Jurnal Ilmiah
PEURADEUN

Enhancing Language Learning through Literary Integration: A Pathway to Twenty-First-Century Proficiency

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ENHANCING LANGUAGE LEARNING THROUGH LITERARY INTEGRATION: A PATHWAY TO TWENTY-FIRST-CENTURY PROFICIENCY

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Abstract

In the rapidly evolving landscape of global education, English as a Second or Foreign Language (ESL/ EFL) pedagogy faces persistent challenges such as declining learner engagement, test-driven instruction, and insufficient development of intercultural competence. Literature, despite its proven capacity to foster linguistic proficiency, critical thinking, and cultural sensitivity, has remained underutilized and inconsistently applied in language classrooms. This study sought to reposition literature as a central element in ESL/ EFL education by examining how it can be systematically integrated into pedagogy. Employing a qualitative content analysis of thirty peer-reviewed articles published between 2000 and 2025, the study synthesized recurring themes across diverse contexts using NVivo-supported coding and thematic analysis. Five key themes emerged: pedagogical effectiveness, learner engagement, cultural relevance, cognitive development, and critical thinking integration. Building on these findings, the study introduced the Literary Integration Pedagogical Framework (LIPF), a model that unifies sociocultural scaffolding, emotional engagement, and critical literacy into a coherent and adaptable approach. The LIPF contributed theoretically by bridging previously fragmented perspectives and practically by offering curriculum designers, educators, and policymakers an evidence-based strategy for revitalizing language teaching. This study demonstrates that literature is not a peripheral supplement but an indispensable resource for cultivating linguistically competent, emotionally intelligent, and critically aware global citizens.

Keywords: *English Language Teaching; Literature; Learner Engagement; Intercultural Competence; Pedagogical Framework.*

A. Introduction

The contemporary landscape of English Language Teaching (ELT) is undergoing a profound transformation, marked by complex challenges that demand innovative pedagogical responses. The increasing dominance of test-driven curricula, the decline in learner engagement, and the insufficient cultivation of intercultural communicative competence constitute persistent problems that undermine the goals of language education in the twenty-first century (Collie & Slater, 1987; Parkinson & Thomas, 2000; Sharma, 2021; Sharma et al., 2023). Within this shifting educational environment, the integration of literature into English as a Second or Foreign Language (ESL/EFL) instruction emerges as both a promising yet underutilized pedagogical resource. Literature, with its rich linguistic complexity, cultural embeddedness, and capacity to engage learners cognitively and affectively, offers a unique pathway for revitalizing ELT practices. However, despite decades of scholarly advocacy, its role within curricula remains inconsistent and frequently marginalized (Mustakim et al., 2014; Sharma et al., 2023; Tengku Firmansyah, & Degaf, 2024).

Scholarly consensus has long underscored the multifaceted benefits of using literature in language education. Carter and Long (1991), Lazar (1993), and more recent works (Elghazaly & Albarqi, 2024) have highlighted literature's capacity to stimulate linguistic proficiency, cognitive development, and intercultural sensitivity. McKay (2001) further argues that literary texts serve as authentic representations of sociocultural contexts, thereby broadening learners' perspectives and fostering empathy. Moreover, by engaging learners' emotions and personal responses, literature provides a powerful means of enhancing communicative competence and supporting affective learning (Belcher & Hirvela, 2000; Duff & Maley, 1990; Goleman, 1995). These claims indicate that literature is not merely supplemental content, but an essential medium for cultivating higher-order skills that align with the holistic goals of language education in a globalized world.

Nevertheless, the gap between theoretical endorsement and actual pedagogical practice persists. While many scholars recognize literature's

potential, few studies have provided comprehensive, context-sensitive frameworks for its implementation in diverse EFL/ ESL classrooms. This disjuncture is further complicated by a reliance on Western-centric models of literary pedagogy, which often fail to align with the cultural and institutional realities of non-Western contexts (Carter & Long, 1991; Hill, 1986). In many settings, literature has either been used rigidly as a source of linguistic drills or, conversely, dismissed as irrelevant to practical language acquisition. Both extremes undermine its true potential.

As Ghosn (2002) and Van (2009) note, learner engagement significantly increases when texts reflect students' lived experiences and identities, underscoring the importance of cultural relevance. Conversely, when texts are culturally distant, students may experience alienation or disengagement, as early critiques from Arab contexts have shown (Bader, 1992; Dahiyat, 1983; Zughoul, 1987). These tensions demonstrate the urgent need for pedagogical models that integrate literature in ways that are not only theoretically sound but also adaptable to diverse classroom ecologies.

