

DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

THESIS BOOKLET

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**The Use of Children's Literature in Teaching English as a Foreign
Language in Schools with Hungarian Language of Instruction in
Transcarpathia**

Doctoral School of Education

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¹ADATLAP
a doktori értekezés nyilvánosságra hozatalához

I. A doktori értekezés adatai

A szerző neve: Nagy-Kolozsvári Enikő

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A doktori értekezés címe és alcíme: A gyermekirodalom alkalmazása az angol mint idegen nyelv oktatásában a kárpátaljai magyar tannyelvű iskolákban

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A témavezető neve és tudományos fokozata: Prof. Dr. Győri János

A témavezető munkahelye: Eötvös Loránd Tudományegyetem, Pedagógiai és Pszichológiai Kar,
Interkulturális Pszichológiai és Neveléstudományi Intézet

II. Nyilatkozatok

1. A doktori értekezés szerzőjeként³

a) hozzájárok, hogy a doktori fokozat megszerzését követően a doktori értekezésem és a tézisek nyilvánosságra kerüljenek az ELTE Digitális Intézményi Tudástárban. Felhatalmazom a Doktori Iskola hivatalának ügyintézőjét, Barna Ildikót, hogy az értekezést és a téziseket feltöltse az ELTE Digitális Intézményi Tudástárba, és ennek során kitöltse a feltöltéshez szükséges nyilatkozatokat.

b) kérem, hogy a mellékelt kérelemben részletezett szabadalmi, illetőleg oltalmi bejelentés közzétételéig a doktori értekezést ne bocsássák nyilvánosságra az Egyetemi Könyvtárban és az ELTE Digitális Intézményi Tudástárban;⁴

c) kérem, hogy a nemzetbiztonsági okból minősített adatot tartalmazó doktori értekezést a minősítés (dátum)-ig tartó időtartama alatt ne bocsássák nyilvánosságra az Egyetemi Könyvtárban és az ELTE Digitális Intézményi Tudástárban;⁵

d) kérem, hogy a mű kiadására vonatkozó mellékelt kiadó szerződésre tekintettel a doktori értekezést a könyv megjelenéséig ne bocsássák nyilvánosságra az Egyetemi Könyvtárban, és az ELTE Digitális Intézményi Tudástárban csak a könyv bibliográfiai adatait tegyék közzé. Ha a könyv a fokozatszerzést követően egy évig nem jelenik meg, hozzájárlok, hogy a doktori értekezésem és a tézisek nyilvánosságra kerüljenek az Egyetemi Könyvtárban és az ELTE Digitális Intézményi Tudástárban.⁶

2. A doktori értekezés szerzőjeként kijelentem, hogy

a) az ELTE Digitális Intézményi Tudástárba feltöltendő doktori értekezés és a tézisek saját eredeti, önálló szellemi munkám és legjobb tudomásom szerint nem sértem vele senki szerzői jogait;

b) a doktori értekezés és a tézisek nyomtatott változatai és az elektronikus adathordozón benyújtott tartalmak (szöveg és ábrák) mindenben megegyeznek.

3. A doktori értekezés szerzőjeként hozzájárlok a doktori értekezés és a tézisek szövegének plágiumkereső adatbázisba helyezéséhez és plágiumellenőrző vizsgálatok lefuttatásához.

Kelt:

Nagy-Kolozsvári Enikő
a doktori értekezés szerzőjének aláírása

¹ Beiktatta az Egyetemi Doktori Szabályzat módosításáról szóló CXXXIX/2014. (VI. 30.) Szen. sz. határozat. Hatályos: 2014. VII.1. napjától.

² A kari hivatal ügyintézője tölti ki.

³ A megfelelő szöveg aláhúzendó.

⁴ A doktori értekezés benyújtásával egyidejűleg be kell adni a tudományági doktori tanácshoz a szabadalmi, illetőleg oltalmi bejelentést tanúsító okiratot és a nyilvánosságra hozatal elhalasztása iránti kérelmet.

⁵ A doktori értekezés benyújtásával egyidejűleg be kell nyújtani a minősített adatra vonatkozó közokiratot.

⁶ A doktori értekezés benyújtásával egyidejűleg be kell nyújtani a mű kiadásáról szóló kiadói szerződést.

1 Introduction

The benefits of using children's literature in foreign language teaching have been extensively discussed by a number of researchers (Ahlquist & Lugossy, 2015; Bland & Lütge, 2015; Ellis & Brewster, 2014; Enever, 2006; Kovács & Trentinné Benkő, 2011; Láng, 2009; Maley, 2012; Pardede, 2021; Wright, 2009). Utilizing children's literature in foreign language education fosters not only language skills from an early age but also enhances creativity, empathy, moral development, critical thinking, and cultural awareness, and has a motivational effect (Ellis & Brewster, 2014; Garvie, 1990; Ghosn, 2002; Enever, 2006; Kurtán, 2001; Nikolov, 2004; Savvidou, 2004; Wright, 2009). Despite these numerous advantages, current educational practices remain largely uncommitted to the integration of authentic children's literature. Few primary and even fewer secondary school English teachers fully recognize the potential of authentic children's literature to cultivate literary and intercultural communicative competence (Bland, 2015; Graham et al.). As Lima (2010) asserts, literary works, graded readers, short stories, and poems are frequently excluded from foreign language curricula. In contrast, the demands of today's knowledge-based society not only advocate for but necessitate an interdisciplinary approach to foreign language teaching. This approach could significantly enhance educational outcomes through the inclusion of children's literature, thereby laying the foundation for lifelong learning in a foreign language (Bland, 2015).

