DOCTORAL DISSERTATION
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THE ROLE OF USING LITERATURE IN EFL CLASSES FOR DEVELOPING ENGLISH MAJOR UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' CRITICAL READING AND INTERPRETATION SKILLS: A STUDY OF PERCEPTIONS AND PRACTICES

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1 Introduction

First-year English majors, who speak English as a foreign language, have to meet various expectations and face different challenges when they enter tertiary education, for instance, reading English literature and participating in literature classes. Secondary schools in Hungary cannot be expected to prepare students for subject specific skills as they have to focus on preparing the students for final exams and language exams in EFL, thus first-year English majors tend to experience difficulties related to reading in the target language. Apart from language-related difficulties, the students may encounter other obstacles as various genres are accessed in different manners (Hall, 2005). English major students need different reading strategies when they read literature from the ones that they apply when reading a text in their EFL coursebook. One proposed solution to their reading-related problems is the inclusion of literary texts in their English language development courses at university. Nevertheless, despite the rediscovery of literature in foreign language teaching (Bloemert et al., 2017), this is still an understudied area in Hungary.

The main purpose of the study was to investigate the role of literature in EFL classes in university English major programmes in Hungary focusing on teachers' and first-year English majors' perceptions and teaching practices. Since the use of literature requires reading and using various reading skills and strategies, an additional aim was to investigate the students' reading practices. The research project was conducted at a university in Budapest, Hungary; and consisted of four main studies.

2 Background

2.1 The Concept of Literature

Formulating one universally acknowledged definition of literature, which covers all aspects of the complex and collective term, is a truly challenging task. As pointed out by Ross (1993), the term is constantly changing, it is changed and redefined by each school. Definitions of literature might be divided into two groups: ontological and functional definitions. Ontological definitions discuss literature as a static, unchanging term and aim to find common features that would define it (Carter, 2007; Parkinson & Reid Thomas, 2000) such as the language of literary texts, which is often considered to be different from ordinary language

(Hall, 2005). Functional definitions shift the focus onto the functions of literature and the role of the reader; in other words, the focus is on what literature does and what one can do with it (Parkinson & Reid Thomas, 2000). In the foreign language context, literature is treated as material for language teaching purposes. Language and literature are interrelated (Brumfit & Carter, 1986), therefore, literary texts provide an excellent opportunity to discuss content while also studying the language.

As the dissertation does not intend to describe the changes in the definition of literature, nor does it attempt to provide an introduction to the field of literary studies, the definitions were used to create the background of the term literature in the present context. In this dissertation, literature and literary texts indicate both the classics and contemporary texts in English that are written with creative, artistic, moral and teaching purposes in the form of traditional and experimental literary genres. Traditional genres refer to the ones included in the canon such as drama, novel, poetry; experimental literary genres signify those which do not form a part of the canon like spoken poetry, young adult fiction, graphic novel.

2.2 The Role of Literature in the EFL Classroom

Although innumerable arguments have been listed for using literary texts in the EFL classroom, first and foremost it is indispensable to clarify why literature can and should be used in the EFL classroom. Countless resources are available to an EFL teacher; thus, the questions concerning what makes literary texts unique, and why literature should be integrated into an EFL lesson arise.

What makes literary texts unique is the fact that they have five levels or stages (Littlewood, 1986). At the first stage, the focus is on the language, the reader is confronted with examples of language use. The second stage, stylistic variety refers to the fact that literary texts demonstrate various styles from the classic to the informal, thus enabling the reader to note the differences and similarities between various styles. The third level of literature is a threshold since the functions mentioned before (i.e., language use, stylistic variation) could be fulfilled by other text types or simplified texts specifically designed for the EFL classroom. However, the fourth level of a literary text takes a step further from the literal meaning of the text: upon entering the fourth level the reader faces the underlying meaning of the text such as symbols, the author's views and aims. These levels signify the different perspectives of regarding the text. A fifth level or perspective is added to the list when the literary work is placed in time and place, located in literary history and regarded as a part of the author's biography.

