

# Definitions of ‘Literature’ in Bangladesh EFL Context – an Empirical Study

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**Abstract:** This article attempts to explore various perceptions of the term ‘literature’ of English teachers in the Bangladesh EFL context. It also examines the relevance of using literary pieces in language classrooms in view of the negative beliefs of many teachers and learners in this regard. It is based on a study conducted with 20 teachers of English each from primary, secondary and tertiary levels in Bangladesh. Both quantitative and qualitative data was collected from the participant teachers. The study reveals that in most cases teachers perceived ‘literature’ in a narrow and limited way. It is argued that a broader understanding of the term ‘literature’ may help in promoting learner autonomy and enhance learners’ sense of self-achievement, confidence, and self-reliance. It is also argued that proceeding from a broader sense of ‘literature’, reintroducing literary texts in the English classroom may create a positive impact on the learning and learners.

**Keywords:** language, literature, defining ‘literature’, EFL context, Bangladesh

## I. INTRODUCTION

While thinking about the term ‘literature’, traditionally, literature (with a large L) is defined as the ‘best’, ‘classical’ writing produced in a given language or society that possesses the quality of surpassing the barrier of time and thus gets considered as a literary canon for all times. Literature could encompass fairy tales from Hans Christian Anderson to the Homeric classics. This normally includes ‘classical’ writers belonging to the past, and often excludes contemporary writing.

However, in the post-modern, deconstructionist age, the definition of literature took on a new shape to include texts such as advertising copy, graffiti and public notices which use literary devices like parallelism, rhyme, rhythm and metaphor (Maley, 2001). These are thought to be appropriate and relevant in the classroom because of their use of literary devices. They are considered to be worth interpretation, and more relevant than the canonical texts which sometimes pose difficulty for the students, because of the nature of language used. Therefore, literature now encompasses popular fiction, advertising and film in order to make the whole teaching/learning process more attractive and interesting. According to Scholes:

What students need from us...is the kind of knowledge and skill that will enable them to make sense of their worlds, to determine their own interests, ... to see through the manipulations of all sorts of texts in all sorts of media,

and to express their own views in some appropriate manner (Scholes 1985:15-16).

### 1.1 Background of the Study

In the EFL context of Bangladesh, currently English as a subject is broadly categorised as having two wings, ‘literature’ and ‘language/linguistics’. English as a language is predominantly introduced in the education sector, from grade one to tertiary level. This was not always the case. In regular English classes learners were introduced to appropriate literary texts according to their level of education and understanding from where they used to learn English as a language quite directly as literature itself is language and reflects life and predominantly real language.

The sudden separation of language and literature being two entirely different ‘subjects’ have resulted in teachers losing interest in introducing literary pieces in the classroom as they are somehow bound to be ‘abide by the law’ of following the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) produced and provided textbooks, which totally aims at formulaic language learning. Teachers themselves somehow are losing interest reading books of universal values.

In such a situation, this study aims at finding first of all, how do the teachers of English these days define the term ‘literature’ that may eventually throw some lights on the impact of reintroducing literature in the English classroom as a beneficial tool in learning the language.

### 1.2 Research Objectives

This particular small-scale study aims at looking for the loopholes, regarding mainly the area of grayness – how exactly the teachers of English define ‘literary’ texts, how do they themselves feel about literature and whether they feel that bringing ‘literary’ texts in their classroom would better the English teaching/learning situation ultimately preparing their students to face the world where they may not do without being proficient in the target language.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Etymologically, the term derives from Latin *litteratura/litteratura*, ‘writing formed with letters,’ although some definitions include spoken or sung texts. More restrictively, literature possesses literary merit. Literary works are often categorised according to historical periods or their adherence to certain aesthetic features or expectations (genre).

### 2.1 Introduction

'Literature', the name has traditionally been applied to those imaginative works distinguished by the intentions of their authors and may be classified according to a variety of systems, including language, national origin, historical period, genre, and subject matter. Literature also functions as a means of both criticising and affirming cultural values of a given society.

### 2.2 Prevalent Definitions of 'Literature'

A definition of 'literature' is not a homogeneous one. There remain problems in defining the term, especially once the socio-historical and cultural factors are considered.

As defined in the Oxford Learner's Dictionary of Academic English, 'literature' encompasses pieces of writing that are considered to be works of art, especially novels, plays and poems. These writings are in contrast to technical books and newspapers, magazines, etc. This definition of literature certainly points out to literature with a capital 'L' rather than a small 'l'.

