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# An Analysis of Literary Content in The English Course Book For Iraq's Sixth Preparatory Level, Evaluated Through The Perspectives of Teachers

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**Abstract:** This study explores the perceptions of Iraqi EFL preparatory school teachers regarding the integration of literature in English textbooks. The research aims to understand how teachers perceive the role of literature in enhancing students' language proficiency, cultural awareness, and personal growth. A quantitative research design was employed, utilizing a questionnaire to collect data from 58 Iraqi EFL teachers in Najaf City. The findings reveal that teachers generally hold positive perceptions of literature, believing it enhances students' linguistic skills, cultural understanding, and personal development. However, concerns were raised about the quality and relevance of literary texts in the textbooks, as well as challenges in teaching literature due to limited time and resources. The study concludes with recommendations for improving the integration of literature in Iraqi EFL textbooks to better meet the needs of both teachers and students.

**Keywords:** Literature, EFL, Iraqi Teachers, Cultural Awareness, Language Proficiency, Textbooks

## 1. Introduction

Integrating literature into English language teaching has been a topic of extensive discussion among educators and researchers for several decades. Literature is widely recognized for its potential to enhance language learning by providing authentic and engaging materials that reflect real-life experiences and cultural contexts (Violetta-Irene, 2015). Over the years, numerous studies have highlighted the positive impact of literary texts on second or foreign language acquisition, emphasizing their role in developing linguistic, cultural, and cognitive skills (Gilroy & Parkinson, 1997; Hall, 2015a; Rehan, 2022; Schultz, 2002). For instance, Maley (1989) identified several characteristics of literature that make it a powerful tool in language education, including its universality, personal relevance, and ability to stimulate imagination and creativity. Similarly, Widdowson (1983) argued that literary texts offer a representational form of language that encourages readers to engage deeply with the material, fostering both linguistic and interpretive skills.

In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education, literature has been shown to play a crucial role in enhancing students' language proficiency, cultural awareness, and critical thinking abilities (Carter, 2007; Hasan & Hasan, 2019). Literary texts provide learners with opportunities to explore diverse linguistic structures, expand their vocabulary, and develop a deeper understanding of the target language's cultural nuances (Takahashi, 2015; Mohammed & Ahmed, 2019). Moreover, integrating literature in EFL classrooms has been associated with increased student motivation and engagement, as

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literary works often resonate with learners on a personal level, making the language learning process more meaningful and enjoyable (Gangola, 2015; Jewett, 2017).

Despite the recognized benefits of incorporating literature into language teaching, there remains a need to explore teachers' perceptions of its effectiveness, particularly in specific EFL contexts such as Iraq. While some studies have investigated teachers' attitudes toward the use of literature in language education (Hussein & Al-Ali, 2021; Kaya, 2018; Zengin et al., 2019), there is limited research focusing on Iraqi EFL teachers' views on the integration of literary texts in their teaching practices. This study aims to address this gap by examining the perceptions of Iraqi EFL preparatory school teachers regarding the inclusion of literature in English textbooks. By doing so, it seeks to provide valuable insights into how literature can be effectively utilized to enhance English language learning in Iraq, while also offering recommendations for curriculum designers and policymakers to improve the quality and relevance of literary content in EFL textbooks.

### **Statement of the problem**

The integration of literature into English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching has been widely recognized for its potential to enhance language learning by providing authentic materials that reflect real-life experiences and cultural contexts (Violetta-Irene, 2015). However, in the Iraqi EFL context, there is a lack of research on how teachers perceive the inclusion of literary texts in English textbooks. While studies have explored teachers' perceptions of literature in other EFL contexts (Hussein & Al-Ali, 2021; Kaya, 2018; Zengin et al., 2019), little attention has been given to Iraqi EFL teachers' views on the relevance and quality of literature spots in their textbooks. This gap in research raises questions about the effectiveness of the current literary content in Iraqi English textbooks and whether it meets the needs of both teachers and students. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the perceptions of Iraqi EFL preparatory school teachers regarding the integration of literature in their teaching materials and to identify areas for improvement.

### **Purposes of the Study**

The primary purpose of this study is to explore the perceptions of Iraqi EFL preparatory school teachers regarding the inclusion of literature spots in Iraqi English textbooks. Specifically, the study seeks to:

- a. Understand how teachers perceive the role of literature in enhancing students' language proficiency.
- b. Examine teachers' views on the relevance and quality of the literary content in the textbooks.
- c. Identify the challenges teachers face when teaching literature in the EFL classroom.
- d. Provide recommendations for improving the integration of literature in Iraqi EFL textbooks.