However, it should also be pointed out that only a minority of researchers address the challenges inherent in this educational approach. There is a dearth of information regarding the specific difficulties language teachers encounter in selecting, planning, organizing, and delivering children's literature, which is a time-consuming process that imposes additional burdens on teachers. Furthermore, the reasons and factors impeding the broader adoption of children's literature in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms remain largely unexplored. This is particularly true in the context of my research, which focuses on schools with Hungarian language of instruction in Transcarpathia, Ukraine. According to the review of the scientific literature, in Ukraine, there is a significant gap in academic studies on this topic by both researchers and educators.

Thus, a research project was needed with the primary objective of investigating the perspectives, attitudes, and practical aspects of using authentic children's literature among English language teachers, pre-service English teachers, and parents of children in schools with Hungarian language of instruction in Transcarpathia. The research project comprised five research studies, conducted in Transcarpathia between 2018 and 2024.

2 Theoretical Background of the Research

2.1 Definition of Childhood and Young Language Learners

To understand the effective use of children's literature in foreign language teaching, it is essential to define what is meant by childhood within the context of the given thesis.

Defining childhood in the context of English as a foreign language is of paramount importance because it contributes to a deeper understanding of the cognitive and linguistic developmental stages of learners. Such an understanding enables the adaptation of teaching methods and materials to the specific needs and abilities of young language learners (Shin & Crandall, 2014). Overall, defining childhood in terms of language learning facilitates the design of targeted, age-appropriate language teaching programmes, thereby enhancing the quality of language learning experiences.

Pinter (2006) classifies child language learners into three groups based on their age: between about 3 and 5 years old; 5/7 to 11/12 years old; and children over 13 years old, often referred to as young adults.

Cameron (2001) identifies children between the ages of 5 and 12 as young language learners, while Scott and Ytreberg (1990) consider children aged 5 to 10/11 as young language learners. Bland (2019), in her study emphasizing the significance of children's literature, categorizes children aged 6 to 12 as young language learners but underscores the rapid development during this period, noting the substantial differences between a six-year-old and a twelve-year-old who can learn languages independently, even outside the classroom. Children under five are generally referred to as very young language learners in the scientific literature.

According to Ahlquist and Lugossy (2015), children aged 5-9 years are classified as very young learners. A defining characteristic of this group is their holistic learning approach, utilizing their entire body. Consequently, they prefer movement-based activities, such as music, dance, and drama. Cognitively, they are not yet developed enough to understand complex grammatical concepts. Children aged 10-13 are identified as young language learners by Ahlquist and Lugossy (2015). This age group is capable of understanding abstract concepts and making inferences, yet still shows a preference for kinesthetic activities. Furthermore, Ahlquist and Lugossy (2015) categorize learners aged 13-16 as older language learners.

In this study, I adopt the categorization defined by Cameron (2001), commonly referenced in the scientific literature, which identifies young language learners as children between the ages of 5 and 14 who are learning English in schools. This choice aligns with the research context, as compulsory schooling in Ukraine commences at the age of six, establishing

this age as the primary reference point. However, it is noteworthy that some children may begin first grade at the age of five due to age allowances.

The decision to extend the definition of young language learners up to the age of 14 is informed by several factors. Firstly, I believe that children's literature can be interesting and motivating even at the age of 12-13. Secondly, the relatively limited population size in Transcarpathia that can be included in the research necessitates this broader age range.

2.2 Conceptualization of Children's Literature

Defining children's literature is challenging, as there is no professional consensus on the matter. According to the Britannica Encyclopaedia online dictionary:

„Children's literature, the body of written works and accompanying illustrations produced in order to entertain or instruct young people. The genre encompasses a wide range of works, including acknowledged classics of world literature, picture books and easy-to-read stories written exclusively for children, and fairy tales, lullabies, fables, folk songs, and other primarily orally transmitted materials” (Children's literature, 2024).

McDowell (1973) offers a broader definition, describing children's literature as books written and read for a group of people defined as children by a particular society. Tomlinson and Lynch-Brown provide a more precise definition, describing children's literature as “good quality trade books for children from birth to adolescence, covering topics of relevance and interest to children of those ages, through prose and poetry, fiction and nonfiction” (Tomlinson & Lynch-Brown, 2002, p. 2).

Ghosn (2002) explicitly limits children's literature to fiction, emphasizing that it comprises texts that children “read for pleasure, rather than for didactic purposes” (Ghosn, 2002, p. 172).

Overall, the definitions of children's literature can be grouped according to three main aspects: the target audience, the intention of the text, and the quality of the text.

Maley (2011) emphasizes an important distinction between the study of literature and the use of literature in foreign language teaching. According to Brumfit (1989), the study of literature involves treating the text as a work of art, whereas in language teaching, the text is viewed as a medium of language used by people, which can be harnessed for language learning purposes. In the present thesis, the focus is on the latter approach: viewing children's literature

as a collection of fiction texts suitable for language teaching, with particular emphasis on fairy tales and short stories.

