



Linguistics

# Improving Students' Attitudes toward the Study of Literature in EFL Classroom: A Systemic Review

Fatma Rahayu Nita<sup>1</sup>, Ali Mustofa<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1,2</sup> Universitas Negeri Surabaya

## SUBMISSION TRACK

Received: March 20, 2022  
Final Revision: August 5, 2022  
Available Online: December 12, 2022

## KEYWORD

Positive attitude; negative attitude; text selections; teaching method

## CORRESPONDENCE

E-mail: [fatma.20043@mhs.unesa.ac.id](mailto:fatma.20043@mhs.unesa.ac.id)

## ABSTRACT

Several students do not show their positive attitude in studying literature because they are getting difficulties engaging with the materials and the literary texts that are provided by the teachers. Other than that, there are various factors that influence the students not to show their positive attitude to the study of literature. Therefore, this article attempts to elaborate on two main factors that influence student attitudes in studying literature in the EFL (English as a Foreign Language) classroom and offer the strategies used to improve student attitudes in studying literature. Two main factors that affect their attitude toward the study of literature are the selection of literary texts and the teaching method used by the teachers. Thus, this article elaborates on how to select the appropriate literary text to improve student attitudes toward the study of literature. Also, it offers two possibilities of teaching methods that are used to encourage the students in studying literature. It involves reading response and visual aids. To generalize the idea, in increasing student attitudes in studying literature, it needs creativity and much effort for the teachers. Students also face many difficulties in studying literature in the classroom. Thus, educators should be aware of the problems that arise among the students and provide the appropriate solution to them.

## I. INTRODUCTION

There is much research that conducts student attitudes toward general foreign language study. In other words, only a few focus on student attitudes toward literature. To mention a few of them are Ahmad & Aziz (2009), Al-Mahrooqi & Al-Wahaibi (2012), Alfauzan & Hussain (2016), Ghazali et al., (2009), Karakaya & Kahraman (2013), Tevdovska (2016), Tseng (2010), Yilmaz (2012), and Afdian & Wahyuni (2020). They have examined student attitudes in studying and learning literature in the EFL classroom. Most of them figure out the problems faced and propose the strategies to be used in the classroom. After that, the teachers evaluate student attitudes while learning literature. Based on their study, various factors are affecting their opinion regarding the study of literature. The examples are the criteria for text selection and the instructional method used by the teachers.

Some challenges faced by students in studying

literature, so teachers must help them to deal with the difficulties. The students are difficult to engage with text because they do not have a good comprehension of reading literary text. With this in mind, teachers play important roles in developing the strategy to be used in studying literature. Teachers must offer several possibilities that are appropriate to improve student attitudes in studying literature. As a conclusion of many studies, it found that short story is the most frequently selected among the students and it becomes popular in studying literature. It makes them engage with literature, poem, and novel are not common for students due to the complexity.

Tseng (2010) has revealed that students show their positive attitude toward literature because they love reading literary works. Yet, most of them prefer to engage with contemporary literature rather than classic literature. For instance, movie, realistic fiction, novels, fantasies, and mysteries are

selected by the students in studying literature. In the study, Tseng (2010) generalized the notions related to literary syllabi such as literary text selection and instructional method. Another study was done by Ghazali et al., (2009), student attitudes is crucial because it determines the success of learning. Attitudes towards the target language and learning context are considered to be achieved to determine the success or failure in studying literature (Candlin and Mercer, 2001 as cited in Ghazali et al., 2009). The factors which significantly determine the attitudes are teaching strategies, classroom, and social environment (Ghazali et al., 2009). The students show their positive attitude in studying literature, students can achieve the learning outcomes, and the teachers play an important in determining the student attitudes.

Other researchers like Alfauzan & Hussain (2016), Tevdovska (2016), Yilmaz (2012) have discussed the same ideas, that selecting literary text and teaching method will create a good atmosphere in EFL classroom. Besides, they evaluate some problems that arise from a student's inability to understand literature due to their lack of knowledge in English and they have poor reading skills. The elaboration of the factors is not discussed. Therefore, the current paper will elaborate on those factors and it firstly discusses the possibility of strategies used as the solution for the challenges and the problems that they faced.