Literature with a capital 'L' would suggest that literary works could be under headings indicating time throwing some light on a certain period reflecting the trends of that era. For example, the Romantic era was marked by a renewed interest in the art and literature of ancient Greece. Narrative poetry in English literature is often associated with the Middle Ages. Great works of literature can change the way people think, and so on.

As pointed out by Williams, (1976:183): 'Literature' is a difficult word, in part because its conventional contemporary meaning appears, at first sight, so simple.' By the late twentieth century, 'literature' as a concept and as a term, has become problematic, either through ideological symbol of the high culture 'Canon', or, conversely, through demystification by radical critical theory. Therefore, as pointed out by Eagleton (1976:166), it is now a state when 'Literature must indeed be re-situated within the field of general cultural production; but each mode of such production demands a semiology of its own, which is not conflatable with some universal "cultural" discourse'.

The word 'literature' in itself can be used in a number of ways. As observed by Widdowson (1999), however, in normal usage, a distinction tends to be drawn and signalled by the fact that when reference is made to critical, theoretical or promotional literature, there is a tendency to put the definite article in front of the word, whereas, to refer to 'literary' writings, the use of definite article is left out. Again, 'Literature' with an upper-case 'L' and within inverted commas signifies the idea of that global body of literary writing which has been recognised with Matthew Arnold's famous utterance, as quoted in Widdowson (ibid: 4) – 'the best that has been known and said in the world'.

In addition, the 'critical approach' which is also known as the checklist approach to literature suggests that once the items on

the list that associated with 'literature' are checked off, the word applies. It is characterized by 'clear, inflexible boundaries' and by categories which are 'internally defined, i.e., defined on the basis of the properties of the members' (Hohulin 1987:4). Based on this approach, is the definition of literature as proposed by Wellek (1978):

To speak sweepingly one can say, summarizing, that in antiquity and in the Renaissance, literature or letters were understood to include all writing of quality with any pretense to permanence (Wellek 1978:20)

And according to McFadden (1978):

I should say, then, that literature is a canon which consists of those works in language by which a community defines itself through the course of its history. It includes works primarily artistic and those whose aesthetic qualities are only secondary. The self-defining activity of the community is conducted in the light of the works, as its members have come to read them (or concretize them) (McFadden 1978:56).

### 2.3 English Literature and Contemporary Literature

Although, apparently there is not much difficulty in phrases such as 'English literature' or 'contemporary literature', until the question regarding whether all books and writing are 'literature' and what are the criteria set in selecting are raised. Widdowson (1999:8) elaborates the problematic areas in definitions of 'literature', definitions that have made entries in pioneering encyclopaedias and references. For example, the entry on 'literature' in *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica: Micropaedia*, reads: 'a body of written works. The name is often applied to those imaginative works of poetry and prose distinguished by the intentions of their authors and the excellence of their execution'. The distinction between 'literature' and 'drama' also poses problems, apparently because drama is a form primarily written for spoken performance.

The above definition introduces the notion of 'imagination' as the defining characteristic of 'literary' writing and discriminates in favour of those writings 'distinguished by the intentions of their authors'. The argument does not make it clear how an author's intention 'distinguishes' a work as literature. Widdowson adds that although it may seem natural for one to think that some works may be better than others, the problem is, however, that the 'canonising process is cognate with the discourse of evaluation: the criteria are imprecise, unexplained, tacitly assumed, and thoroughly naturalised' (ibid.:8).

However, in an attempt to 'demystify' literature, McRae (1991:2-3), differentiates between 'referential' language, which communicates on the informative level only, and 'representational' language, which engages the imagination of the reader. He defines a literary text as any imaginative material that stimulates a response in the reader, including songs, cartoons, idioms and proverbs.

### III. SCOPE OF THE STUDY

It is factual that exclusion of literature from the English classroom hasn't proved to be anything positivity contributing towards learning the language. A total language-based approach firstly results in learners' memorization tendency that ultimately produces fear and inertia in using the language in real life. They look forward to an examination paper that they can answer from memory; they covet and wait eagerly for the teacher giving them suggestions; during exam there is no trace of an iota of need of creativity and critical thinking ability while answering the questions.

In order to better the situation above, confirmation of literature in English classroom may prove to be much beneficial. And bringing back literature into the classroom mainly depends on the teachers' attitude towards and fascination towards literary works themselves, because they are the resources who are to handle the texts with their students.

Under the present circumstance, I would rather agree with Meyer (1997) that most discussions regarding defining the term 'literature' try to incline towards either the authoritarian definition based on certain critical assumptions and or towards a definition solely on whatever a particular reader chooses to call literature.

