking abilities of EFL students (Aydin & Sariçoban, 2022; Golkowska, 2011). Lazar (1993) investigated the function of literature in language instruction, particularly in light of its cultural content. According to the research, literature may be a valuable source of cultural information that can enable students to build their intercultural competency. By exposing students to a variety of ethnic viewpoints and experiences, literature may strengthen their understanding of global diversity and improve their communication abilities in intercultural settings. Cheung and Hennebry-Leung (2023) focused on the literature's cultural value as they looked at the role of literature in language learning in Hong Kong. They concluded that literature helps students understand the cultural norms and beliefs of the target language culture. This understanding may help students manage social situations and communicate with native speakers in the target language. These results are in line with previous studies on the use of literature in language training. Literature may improve language acquisition by exposing students to great works and broadening their cultural awareness, as Zakarneh and Mahmoud (2021) claims. Literature is a helpful instrument for teaching the English language and culture (Cheung & Hennebry-Leung, 2023; Karakaya & Kahraman, 2013; Nguyen, 2022; Zakarneh & Mahmoud, 2021). Literature improves exposure to authentic language usage, as highlighted by numerous academics (Aydinoğlu, 2013; Karakaya & Kahraman, 2013; Phan, 2022; Violetta-Irene, 2015), which is an advantage of adding it to language acquisition. Language students may gain a variety of linguistic information through literature, such as idiomatic phrases, collocations, and metaphors. Students may get acquainted with the many slang terms and writing patterns of the target language via literature, which will help them understand the social and cultural context of the language (Akanmu & Rasheed, 2015). In general, despite certain difficulties, recent research has demonstrated that integrating literary texts into EFL lessons provides benefits for increasing cultural awareness, improving language proficiency, and fostering intercultural competency and critical thinking (Gabriel, 2019; Kaowiwattanakul, 2021; Huynh et al., 2023).

Overall, it seems that literature can still play a valuable role in developing students' language proficiency and cultural competence, provided that it is used appropriately and with consideration of students' needs and abilities. Although there is some agreement among researchers about the effectiveness of literature courses for the language learning process, research on Vietnamese EFL students' perception of literary courses has been lacking. By examining what Vietnamese EFL students perceive as literary courses in English studies programs, this study seeks to fill this gap.

Challenges of using literature in teaching foreign language

Language teaching and learning professionals have long debated the benefits of literature courses for language learning. While some researchers think that literature can be a useful medium for learning a language, others have voiced concern about its effectiveness.

Students' English proficiency level is one of the considerations for integrating literature into EFL classrooms. Leki (1991) indicated that literature texts might be overwhelming for students who are still having problems with basic language patterns and vocabulary. In a similar vein, Lazar (1993) contended that literature courses would be better suited for more critical students.

Another challenge is that literature courses may not provide language input for language learning. According to Macalister and Nation (2019), in order to learn a language, a student needs a lot of intelligible input. As the vocabulary employed in literary writings is frequently more complicated and abstract than that used in everyday dialogue, they speculate that literature courses may not provide enough of this input. Additionally, Crakli and Kiliçkaya (2011) discovered that literary works utilized in EFL classes lacked relevance to students' current issues, posed unnecessarily abstract tasks for non-native speakers, only permitted rephrasing and memorizing, and did not stimulate creative responses.

Based on the proposed research topic, the gap in literature could be related to the lack of exploration of Vietnamese EFL students' perceptions of literature courses in the English Studies Program. Despite the importance of literature in language learning, limited research specifically examines EFL students' perceptions of literature courses in the Vietnamese context. Additionally, the existing literature tends to focus on the perceptions of literature courses from the perspective of teachers or a broader range of students rather than specifically EFL students (Al-Matrafi, 2022; Amalyah, 2021; Bloemert et al., 2019; Chi, 2022; Le et al., 2022; Lien, 2014). Therefore, this proposed study would aim to fill the gap in literature by exploring the perceptions of literature courses among Vietnamese EFL students in the English Studies Program. The study may be able to point out the program's advantages and disadvantages and offer suggestions for improving the curriculum to help EFL students learn English and appreciate literature.