2.3 The Definition of Authentic Literature

Defining authentic literature within the context of foreign language teaching is a complex task. Numerous definitions exist in the literature. Widdowson (1996) describes authenticity as “the reality of native-speaker language use: in our case, the communication in English which is realized by an English-speaking community” (Widdowson, 1996, p. 68). Thus, authentic materials are generally considered those written by native speakers for native speakers, without any specific educational or language teaching purpose. However, it is important to recognize that the perspective which holds that only texts produced by native speakers can be considered authentic has been questioned by some researchers (Pinner, 2014; Tan, 2005).

Richards and Schmidt define the concept of authentic materials in a slightly more nuanced way, specifically in terms of language learning:

“In language teaching, the use of materials that were not originally developed for pedagogical purposes, such as the use of magazines, newspapers, advertisements, news reports, or songs. Such materials are often thought to contain more realistic and natural examples of language use than those found in textbooks and other specially developed teaching materials” (Richards & Schmidt, 2013, p. 43).

Furthermore, Swaffar specifically defines the concept of authentic text in terms of foreign language learning. According to him:

“For purposes of the foreign language classroom, an authentic text... is one whose primary intent is to communicate meaning. In other words, such a text can be one which is written for native speakers of the language to be read by other native speakers (with the intent to inform, persuade, thank, etc.) or it may be a text intended for language learner group. The relevant consideration here is not for whom it is written, but there has been an authentic communicative objective in mind” (Swaffar, 1985, p. 17).

Peacock (1997) does not explicitly define authentic materials in his study, though it is evident that he views them as specific to the target culture. Culture, in turn, is integral to

language learning. According to Holló (2019), the use of literary texts is one of the most suitable tools for learning about culture in the language classroom because of its textuality. She believes that “it is a great experience for foreign language learners to read literature in the target language” (Holló, 2019, p. 56) (own translation).

The scientific literature thus shows the diversity and variety of literary works, but researchers agree that literature, especially authentic works, has a place and an important role in the classroom. Accordingly, my thesis will focus on authentic children’s literature, specifically examining the role of short stories and fairy tales.

2.4 The Role of Children’s Literature in Foreign Language Teaching

According to Stewig and Norberg (1995), literature has three main functions in education: a) to provide a literary experience, b) to convey information, and c) to develop the skills necessary for language learning, such as memory, sequencing, description, expression, comprehension, interpretation, analysis, synthesis and evaluation.

Children’s literature, including stories and tales, proves particularly relevant and motivating for young learners due to its engaging topics, relatable connections to their personal experiences, and alignment with their developmental needs. They deal with themes such as friendship, love, helpfulness, joy, sadness, success, courage, exclusion, etc., helping to develop relationships between people. Storytelling and discussions around these narratives teach learners the importance of listening, respecting diverse perspectives, and accepting different viewpoints (Ghosn, 2013). As Illés (2013) succinctly summarizes, “Literature, one of the outposts of communicative language teaching, can effectively prepare learners to accept difference, to see the world as an individual, and to express themselves creatively”. She further emphasizes that “literature encompasses a wide array of topics and genres, enabling teachers to select works that meet the specific needs of language learners and motivate them accordingly” (Illés, 2013, p. 13) (own translation).

According to Lugossy (2006), exposure to stories and fairy tales also has an impact on another component of children’s educational process, namely socialization into language use. Stories aid children in acquiring words and structures within meaningful contexts that mirror their own experiences. As noted by Donaldson (1987) and Tomlinson (2003), childhood learning, particularly language acquisition, occurs in contexts that are relevant and relatable to children's lived experiences. Storytelling and story-reading are socially and linguistically familiar activities for children. From an early age, children are accustomed to the methods, frameworks, processes, and interpretations involved in storytelling or reading in their mother

tongue. This proficiency allows them to build on their existing knowledge and skills when learning about stories in a foreign language, creating a safe environment where children do not feel anxious and therefore the affective filter is low (Krashen, 1985), allowing for natural learning and acquisition. Consequently, vocabulary and phrases in the foreign language are not introduced in isolation but within contexts meaningful to the children.

Of the literary genres, Pardede (2021) argues that the use of short stories is the most effective in teaching English as a foreign language.

Among the arguments in favour of literary works, it is important to mention the importance of authenticity, i.e. literary works have a rich potential to provide an authentic linguistic model (Ghosn, 2002; Lima, 2010; Pardede, 2021).

2.5 Rationale for the Research

In the Hungarian context, while numerous researchers have investigated the relationship between literature and reading, relatively few studies focus specifically on children's literature and young language learners within the context of English as a foreign language. Notable contributions in this area include the works of Trentinné Benkő et al. (2021), Lugossy and Nikolov (2003), and Nikolov (1998). Additionally, Palláné Szénási (2010) examined the use of Grimm's fairy tales in teaching German at lower secondary schools, while Hirzics and Nemes (2016) explored the potential applications of story pedagogy in early foreign language development within a kindergarten context. However, Hirzics and Nemes' study primarily addresses theoretical and practical issues without reporting empirical research findings.