Nevertheless, it is believed that bringing in literary texts with a small 'l' along with traditionally acknowledged literary pieces may be more beneficial in terms of learning the language as well as improving motivational spirit among learners of English. Therefore, literature would encompass texts both from literature with a small 'l' and also with a capital 'L' – starting from present day graffiti and ending with Homer, if applicable and necessary.

### IV. METHODOLOGY AND SUBJECTS

This study employed both quantitative (which brings precision) and qualitative (which provides more nuanced picture) approaches in the exploration. As Best and Kahn (1989: 89-90) suggest: 'Quantitative research is based more directly on its original plans and its results are more readily analysed and interpreted. Qualitative research is more open and responsive to its subject.... It is possible for a single investigation to use both methods'.

According to Blaxter *et al.* (1996), qualitative and quantitative data taken separately provide only a partial description of the whole situation. Bell (1993) suggests that the open-ended questions be used to give the subjects an opportunity to express their personal views and support the choice they made in the close-ended ones. The close-ended questions were based on a *scale*, devised to discover 'strength of feeling of attitude' (Bell, 1993:139). According to Bell, the most straightforward attitude scale is probably the Likert, one which asks respondents to indicate strength of agreement or disagreement with a given statement or a series of statements on a four point range (from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly

agree'). The questionnaire was distributed among teachers working at different levels also to perceive the similarities and dissimilarities of their thoughts and perception based on the target group they teach. The teachers were codified in order to keep their identity confidential as most of them wished so.

In order to assist the library research and literature review, a questionnaire survey is conducted among 60 teachers of English from different levels of education that included teachers from primary, secondary and tertiary levels. Each level involved 20 participants and all questionnaires were returned to the researcher though in most of the cases the researcher had to wait beyond the stipulated time given for their return. In some cases, a little push worked well, for example, a small text message, a short conversation, a good wish note from the researcher proved helpful in getting back the responses. Another small observation on the researcher's part is that, since the investigation was conducted during Covid 19 period, the teachers were working from home and hence perhaps they could manage to do the questionnaire at their own time and pace amid other schedule. It was in a sense, a plus point in having all the questionnaires returned.

The questionnaire aimed at eliciting a general view of the teachers' attitudes towards literature: their understanding of the term 'literature' in Bangladesh EFL context hoping that this finding will contribute to the idea of reintroducing literary texts in the 'language' dominated classroom that is prevailing at the moment and proving not to be much helpful in learning the language on the learner's part.

### V. DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSIONS

The following section presents the data received on the questionnaire in tabular form followed by a discussion on the findings.

The questionnaire started with questions in order to elicit data on the participants in order to see their year of teaching or work experience, the age group of their students and the levels they teach. It is already mentioned that data were sought from 3 groups of teachers – primary, secondary and tertiary levels with the rationale of having an overall view that comes from different levels of teachers on the purpose of this small empirical study.

Personal data: How long have you been teaching English? What is the age group and levels of the students you teach?

Teaching experience	Students' age group (approximately)	Level of students
7-20 years	5-12	Primary
10-25 years	13-18	Secondary
10-20 years	19 - 27	Tertiary

The above data indicates that the teachers' level of experience is matured; the students belong to normal age groups according to the level of study from Bangladesh perspective.

Question 1 of the questionnaire asked about the teachers' reading interest in English. The data obtained is presented below:

Q. 1. Table 1: You enjoy reading books in English.

Level of teachers	1 Strongly disagree	2 Disagree	3 Agree	4 Strongly agree
Primary			4 (20%)	16 (80%)
Secondary				20 (100%)
Tertiary				20 (100%)

The data reveals on Question 1 reveals that among the 60 teachers only 4 from primary level agree that they enjoy reading books in English whereas, the majority strongly agrees with the statement. Therefore, it can be deduced that teachers of English from all levels enjoy reading books in English.

Question 2 asked the teachers to define the term 'literature' from their own perspective. Some of the comments are presented below:

Q. 2. Table 2: Defining the term 'literature'.

Level of teachers	Defining the term 'literature'.
Primary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Literature is an art document where reflection of life is presented. It is the main essence of life. Literature unfolds every aspects of life and helps us to think differently and see differently. Essentially it is a mirror of our life.</li> <li>Literature is an imaginary state of people and events.</li> <li>Literature is a medium of expression.</li> <li>Literature is a group of inscribed works including poetry, prose, fiction, and non-fiction. Sometimes it can be oral and pass down from one generation to the other through storytelling.</li> <li>Literature is considered to be an art form, especially prose, fiction, drama and poetry distinguished by the intentions of their authors and the perceived aesthetic excellence of their execution</li> <li>A piece of written work where we can find entertainment, ethical issues, love and sorrow. We can see the world through literature.</li> <li>Literature is knowing and writing things more accurately enhancing one's knowledge.</li> </ul>
Secondary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>'Literature' is the proper expression in written form of the conscious and sub-conscious mind of an individual which is served to be enjoyed by others.</li> <li>'Literature' is a comprehensive and creative perspective of and reflection on the explicit and salient aspects of human life and imagination.</li> <li>Literature shapes second language learning through comprehensible input that includes but not limited to word bank, spontaneous language form and essence of language.</li> <li>'Literature' is a relative term. However, it is an effort to translate emotion into words and ornamenting them with literary leaves.</li> <li>Literature is a collection of written work which is considered to have superior or lasting artistic merit.</li> <li>Literature is fiction created for entertainment.</li> <li>Literature reflects social life.</li> </ul>
Tertiary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>'Literature' is a piece of art worthy of being remembered, which connects intellectuality to emotional appeal.</li> <li>Literature is a body of written works that contain a strong creative and artistic value. It can present, reflect and foreshadow ideologies that have social, cultural, universal, and psychological importance. It can also be experimental, showcasing the creative expressions of the author/ creator.</li> <li>'Literature' represents the creative and aesthetic linguistic compositions to provide pleasure along with insights about life.</li> <li>'Literature' is the reflection of life through beautiful depiction of words.</li> <li>'Literature' is a written work of artistic merit.</li> </ul>

A summary of the definition of literature mainly projects literature with a capital 'L', and to be a reflection of life through beautiful depiction of words also representing the creative and aesthetic linguistic compositions to provide pleasure along with insights about life.

Question 3 asked the respondents to indicate their choice of literary genre and comment on their preference. They could choose more than one option. Table 3 presents the data obtained.

Q. 3. Table 3: Genres of preference with comments.

Level of teachers	Poetry	Drama	Short story	Novel
Primary	6 (30%)		16 (80%)	
Secondary	5 (25%)		9 (45%)	18 (90%)
Tertiary	12 (60%)	9 (45%)	15 (75%)	9 (45%)

The data indicates that the majority from all three groups of teachers prefer short stories, primary group (80%), secondary (45%) and tertiary group (75%); and then poetry, primary (30%), secondary (25%), tertiary level (60%) as their choice

of preference. Only tertiary level teachers indicated that drama could be another choice (45%), whereas, novel was another preferred genre by secondary (90%) and tertiary level (45%) teachers. So, it can be deduced that the most preferred genre

is short story, then poetry and the least preferred literary genre is drama.

Level of teachers	Genre preference with comments
Primary	<p><b>Poetry</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Poetry refreshes my mind and soul. I feel alive and get motivated when I read them.</li> </ul> <p><b>Short story</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The main content could be revealed within a short time and as in a short story; a writer tries to focus on the main theme very strongly.</li> <li>Short story is more dramatic.</li> <li>Short stories provide authors the freedom to convey a message or experiment with a theme without the burden of committing to a lengthier one. Short stories teach us about life, about ourselves and about others.</li> </ul> <p><b>Novel</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I use graphic novels as many students consider them to be a literary art form and they are very interested in them.</li> <li>I like reading novels because they tell a story in detail where short stories do not.</li> </ul>
Secondary	<p><b>Poetry</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Poems are the pure beauty of literature like sparkling stars in the sky.</li> <li>Poetry engages the students' interest once they get involved.</li> </ul> <p><b>Drama</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Drama is a narrative form of a story, students can participate and can act out a drama in the class.</li> </ul> <p><b>Short story</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Short stories are like beautiful afternoons in a backyard sinking into oblivion with thrilling excitement.</li> </ul> <p><b>Novel</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Novels are like sleepless nights filled up with laughter and tears, they're the precious jewels of literature.</li> <li>Novels deal with many twists in the form of plot and sub-plot which are connected to our daily life.</li> </ul>
Tertiary	<p><b>Poetry</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Poetry could be used successfully in multiple level classrooms.</li> </ul> <p><b>Short story</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Short stories focus on a single plot and explore it thoroughly. A well-written short story can successfully convey the same messages as a novel. It can also employ many literary devices. Due to its short length, it often ends without a definite conclusion, which lets the readers seek their own conclusion.</li> </ul>

The data above indicates that short story and poetry are the most preferred and interesting literary genres among the teachers. A summary of their choice indicates that they prefer short stories because, the main content could be revealed within a short time; they are more dramatic, a short story can be finished at one go and is very helpful in building up the habit of daily reading. It can also employ many literary devices. Due to its short length, it often ends without a definite conclusion, which lets the readers seek their own conclusion. These could be used successfully in multiple level classrooms.