Another response to the question is another unique feature of literature. All kinds of texts are open to various interpretations, but literary texts offer interpretations that are impacted both by the socio-cultural context and the individual (Widdowson, 2004). Hence, literary texts offer individual interpretations. Moreover, literary texts have some merits that other mediums lack or present insufficiently; and these merits are important not only for those who intend to study literature but for any language learner. Simplified readers and coursebook texts are written specifically for L2 learners; and they present language learners with a structured copy of literature but without any literary effect (Short & Candlin, 1986).

Apart from the unique feature of literature, literary texts have a place in the foreign language classroom for various reasons. According to the literature, the use of literary texts has a positive impact on the following areas:

- language proficiency: language skills, vocabulary (Hall, 2005; McKay, 1982; McQuillan, 2020; Parkinson & Reid Thomas, 2000)
- reading skills and reading strategies (Carter, 1986)
- cultural knowledge, cultural awareness (Lazar, 1996; McKay, 1982)
- critical thinking skills (Ghosn, 2002)
- emotions (empathy, tolerance, personal involvement) (Delanoy, 2018; Ghosn, 2002; Kramsch, 1993; Lazar, 1996)

2.3 Reading Skills and Strategies

As pointed out by Afflerbach et al. (2008), there is confusion and inconsistency in the use of terms *skills* and *strategies*. Indeed, the difference between skills and strategies is not easy to determine in many cases (Grabe, 2009) for the two concepts are frequently convergent; nonetheless, there are some significant differences that must be noted.

Numerous definitions highlight that reading skills are activated unconsciously while reading strategies are applied to a text consciously and deliberately (Grabe, 2009: Paris et al., 1991). Skills are activated while reading automatically and not because of a conscious decision made by the reader (Paris et al., 1991). Strategies are applied as a result of a conscious decision that the reader makes to solve a problem or difficulty while reading. Although these definitions differentiate between skills and strategies, it has to be remarked that skills and strategies are also related. Skills are usually automatic for skilled readers; however, first, focused attention and conscious decisions are needed for their development (Grabe, 2009). Furthermore, it should be added that strategies could develop into skills later on (Grabe, 2009).

Reading for various purposes results in different types of reading, which require various reading skills, particularly in academic contexts. Focusing on the academic context, six major reading purposes can be distinguished (Grabe, 2009) which necessitate different reading skills. The following reading purposes and the required skills are distinguished (Grabe, 2009):

- reading in order to find information (skimming, scanning)
- reading for quick understanding (skimming)
- reading in order to learn (complex skills such as organising and recalling information, activating background knowledge)
- reading to integrate information (synthesise and integrate information)
- reading to evaluate, critique and use information (complex skills such as connecting new information to background knowledge, reflecting on text information)
- reading for general comprehension

These reading purposes are relevant to English majors as well, especially when they have to read literature or academic texts in their courses. Since they are EFL students, reading for general comprehension is part of their daily activities. It is important to add that reading for general text comprehension is often regarded as an easy process, however, it is not easy at all (Grabe, 2009). It requires several complex reading processes from the reader that become automatic with practice, but they are essential for all L2 readers as they form a solid basis for the remaining reading purposes and reading types (Grabe, 2009).

Although the two terms, *skills* and *strategies* have been distinguished as presented above, it must be pointed out that both skills and strategies are vitally needed and must be balanced for successful reading (Afflerbach et. al., 2008). Accomplished readers have to be capable of shifting between the two as required by the text and the reading situation: in the case of solid background knowledge or an easy text, readers are likely to rely on their skills while reading; and in the case of a demanding text or task, readers use reading strategies (Afflerbach et al., 2008). The main purpose of teaching and developing reading skills and strategies is to nurture strategic readers who are able to select the necessary and appropriate strategies in various reading situations (Paris et al., 1991).

2.4 Rationale for the Study and Research Niche

Although the main purpose of the project was to explore the role of literature in the EFL classroom, the study also aimed to investigate whether first-year English majors are prepared for academic reading, whether their reading abilities and their EFL and literature tutors' requirements meet. The focus of the research was on first-year English majors (including the students enrolled in the English Studies BA Programme and the Teacher Training Programme) for the following reason.