In Ukraine, specifically in Transcarpathia, the topic remains even less explored. A review of 1,029 studies published in scientific and professional journals over the last decade reveals a paucity of research on this topic, suggesting that this educational approach is not prevalent in the region. There is no empirical research investigating the use of children's literature in foreign language teaching, nor studies examining the use of literary works in language instruction from any perspective, including the attitudes and views of students, teachers, and parents. The existing studies predominantly address the theoretical background and discuss the advantages and potential challenges of using literary works. Given that this pedagogical approach is absent from the local textbooks used in higher education, it can be inferred that future language teachers in Ukraine may not be adequately exposed to it during their training.

An additional argument supporting this research is the problem with textbooks used in schools with Hungarian language of instruction in Transcarpathia. According to a publication by the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, many textbooks are outdated in terms of content, visually unappealing to children, or based on outdated methods (Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, 2017, p. 12). Addressing the textbook issue is a long-term task; meanwhile, teachers can employ local solutions, such as using children's literature as supplementary teaching material. This research aims to explore the current situation and propose practical solutions to address this issue locally.

3 Research Methods

My dissertation comprises five researches, collectively aimed at examining the perspectives, attitudes, and practical aspects of using authentic children's literature among English language teachers, teacher candidates, and parents of children in schools with Hungarian language of instruction in Transcarpathia. The overarching objective of the dissertation can be subdivided into several specific aims:

a) Teachers: to investigate the frequency of authentic children's literature usage in classrooms, as well as to identify the perceived advantages, disadvantages, challenges, and barriers teachers encounter in employing children's literature for instructional purposes.

b) Pre-service teachers: to explore their previous experiences with children's literature as language learners, their prospective views on its use in teaching, and their perceptions following the application of children's literature during their own teaching practice.

c) Parents: to ascertain their perspectives on the role of English in their children's lives and their views on the significance of children's literature in language learning.

The research is divided into five main parts, each with distinct research questions. The numbering of these questions is not hierarchical but instead reflects their association with specific research segments. Due to this structure, some research questions may overlap. The following research questions (RQs) have been formulated to achieve the research objectives across the five studies:

RQ 1 Do teachers use authentic fiction books in teaching English in schools with Hungarian language of instruction in Transcarpathia?

RQ 1.1 What are the attitudes and views of English teachers in schools with Hungarian language of instruction in Transcarpathia regarding the use of children's literature in the classroom?

RQ 1.2 What are the teachers' attitudes towards children's literature in English, and what are the main barriers to their use?

RQ 2 How do English teachers in schools with Hungarian language of instruction perceive the advantages, disadvantages, and difficulties of using children's literature, as determined through an interview survey?

RQ 3 What are the childhood experiences of English language college students regarding the use of children's literature in their own foreign language learning?

RQ 3.1 How do college students, pre-service teachers perceive children's literature concerning future English language teaching?

RQ 4 What are the attitudes and views of English language students at a college of higher education with Hungarian language of instruction on the use of children's literature in the classroom after having implemented this teaching approach in their pedagogical practice?

RQ 5 How do parents perceive the role of children's literature in foreign language teaching?

RQ 5.1 Do parents read foreign language children's literature to their children at home?

RQ 5.2 How do parents perceive the importance of English for their child's future?

Table 1 presents the research objectives and associated research questions, detailing the data collection processes and methods of data analysis.

The first research question, along with its sub-questions, aims to explore the prevalence, frequency, and methods of using children's literature in English language lessons. This includes an investigation into what types of children's literature are used, how they are integrated into the classroom, how teachers access these books, and the primary criteria they consider when selecting them.

The second question focuses on exploring the views and difficulties of teacher-led classroom activities with particular reference to the use of children's literature.

The third main question examines whether pre-service English teachers have prior experiences with using children's literature in their own language learning and how these experiences influence their future attitudes as language teachers.

The fourth question concerns the experiences gained by pre-service English teachers during their teaching practice, particularly when they have the opportunity to use children's literature in the classroom.

The fifth and final main research question addresses the parents' perspective, investigating the role parents play in their children's exposure to foreign language children's literature and their perceptions of its importance.

Table 1*Research objectives, research questions, data collection and data analysis methods*

Research objectives	Research questions	Data collection	Data analysis
<i>Main objective:</i> to examine the views, attitudes, and practical characteristics of the use of authentic children's literature by English language teachers, pre-service English teachers, and parents of children in Transcarpathian schools with Hungarian language of instruction			
To investigate the prevalence of authentic children's literature in the classroom and to evaluate teachers' perceived benefits, disadvantages, challenges, and barriers associated with its use.	RQ1 Do teachers use authentic children's literature in teaching English in schools with Hungarian language of instruction in Transcarpathia?	teacher questionnaire with 118 English teachers	descriptive statistical analysis and thematic content analysis
	RQ1.1 What are the attitudes and views of English teachers in schools with Hungarian language of instruction in Transcarpathia regarding the use of children's literature in the classroom?		
	RQ1.2 What are the teachers' attitudes towards children's literature in English, and what are the main barriers to their use?	semi-structured interviews with 10 EFL teachers	thematic content analysis
	RQ2 How do English teachers in schools with Hungarian language of instruction perceive the advantages, disadvantages, and difficulties of using children's literature, as determined through an interview survey?		
To investigate pre-service English teachers' experiences with children's literature as previous language learners, to examine pre-service teachers' perspectives on its use, and assess their views following the application of children's literature in the classroom during teaching practice.	RQ3 What are the childhood experiences of English language college students regarding the use of children's literature in their own foreign language learning? RQ 3.1. How do pre-service English teachers perceive children's literature concerning future English language teaching?	student questionnaire with 125 pre-service English teachers	descriptive statistical analysis and thematic content analysis
	RQ 4. What are the attitudes and views of pre-service English teachers on the use of children's literature in the classroom after having implemented this teaching approach in their pedagogical practice?	student questionnaire with 22 pre-service English teachers	descriptive statistical analysis and thematic content analysis
	RQ 5. How do parents perceive the role of children's literature in foreign language teaching? RQ 5.1. Do parents read foreign language stories to their children at home? RQ 5.2. How do parents perceive the importance of English for their child's future?	parent questionnaire with 278 parents	descriptive statistical analysis