## II. METHOD

The article highlights two main factors that determine students' perception toward the study of literature. At the same time, it also tried to offer the possibilities in increasing student's attitudes toward the study of literature. The method used to discuss the problem is by reviewing some papers from different sources and opinions and the data must be valid. As a final point, the results and discussion were measured through several previous studies and research on the same topic.

## III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### The Factors that Influence Students' Attitude

Before analyzing the factors which may influence students' attitude, it is important therefore to know students' attitude toward literature in EFL learning and teaching. Tevdovska (2016) stated that literature is not closely related to the language of daily communication which is essentially used in

a foreign language classroom. Yet, along with the fact that many learners are willing to read literary texts, it probably drives to force literature to be implemented in language classrooms. With this in mind, the relevant literature exists with a large number of reasons why a study of literature must be beneficial in the English language classroom. Smith (1972) suggested that between literature teacher and language teacher cannot be separated because they are interconnected. For literature teachers, they are aware of linguistic problems faced by the students while language teachers; will support their students to speak aesthetically. As a result, language and literature are interrelated with each other to enhance language skills. This is important to reveal the importance of literary texts in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) because literary texts are used in class to teach literature which may influence student's attitudes toward learning literature. To make harmony with the trends arising, as suggested by Carter and Long (1991, as cited in Yilmaz, 2012), there are three models to validate the reasons for using literature in the classroom. These are explained as follows:

#### 1. Cultural model

This model empowers the students to have a good understanding of different cultures, so they are realized by the different cultures and ideologies that are found in the literary texts.

#### 2. Language model

This model focuses on the varied and creative language used in a literary text, so the students can cope with many linguistics forms. They can recognize the connection between linguistic forms and literary meanings.

#### 3. Personal growth model

This model helps the students to engage with the reading of literary texts. Besides, they can understand society, culture, and the relationship with people and institutions. It is needed because the appreciation and the evaluation of the complex cultural artifacts help the students to build personal growth.

Connecting to these benefits of using literature in EFL learning and teaching, it is thus important to reveal some factors that influence students' attitudes in studying literature. According to Zulfikar, Dahlia, and Sari (2019 as cited in Afdian & Wahyuni, 2020) stated that students' positive attitudes in learning means they feel excited and more actively engage in the learning process. Yet, negative attitudes can be seen if the students may

feel anxious in the learning process and they are trying so hard to engage with the material given and the students may feel bored during the class. Based on the study by Kline and Hsieh (1992, as cited in Yilmaz, 2012), it conducted a study related to student's attitudes toward the study of literature in EFL and mention some factors that influence student's attitudes in studying literature. The results revealed that more than two-thirds of the students showed positive attitudes in language learning. They come to the same agreement that studying literature is a reward and that the departments should support their students to select literature courses.

However, some students are confronted with various problems during the study of literature. It is hard for them to cooperate with literature and the teachers do not realize the problems faced by the students. Since literature consists of a large number of different genres to be discussed so that they must deal with linguistic as well as experiential knowledge of it. Apart from mastering the content, the students are asked to becoming proficient in the language. Those challenges will determine whether students give their positive attitude or negative attitude. Students' attitude has been regarded as one of the important variables which influence the process of learning. If students show their positive attitude means that they will be able to reach the goal of learning while for students with a negative attitude it will be difficult for them to follow the learning process. Two factors become important in determining students' attitudes, it is explained as follows:

### **Literary Text Selection**

Text type and genre may influence the student's attitude toward literature. In this case, teachers are expected to serve the most appropriate genre and text type to their students. The texts which may burden the students are the classic one. Yet, the students need to compromise with their linguistic difficulties. Other than that, the literary text must not too culturally oriented and burden the students with cultural or historical aspects (Tevdovska, 2016). Introducing new cultural concepts increases the student's interest, personal response, and cultural awareness. In this case, students must understand the whole message in the literary text. Another challenge of the students toward the text is they do not realize the background information which is relevant to the text. Therefore, providing

the background information is important to scaffold the students in learning literature.