Secondary EFL lessons equip students with some reading skills, but the main aim is to prepare students for exams and not for English major programmes. In English study programmes literature is mainly discussed as literature and it is supposed that the students have reached the necessary language knowledge, reading skills and strategies to read and discuss literature. The research project aimed to provide some insight into the difficulties first-year students face in literature lessons as well as provide some solutions to these issues. The use of literary texts in the language classroom may be one of these solutions.

The study intended to fill some research gaps as well. Regarding the Hungarian context, reading habits, reading skills and strategies of university students have been researched before (Hódi & Tóth, 2019; Kóródi & Herczeg, 2006; Nagy, 1998; Szűcs, 2017). Nevertheless, no study has been found that investigated English majors' reading habits; moreover, no study has been found that explored both reading habits and reading skills. This study intends to fill these gaps. Regarding the use of literature in the foreign language classroom, there is a dearth of research in the Hungarian context. Although some studies have addressed the use of literary texts in foreign language teaching and propose some pedagogical implications (Kovács, 2014; Lipócziné, 2019; Szénási, 2012;), no research has been carried out in the Hungarian context that examined EFL students' and EFL teachers' perceptions and practices of using literary texts in their EFL lessons. Two of the studies in this research project intended to fill this void.

3 Research Design and Methods

The main purpose of the study was to investigate the role of literature in EFL classes in university English major programmes in Hungary focusing on teachers' and students' perceptions and teaching practices. In accordance with the main aim of the study and based on the literature, the study sought to find answers to the following research questions (RQs):

RQ 1 What are the reading habits of first-year English major university students?

RQ 1.1 What are the reading preferences of first-year English major university students in terms of genres that they choose to read in Hungarian and in English?

RQ 1.2 What factors motivate first-year English major university students to read in English?

RQ 2 How do first-year English major university students perceive their reading skills and strategies in English?

RQ 2.1 What views do first-year English major university students have on their reading skills in English?

RQ 2.2 What reading strategies do first-year English major university students use while reading in English?

RQ 3 What reading skills and strategies do EFL and literature tutors expect from English major university students?

RQ 4 How do EFL and literature tutors perceive the reading skills and strategies of English major university students?

RQ 5 How can the use of literary texts develop first-year English major university students' language skills in university EFL courses?

RQ 5.1 What are EFL tutors' perceptions and practices of using literary texts in EFL classes for students in English major programmes?

RQ 5.2 What are first-year English major university students' perceptions of using literary texts in their EFL classes?

The aim of the **first research question** and its sub-questions was to explore the students' reading background in Hungarian and in English: what type of texts they read in Hungarian and in English, how often they read in both languages and what factors motivate them to read in English. The **second research question** and its sub-questions focused on reading skills and strategies applied while reading in English from the students' perspective. The **third research question** addressed the expectations connected to reading skills and strategies of EFL and literature tutors. The **fourth research question** explored the experience of literature tutors in relation to their students' reading skills and strategies used in literature lessons. The **fifth research question** and its sub-questions inquired into the use of literary texts in the EFL classroom. They explored EFL tutors' views and classroom practices, and first-year English majors' perceptions of using literary texts in their EFL classes.

Given the complex issues that the research project addressed, it followed the mixed-methods approach, so both qualitative and quantitative approaches were used (Creswell, 2009). In order to answer the research questions, four studies were carried out. A comprehensive summary of the studies is presented in Table 1.

Table 1

A Summary of Studies 1-4

Studies	Research questions	Methods of data collection	Participants	Methods of data analysis
Study 1	Reading habits (RQ 1; RQ 1.1; RQ 1.2) Reading skills and strategies (RQ 2; RQ 2.1; RQ 2.2) The use of literature (RQ 5; RQ 5.2)	student questionnaire	253 first-year English majors	descriptive statistical analysis inferential statistical analysis
Study 2	Reading habits (RQ 1; RQ 1.2) The tutors' expectations (RQ 3) Reading skills and strategies (RQ 4) The use of literature (RQ 5; 5.1)	semi-structured interviews with EFL and literature tutors	4 literature tutors 4 EFL tutors	thematic content analysis
Study 3	The use of literature (RQ 5; RQ 5.1; RQ 5.2)	action research student feedback research journal	15-16 first-year English majors	descriptive and interpretative analysis thematic content analysis of the research journal
Study 4	The use of literature (RQ 5; RQ 5.1; RQ 5.2)	extended action research semi-structured interviews student feedback	3 EFL tutors and their first-year students	descriptive and interpretative analysis thematic content analysis

As it can be seen in Table 1, first a **questionnaire study** was conducted with first-year university students enrolled in English major programmes in an attempt to answer research questions 1, 2 and partly 5. Altogether 253 first-year students took part in the study. The data gained from the questionnaires were submitted to descriptive statistical analysis as well as to inferential statistical analysis with the help of SPSS 28.