Regarding poetry as a preferable genre, the teachers indicated that poetry has the refreshing quality. One can feel alive and can get motivated while reading them. Poetry also can engage the students' interest once they get involved in it. Poetry can also be used successfully in multiple level classrooms.

*Question 4 asked the respondents to indicate the choice of literature that they would prefer to use in the classroom mentioning the reasons behind their choice. They could choose more than one type.*

Q. 4. Table 4: Types of literature teachers prefer to use in the classroom, citing reasons on their preference.

Level of teachers	Classical literature	Contemporary literature	All kinds of literary works
Primary	6 (30%)	8 (40%)	6 (30%)
Secondary	2 (10%)	13 (65%)	5 (25%)
Tertiary	2 (10%)	11 (55%)	11 (55%)

The data indicates that the majority from all three groups of teachers prefer contemporary literature, primary (40%), secondary (65%) and tertiary (55%); and then all kinds of literary works, primary (30%), secondary (25%), tertiary level (55%) as their choice of preference. Classical literature is preferred by 30% primary group teachers, 10% secondary and only 10% tertiary level teachers. So, it can be deduced that the most preferred type of literature is contemporary literature to all levels of teachers.

Level of teachers	Type of literature preference with comments
Primary	<p><b>Classical literature</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Classical literature is an expression of life, truth, and beauty. It must be of high artistic quality, at least for the time in which it was written. Classical literature refers to the great masterpieces of Greek, Roman, and other ancient civilizations. The works of Homer, Ovid, and Sophocles are all examples of classical literature.</li> <li>There are lots of references to work with.</li> </ul> <p><b>Contemporary literature</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Contemporary literature is easy to relate to personal experiences.</li> </ul> <p><b>All kinds of literary works</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Since, literature is a reflection of life therefore, different kinds of literature reflect different aspects of life. One can get different flavors from different literary works that makes one think about life, love, nature, and everything else. Literature texts in the lessons of English can help learners to improve their English.</li> </ul>
Secondary	<p><b>Classical literature</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>If teachers are given a chance to teach literature then I would go for 'classical' ones. I won't allow contemporary literature, no Mills and Boons types. Classical literature crosses the boundary of time, and they offer something special. Outside classroom they go for easy literary books, I want them to enjoy and get introduced to classical literature. No entry of contemporary literature in the classroom.</li> </ul> <p><b>Contemporary literature</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Contemporary literature has familiarity with current situations. They represent real situation, and place through characters, initiates critical thinking, acceptable to younger generation.</li> </ul> <p><b>All kinds of literary works</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I like to enjoy a variety of literary works, from classical to contemporary. I like old epic poem "Beowulf" and also enjoy science fiction of Isaac Asimov. I like Charles Dickens's "A tale of two cities", on the other hand, J.K Rowling's phenomenal creation "Harry Potter".</li> </ul>
Tertiary	<p><b>Contemporary literature</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I prefer contemporary literature mostly because of its reliability and versatility. Classical literature to a large extent is focused on a few selected cultures/ religions/ social backgrounds, whereas contemporary literature explores the much wider world. Besides, the students are likely to understand/ relate to the contents of contemporary literature more.</li> </ul> <p><b>All kinds of literary works</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Variety brings spice to teaching and learning.</li> </ul>

The data above indicates that the most preferred type of literature is contemporary literature to all levels of teachers and the next preference is all kinds of literary works.

A summary of the reasons behind their choice indicates that they prefer contemporary literature most because, they find contemporary literature easy to relate to personal experiences, it has familiarity with current situations. They represent real situation and place through characters, initiate critical thinking which are acceptable to younger generation. It is a preference mostly because of its reliability and versatility. Classical literature to a large extent is focused on a few selected cultures/ religions/ social backgrounds, whereas contemporary literature explores the much wider world. Contemporary literature instantly grabs students' attention as those would be relatable to their day to day lives.

Some teachers also prefer to use all kinds of literary works because literature itself is a reflection of life, and therefore, different kinds of literature reflect different aspects of life. Literature texts in the lessons of English can help learners to improve their English.

*Question 5 asked the teachers whether literary texts motivate their students in English lessons.*

Q. 5. Table 5: Literature texts motivate your students in English lessons.

Level of teachers	1 Strongly disagree	2 Disagree	3 Agree	4 Strongly agree
Primary	2(10%)	4 (20%)	4 (20%)	10 (50%)
Secondary			14 (70%)	6 (30%)
Tertiary			11 (55%)	9 (45%)

Data gathered on question 5 exposes that the majority of the respondents from all levels of education agree (50% from primary, 30% from secondary and 45% from tertiary level strongly agree) that literature texts motivate their students in English lessons. Only 20% disagree and 10% primary teachers think that literature texts do not motivate their students in English lessons. However, from the above data it can be deduced that the majority of the teachers from all groups believe that literature texts motivate their students in English lessons.