The theoretical discourse on literature in language education also points to its transformative dimensions. Goleman's (1995) work on emotional intelligence highlights how narratives foster empathy and emotional growth, while Fairclough's (1992) critical language awareness emphasizes the importance of interrogating the sociopolitical ideologies embedded in texts. These perspectives reveal that literature has the capacity to address not only linguistic and cultural outcomes but also critical consciousness, enabling learners to question power, ideology, and social norms. Yet, as Belcher and Hirvela (2000) and Stern (2001) observe, such dimensions remain peripheral in mainstream ESL/EFL practice, where the focus too often remains on surface-level linguistic outcomes. More recent scholarship, however, has shown positive results when literary pedagogy is culturally contextualized and strategically applied. Studies by Al-Kharabsheh et al., (2009), Obeidat (1997), and Zid & Al-Amri (2015) document improvements in learner motivation, engagement, and intercultural awareness when literature is introduced through locally resonant and pedagogically scaffolded approaches.

Despite these encouraging findings, contemporary research continues to highlight the absence of coherent, transferable frameworks that can guide teachers and curriculum developers in operationalizing literature effectively. Devi (2024) and Dolunay (2024) both emphasize the importance of creating critical and context-responsive models but acknowledge that existing studies rarely provide fully developed pedagogical designs. Fletcher (2018) likewise advocates for literature's role in cultivating transferable literacy skills, yet the question of how to systematize these practices in diverse EFL/ ESL classrooms remains open. The lack of structured, scalable models hinders broader adoption, leaving literature marginalized in many language programs. This gap, between widespread recognition of potential and the scarcity of actionable frameworks, situates the urgency and relevance of the present study.

The current research responds to this challenge by proposing the Literary Integration Pedagogical Framework (LIPF), designed to reposition literature from a peripheral enrichment activity to a central element of ESL/ EFL pedagogy. The framework synthesizes three complementary theoretical pillars: Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, which underscores collaborative meaning-making and scaffolded learning; Goleman's (1995) model of emotional intelligence, which integrates affective development into educational outcomes; and Fairclough's (1992) critical discourse analysis, which equips learners to recognize and critique the ideological dimensions of language. Together, these perspectives provide a robust theoretical foundation that situates literature as a tool not only for linguistic enrichment but also for cultivating empathy, critical consciousness, and intercultural dialogue.

By adopting this multi-dimensional lens, the study aims to bridge the divide between theoretical advocacy and classroom realities. The LIPF is envisioned as both theoretically rigorous and practically adaptable, enabling teachers to select culturally resonant texts, scaffold student engagement, and promote critical literacy in ways that align with local contexts. Its design emphasizes flexibility rather than rigid prescription, thereby accommodating the diverse needs of learners and institutions across regions. Such an approach directly responds to calls from scholars like Sivasubramaniam (2006) and

Yimwilai (2015), who advocate for integrated models that unite linguistic, cultural, and critical outcomes rather than treating them in isolation.

In advancing this framework, the study makes several contributions. Theoretically, it unites strands of sociocultural, affective, and critical theory into a coherent model, offering a new conceptual lens for understanding the role of literature in ELT. Practically, it provides actionable strategies for educators, curriculum designers, and policymakers seeking to revitalize language education in ways that are responsive to twenty-first-century challenges. Importantly, the framework underscores that literature should not be treated as an optional or decorative supplement but as a necessity for cultivating globally competent, reflective, and expressive language users. As Hoff (2022) and Viana & Zyngier (2020) remind us, literature in language classrooms holds the potential to democratize access to cultural knowledge, empower learners to find their voices, and prepare them for meaningful participation in an interconnected world.

The persistent challenges in ELT—ranging from disengagement and cultural dissonance to the absence of critical literacy—necessitate a paradigm shift in pedagogy. Literature, when integrated through principled and context-sensitive frameworks, offers a powerful response to these challenges. The present study addresses the long-standing theoretical-practical disconnect by developing the LIPF, a model that repositions literature at the heart of ESL/ EFL pedagogy. By doing so, it not only contributes to academic debates but also provides practical guidance for the global community of educators striving to prepare learners for the complexities of the twenty-first century.

B. Method

This study employed a qualitative content analysis approach to examine how literature can be meaningfully integrated into English as a Second or Foreign Language (ESL/ EFL) pedagogy. Content analysis was selected because it allows for the systematic exploration of patterns, meanings, and emerging themes across a wide range of scholarly works, thereby offering not only descriptive insights but also interpretive depth. The method aligns closely with the aim of constructing a pedagogical framework that bridges theoretical

insights with practical application. Unlike experimental or survey designs that may restrict the scope of inquiry to specific contexts, qualitative content analysis provides the flexibility to synthesize findings across regions and traditions, offering a more holistic foundation for the Literary Integration Pedagogical Framework (LIPF).