In Study 2 the focus was on EFL and literature tutors; an **interview study** was carried out involving four EFL and four literature tutors. The interview study sought answers to

research questions 3, 4 and partially 5. The interview study involved 8 tutors who all had first-year courses. The data were submitted to thematic content analysis.

The third and the fourth phases were linked together. The third phase consisted of **action research**: I carried out a longitudinal classroom study in which I experimented with literary texts and worksheets in my first-year *Language Practice* groups. After each lesson, anonymous feedback was sought from the students which was complemented by a research journal. The feedback forms were submitted to descriptive statistical analysis; the entries from the research journal were submitted to thematic content analysis.

The fourth phase took the form of **extended classroom research** involving three EFL teachers who used the texts that I prepared in their classes, collected anonymous feedback from their students and then they were also interviewed. Descriptive statistical analysis was performed on the data from the feedback forms; the interviews were submitted to thematic content analysis. Studies 3 and 4 - complemented by the previously gained data- aimed to answer research question 5.

4 Main Results

4.1 First-Year English Majors' Reading Habits

The first research question set out to explore the reading habits of the students with the help of the questionnaire study. Regarding languages, the students tend to read more at weekends than on weekdays both in Hungarian (M=2.24, SD=.96; M=1.79, SD=.85) and in English (M=2.47, SD=1.00; M=2.21, SD=.98). No significant difference was found between the students' proficiency level and the amount of reading time. Moreover, only weak correlations were found between the students' reading time in Hungarian and in English. The respondents were also contrasted based on their field of studies, so the differences between trainee teachers and English studies majors were also examined. Focusing on the time spent on reading, three significant differences were established related to the following items: reading in Hungarian on weekdays, reading in English both on weekdays and at weekends. Based on the data, trainee teachers read more in Hungarian on weekdays (M=1.97, SD=.93) than English majors do (M=1.58, SD=.67). Nevertheless, English majors spend more time reading in English both on weekdays (M=2.44, SD=1.02) and at weekends (M=2.71, SD=1.01) than trainee teachers on weekdays (M=2.05, SD=.94) and at weekends (M=2.30, SD=.98). Moreover, the data show that both groups read more at weekends than on weekdays. When we take a closer look at the languages, it can be seen that both groups read more in English than in Hungarian

on weekdays; however, trainee teachers seem to read slightly more in Hungarian at weekends than in English. Perhaps not surprisingly, English majors read more in English both on weekdays and at weekends than in Hungarian.

No significant difference was found between the genres read in Hungarian and the ones read in English, which suggests that the language does not impact the students' genre preferences. But moderate relationships were found which implies that the students tend to read and avoid the same genres in both languages. Regarding the students' motivation for reading, the results show that most students read prose for pleasure, drama because it is mandatory. An interesting difference was found in the case of poetry: most students read poems in Hungarian for pleasure, in English because they are compulsory.

Considering the main genres, novel is in favour both in Hungarian and in English followed by poems. Focusing on the subgenres in Hungarian, romantic stories and fantasies seem to be the most well-liked ones. Romantic stories in English are favoured by the students followed by fantasy. A significant difference ($p< .05$) was found between the male and female students regarding romantic stories read in Hungarian and science fiction read in English. There was no significant difference found between the two groups in terms of other genres. Some additional genres were also added by the respondents including the classics, articles and manga.