The previous study was done by Ghazali et al., (2009) revealed that short stories are chosen by students due to their easiest. A total of 80% of the students said that they are likely to read the short story and none of them showed disagreement that the short story is the popular one in learning literature. They believe that a short story does not spend much time to read since it is a short one. Surprisingly, the study discovered that students are having negative attitudes toward poetry. They considered that learning poetry is the hardest part of understanding the text. The data showed that most students showed their agreement with the statement 'I find the poems difficult to understand'. The reason behind that is students are not willing to engage with poems particularly Sonnet 18. They felt that the use of "archaic" and classic" language made it hard to be understood. Also, the theme of poems mostly is boring. This finding is in line with the study of Tseng (2010), and Yilmaz (2012) that all the students like a short story. Then, they prefer novels, plays and the last is poems. Even though the results of the study found that poem is the hardest one because it does not provide a standard model for language use but it has a role in enhancing the students' ability to imitate such texts in creative writing and to use their limited language resources to express complex ideas ( McKay, 2014; Malay & Duff, 1989; Widdowson, 1992 as cited in Dwaik et al., 2018).

According to Hall (2016), Literature', in current approaches to language teaching in ELT is literature with small 'l' so that texts which use language imaginatively and it does not need classic texts. Since the concept of literacy is related to literature so that teaching literature for the content could be more expressive and creative as the use of multimodal literary text. This is in harmony with the study by Tseng (2010) that the texts must relate to the need of the students. Such a perspective will motivate students to study the literature. Besides, experiencing the 'here and now literature' may build students' understanding that literature becomes important in life. The study by Tseng (2010) also offered the possibility of the use of Computer-assisted literature teaching (CALT). Today's era is integrated with technology and it has made teaching and learning is not difficult and becomes efficient. To create the literature class more attention-grabbing, he engaged with

the 'online cribs' which are used by students to learn the materials of literature. Moreover, the use of technology may expand the interpretation of literature through multimodalities. Apart from selecting the most suitable genre and type of text, it is also crucial to consider the language use.

Because of the complexity of the language in the text, students cannot engage with the text and they find it difficult to understand it (Lazar, 1993). Other than that, research has revealed that it is not so much that the language of literary texts can be found in other texts because of their unusual vocabulary or grammar and language tends to be used in different ways, for different purposes as well as greater variety. With that assumption, literary texts can be seen as an advantage to the learner. However, it might become a challenge for them who need to focus on language and to expand their repertoires beyond a minimal survival' core. To give an example, Adamson (1998, as cited in Hall, 2016), showed vernacularization toward all genres of literature in English especially modern English Literary texts, involving poetry, drama, novels, and short stories which are considered by ordinary, everyday language like more spoken forms. Dorst (2015) stated that literary texts do not employ more metaphors and figurative language than other kinds of writing but it uses more innovative metaphors. Those proved that the language used in literature is an area of some complexity that may influence students' attitudes toward the study of literature. This is supported by the survey done by (Tevdovska, 2016), the survey examined students' perception of difficulties toward literary texts. The finding revealed that the language used in a literary text is one of the criteria in selecting texts. Thus, the language use of literary text should be considered since it also influences the student's perception of the literature.

### Teaching Method

Teachers have a big role to make the students are interested in studying a particular lesson. Teachers do not only deliver knowledge to students but also they cope with students' attitude toward education, school, and most importantly the subject that they deal with it. Instead of following the Ministry of Education and Culture policy, teachers must be able to select what is the best material which could be applied based on the student's level and their interest. Creating some attractive teaching strategies is needed because it will affect

the students' perceptions and attitudes. Besides, it is necessary to choose and create some possibilities in teaching literature to encourage the students in studying literature. The variety of activities during the learning process will reduce monotony and the student's boredom. This article provides two approaches as the "breakthrough teaching method" which could help the students with high and low proficiency to engage with literary texts. The explanation is as follows:

### *Reading Response*

Dealing with the students who have higher proficiency, the teachers might use activities that could help them to develop their creativity and critical thinking such as reading response. According to Hall (2016), reading response is generally used in the ELT classroom today since it motivates the students to express their ideas and reactions to text based on their knowledge and experiences. According to Church (1997), the reading response approach to literature has become an important role in teaching literature. It has been regarded as a beneficial method of literature teaching in the classroom. It allows the students to be more critical thinkers since they go beyond the text. Furthermore, the approach is considered as learner-centered and more likely to stimulate real and authentic communication in a language classroom. 'Learning from literature' is likely to be promoted in teaching literature. This is suited with the results of the study conducted by Tseng (2010) that most students strongly agreed with the statement 'I think students should be encouraged to give their opinions and views concerning the text'. It showed that students agree if they are involved in-class discussion to deliver their opinions. From that perspective, it is necessary to apply reading response which is mediated by group work and further discussion and reflection, it will help the students to deal with the text.

Another study was conducted by Yilmaz (2012), by giving a questionnaire to the students to measure the approaches to teaching literature (small group work, lecture, whole-class discussion, and student-led). It reported that 87.6 % of the students tend to choose the small group work as the most useful approach to deal with the literary texts in the classroom. Then, it is followed by 70 % of the students are likely to have whole-class discussion and student-led. They consider that is more beneficial for them to study literature. According to



Kamariah (2009), students showed their negative attitude towards the activities which push them to memorize the materials, drilling activity, answer multiple-choice questions, read aloud, and teacher-centered. The study conducted by Ahmad & Aziz, (2009) compared student-centered and teacher-centered strategies. The finding showed that student-centered makes a better learning atmosphere and improves a student's attitude towards literature.

### *Visual Aids*

In maintaining students' interest in reading literary texts, it is important to create a new approach in teaching literature especially with the students with have low proficiency in reading text. To engage with the texts easily, students are encouraged to deal with multimodality. Bland (2013 as cited in Hall, 2016) said that multimodal literary text and spin-off could be applied in teaching literature. To give an example, gaming, film, and video could give a contribution to the students in building visual literacy, literary literacy, and critical cultural literacy. Thus, one of a way of showing multimodality is by using visual aids in teaching literature. Based on the study conducted by Yunus et al., (2013), the first benefit to the use of visual aids in teaching literature is to help the students to engage with the texts easily and visualize the text. In this case, visual aids as the 'vehicle' that can be used to enrich and enhance the reading interest of the students.

The same research revealed that the use of multimedia applications for language teaching and learning literature enables engagement between students and literary texts. Consequently, it makes the students have a better understanding of the story and how the texts are created. The second benefit is to motivate the students in studying literature. In this case, the students with low motivation due to the difficulties they encounter will show their positive attitude toward the study of literature. A previous study conducted by Sivapalan & Wan Ahmad (2010) revealed that audiovisual and other visual aids are very important to encourage the students to study literature and engage with it. For example, the use of voice clips in teaching poems is important and needed since it will enable the students to cope with the meaning and understand the theme of the poems.

In other words, with the help of the animation of the texts and graphics in the web-based multimedia as a tool can lead the students' interest

to read the literary texts. The last benefit of applying visual aids is to comprehend their concepts of the text since the students deal with many difficulties while reading the texts. Examples of visual aids are video, graphics, illustrations, pictures, and audio. It can be used to help them to cope with the literary text. Studying literature through film can help the students to visualize some cultural aspects that are found in the texts. Since this approach affects the way of study literature, therefore it is needed to be implemented in the study of literature. The study was conducted by Yunus et al., (2013) showed that teachers gave their positive attitude in response to the use of visual aids in studying literature. They believe that the use of visual aids encourages the students to engage with the complexity of the language used and the content in literary texts.

## IV. CONCLUSIONS

Prior to the study of literature, it is important for the teachers to recognize the students the importance and the role of literature. Make the students realize that literature empowers the students to have a good understanding of the different cultures and ideologies employed in the literary texts. It also helps them to engage with the relations between linguistic forms and literary meaning. It is necessary to appreciate and evaluate the complexity of cultural artifacts that shape the personal growth of the learners. Along with the difficulties that they face, therefore it is also important for the teachers to provide some possibilities in improving student's attitudes. Attitudes of the students can be determined through the way teachers address the students in studying literature such as literary text selection and the teaching method that they used.