The theoretical framework

There are various approaches to teaching literature in language education. Three common approaches are the cultural model, the language model, and the personal growth model (Carter & Long, 1991, as cited in Savvidou, 2004).

The cultural model requires students to investigate and analyze the social, political, literary, and historical background of a particular literary text (Carter & Long, 1991). The language model employs a variety of language activities to comprehend key linguistic properties of a literary text (Carter & Long, 1991). The personal growth model emphasizes how language is used in a literary work, situates it in a particular cultural context, and encourages students to articulate their thoughts, feelings, and connections to their own personal and cultural experiences (Carter & Long, 1991). In the study of Yimwilai (2015), in the language model, literary texts are employed as a point of emphasis for grammar, while the language model is used as cultural objects in the cultural model, and as a springboard for personal development

activities in the personal growth model. Each of the models has its own strengths and weaknesses. However, researchers tend to agree that the combination of the three models is beneficial for teaching literature in language classrooms (Adeyemi, 2010; 2015; Atek et al., 2020; Khatib et al., 2011; Savvidou, 2004). For instance, Adeyemi (2010) discovered that instructors of social studies who employed the integrated method for teaching literature outperformed other social studies educators. The outcomes of this study also show that the integrated model of teaching literature outperforms the traditional technique. Therefore, researchers suggested implementing an integrated model for teaching literature that combines linguistic, methodological, and motivational elements (Adeyemi, 2010; 2015; Savvidou, 2004). Such an integrated model uses a wide range of authentic texts to introduce students to a variety of English language types and difficulties, sensitizes them to the processes of reading, and prioritizes the enjoyment of reading by touching on significant and engaging themes. This model, which is adaptable for all levels, incorporates linguistic description with textual analysis (Savvidou, 2004).

In the present study, the researcher adapts the integrated model of teaching literature proposed by Savvidou (2004) to analyze and interpret the obtained data to gain insight into the perceptions of Vietnamese EFL students towards the teaching of literature courses in their studies through three aspects: Linguistics development, cultural awareness and personal growth.

Research Questions

The present study was seeking to address the following research question:

How do Vietnamese EFL students perceive literature courses in English Studies programs?

Methods

Pedagogical Setting & Participants

The study selected 77 participants (12 males and 65 females) who were in the final year of their English Studies program at a university in the Mekong Delta of Vietnam. Their ages ranged from 22 to 24 years old. The participants were selected using a convenience sampling method. All the participants have experienced two courses of British literature and one American literature. In their process of learning, they were given the literary texts selected to reach the course objectives and learning outcomes.

Design of the Study

A quantitative research design was employed to address the research question, and a questionnaire was used as the data collection instrument. The questionnaire was designed based on the integrated model of teaching literature (Savvidou, 2004). The Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree, was used to collect the participants' responses, which allowed for the collection of numerical data that could be analyzed statistically. In a relatively short amount of time, the use of a questionnaire in this study for data collection is appropriate because it allows the researcher to collect large amounts of data from a diverse sample of participants.

The questionnaire consisted of two main sections. The first section was to collect some demographic information about the participants, such as gender, age, and the number of literature courses they have taken part in. The second section aimed to identify their perceptions towards the importance (one item), benefits (20 items) and challenges (6 items) when enrolling in literature courses in their English Studies Program.

Pilot study

After developing the questionnaire's content, the researcher conducted a pilot to measure its validity and reliability by asking 18 participants who shared common characteristics with the main participants. They were all fourth-year students who were studying the same English Studies program. They were required to thoroughly read each item to measure the content validity and provide their best responses to evaluate the internal reliability. The research used SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) software version 25 to run the reliability test, and the result was 0.72, which shows an acceptable reliability coefficient. This means that the questionnaire used in this study was reliable and efficient in collecting data about Vietnamese EFL students' perceptions of literature courses in the English Studies program.

Data collection & analysis

After the survey questionnaire was tested to measure validity and reliability, the researcher asked permission from the participants' management leaders to meet them face-to-face in their classrooms. The researcher introduced the objective of the survey questionnaire to collect information related to their perceptions of the importance of literature learning in the English Studies program and the benefits and limitations in the process of reading literary works. They received the questionnaire and completed it voluntarily in 15 minutes. Then, the researcher collected the filled questionnaire and entered the data into the computer, using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) software version 25 for analysis. The results of the questionnaire were run using a descriptive statistical test.