### **Aims of the Study**

The study aims to:

- a. Investigate the extent to which Iraqi EFL teachers believe literature contributes to students' linguistic, cultural, and personal development.
- b. Assess the quality and relevance of the literature spots in Iraqi English textbooks from the teachers' perspective.
- c. Highlight the potential benefits and drawbacks of using literary texts in the EFL classroom.
- d. Offer insights for curriculum designers and policymakers to improve the integration of literature in EFL teaching materials.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study is significant for several reasons:

- a. For Teachers: It provides insights into how Iraqi EFL teachers perceive the use of literature in their teaching, which can help them better utilize literary texts to enhance students' language skills and cultural awareness.
- b. For Curriculum Designers: The findings can inform the development of more effective and engaging literary content in EFL textbooks, ensuring that the materials are relevant and beneficial for students.
- c. For Policymakers: The study highlights the importance of integrating literature into the EFL curriculum and suggests ways to improve the quality of literary content in textbooks.
- d. For Researchers: It contributes to the growing body of research on the role of literature in EFL teaching, particularly in the Iraqi context, and encourages further studies on this topic.

### Research Questions

The study seeks to answer the following research question:

What perceptions do Iraqi EFL preparatory school teachers hold about literature spots in Iraqi English textbooks?

### Hypothesis

**H1** -Iraqi EFL teachers have positive perceptions of the integration of literature in English textbooks.

### Review of Literature

#### Integrating Literature in EFL Courses Language

The integration of literature into English as a Foreign Language (EFL) courses has been a subject of extensive research and discussion. Literature has long been recognized as a valuable tool for language learning, offering authentic and engaging materials that reflect real-life experiences and cultural contexts (Violetta-Irene, 2015). Over the years, various models have been proposed to incorporate literature into language teaching. For instance, Duff and Maley (1990) introduced the "Integrated Model," which emphasizes the dual focus on language and meaning, as opposed to merely teaching language through literature. Similarly, Carter and Long (1991) proposed three models for teaching literature: the cultural model, the language model, and the personal growth model. These models highlight the multifaceted benefits of literature, including enhancing language proficiency, fostering cultural awareness, and promoting personal development (Ali, 2020).

Moreover, literary texts are considered authentic materials that provide learners with real-life language samples, which are crucial for developing communicative competence (Collie & Slater, 1987). The experiential approach to language learning prioritizes the use of authentic materials, as they promote real interaction and deeper engagement in communication experiences (Daskalovska & Dimova, 2012). Literature, with its rich and varied language, helps learners improve their linguistic skills, including vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation, while also encouraging critical thinking and creativity (Maley, 1989; Lazar, 1999).

#### Literature and EFL Textbooks in Iraq

In Iraq, the integration of literature into EFL textbooks has been a relatively recent development. The Iraqi Ministry of Education introduced a new curriculum and EFL textbooks titled "English for Iraq" in 2012. These textbooks, designed for students in grades 7 to 12, include sections dedicated to literature, referred to as "literature spots" (Sharhan & Jarfeshan, 2024). These sections feature excerpts from both national and international literary works, including poems, short stories, and plays. However, the inclusion of literature in Iraqi EFL textbooks is limited, with only three preparatory-level books containing literary content.

The literature spots in these textbooks aim to enhance students' language skills and cultural awareness. However, the quality and quantity of the literary content have been

questioned by teachers. Many educators believe that the literary texts are poorly compiled and require significant revision to meet the learning objectives (Sharhan & Jarfeshan, 2024). Despite these challenges, the inclusion of literature in Iraqi EFL textbooks represents a step toward enriching the language learning experience and exposing students to diverse cultural perspectives.

### **Related Studies**

Several studies have explored the role of literature in EFL teaching and its impact on language learning. For example, Babaei and Yahya (2014) emphasized the significance of literature in foreign language teaching, arguing that it helps learners develop linguistic, cultural, and cognitive skills. Similarly, Hasan and Hasan (2019) found that integrating literature into EFL courses enhances students' personal growth, critical thinking, and cultural awareness.

In the context of Iraq, few studies have investigated teachers' perceptions of literature in EFL textbooks. Hussein and Al-Ali (2021) examined the cultural and literary content in Iraqi EFL textbooks and highlighted the need for more diverse and engaging literary materials. Additionally, Kaya (2018) and Zengin et al. (2019) explored teachers' attitudes toward the use of literature in EFL classrooms, finding that while many educators recognize the benefits of literature, they often face challenges in implementing it effectively due to time constraints and inadequate resources.