This article reveals that the students have positive attitudes toward the use of short stories in the study of literature and they showed less interest in studying poems. Also, students are interested in having small group work because it helps them to collaborate with other students in discussing the literary texts. In contrast, students have a negative attitude when the activities push them to memorize, drill, read aloud, answer multiple-choice questions, and teacher-centered. They consider that those activities do not involve them in the discussion. In short, this article offers two possibilities that might use to enhance students' interest in studying literature namely reading response and the use of visual aids. Also, the article is very beneficial

for educators who teach literature to consider two factors to raise the student's attitude to the study of literature. In conclusion, with the emergence of the 21st century, educators must prepare how they teach, why they teach, and the students' attitude toward what to evaluate and find the appropriate solution to achieve the learning goals of the study.

## REFERENCES

- Afdian, S., & Wahyuni, D. (2020). Indonesian Senior High School Students' Attitude towards Literature in English. *Journal of English Language Teaching*, 9(1).
- Ahmad, F., & Aziz, J. (2009). Students' perception of the teachers' teaching of literature communicating and understanding through the eyes of the audience. *European Journal of Social Sciences*, 7(3), 17–26.
- Al-Mahrooqi, R., & Al-Wahaibi, T. (2012). EFL student attitudes towards studying literature at a higher education institution in Oman. *European Journal of Social Sciences*, 32(1), 77–83.
- Alfauzan, A. H., & Hussain, A. G. (2016). Attitude towards and Perception of Literature in EFL Setting: A Case Study on QU Male Undergraduate Students. *English Language Teaching*, 10(1), 1. <https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v10n1p1>
- Dwaik, R., Shrouf, S., & Sahib, B. (2018). An Exploration of Freshman Students' Attitude towards English Literature. *Arab World English Journal*, 6(3), 244–260. <https://doi.org/https://dx.doi.org/10.24093/awej/vol6no3.16>
- Ghazali, S. N., Setia, R., Muthusamy, C., & Jusoff, K. (2009). ESL Students' Attitude towards Texts and Teaching Methods Used in Literature Classes. *English Language Teaching*, 2(4), 51–56. <https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v2n4p51>
- Hall, G. (2016). Using literature in ELT. *The Routledge Handbook of English Language Teaching*, June 2016, 456–470. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315676203.ch32>
- Karakaya, E., & Kahraman, A. (2013). Students' attitudes towards literature use and its effects on vocabulary learning. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics and English Literature*, 2(5), 155–166. <https://doi.org/10.7575/aiac.ijalel.v.2n.5p.155>
- Lazar, G. (1993). Literature and Language Teaching: A Guide for Teachers and Trainers. *The Modern Language Journal* (Vol. 78, Issue 1). <https://doi.org/10.2307/329262>
- Sivapalan, S., & Wan Ahmad, W. F. (2010). A web-based multimedia approach to literature in Malaysian secondary schools: Learners' preferences. *European Journal of Social Sciences*, 12(3), 328–335.
- Tevdovska, E. S. (2016). Literature in ELT Setting: Students' Attitudes and Preferences Towards Literary Texts. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 232(April), 161–169. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2016.10.041>
- Tseng, F. (2010). Introducing Literature to an EFL Classroom: Teacher's Presentations and Students' Perceptions. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, 1(1), 53–65. <https://doi.org/10.4304/jltr.1.1.53-65>
- Yilmaz, C. (2012). Introducing literature to an EFL classroom: Teacher's instructional methods and students' attitudes toward the study of literature. *English Language Teaching*, 5(1), 86–99. <https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v5n1p86>
- Yunus, M. M., Salehi, H., & John, D. S. A. (2013). *Using Visual Aids as a Motivational Tool in Enhancing Students Interest in Reading Literary Texts*. 114–117. <http://arxiv.org/abs/1305.6360>