In my study, I adopted a mixed-methods research approach, encompassing both qualitative and quantitative data collection (Creswell, 2009). To gather comprehensive data and explore the role of children's literature in foreign language teaching in schools with Hungarian language of instruction in Transcarpathia, I initially conducted a questionnaire survey among 118 English teachers. This was subsequently supplemented by a second survey involving 125 pre-service English teachers. The objective of the latter was not only to understand the current situation from the perspective of English teachers but also to gain insights from former language learners who had recently experienced English language education and thus had personal experience with language learning challenges. The results from the two questionnaire surveys were analysed separately using Microsoft Excel and SPSS v22.

Following the quantitative phase, I conducted interviews with ten English teachers to gain a deeper understanding of the use of children's literature in the classroom, the criteria for selecting works, and any challenges encountered. The data obtained from these interviews were analysed using thematic content analysis. My research followed the explanatory sequential design of mixed-methods research, which involves collecting quantitative data first, followed by qualitative data collection to elaborate on the initial findings (Király et al., 2014).

The fourth part of my work is action research involving college students who, as part of their mandatory pedagogical practice, implemented the use of a piece of children's literature in the classroom. Subsequently, a reflective questionnaire was administered, and I analysed the responses using the aforementioned software tools and thematic content analysis.

Finally, I conducted a quantitative questionnaire survey among parents of children enrolled in schools with Hungarian language of instruction in Transcarpathia. I believe that parents play a pivotal role in exposing their children to stories in a foreign language, thereby supporting language acquisition. The collected data were also analysed using Microsoft Excel and SPSS v22.

Throughout my research, I adhered to the principle of triangulation, which allows for a comprehensive exploration of research questions from multiple perspectives. In my thesis, I follow Denzin's triangulation typology, which distinguishes between theoretical, methodological, personal and data triangulation (Denzin, 1989). In order to answer the research questions formulated, I chose the mixed methodological paradigm, whereby in my case, two types of triangulations can be distinguished: data and methodological triangulation. Data triangulation requires the use of several different data sources, while methodological triangulation involves the use of several different methods to explore the same research problem.

4 Main Results

The investigation into teachers' views and attitudes regarding the integration of children's literature in the classroom primarily relied on data from the initial questionnaire survey, complemented by insights garnered from subsequent interviews. The first two studies aimed to address the following questions: "Do English language teachers in schools with Hungarian language of instruction in Transcarpathia use authentic children's literature for teaching purposes?" "What are their perceptions and attitudes toward incorporating children's literature into their teaching practices, and what are the principal obstacles hindering its adoption?"

Regarding the first research inquiry, findings indicate that 29% (N=34) of teachers currently incorporate children's literature into their teaching practices, while a majority of 52% (N=61) do not use such materials at all. A noteworthy 19% (N=23) expressed a desire to integrate children's literature but cited lack of access to suitable storybooks as a significant impediment. In response to open-ended questions, teachers who did employ children's literature highlighted persistent challenges such as overcrowded curricula and time constraints, which frequently restrict their ability to integrate these resources effectively.

The first sub-question investigated teachers' attitudes and perspectives regarding children's literature. Insights from both the initial questionnaire and subsequent interview survey reveal predominantly positive attitudes among teachers towards integrating children's literature into their classrooms. Teachers generally acknowledge the educational merits of children's literature, yet they also encounter various challenges, such as fluctuating class sizes — both too large and too small — combined classes, and other logistical constraints.

However, it is noteworthy that a minority of teachers hold sceptical or pessimistic views regarding the pedagogical benefits of children's literature. Ten respondents expressed reservations, believing that children's literature might exceed their learners' abilities. Additionally, two teachers reported attempting to implement this approach but concluded it was not sufficiently successful, falling short of their expectations.

Conversely, the majority of teachers perceive themselves and their learners as adaptable to using stories, recognizing children's inherent affinity for children's literature.

The second sub-question aimed to identify the primary factors hindering the integration of children's literature in classrooms.

- The results show that one of the main obstacles is the limited availability of storybooks in English.

- Furthermore, overcrowded school curricula, extensive material requirements, and a fast-paced school environment pose additional challenges.
- The curriculum does not include suggestions and references to the use of children's literature in the classroom.
- Widely used textbooks generally lack authentic children's literature or materials that captivate children's interest.
- The preparation required for implementing children's literature in classrooms is time-consuming, placing considerable strain on teachers who are already burdened.
- Concerns about inspections by school authorities evaluating adherence to curriculum and program relevance also deter teachers.
- The availability of digital tools for teaching is not always the same at both individual and school level.
- Inadequate availability of classrooms equipped with necessary digital resources further complicates implementation.
- Although rare, instances of teachers lacking internet access at home or school still occur.
- Moreover, many teachers have not been exposed to this teaching method during their formal teacher training or ongoing professional development, which serves as an additional deterrent.