Regarding the students' motivation for reading, the results show that the love for reading is the most impactful factor in motivation for reading in English (M=4.25, SD=1.02) followed by knowledge-related factors, especially language followed by the sense of accomplishment. When the results of the three groups that involve motivational factors (i.e., amotivation, extrinsic motivation and intrinsic motivation) are compared, it can be seen that the items related to intrinsic motivation yielded the highest mean values. Extrinsic motivation, especially identified regulation seems to be also determinant, while amotivation does not seem to be common among the students. In Study 1, the impediment that prevents the students from reading more in English is lack of time (M=3.33, SD=1.35). The least determinant factor is their lack of interest in reading (M=1.37, SD=.84). Similarly, lack of time affects the reading time in Hungarian (M=3.59, SD=1.30). Lack of time is commonly mentioned as an obstacle to reading in other studies, too (Huang et al., 2014). Although the reasons for not having a sufficient amount of time were not sought, the results clearly show that it has an impact on the students' reading time both in Hungarian and in English.

The literature and EFL tutors' responses related to their students' reading habits varied. Most tutors relied on their impressions; however, two literature tutors ask their students about their favourite books. They said that most of their students mention classic Hungarian literature

especially from the 20th century or popular literature. The EFL tutors added the same examples. The interviewees also mentioned that reading habits had changed: the fact that students read on small screens has an impact on their reading skills, other narratives had become more influential than books (such as films or video games).

4.2 First-Year English Majors' Reading Skills and Reading Strategies

The second research question focused on the students' perceptions of their reading skills and strategies. The results of the questionnaire study show that the students seem to be rather confident about their reading skills, especially about understanding the gist of a text (M=4.14, SD=.76) followed by forming an opinion about a text (M=4.08, SD=.92). The areas that they feel the least assured about are related to text analysis: identifying the style (M=3.40, SD=1.00) and the structure of a text (M=3.44, SD=.99). Considering reading strategies, most students use strategies related to text comprehension. The most widely used strategies include decoding unknown vocabulary items based on the context (M=4.37, SD=.78) and rereading the challenging parts of a text (M=4.21, SD=1.00). The least frequently used strategy is highlighting important information while reading (M=2.24, SD=1.26) followed by summarising the gist of a text (M=2.34, SD=1.19). There are also some significant differences between female and male students. For example, female students are more likely to highlight important information during reading than male students.

4.3 EFL and Literature Tutors' Expectations and Experience

The tutors' expectations were addressed by the third research question. The tutors' expectations can be grouped into four main categories: knowledge, attitude, skills and strategies. Both EFL and literature tutors mentioned *background knowledge*, *appropriate language skills*, *critical thinking skills*, *text analysis*, *dictionary skills*. Apart from similarities, some notable differences between EFL and literature tutors were also observed. On the whole, the EFL teachers listed more reading strategies on their own, they were more confident about and familiar with these strategies than the literature tutors. Another surprising difference involved three EFL teachers who mentioned that it is important that students understand the gist of a text whereas the literature tutors complained about students not understanding the text word for word but focusing only on the gist. As one EFL tutors highlighted: students seem to be accustomed to focusing only on the gist, which may be related to the fact that they are trained to do so in secondary EFL classes; nevertheless, this may cause some severe difficulties for

them in university classes where they need thorough and deep understanding of the texts in their content subjects.

In the interviews, the participants often reflected on what skills and strategies are needed for one in their lessons, they often drew parallels between the requirements and the actual situation. Table 2 presents both the tutors' expectations and their perceptions of the actual classroom situations.

Table 2

The EFL and Literature Tutors' Expectations and Classroom Experience

	Expectations	Perceptions
Knowledge	- background knowledge - text structure	lack of background knowledge
Attitudes	- being critical - being curious - being open-minded	- lack of interest, attention and focus - problems with motivation - overall attitude towards reading
Skills	- language skills - study skills - critical thinking skills - forming an opinion and discussing it - text analysis	- language difficulties - lack of appropriate study skills
Strategies	- checking vocabulary - rereading - focusing on the gist - understanding the text - understanding the text word for word - note taking strategies - asking questions about the text - dictionary skills - seeing the text as a whole - selecting key words	- reading superficially (focusing on the gist) - problems with finding key words

Numerous items from the list of requirements were mentioned as problems that inhibit reading in academic literary and language lessons. According to the tutors, many first-year students have difficulties in text comprehension due to language difficulties. Some of these language problems are related to vocabulary. Based on their experience, the students do not use dictionaries; more importantly, some do not know how to use a dictionary. Some issues in

reading are related to the lack of background and conceptual knowledge. Nonetheless, based on the interviews one requirement is met by the students: forming an opinion and discussing it. The tutors agreed that most of their students seem to have an opinion about the texts they read, however, they are not always able to justify it as they do not have the necessary background knowledge to support their opinions or they do not comprehend the text word for word.