A study conducted by Sharhan and Jarfeshan (2024) to examine the perceptions of Iraqi EFL preparatory school teachers regarding the integration of literature in Iraqi English textbooks. The findings reveal that Iraqi teachers generally hold positive perceptions of literature, believing that it enhances students' linguistic development, cultural awareness, and personal growth. However, the study also highlights significant concerns about the quality and relevance of the literature spots in the textbooks. Many teachers reported that the literary content is poorly compiled and lacks sufficient depth, which undermines its effectiveness in achieving the intended learning objectives. Furthermore, the study found that teachers often face challenges such as limited time and resources when teaching literature, which affects their ability to fully utilize literary texts in the classroom.

These findings align with previous research, such as Yildirim (2012), who noted that literary texts in EFL textbooks are often limited in quantity and confined to upper-intermediate levels. Similarly, Masuhara et al. (2007) and Gümüşok (2013) found that many EFL textbooks lack sufficient literary content, which limits their potential to engage students and foster deeper language learning.

## **2. Materials and Methods**

### **Research Design**

The study conducted a quantitative research design to investigate the perceptions of Iraqi EFL preparatory school teachers regarding the integration of literature in Iraqi English textbooks. The research is based on a survey method, utilizing a questionnaire as the primary data collection tool. The questionnaire is designed to gather insights into teachers' perceptions of the linguistic, cultural, personal, and individual growth benefits of literature in EFL teaching.

### **Participants**

The participants of the study consist of 58 Iraqi EFL teachers from various high schools in Najaf City, Iraq. The sample includes 40 female teachers and 18 male teachers, all of whom teach English at the preparatory level. The participants were selected using a convenience sampling method. They were selected randomly.

**Table 1.** Demographic Information about the Participants.

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	40	69.0%
	Male	18	31.0%

### Instruments

**Table 2.** English for Iraq-6<sup>th</sup> preparatory (students' book) by Johnston and Messieres (2015).

Page/Lesson	Author	Published/Original Title	Course Book Material	Genre
Section A - Pages 85, 86, 87	Mohammed Khudhair	Literature Focus - The Swing	English for Iraq-6th preparatory	Poetry
Section B - Pages 89, 90	Katherine Mansfield	The Canary	English for Iraq-6th preparatory	Poetry

The third preparatory-level textbook, titled "English for Iraq", was originally written by Olivia Johnston and Caroline de Messieres and later revised by the Editorial and Adaptation Committee of the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Iraq in 2013. The textbook consists of 135 pages, organized into eight units, with each unit spanning 10 to 15 pages. The literature section begins on page 87 and covers 8 pages, featuring excerpts from the works of two national authors. These literary extracts are included to provide students with exposure to literary content as part of their English language curriculum.

### Questionnaire

The questionnaire used in this study, developed by Sharhan and Janfeshan (2024), consists of 30 closed-ended questions based on a five-point Likert scale, divided into four themes: Linguistic Development, Appreciation of Different Cultures, Personal Involvement, and Individual Growth see appendix (A). Three PhD instructors from Kufa University were consulted for evaluation and validation.

**Table 3.** Cronbach's Alpha.

Theme	Cronbach's Alpha ( $\alpha$ )
1. Linguistic Development	0.87
2. Appreciation of Different Cultures	0.85
3. Personal Involvement	0.93
4. Individual Growth	0.89

### Procedure

The data collection process was conducted as follows: the researchers created a Telegram group to communicate with the participants, explaining the study's objectives and emphasizing voluntary participation. A Google Form link containing the Arabic version of the questionnaire was shared with participants via the Telegram group, and they were given one week to complete it. Before the main data collection, the questionnaire was piloted with 10 teachers to identify and address any ambiguities or issues, and feedback from the pilot study was used to refine the questionnaire. After the data collection period, the responses were analyzed using SPSS software to obtain descriptive statistics and other relevant results.