*Question 6 asked the participants whether literary texts provide many possibilities for foreign language teaching and learning.*

Q. 6. Table 6: Literary texts provide many possibilities for foreign language teaching and learning.

Level of teachers	1 Strongly disagree	2 Disagree	3 Agree	4 Strongly agree
Primary			11 (55%)	9 (45%)
Secondary	3 (15%)		6 (30%)	11 (55%)
Tertiary		2 (10%)	6 (30%)	12 (60%)

Data gathered on question 6 reveals that the majority of the respondents from all levels of education agree (45% from primary, 55% from secondary and 60% from tertiary level strongly agree) that literary texts provide many possibilities for foreign language teaching and learning. Only 15% disagree from secondary and 10% tertiary level teachers think otherwise. Therefore, it can be concluded that the majority of the respondents whether they have literature in their classroom or not believe that literary texts provide many possibilities for foreign language teaching and learning.

*Question 7 asked the respondents whether literary texts are valuable authentic materials.*

Q. 7. Table 7: Literary texts are valuable authentic materials.

Level of teachers	1 Strongly disagree	2 Disagree	3 Agree	4 Strongly agree
Primary			12 (60%)	8 (40%)
Secondary		4(20%)	6 (30%)	10 (50%)
Tertiary			6 (30%)	14 (70%)

*Question 9 asked the respondents to put their positive comments on the use of literature texts in a foreign language classroom.*

Q. 9. Table 9: Positive comments on the use of literature texts in a foreign language classroom

Level of teachers	Positive comments
Primary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students enjoy their lessons, literature widens their creativity, they can think about life in a new way.</li> <li>Literature allows students to get to know the culture and norms of other countries.</li> </ul>
Secondary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Method of using literary text in a foreign language classroom is a great technique that can motivate students to learn the language with much more enthusiasm and of course with great effectiveness.</li> <li>Using literary texts in language classroom provides very unique opportunities of task-grading, leveraging on individual learner strategy and aptitude, and addressing linguistic, communicatively pragmatic, semantics and affective barriers in an individualist manner.</li> <li>Literature motivates students to become a better person.</li> </ul>
Tertiary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The purpose of learning a language is to communicate and literature helps one to communicate with emotion and expression. It is an effective tool to teach language. In my opinion, using literature texts in a foreign language classroom is an effective way to show the learners the proper context of using the language. It gives them the chance to get to know the social/ cultural aspects of the language as well.</li> <li>If used well by a knowledgeable instructor, literary texts can work wonders.</li> </ul>

From the comments on question 9 it is evident that, literature can make students more aware of the benefits of learning a foreign language. They enjoy their lessons more, it widens their creativity, they can think about life in a new way. Method of using literary text in a foreign language classroom is a great technique that can motivate students to learn the language with enthusiasm.

Data on question 7 reveals that the majority of the respondents from all levels of teachers (40% from primary, 50% from secondary and 70% from tertiary level) strongly agree whereas, the second largest group from all the levels (60% from primary, 30% from secondary and 30% from tertiary level) agree with the statement that literary texts are valuable authentic materials. Only 20% from secondary group disagree with the statement which is insignificant in terms of the positive data received.

*Question 8 asked the respondents whether literature in the language classroom is irrelevant.*

Q. 8. Table 8: Literature in the language classroom is irrelevant.

Level of teachers	1 Strongly disagree	2 Disagree	3 Agree	4 Strongly agree
Primary	8 (40%)	12 (60%)		
Secondary	6 (30%)	6 (30%)	8 (40%)	
Tertiary	10 (50%)	10 (50%)		

Data collected on question 8 reveals that the majority of the respondents from all levels of teachers (40% from primary, 30% from secondary and 50% from tertiary level) strongly disagree whereas, the other majority group of teachers (60% from primary, 30% from secondary and 50% from tertiary level) disagree with the statement that literary texts are irrelevant in the language classroom. Only 40% from secondary group agree with the statement which is insignificant in terms of the rest of the data received.

To quote one teacher: ‘Literary texts get students to focus on their reading skills which are unfortunately the ones they want to focus on the least. However, I’m a big believer that reading skills can help in vocabulary acquisition so I definitely try to encourage my students to focus/improve their reading skills. In this regard, literature is the best tool as students can improve their skills while getting entertained by the story itself’.