4.4 The Use of Literature in the University EFL Classroom

The results of Studies 2, 3 and 4 provided some insight into the benefits and problems of using literature in the EFL classroom. All the four EFL tutors who took part in Study 2 and Study 4 had some previous experience of using literature for language teaching purposes. The tutors all agreed that literature can be an excellent source, however, there are some impediments and challenges that teachers face. The tutors' responses are presented in Figure 1. Among the advantages, language-related benefits were mentioned such as vocabulary building, skills development. Non-language related benefits involved creativity and motivation. The versatility of literary texts must be highlighted. The tutors' lesson plans as well as their accounts showed that literature can be used for various purposes and in various ways in a language lesson. The same texts were used in Studies 3 and 4, but the activities were really different. The tutors approached the texts differently, they focused on different aspects, which resulted in various activities and lesson plans.

Figure 1

The Benefits and Drawbacks of Using Literature in the EFL Classroom (based on Studies 2, 3 and 4)
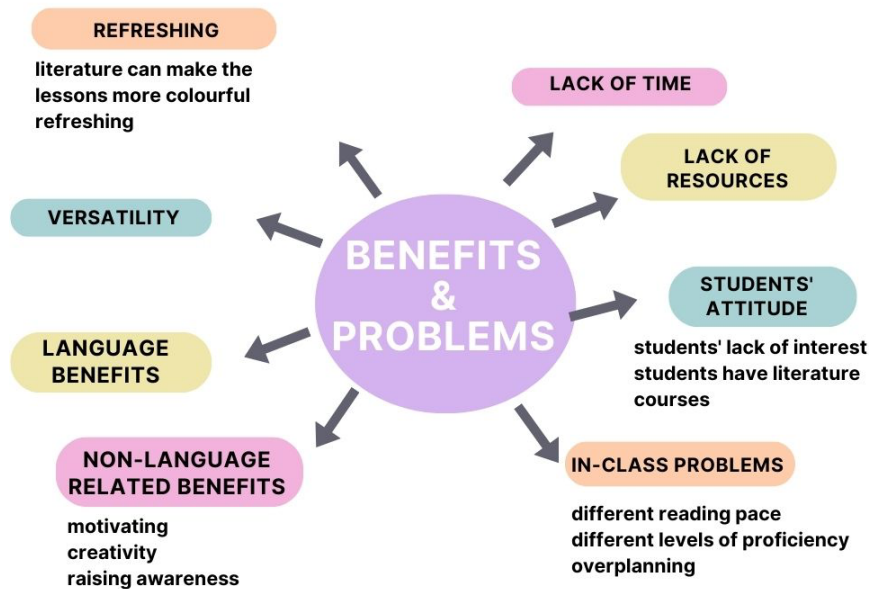
Considering the reasons which prevent the EFL tutors from incorporating more literary texts in their lessons, external factors (i.e., lack of time and lack of resources) were mentioned by the tutors. Regarding preparation, the tutors emphasised the difficulty of finding appropriate and relevant texts. Overplanning was another issue that the tutors in Studies 3 and 4 had to face. Moreover, some in-class problems were encountered by the tutors who took part in Studies 3 and 4: for example, different reading pace, different levels of proficiency caused difficulties. The tutors also gave voice to their fear that their students might not be interested in literature, they already have literature courses, so literature in a language lesson may seem pointless to some. Nevertheless, this belief was not reinforced by the students' reactions in Studies 3 and 4.

Based on the tutors' perceptions and practices, literary texts can be beneficial in the EFL classroom on the condition that they suit certain criteria. These criteria include the length of the chosen text, its relevance, its suitability for language development purposes. Moreover, the chosen text must be interesting and enjoyable, which may be challenging as the generation gap between the teacher and the students widens, as noted by one of the participants.