Results/ Findings

The questionnaire was completed by 77 participants and computed into the SPSS software to measure the reliability, which was illustrated by Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.740, as stated in Table 1.

Table 1.

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.740	26

It indicated that the questionnaire has a fairly high level of internal consistency.

Importance of literature in their English learning

With respect to the participants' perceptions of the role of literature, the majority of the respondents revealed that integrating literature courses is essential in their studies, as illustrated

in Table 2.

Table 2.

Participants' belief about the importance of literature in their English learning

Not important	Slightly important	Fairly important	Important	Very important
0%	0%	18.2%	53.2%	28.6%

According to the data in Table 2, literature is considered an important aspect of learning English. Out of the 77 participants surveyed, 18.2% rated literature as quite important, 53.2% rated it as important, and 28.6% rated it as very important. These findings suggested that incorporating literature into English language learning can be beneficial for students.

Participants' perception of language development through learning literature

Regarding participants' perceptions of language benefits when learning literature courses, the result of the descriptive statistical test showed a high overall mean score. As illustrated in Table 3, the descriptive statistic test result indicated that literature courses are beneficial to participants' language development (4.03. SD=.38).

Table 3.

Participants' perception of language benefits of learning literature

	n	M	S.D.
1. Studying literature has exposed me to a variety of English sentence structures.	77	4.18	.66
2. Reading literature has broadened my vocabulary.	77	4.00	.76
3. Discussing literary works with others has enhanced my communication abilities in English.	77	4.25	.63
4. Literary texts serve as authentic materials that help me understand the context in which the language is used.	77	3.94	.84
5. Studying literature has improved my writing skills in English.	77	4.12	.72
6. Literary works have provided a foundation for understanding and producing idiomatic expressions.	77	4.00	.82
7. Literature has helped me understand different ways of expression in English.	77	4.08	.79
8. Literature has improved my reading skills.	77	3.74	.88
Overall mean score	77	4.03	.38

As can be seen, most of the participants believed that their communication skills have been increased thanks to the discussion activities about the literary works with others (M=4.25. SD=.63). Moreover, learning English through literature helps them exposure to a variety of sentence structures (M=4.18. SD=.66) and improve their writing skills (M=4.12. SD=.72). They also value the merits of reading skills development and exposure to a variety of vocabulary and different ways of expression in English with mean scores around 4.00.

Participants' perception of cultural understanding through learning literature

Regarding the attitude of the participants towards the cultural benefits of learning literature, the results of the descriptive statistic test indicated that generally, the participants hold a positive attitude towards learning literature in their English studies program, with an overall mean score of 4.06 (as can be seen in Table 4).

Table 4.

Participants' perception of cultural benefits of learning literature

	n	M	S.D.
9. Literature helps me to understand some lifestyles and perspectives of the people.	77	4.08	.75
10. Through literature, I am better able to understand the historical and cultural backgrounds of English-speaking countries.	77	4.17	.71
11. Literature encourages me to explore the beauty of the English language.	77	3.99	.86
12. Through literature, I have developed a deeper appreciation for the English language.	77	4.01	.76
Overall mean score	77	4.06	.52

The finding suggested that literature can make a big contribution to promoting cross-cultural understanding and appreciation for the English language. First, literature can enhance their understanding of English-speaking countries' historical and cultural backgrounds, with a mean score of 4.17. The second highest mean score was 4.08, indicating that participants also strongly agreed that literature can help them understand some lifestyles and perspectives of the people. The third highest mean score (M=4.01) means participants deeply appreciated the English language. The item with the lowest mean score was that participants are encouraged to explore the beauty of the English language, with a mean score of 3.99. While this score is still relatively high, it suggested that participants are slightly less enthusiastic about the idea that literature can inspire them to explore the beauty of the English language. Overall, the survey results suggested that participants perceive literature as having significant cultural benefits, particularly in terms of broadening their understanding of different cultures and historical contexts.