According to another teacher: ‘In our classroom we must follow the textbook by NCTB only; there is also the issue of time constraint. However, if I could introduce literature in the

class, it would have proved much helpful for the student in developing creativity, imaginary power, social involvement and awareness, vocabulary accumulation in English , etc.’.

*Question 10 asked the respondents to put their negative comments on the use of literature texts in a foreign language classroom.*

Q. 10. Table 10: Negative comments on the use of literature in a foreign language classroom.

Level of teachers	Negative comments
Primary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sometimes a negative impact can be created on the psychology of students by reading about different types culture, norms, life style, traditions, and moralities of other countries. These could involve sensitive issues disturbing to the learners. Culture differences may have shocking impact on some learners if not introduced properly.</li> <li>• It is very challenging to select texts for a foreign language classroom as the culture and society could be to some extent not familiar to the students.</li> <li>• In certain kinds of writing, particularly in art criticism and literary criticism, it is normal to come across long passages which are at the onset, almost completely lack in meaning.</li> </ul>
Secondary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The success of bringing literary texts in the language classroom greatly depends on two components - the selection of the right text and the ability of the teacher to connect the text with the students. Absence of the any of the two elements can remarkably show a decline in its desired result.</li> <li>• Literary content should not be introduced if the class is multicultural and might require too much predisposition to literary technicalities.</li> <li>• It takes time to understand the context and other features of literature. At times, it may deviate students from the original focal point.</li> <li>• I do not find any negative impact of using literature in the language classroom. Teaching language following traditional systems may initiate disinterest in students in learning English. However, a combination of language and literary text may help us to hold the attention of the learners.</li> <li>• Reading is one of the least explored skills in our education system. Longer English texts definitely present a challenge to all teachers in a classroom where reading skill is involved.</li> <li>• Tough language may result in student demotivation. If not related to their own content and context, the students may feel lost. Contemporary literature is not appropriate for teen agers as through literature they may get introduced to unwanted issues.</li> </ul>
Tertiary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When the learners have basic knowledge and comprehension skill, they can surely improve their language skills with the help of literature.</li> <li>• Realia and other authentic materials which are not traditionally considered as ‘literature’ should be incorporated so that students would have hands on practices to face the real world. Not all students love literature may be because they are not properly introduced to literature from an early age.</li> <li>• If text is not chosen according to the intended level, it may fail to reach its goal as learners may find it challenging. They will ultimately lose interest if the text is not properly handled.</li> <li>• If the instructor is not prepared, or not comfortable with a literary text, they should not be the ones introducing it to the students, or using it in class. It will prove to be detrimental both to the students and the instructor.</li> </ul>

*A summary of the comments on question 10 is presented below.*

Sometimes a negative impact can be created on the psychology of students by reading different types of literature as they may reflect sensitive issues that go against the norms and culture of the learners’ society. The teacher may have to state the significance or importance of each part of the text, which may pose difficulty. In art criticism and literary criticism, it is usual to come across long passages which are at the onset, may seem to lack in meaning.

According to one teacher: ‘The success of bringing literary texts in the language classroom greatly depends on two components - the selection of the right text and the ability of the teacher to connect the text with the students. Absence of the any of the two elements can remarkably show a decline in its desired result’.

A combination of language and literary text may help us to hold the attention of the learners. Tough language may result in student demotivation. If not related to their own content and context, they students may feel lost. Contemporary literature

may introduce controversial and inappropriate matters that go against the norms of the society and country of the learner. The main downside of using literature in a foreign language classroom would be the matter of reliability and comprehension. If the learners are not at the level where they can comprehend the contents of the texts, they are not likely to be benefitted from it.

According to another respondent: ‘Not all the teachers can teach literature. They must be trained to teach literature’.

To quote another teacher: ‘If the instructor is not prepared, or not comfortable with a literary text, s/he should not be the one introducing the text to the students. It will prove to be detrimental both to the students and the instructor’.

So, from the comments mentioned above it can be deduced that while talking about the negative aspects of introducing literature in the English classroom, it’s more of a problem of text selection and teacher training rather than having literary texts in the classroom.



### 5.1 A Summary of the Findings

The reason behind selecting teachers from three levels of education were mainly to find out the similarities and dissimilarities regarding their attitude towards literature in the EFL classroom, the probable problems that may affect their use of literary items and also if they could come up with some possible solutions to the problems detected.

A summary of the findings from the answers to the queries show that teachers of English from all levels do enjoy reading books in English, despite whether they could use literature in their respective classrooms or not. The sense of enjoyment in reading literary pieces is still prevalent.