Regarding the students' opinions, they have rather positive opinion on the use of literature in the EFL classroom. Language-related benefits were highlighted by the students as

well both in Studies 1 and 3. Based on the results, the students were more certain about the language benefits (i.e., vocabulary building and language skills development) than about other skills even in those cases when the tutor's goal was to develop interpersonal and intrapersonal skills. The students' answers to the open-ended questions revealed some new items such as: literature the scope of knowledge (Study 1 and Study 3), the context helps one learn new vocabulary items (Study 3), it is fun (Study 1), it makes one more open-minded towards other cultures (Study 1), it is motivating (Study 1). Within drawbacks the students mentioned the following: outdated language (Study 1 and Study 3), language difficulties experienced by lower-level students (Study 3), demotivating (Study 1), there is another course for literature (Study 1), not suitable for every student (Study 1). These responses reinforced the EFL tutors' ideas that a lot depends on the students' attitudes and interests. It must also be emphasised that those students who took part in Study 3 were more positive about the use of literature than the students in the questionnaire study.

5 Conclusion

5.1 Summary of the Main Findings

The results show that the literature and EFL tutors' expectations are not aligned with the reality they experience in the classroom. There are severe reading problems in first-year literature and language courses when first-year students are required to read academic or literary texts in English. Based on the data that the questionnaire study yielded, most first-year English majors read texts in their leisure time, however, there is still room for improvement in terms of reading. There are certain strategies that the students avoid using such as highlighting important information in the text; also, there are some skills and strategies that they do not feel confident about, for example, identifying the style of the text. The interview study provided more details on EFL and literature tutors' expectations in terms of reading and also their classroom experience. Regarding expectations, knowledge (e.g., background knowledge), attitudes (e.g., being open-minded), skills (e.g., text analysis) and strategies (e.g., looking up vocabulary) were mentioned by the tutors. The classroom studies shed some light on how literary texts can be used for language and personal development in university EFL lessons. The feedback gained from the students and the EFL teachers proves that despite the difficulties the use of literature in language lessons may entail, it is an invaluable source and material both for teachers and students. Most students think that literature can make the lessons more colourful and it can develop their language skills. The tutors who took part in the extended classroom research also

advocate for the benefits of literary texts, however, they mentioned some of the difficulties it may entail (e.g., the lack of appropriate texts and resources).

5.2 Pedagogical Implications

The most important pedagogical implications concern the study programmes of English Studies and English Teacher Training. The results of Study 2 and partly Study 1 provided an insight into the challenges that first-year students face and also into their reading problems. Many literature courses take it for granted that students have the necessary language knowledge and skills (Paran, 2008), but the tutors in Study 2 cannot turn a blind eye to the problems their students experience as there are some severe obstacles that impede not only reading but classroom discussions as well. First and foremost, both EFL and literature tutors mentioned language-related difficulties: many students struggle with text comprehension because they do not have the necessary language proficiency.

Apart from language issues, the students seem to have problems with reading skills and strategies. They are familiar with skills and strategies that involve general text comprehension, however, they have severe difficulties with reading in literature lessons. Some of these problems could be remedied or lessened at university, nevertheless, some changes in the study programmes are needed. Study 2 shed some light on the structure of literature courses: the tutors can choose their own texts and methods in their lessons. This results in some differences between the courses: some tutors provide extra materials (such as worksheets), some try to involve other mediums in their lessons to enable understanding and some not. Nevertheless, the students need more guidance in reading such as some prompts and questions that they can use while reading. The idea of a study skills course was also proposed by one of the interviewees. Although first-year English majors attend such a course, they still lack the needed study skills and strategies such as note-taking strategies, dictionary skills, which are imperative in university courses.

Although the focus of the research project was on first-year university students, it is unavoidable to mention the role of secondary education. Some issues mentioned by the tutors in Study 2 and also the results of Study 1 are related to the students' previous educational experience. The results imply that some of the challenges that first-year students face in university courses could be avoided with the help of some focused training in secondary (EFL) lessons. For instance, the lack of the necessary background knowledge is truly alarming as the students learn history, geography and literature in secondary schools, thus one would assume that they enter the university equipped with some background knowledge. The fact that first-

year students are generally unaware of important figures and events in history and literature suggests that the roots of the problems are to be found in their previous education. Even though Hungarian students learn history and literary history, they seem to be unable to use that acquired knowledge at university, i.e., in a different context.