### 3. Results

**Table 4.** Questionnaire on Teachers' Perceptions of Literature (Items 1-11).

Statement	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neutral (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)	Mean Score
1. Literature enhances students' overall English proficiency.	2 (3.4%)	4 (6.9%)	6 (10.3%)	30 (51.7%)	16 (27.6%)	3.94
2. Integrating literature improves writing, reading, speaking.	1 (1.7%)	3 (5.2%)	7 (12.1%)	32 (55.2%)	15 (25.9%)	3.98
3. Literary texts contribute to learners' English proficiency.	2 (3.4%)	4 (6.9%)	8 (13.8%)	28 (48.3%)	16 (27.6%)	3.90
4. Literary texts beyond proficiency level reduce motivation.	6 (10.3%)	9 (15.5%)	12 (20.7%)	20 (34.5%)	11 (19.0%)	3.36
5. Literature introduces new vocabulary.	1 (1.7%)	3 (5.2%)	6 (10.3%)	30 (51.7%)	18 (31.0%)	4.05
6. Literature in preparatory textbooks enhances vocabulary.	2 (3.4%)	5 (8.6%)	9 (15.5%)	28 (48.3%)	14 (24.1%)	3.81
7. Some students question the relevance of literature.	4 (6.9%)	6 (10.3%)	12 (20.7%)	22 (37.9%)	14 (24.1%)	3.62
8. Some students find literary texts uninteresting.	5 (8.6%)	8 (13.8%)	14 (24.1%)	18 (31.0%)	13 (22.4%)	3.45
9. Students encounter challenges in understanding literature.	4 (6.9%)	7 (12.1%)	10 (17.2%)	25 (43.1%)	12 (20.7%)	3.58
10. Literature provides authentic language use.	1 (1.7%)	3 (5.2%)	6 (10.3%)	30 (51.7%)	18 (31.0%)	4.05
11. Teaching literature encourages meaning-focused learning.	2 (3.4%)	4 (6.9%)	7 (12.1%)	30 (51.7%)	15 (25.9%)	3.90

Teachers strongly believe that literature enhances students' overall English proficiency, particularly in vocabulary development and authentic language use (mean scores: 3.94–4.05). However, there are concerns about the difficulty of literary texts, as some teachers noted that texts beyond students' proficiency levels can reduce motivation (mean: 3.36). Additionally, some students find literary texts uninteresting or question their relevance to language learning (means: 3.45–3.62).

**Table 5.** Iraqi Teachers' Perception of the Impact of Teaching Literature on Cultural Appreciation (Items 12-16).

Statement	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neutral (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)	Mean Score
12. Literature broadens students' perspectives on culture.	1 (1.7%)	4 (6.9%)	6 (10.3%)	30 (51.7%)	17 (29.3%)	4.00
13. Literature promotes tolerance.	2 (3.4%)	5 (8.6%)	8 (13.8%)	28 (48.3%)	15 (25.9%)	3.84
14. Literary texts enrich general knowledge of English cultures.	2 (3.4%)	5 (8.6%)	7 (12.1%)	28 (48.3%)	16 (27.6%)	3.88
15. Literature allows students to compare cultures.	3 (5.2%)	6 (10.3%)	8 (13.8%)	28 (48.3%)	13 (22.4%)	3.72
16. Literature has little impact on cultural understanding.	9 (15.5%)	14 (24.1%)	16 (27.6%)	12 (20.7%)	7 (12.1%)	2.90

Teachers generally agree that literature broadens students' cultural perspectives and promotes tolerance (mean scores: **3.72–4.00**). However, a significant portion of teachers (mean: **2.90**) believe that literature has little impact on cultural understanding, suggesting that the cultural content in the textbooks may need to be more engaging or relevant to students' experiences.

**Table 6.** Iraqi Teachers' Perception of the Effects of Teaching Literature on Personal Involvement (Items 17-24).

Statement	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neutral (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)	Mean Score
17. Literature makes lessons more engaging.	1 (1.7%)	3 (5.2%)	6 (10.3%)	30 (51.7%)	18 (31.0%)	4.05
18. Literature supports personal growth.	2 (3.4%)	4 (6.9%)	8 (13.8%)	30 (51.7%)	14 (24.1%)	3.86
19. Reading literature encourages imagination.	1 (1.7%)	4 (6.9%)	7 (12.1%)	30 (51.7%)	16 (27.6%)	3.97
20. Students enjoy lessons more with literature.	2 (3.4%)	6 (10.3%)	8 (13.8%)	26 (44.8%)	16 (27.6%)	3.83
21. Some students believe literature is unrelated to language learning.	6 (10.3%)	8 (13.8%)	14 (24.1%)	17 (29.3%)	13 (22.4%)	3.40
22. Studying literature contributes to personal development.	2 (3.4%)	4 (6.9%)	7 (12.1%)	30 (51.7%)	15 (25.9%)	3.91
23. Literature enhances creativity and imagination.	1 (1.7%)	3 (5.2%)	6 (10.3%)	30 (51.7%)	18 (31.0%)	4.05
24. Literature improves interpretative and analytical skills.	2 (3.4%)	4 (6.9%)	8 (13.8%)	28 (48.3%)	16 (27.6%)	3.90

Teachers perceive literature as highly effective in engaging students and fostering personal development, with mean scores ranging from **3.83 to 4.05**. However, some students still struggle to see the relevance of literature to language learning (mean: **3.40**), indicating a need for better alignment between literary content and language learning objectives.