Participants' perception of personal growth through learning literature

Table 5 shows the results of participants' perception of their personal development after experiencing the literature courses in their program. With an average mean score of 4.00, participants agreed that literature courses can help them develop their different personal skills, motivation, and interests.

Table 5.

Participants' perception of personal growth benefits of learning literature

	n	M	S.D.
13. Analyzing literary texts has improved my critical thinking skills.	77	3.94	.92
14. Engaging with literature has developed my ability to interpret and analyze texts in English.	77	3.87	.86
15. Literature enhances my motivation to learn English.	77	4.05	.74
16. Literature offers a creative and enjoyable way to learn English.	77	4.10	.82
17. Studying literature has fostered my empathy and understanding of human emotions and experiences.	77	4.08	.77
18. Engaging with literature has improved my problem-solving and decision-making abilities.	77	4.05	.75
19. Studying literature has had a positive impact on my self-confidence in using English.	77	3.99	.91
20. Studying literary texts has enabled me to make connections with other academic subjects.	77	3.94	.71
Overall mean score	77	4.00	.39

As can be seen, literature offers a creative and enjoyable way to learn English ($M=4.10$, $SD=.77$), hence increasing their motivation in learning English ($M=4.05$, $SD=.74$). They also develop their empathy and understanding of human emotions and experiences with a mean score of 4.08. Participants can gain various skills, including problem-solving, decision-making, interpreting, analyzing, and critical thinking, with mean scores ranging from 3.87 to 4.05.

Participants' perception of challenges when learning literature

As for difficulties faced by participants when learning literature in their English studies courses, results of descriptive statistics (as illustrated in Table 6) showed that respondents of this study partly agree that they had challenges when learning English with literature input ($M=3.26$, $SD=.27$).

Table 6.

Participants' perception of challenges of learning literature

	n	M	S.D.
21. My level of language proficiency is not high enough to understand the literary texts.	77	3.01	.73
22. Literary devices such as metaphors and symbolism are challenging for me.	77	4.23	.66
23. Cultural differences provided in literary texts can be a barrier for me.	77	2.83	.71
24. The length and complexity of literary texts can make me demotivated.	77	3.88	.70
25. I have difficulty identifying the main themes and messages in literary works.	77	2.81	.67
26. I am not critical enough to analyze literary works.	77	2.84	.54
Overall mean score	77	3.26	.27

In particular, the biggest challenge they experienced was understanding literary devices such as metaphors and symbolism in the works ($M=4.23$, $SD=.66$). The second most difficult was participants demotivated feeling due to the length and complexity of the works with a mean score of 3.88. The other challenges related to their English proficiency level, cultural differences, and identifying the main ideas and messages in the works seem insignificant, with relatively low mean scores of approximately 3.00.

In conclusion, participants positively perceived the benefits of literature integration into the English Studies Program regarding language development, cultural understanding, and personal growth. However, they might experience some challenges in gaining the literary devices.

Discussion

As mentioned in the research results section, the importance of integrating the teaching of literary works in the English language training program has been highly appreciated by students. This is demonstrated through the results in terms of the benefits and limitations of this course for EFL students.

The results of the present study show that students have a very positive assessment of the role of literature in language development, including knowledge of structure, vocabulary, and speaking, reading, and writing skills. These findings further support the studies of Karakaya

and Kahraman (2013), Zakarneh and Mahmoud (2021), and Shtokhman (2022). Students are provided with literary works and then read, research, analyze, and evaluate works at the request of lecturers. During that process, students are exposed to a large amount of vocabulary and structure in the work and learn the content of the passage, such as the main idea of the lesson, the events taking place in the work, the characteristics of the characters, and then draw meaningful lessons for themselves and those around them. Throughout the process, the lecturer organizes a variety of activities for students, such as discussions, debates, plays, presentations, etc. Finally, students are asked to produce essays, speeches, or create video clips about that work. It can be seen that bringing literature into the English classroom plays an important role in language development for students.