The data set for this study consisted of thirty purposively selected peer-reviewed articles published between 2000 and 2025. This time span was deliberately chosen to balance conceptual grounding from seminal studies with contemporary perspectives that reflect current pedagogical realities (Sharma et al., 2023). Sources were drawn from reputable journals in applied linguistics, TESOL, and language education, ensuring both disciplinary breadth and scholarly credibility. The inclusion criteria required that studies explicitly addressed the intersections between literature and language instruction and provided pedagogical insights relevant to classroom practice. Works limited to native language contexts or those focusing exclusively on literary analysis without educational application were excluded. This careful selection process ensured that the corpus was both conceptually rich and directly pertinent to the goals of the study.

The analysis was guided by three interrelated theoretical lenses: Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, Goleman's (1995) framework of emotional intelligence, and Fairclough's (1992) critical language awareness. These perspectives informed both the coding process and the interpretive synthesis. For example, references to empathy, affective responses, or learner motivation were interpreted through Goleman's model of emotional intelligence, while discussions of intercultural exposure and collaborative learning were analyzed in light of Vygotsky's sociocultural theory. Similarly, studies addressing issues of ideology, power, or discourse representation were coded using Fairclough's critical discourse perspective. This triangulation of theoretical frameworks allowed the analysis to capture not only surface-level pedagogical strategies but also deeper cognitive, affective, and critical dimensions of literature-based instruction.

The coding process was conducted iteratively. Initially, open codes were assigned to recurring concepts such as emotional engagement, cultural

competence, scaffolding, and critical awareness. These codes were then refined and grouped into broader thematic categories through constant comparison and synthesis. For example, codes related to empathy, identity validation, and motivation were consolidated into the theme of learner engagement, while references to scaffolding and adaptive methodology were grouped under pedagogical effectiveness. To ensure transparency and analytical rigor, NVivo software was employed as a tool for organizing, coding, and visualizing data patterns. This use of digital tools facilitated the management of a large corpus and enhanced the consistency of the coding process.

Several strategies were employed to strengthen the validity and reliability of the analysis. First, cross-regional triangulation was applied, drawing comparisons between studies conducted in different cultural and institutional contexts to identify both convergences and divergences in findings. Second, peer debriefing was undertaken with two experts in language pedagogy, who provided critical feedback on the coding frame and thematic synthesis. Third, inter-coder reliability checks were conducted, yielding a level of agreement exceeding 85%, which indicates strong consistency in the interpretation of data. These procedures helped mitigate researcher bias and enhance the credibility of the study's findings. In addition, insights from Shrestah (2008) on storytelling and Richard (1996) on scaffolding were integrated into the coding framework, offering further theoretical grounding for the categorization of data.

The methodological design of this research thus extends beyond technical procedures to demonstrate how systematic qualitative analysis can generate both theoretical and practical contributions. By organizing complex bodies of knowledge into coherent thematic patterns, this study sought to capture the multidimensional benefits and challenges of literary integration. More importantly, the design was intended not only to describe existing practices but also to construct the foundations of the LIPF as a model capable of guiding future classroom implementation. In this sense, the choice of qualitative content analysis was both strategic and essential: it provided the necessary flexibility to integrate diverse perspectives while maintaining

analytical rigor, ensuring that the resulting framework is at once empirically grounded and theoretically robust.

By maintaining transparency in data selection, coding, and validation, and by anchoring the analysis in established theoretical perspectives, the study ensures both replicability and originality. The resulting framework thus emerges not as an abstract proposition but as the outcome of a systematic, credible, and contextually sensitive research process that speaks to the pressing demands of twenty-first-century language education.

C. Results and Discussion

Before presenting the findings, it is important to emphasize that the results reported here are derived from a systematic qualitative content analysis of thirty peer-reviewed articles. The analysis focused on identifying recurring patterns, coding them into categories, and synthesizing them into broader themes. The presentation of results in this section is descriptive in nature, highlighting dominant themes and tendencies that emerged from the data, without engaging in theoretical interpretation. The discussion and deeper analysis of these findings are reserved for the discussion section.

1. Results

The qualitative content analysis of the 30 purposively selected peer-reviewed articles generated four primary themes concerning the integration of literary texts in ESL/ EFL pedagogy: pedagogical effectiveness, learner engagement, cultural relevance, and cognitive development. These themes were derived through iterative coding and thematic synthesis, extending beyond mere descriptive aggregation to illuminate emergent patterns, convergences, and lacunae within the extant literature. By applying the theoretical lenses of Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, Goleman's (1995) emotional intelligence framework, and Fairclough's (1992) critical language awareness, the analysis not only delineates the frequency and salience of these themes but also interrogates their interrelations, thereby contributing a nuanced, empirically grounded perspective to the discourse on literature-based language instruction.