**Table 7.** Iraqi Teachers' Perception of the Impact of Teaching Literature on Individual Growth (Items 25-30).

Statement	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neutral (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)	Mean Score
25. Literature encourages reflection on society.	2 (3.4%)	5 (8.6%)	7 (12.1%)	28 (48.3%)	16 (27.6%)	3.88
26. Literature fosters self-awareness.	2 (3.4%)	4 (6.9%)	8 (13.8%)	28 (48.3%)	16 (27.6%)	3.90
27. Reading literature helps appreciate values.	1 (1.7%)	3 (5.2%)	8 (13.8%)	28 (48.3%)	18 (31.0%)	4.01
28. Engaging with literature inspires ideas.	1 (1.7%)	3 (5.2%)	6 (10.3%)	30 (51.7%)	18 (31.0%)	4.05
29. Reading literature boosts confidence.	2 (3.4%)	4 (6.9%)	7 (12.1%)	30 (51.7%)	15 (25.9%)	3.90

30. Exposure to English literature evokes emotions.	1 (1.7%)	3 (5.2%)	6 (10.3%)	30 (51.7%)	18 (31.0%)	4.05
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Teachers strongly agree that literature fosters self-awareness, creativity, and emotional engagement, with mean scores ranging from **3.88 to 4.05**. These results highlight the role of literature in promoting individual growth and critical thinking among students.

#### 4. Discussion

The study's findings that literature enhances students' overall English proficiency, particularly in vocabulary development and authentic language use (mean scores: 3.94–4.05), agree with the work of Maley (1989) and Carter (2007), who emphasized the role of literature in improving linguistic skills such as vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation. Similarly, Takahashi (2015) and Mohammed & Ahmed (2019) found that literary texts provide learners with opportunities to explore diverse linguistic structures and expand their vocabulary, which supports the current study's results.

The study's results showing that literature broadens students' cultural perspectives and promotes tolerance (mean scores: 3.72–4.00) agree with the findings of Hasan & Hasan (2019), who argued that integrating literature into EFL courses enhances students' cultural awareness. Additionally, Babaee & Yahya (2014) emphasized the significance of literature in fostering multicultural understanding, which is reflected in the current study's findings.

The study's findings that literature fosters personal development, creativity, and emotional engagement (mean scores: 3.83–4.05) agree with Gangola (2015) and Jewett (2017), who highlighted the role of literature in engaging students on a personal level and making the language learning process more meaningful. Furthermore, Lazar (1999) and Duff & Maley (1990) argued that literature encourages critical thinking and creativity, which agrees with the current study's results.

The study's findings regarding the challenges teachers face, such as the difficulty of literary texts and students' lack of interest (means: 3.36–3.62), agree with the work of Hussein & Al-Ali (2021) and Kaya (2018), who noted that teachers often struggle with time constraints and inadequate resources when integrating literature into their teaching. Similarly, Yildirim (2012) and Masuhara et al. (2007) found that literary texts in EFL textbooks are often limited in quantity and quality, which undermines their effectiveness.

While the study found that most teachers agree literature broadens cultural perspectives (mean: 4.00), a significant portion of teachers (mean: 2.90) believe that literature has little impact on cultural understanding. This finding contrasts with Byram (1997), who argued that literature is a powerful tool for developing cultural awareness. The discrepancy may be due to the limited and poorly compiled literary content in Iraqi EFL textbooks, as highlighted by Sharhan & Jarfeshan (2024).

The study's finding that some students question the relevance of literature to language learning (mean: 3.40) contrasts with Carter & Long (1991), who argued that literature is inherently linked to language learning and provides authentic materials for developing communicative competence. This disagreement may stem from the lack of alignment between literary content and language learning objectives in the Iraqi EFL curriculum, as noted by Hussein & Al-Ali (2021).

#### 5. Conclusion

The findings of this study highlight the significant role that literature can play in enhancing English language learning in Iraqi EFL classrooms. Teachers generally perceive literature as a valuable tool for improving students' linguistic skills, cultural awareness, and personal growth. However, the study also identifies several challenges, including the



perceived lack of quality and relevance of literary texts in the current textbooks, as well as practical issues such as limited time and resources for teaching literature.

To address these challenges, it is recommended that curriculum designers and policymakers focus on improving the quality and diversity of literary content in EFL textbooks. Additionally, providing teachers with more training and resources to effectively integrate literature into their teaching practices could further enhance the benefits of using literary texts in the classroom. By addressing these issues, the integration of literature in Iraqi EFL education can be optimized to better support students' language learning and overall development.

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