Regarding the use of literature, the results of Study 3 underpin the claim that literature has a place in the EFL classroom. The findings of Studies 3 and 4 support the versatility of literature as material for language teaching. The results of the students' feedback sheets also advocate for the benefits of using literature in the EFL classroom. Nevertheless, the problems that the tutors in Studies 3 and 4 experienced cannot be ignored. It would be advisable to prepare a collection of appropriate texts accompanied by ready-made worksheets and activities. Based on the findings of Studies 2 and 3, the lack of such text and activity banks impedes the use of literature in the EFL classroom.

5.3 Limitations and Implications for Further Research

As with every study, the present research also has certain limitations. The first main limitation involves the context of the study. The study was conducted primarily at one university in Budapest and partially at another university also located in Budapest. On the one hand, the fact that the scope was narrowed down to one research context enabled me to provide a deep insight into the issues addressed in this research project. On the other hand, the inclusion of different research contexts (e.g., universities in other cities) may have broadened the scope of the research. Another limitation concerns the students who participated in Studies 1 and 3. Including the same students in Studies 1 and 3 would have resulted in a more thorough comparison of the students' views. However, the students who took part in Study 1 could not take part in Study 3 for two main reasons. First, the student questionnaire included a section on the use of literature in the EFL classroom including the course *Language Practice*. In order to answer those questions, the students had to have some experience connected to *Language Practice*. Second, the data gained in Study 1 was needed in order to conduct the subsequent studies. The last main limitation concerns the Covid pandemic. The action research had to be postponed due to the pandemic and lockdown in spring 2020. Since it was not possible to postpone the classroom study again, the longitudinal study had to be conducted in a hybrid form of teaching having face-to-face and online lessons as well. The online lessons made it difficult, in some cases even impossible, to observe the students, which has an impact on the content of the research journal.

To investigate the role literature has in the EFL classroom, further research would be beneficial. As the second limitation above suggests, it would be interesting to examine how students' perceptions may change once they take part in regular literary sessions. Therefore, it would be beneficial to conduct a study which would compare students' preliminary ideas about the use of literature for language development purposes with their opinions after a language course in which literary texts were incorporated. To see whether there are any changes in the students' language proficiency, a follow-up study to Study 3 and 4 would be needed. It would be interesting to see whether the students apply the reading strategies that they practiced or whether they use certain vocabulary items acquired or learnt in these literary sessions.

Focusing on the teacher perspective, it would be interesting to carry out some classroom observation. The observation of literature lessons would provide some insight into how literary texts are approached in these lessons, what are the main problems students face and what are the solutions that the tutors use. Language lessons would shed some light on how texts are used by EFL tutors, what activities are used and whether they provide an opportunity for the students to practice the strategies that they need in literature courses.

Regarding the student perspective, a questionnaire study involving secondary senior students would provide more information on the use of literature in secondary education, which would broaden the scope of the study. In connection with the results of Study 1, it would be interesting to explore some of the results through a focus group interview. The interview would yield more information on first-year students' reading habits. It would also provide a deeper understanding of the reading problems that first-year students experience in literature courses; moreover, their reading skills and strategies would be explored in more detail.

While this study focused on the use of literature in the EFL classroom, it would be interesting to conduct a follow-up study investigating study skills lessons. The lack of appropriate study skills was implied by the interviewees; however, the focus of the present research project did not include study skills. It would certainly be beneficial to carry out a follow-up study and explore the perceptions and classroom experience of study skills tutors.

Publications connected to the topic of the dissertation

Divéki, R., & Pereszlényi, A. (2021). Materials design for using literature to nurture global citizens in the EFL classroom: A pilot study. In J. Sazdovska, É. Illés, Zs. Soproni, Á. Farkas, *ENGaged Spotlight on Learning - 29th IATEFL Hungary Conference: Conference selections* (pp. 68-92). IATEFL, Hungary. https://iatefl.hu/wp content/uploads/2022/07/Engaged-Final-2019.pdf

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Other publications

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