During interviews, one English teacher elaborated extensively on the primary impediments encountered in incorporating children's literature into the classroom in Transcarpathia over the past five years. She attributed these challenges to the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, during which education predominantly shifted online. According to her assessment, this transition posed significant disadvantages for young language learners, particularly those with limited digital skills and access to technology, compounded further in already disadvantaged rural settings. Learners who commenced their schooling during this period were compelled to acquire foundational literacy skills through virtual platforms. Those lacking parental support at home faced severe limitations in their learning opportunities.

Upon the resumption of conventional schooling, teachers were confronted with the task of addressing educational gaps and deficiencies resulting from the online learning period. Shortly thereafter, the outbreak of war introduced additional burdens upon every segment of society, further impacting educational practices. Teachers subsequently found themselves with reduced opportunities, time, and energy to experiment with and incorporate diverse teaching methodologies. These circumstances and the additional, unexpected tasks that have been thrust

upon individuals have also had a major impact on education, with teachers having less opportunity, time and energy to try out and integrate different methods.

Based on the interviews conducted for the second research question, it emerged that teachers recognize the manifold benefits associated with integrating children's literature into classroom instruction. They emphasized its potential to foster language proficiency, particularly in speaking and listening skills, alongside vocabulary acquisition. One teacher highlighted her own observation that using children's literature reduces language anxiety and facilitates natural language acquisition, enabling learners to begin using English spontaneously.

However, interviewees identified several critical challenges. Foremost among these was the scarcity of dedicated class time allocated for such activities and the complete absence of children's literature references within the official curriculum. Teachers frequently expressed a lack of awareness regarding available options and expressed a need for a curriculum-linked list featuring recommended children's literature selections suitable for instructional purposes.

The study highlighted significant challenges related to the availability and adequacy of textbooks and teaching materials in Transcarpathia. A major issue identified was the insufficient supply of textbooks, resulting in many learners not having their own copies. Furthermore, delays in textbook delivery to schools, often due to production timelines not aligning with the start of the academic year, makes this problem worse. Additionally, the absence of workbooks and audio materials for textbooks compounds the challenges faced by teachers.

Even when textbooks are accessible, teachers perceive them as inadequate for modern language teaching practices. They critique the textbooks for being uninspiring, covering topics of little interest to children, and occasionally presenting content that is overly complex or challenging. In response to these shortcomings, teachers view children's literature as a potential remedy. They believe that incorporating children's literature could offer more engaging and age-appropriate content aligned with contemporary language teaching principles.

Despite these obstacles, the research indicated a generally positive and receptive attitude among teachers towards the use of children's literature. While access remains a significant barrier, teachers did not identify insurmountable challenges that would impede the wider adoption of children's literature in English language instruction in Transcarpathian schools.

The findings of this study align closely with existing literature on the challenges surrounding the use of children's literature in foreign language teaching. Novosyari (2019)

identifies several reasons why teachers may not incorporate children's literature effectively into their teaching practices.

- Firstly, there is a perceived scarcity of pedagogically well-designed texts suitable for language learning purposes, a factor that is crucial for effectively integrating literature into educational contexts.
- Secondly, TESL/TEFL preparation programs often fail to adequately address the practical application of literary works in language teaching, leaving teachers ill-equipped to use these resources effectively.
- Thirdly, there exists a lack of clearly defined objectives and guidelines regarding the integration of literature into foreign language teaching curricula, which may contribute to uncertainty among teachers regarding the specific educational goals and benefits of using literary texts.
- Lastly, despite the widespread use of literary works in classrooms, many teachers report not having received formal training on how to effectively incorporate children's literature into their lessons during their professional development.

Furthermore, the literature emphasizes that teachers' personal views and past experiences with language learning significantly influence their approach to using children's literature. Richards and Lockhart (1996) note that teachers often draw upon their own experiences as language learners when making instructional decisions. Given that many English teachers did not begin their language learning journey with exposure to children's literature, they may lack firsthand experience with its use in language classrooms. This gap in personal experience may be compounded by the absence of formal training or coursework on children's literature during their higher education studies, thereby limiting their confidence and competence in using these materials effectively.

In conclusion, the literature underscores the need for targeted professional development initiatives and clear educational guidelines to support teachers in integrating children's literature into foreign language teaching practices effectively. These are all factors that may influence teachers' choice of teaching materials and their greater likelihood of choosing teaching materials that they have tried and are familiar with.

According to Musthafa (cited in Novosyari, 2019), several issues contribute to the challenges in integrating children's literature into foreign language teaching, including the small number of lessons, insufficient opportunities for learners to practise speaking because teachers

focus on grammar and sentence structure, scarcity of authentic children's literature, and insufficient extracurricular opportunities for learners to use English in real-life contexts.

The third research question of this study aimed to investigate the childhood experiences of English major college students with regard to the use of children's literature in English, and to explore their perceptions of its relevance to their future English language teaching. The findings indicate that despite their positive attitudes towards children's literature in English, a significant majority of pre-service teachers (63%) reported a lack of exposure to this approach during their primary and secondary school education. Those who did encounter children's literature mostly engaged with it through activities such as reading and translation, or occasionally as a form of teacher-delivered reward. This suggests that any prior use of children's literature may not have aligned with internationally recognized, literature-based guidelines or standards.