In terms of cultural awareness, the results of this study are similar to those of Zakarneh and Mahmoud (2021) and Cheung and Hennebry-Leung (2023). These studies all show that studying literature can help students develop cultural awareness, including understanding the history and society of some English-speaking countries. However, the results of the present study also indicate some specific aspects related to culture that have not been mentioned in previous studies. Those results are literary works that can help students better understand the lifestyle and views of people in some countries through analyzing the behavior, attitudes, and actions of the characters in the work. At the same time, students raise awareness of the importance of English and the beauty of English through language expressions in each work. This can be explained through the selection of literary works in accordance with the teaching objectives in the program, which is to help students both learn the language and have a basic understanding of historical and social characteristics, culture, and people's way of life in the UK and US, raising awareness of the need for English to meet professional requirements after graduation.

The next highlight is that literature creates an interesting, dynamic and creative language learning environment for students, making students more motivated in the process of learning English. This result is consistent with the results from the study of Ilyas and Afzal (2021) and Verhovtsova et al. (2022). This can be explained by the discussions, debates, presentations, plays, or video clips that the lecturer organizes during the literature class. Students can interact with the lecturer with their classmates when performing the required tasks. For example, they are free to express their opinions on specific issues, such as women's rights, the consequences of war, the pain of enslaved people, racial discrimination, etc., and learn meaningful experiences in life. Since then, students have also develop a very prominent quality of empathizing with the experiences and emotions of those around them. This is considered one of the remarkable results of this study because this quality is essential for students in work as well as in life. In addition, exposure to literary works helps students develop soft skills such as analytical skills, thinking skills, problem-solving, and decision making. This result clarifies the results of Aydin and Sariçoban (2022), and Golkowska (2011). All belong to the group of personal development competencies, which are extremely important in students' professional work and life. That is because students must think to understand, analyze, and evaluate information in works, to answer questions, or to solve requested situations or tasks.

Regarding the difficulty in using literary works to develop English for students, the biggest problem is that the work is too long or too complicated with literary devices such as metaphors, similes, symbolism, etc. This result corresponds to what Macalister and Nation (2019) mentioned. Literary works often use more complex and abstract rhetorical devices than language in everyday communication. On the contrary, the results of this study also found that the student's English level is sufficient to understand the main idea, plot or information that the author wants to convey. This is not consistent with the opinion that Leki (1991) and Lazar (1993) mentioned. One possible explanation for this is that students begin to study literature in the program's third year, at which their language proficiency is around intermediate or beyond.

Conclusion

The findings of the study contribute to the literature on the usefulness of literature courses in learning English as a foreign language. The findings of this study will also be useful for English studies program administrators and instructors in Vietnam to improve the quality of literature courses and enhance the learning experience of Vietnamese EFL students. Despite the limitations of understanding literary rhetoric, this study shows that English language students receive more benefits in terms of language development, cultural understanding, and personal capacity development. Specifically, students expand their knowledge of vocabulary and grammatical structures, and improve speaking and writing skills, which are considered two critical productive skills. In terms of cultural awareness, students also increase their understanding of the history, society and people of some English-speaking countries, raising their understanding and awareness to a new horizon. At the same time, it is to develop some necessary skills such as analysis, critical thinking, problem-solving, etc., and some valuable qualities that help them adapt to different contexts ranging from daily life to future professional expertise.

Due to time constraints, the current study only focuses on analyzing quantitative data through a survey questionnaire, lacking qualitative data analysis to gain a deeper understanding of students' perceptions. Therefore, the researcher expects that there will be more qualitative data analysis from interview questions or can directly do experiments in teaching literature courses to compare and contrast the differences before and after students join the course in future studies. Or the research will follow the case study method to explore in more detail the changes in language, cultural understanding and personal development of EFL students.

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Biodata

Ms. Nguyen Thi Tuyet Nhung, a PhD Candidate, has joined the staff of School of Foreign Languages, Tra Vinh University, Vietnam since 2009. She earned a BA in English Education in 2008 and MA degree in TESOL in 2015. She has published several peer-reviewed journals and presented at various international conferences. Currently, Ms. Nhung is a PhD candidate in the field of English language teaching methodologies. Her research interests include language teaching and learning, literature and intercultural communication, pedagogical translanguaging, AI in language teaching and learning.