A summary of the definitions of literature mainly projected that the teachers are still inclined to define literature with a capital 'L'. A very few teachers touched the point of calling songs, slogans, even leaflets using literary devices to be a part of literature.

The majority of teachers preferred short story, then poetry and the least preferred literary genre according to them is drama. A summary of their choice indicates that they prefer short stories because of its length and therefore it can be handled at one go that is helpful in increasing the daily reading habit.

The data obtained also indicates that the most preferred type of literature to be used in the classroom would be contemporary literature and the next preference is using all kinds of literary works. A summary of the reasons behind their choice indicates that they prefer contemporary literature most because they are easy to relate to personal experiences, and have familiarity with current situations. Some teachers also prefer to use all kinds of literary works because they believe different kinds of literature reflect different aspects of life.

The majority of the respondents from all three groups opine that literature texts are able to motivate their students in English lessons, they provide many possibilities for foreign language teaching and learning, and that they are valuable authentic materials.

The majority of teachers from all three groups do not agree with the statement that literature in the language classroom is irrelevant. A very small percentage believe otherwise, which in terms of the rest of the responses can be ignored.

The respondents opined that literature can make students more aware of the benefits of learning a foreign language and can get students to focus on their reading skills, unfortunately one of the least focused ones which needs addressing. However, literature also motivates students to become a better person. If used well by a knowledgeable instructor, literary texts can work wonders.

The comments on the negative aspects of using literature in an EFL classroom show that there could be sensitive issues related to the text that may instill negative thoughts in a

student. It is challenging to select proper texts for an EFL classroom.

Literary texts if not related to the learners' own content and context may result in demotivating learners in learning the language. However, from the comments received it can be deduced that the disadvantageous issues related to introducing literature in the English classroom, is more of a problem of text selection and teacher training rather than having the texts in the classroom.

The negligible data associated with the downside of comments of having literature in the classroom could also be a result of the teachers own time related constrains and large classroom atmosphere and other reasons that may include their non trained mind and lack of practical knowledge and training in teaching literature.

## VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

To provide maximum benefit to the learners in an EFL atmosphere, teachers should involve learners in a variety of texts that include classical stuff as well as graffiti and songs. They need to come out of the concept of 'literature' only to be the canonical ones. Teachers can choose their own text and engage students in different types of language-oriented activities, e.g., pair work, role-play, question-answer, discussions, projects, etc. Student participation should be given priority over teacher input as the basic skills of language can best be practised through learner-centred activities. Tasks should be interesting and relevant to the learners' life and environment.

The learners should be given the impression that English, like the mother tongue, can be used for real life communication. The immersion in English might initially pose some problems of understanding but if the technique of all-English performance and practice is continued, the learners are likely to develop their comprehension capability quickly enough. They should be encouraged to read and read and read further in English without being paranoid regarding the foreign language which at the beginning may pose challenges because of the jargons and other literary devices involved therein. The learners need to be encouraged to develop their own reading habit that would eventually lead them towards falling in love with literature from all strata of life as literature itself is nothing but life represented in a creative way.

## VII. CONCLUSIVE REMARKS

This small empirical research was conducted to see how the teachers of English in Bangladesh from different educational background and teaching experience define 'literature' in this EFL context and also their current attitude towards using literature in teaching the language.

Having teachers from different educational standpoint, it could be deduced that most of them had similar sort of idea and definition of 'literature' and similar viewpoints related to the queries attached to their definition of literature which were

meant to establish the fact how in real situation do they consider literature to be an effective ingredient in teaching English in the classroom.

The results of the research brought into light the teachers' perspective of 'literature' in the existing English language classroom of Bangladesh. Apart from seeking a definition of 'literature', the research questions that were investigated brought out the facts regarding the present state of literature in the English classroom, and also the fact that even when there were not much of literature in the textbook the teachers were still interested to introduce literature, mentioning the merits and demerits of introducing them in the English classroom.

The results of the research showed that the teachers would like to bring literary texts if opportunities would arise. The main problems associated with literature were that they were not allowed time and space to introduce literary texts in the classroom, the pressure of completing the syllabus within the stipulated time and the time constraint relating to their assigned slot of teaching. However, the findings opened up opportunities to go on further research regarding the impacts or possibilities of reintroducing literary texts in a language dominated classroom and investigate the selection criteria while choosing texts for the target group of learners.

There were time and subject limitation while conducting the study, however, the researcher believes that the overall finding would benefit teachers and policy makers alike for consideration regarding reintroducing literature in the EFL context of Bangladesh.

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