These results suggest a gap in the incorporation of children's literature into English language teaching at earlier stages, highlighting missed opportunities for enhancing language skills and fostering a deeper engagement with English through authentic literary texts. This underscores the need for educational reforms and teacher training initiatives aimed at integrating children's literature more effectively into foreign language curricula, thereby enriching learners' language learning experiences from an early age.

The attitude of teacher candidates towards integrating children's literature into future education is notably positive. These students demonstrate openness and enthusiasm, expressing a desire to incorporate stories into their future language teaching practices.

The fourth research question focused on exploring the experiences of pre-service English teachers during their pedagogical practice, specifically when they conducted story-based lessons. The question aimed to investigate the attitudes and perspectives of pre-service English language teachers at a college of higher education with Hungarian language of instruction regarding the use of children's literature in the classroom, following their practical experience.

The findings from the research indicated that the implementation of children's literature in English classrooms during pedagogical practice was successful and generated favourable outcomes. Fourteen pre-service teachers participated in conducting story-based lessons, all of whom expressed a clear intention to integrate children's literature into their teaching repertoire in the future. They acknowledged several benefits of using children's literature, including enhanced vocabulary development, language skills improvement, and the ability to enrich lessons with engaging and vibrant content.

The research also underscored the significance of pre-service teachers' personal encounters with children's literature during their schooling. Those with a positive inclination towards reading and who have experienced the benefits firsthand are likely to exhibit greater eagerness towards incorporating children's literature into their future classroom practices.

The role of mentor teachers in facilitating story-based lessons is also noteworthy. While many mentor teachers demonstrated flexibility in allowing pre-service teachers to implement such lessons, logistical challenges such as time constraints and curriculum demands influenced their level of participation in the research.

Finally, the fifth research question explored parental perspectives and attitudes towards children's literature in foreign language education. Specifically, it investigated whether parents engage in reading foreign language stories to their children at home and their opinions on the significance of English for their children's future.

Overall, the findings indicate that parents hold a positive perception regarding the quality of language education provided at schools. While there are areas identified for potential improvement, no specific issues emerged as overwhelmingly dissatisfactory to parents.

Parents generally hold a positive view regarding the quality of language instruction provided in schools. They express confidence in language teachers and generally indicate satisfaction with the instructional approaches and curriculum.

However, despite this overall satisfaction, areas for improvement have been identified, particularly concerning the adequacy of teaching materials and the language learning opportunities offered by schools. Parents perceive that the school curriculum emphasizes grammar over practical communication skills and lacks interaction with native speakers.

Parents largely support creative and innovative language teaching methods such as incorporating English literature, films, stories, and interactive online games. They also emphasize the importance of teachers engaging intensively with learners in English and endorse activities that facilitate authentic language practice.

Recognizing the benefits of early language learning, parents believe it enhances language proficiency, cognitive development, and cultural awareness from an early age. They value language learning for fostering curiosity, motivation, and effective language learning strategies among children.

Parents recognize the pivotal role of foreign language acquisition in the personal and social growth of their children, viewing it as crucial for their future educational and career opportunities. They also underscore its contribution to fostering intercultural competencies, tolerance, and adaptability.

Contrary to concerns, parents overwhelmingly dismiss worries regarding any adverse effects on their children's proficiency in their native language.

However, a significant majority of respondents, comprising 90% (N=247), do not engage in reading children's literature in English with their child at home. The proportion of children who read storybooks or original English-language young adult fiction on their own is slightly higher according to parents, because 24% (N=66) do so, while 76% (N=208) do not participate in this activity independently.

5 Conclusion

5.1 Summary of the Main Findings

The doctoral dissertation investigating English teachers', pre-service teachers and parents perspectives on the integration of children's literature predominantly relied on four distinct questionnaires supplemented by interview data. The research aimed to ascertain the extent of adoption of authentic children's literature in English language instruction within schools with Hungarian language of instruction in Transcarpathia, and to examine teachers' attitudes and perceptions on this matter. Findings indicate that a mere 29% of teachers incorporate children's literature into their teaching practices, while 52% do not. Moreover, 19% express willingness but lack access to appropriate materials, and those who do use such resources find it to be infrequent.

Teachers who incorporate children's literature cited overcrowded curricula and time constraints as primary obstacles. Despite favourable attitudes towards the pedagogical benefits of children's literature, teachers encounter challenges such as limited availability of storybooks, absence of curriculum guidelines, lack of authentic literary content in mainstream textbooks, and difficulties in deviating from established curriculum norms.

The interviews underscored that the shift to online learning during Covid-19 significantly impeded the integration of children's literature, particularly affecting young learners in rural areas with limited digital resources. The onset of armed conflict between Russia and Ukraine further exacerbated challenges in education, increasing teacher workloads and limiting opportunities for implementing new teaching methodologies.

Overall, pre-service teachers exhibited a favourable disposition towards incorporating children's literature into their future teaching practices, despite limited exposure to such methods during their own educational experiences. During their pedagogical practice, the implementation of story-based lessons yielded positive outcomes, as trainees acknowledged

benefits such as enhanced vocabulary acquisition and the promotion of natural language learning. Nonetheless, they also noted practical challenges including the time-intensive nature of lesson preparation and the necessity for adequate instructional materials.

Additionally, the study explored parental perspectives on the role of children's literature in foreign language education. While parents generally expressed satisfaction with language instruction in schools, few reported engaging in reading English-language children's books with their children at home. This highlights an area where parental involvement in supporting foreign language learning outside the classroom could potentially be enhanced.

5.2 Main Pedagogical Implications for Practice

Some pedagogical insights and recommendations emerge from the findings of this study. The first and second investigations underscored the challenges encountered by English teachers in schools with Hungarian language of instruction in Transcarpathia. It is evident that the underuse of children's literature in classrooms does not reflect inadequacies on the part of teachers but rather is influenced by prevailing circumstances and systemic factors. While teachers acknowledge the benefits of integrating children's literature, they contend with numerous obstacles.

Introducing a course on children's literature in English followed by a methodology course within the English teacher training curriculum could be highly beneficial and lead to positive outcomes. This educational initiative would provide prospective teachers with a deeper understanding of the subject matter, potentially facilitating the integration of children's literature into their language teaching practices.

Furthermore, organizing additional training sessions for current teachers to familiarize them with this pedagogical approach, or to update their existing knowledge on effectively using children's literature in classrooms, is equally important. Such initiatives could enhance teachers' competencies and confidence in employing children's literature as an instructional tool.

One potential remedy to address the current challenges could involve the development of an informative booklet or brochure. This resource would feature recommendations and pre-designed classroom exercises, including photocopiable or easily adaptable worksheets aligned with digitally available stories. Insights gathered from teacher interviews consistently emphasized the use of such a readily accessible resource, specifically tailored to guide the incorporation of children's literature in English language teaching. Integration with the curriculum would further enhance its effectiveness, enabling teachers to identify suitable children's literature examples for specific teaching topics. Given the limited availability of

English-language storybooks, teachers often struggle with selecting appropriate materials spontaneously that align with the unique characteristics, language proficiency, and interests of their learners.

5.3 Limitations

The research has many limitations, which I have tried to overcome, but unfortunately this was not always possible. The first limitation is the context of the research itself and the number of participating English teachers working in schools with Hungarian language of instruction in Transcarpathia. Given the limited number, I tried to cover the whole population, which was achieved in a relatively high proportion, but the results are not generalisable, they can only be applied to a local community in specific circumstances. Another disadvantage is that the research was only carried out in schools with Hungarian language of instruction in Transcarpathia and schools with Ukrainian language of instruction were not included, so the comparative part is unfortunately missing in this area. However, there are two reasons for this. On the one hand, the differences in the organisation and structure of education between Hungarian and Ukrainian schools do not allow for a comparison between the two systems (English is taught more in Ukrainian schools) and, on the other hand, the difficulties in language learning, especially in the initial period, due to the differences between the Latin and Cyrillic alphabets, may be a factor, especially for young language learners. This means that children do not progress at the same pace initially and face different challenges.

Another limitation of the research pertains to the story-based lessons conducted by pre-service teachers. Regrettably, logistical constraints prevented a more extensive, exploration of the longitudinal use of children's literature in classroom settings. Additionally, the research was not feasible in all schools during the pedagogical practice.

Another shortfall in the study is the inability to capture the perspectives of learners regarding the use of children's literature in the classroom. During the pedagogical practice, I distributed a questionnaire to college students for their learners, comprising ten statements about the short story used during the teaching practice. Employing emoticons on a Likert scale, the questionnaire aimed to measure the learners' emotional responses to the story-based lessons. However, due to challenges in maintaining a continuous sequence of five story-based lessons as intended, only a partial dataset of returned questionnaires (N=102) was obtained, primarily reflecting overwhelmingly positive emotional feedback. Consequently, I deemed this data insufficiently robust for scientific analysis and opted to exclude it from the research findings.

It is possible that the exceptional nature of the lessons may have elicited heightened emotional responses from the children, potentially influencing their feedback.

Furthermore, it is important to note that during the research involving parents, external circumstances within the country posed significant obstacles, greatly complicating data collection efforts. Despite these challenges, it underscores the parents' heightened sense of awareness and importance placed on addressing their children's foreign language learning amidst such difficult conditions.

And finally, of course, it should also be mentioned that the war changed many circumstances in individuals' lives, including my own, which made it many times more difficult to carry out scientific research.

5.4 Implications for Future Research

Taking into account the results and conclusions of the research, and bearing in mind the context of the research, I believe that the most effective and useful direction for the future is the use of digitally accessible children's literature in the classroom.

I do not believe that there is any prospect in the near future of significant reforms in the field of education policy, for example in curricula, which would bring significant results. According to teachers, there is a positive, forward-looking direction in Ukraine in terms of the development of textbooks, but the problem of the availability of children's literature in English will not be solved in the near future. Therefore, I think it is worth exploring and disseminating more widely what digital solutions, which are also available free of charge, could lead to a more positive direction.

Furthermore, should there be an opportunity to implement extended, multi-session, or semester-long story-based teaching approaches by teachers, it would be beneficial to investigate the progression and enhancements in learners' language skills, incorporating control groups for comparative analysis.

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