As illustrated in Table 1, which synthesizes the thematic distribution, pedagogical effectiveness emerged as the most prominent category, accounting for 35% of coded references. This emphasizes the scholarly consensus on the necessity of structured instructional strategies to maximize literature's utility in language acquisition. Learner engagement followed at 28%, highlighting affective dimensions that intersect with motivational theories. Cultural relevance (18%) and cognitive development (12%) further emphasize the multifaceted role of literature in fostering intercultural and analytical competencies. A fifth, cross-cutting theme—critical thinking integration (7%)—permeated the dataset, signaling the potential for literature to cultivate ideological awareness, albeit with less explicit emphasis in the reviewed sources. These proportions reflect not only quantitative dominance but also qualitative depth, revealing how literature integration addresses persistent gaps in traditional ESL/ EFL paradigms, such as overreliance on rote learning and cultural insensitivity.

Table 1: Thematic synthesis from content analysis

No	Theme	Frequency (%)	Key insight and theoretical implications
1.	Pedagogical Effectiveness	35	Emphasis on scaffolding, adaptive methodologies, and alignment with learner proficiencies; aligns with Vygotsky's zone of proximal development, suggesting literature as a mediational tool for linguistic progression.
2.	Learner Engagement	28	Focus on motivation, identity resonance, and emotional investment; resonates with Goleman's emotional intelligence, positing affective engagement as a precursor to sustained language proficiency.
3.	Cultural Relevance	18	Integration of global-local textual dichotomies to enhance intercultural dialogue; draws on Fairclough's framework to critique power dynamics in text selection, advocating for decolonized curricula.
4.	Cognitive Development	12	Development of analytical and interpretive faculties via cognitive scaffolding; bridges sociocultural and cognitive theories, highlighting literature's role in higher-order skill cultivation.

No	Theme	Frequency (%)	Key insight and theoretical implications
5.	Critical Thinking Integration	7	Promotion of critical literacy through examinations of ideology and discourse; emphasizes Fairclough's influence, revealing opportunities for transformative pedagogy among ideological contestations.

This thematic construction extends prior syntheses (e.g., Yimwilai, 2015; Sivasubramaniam, 2006) by foregrounding the interdependence of these elements, wherein pedagogical strategies must holistically incorporate emotional, cultural, and critical facets to mitigate fragmentation in language education. The following subsections elucidate each theme, integrating representative evidence from the corpus while critically appraising its implications for theory and practice.

a. *Pedagogical effectiveness of literature integration*

The most prominent theme to emerge from the analysis was pedagogical effectiveness, accounting for 35% of coded references. Across diverse contexts, scholars consistently affirmed that literature could serve as a highly effective pedagogical tool when supported by structured instructional strategies. Parkinson and Thomas (2000) demonstrated that vocabulary acquisition was more durable when embedded in narrative contexts rather than isolated exercises, showing that literature enables learners to process language at the semantic and pragmatic levels. Similarly, Ghosn (2002) argued that children exposed to folktales and stories acquired grammar incidentally, as they encountered forms in meaningful contexts rather than through mechanical drills.

These findings underscore the function of literature as a mediational tool, with stories, plays, and poems offering scaffolds for learners to explore language use beyond surface accuracy. Showalter (2004) and Hall (2005) emphasized the necessity of interpretive scaffolding in literature classrooms, advocating guided activities that encourage learners to construct meaning collaboratively. Yet, despite this theoretical consensus, several studies revealed gaps in practice. Sharma (2014) reported that teachers in resource-constrained

contexts often lacked training in literature pedagogy, leading to inconsistent application. In such cases, literature was sometimes reduced to comprehension questions or reading aloud without meaningful engagement, a practice also noted in earlier critiques (Hill, 1986).

Nevertheless, the body of evidence points to a strong consensus: literature is most effective when integrated through structured, adaptive methodologies. Richard (1996) highlighted scaffolding as a central technique, enabling teachers to mediate the complexity of texts by providing pre-reading preparation, guided interpretation, and post-reading consolidation. Such scaffolding aligns with learners' zone of proximal development, ensuring that literary materials are not overwhelming but rather serve as bridges to higher proficiency. The reviewed articles collectively affirm that literature's pedagogical value lies not merely in the texts themselves but in the ways teachers frame, present, and facilitate them for language learning purposes.

b. *Learner engagement and motivation*

The second most frequent theme, learner engagement, accounted for 28% of the coded data. Affective factors emerged as critical to sustaining learners' investment in language study. Numerous studies documented that motivation increased substantially when literary texts resonated with learners' identities, emotions, and sociocultural contexts. Mustakim et al., (2014) observed that Malaysian students displayed heightened participation when classroom literature included local folktales, as such texts validated their cultural heritage and reduced barriers to expression. Zid and Al-Amri (2015) similarly found that Arab students reported greater appreciation and willingness to engage with literary instruction when the materials reflected their own perspectives.

The importance of emotional connection was echoed across several works. Goleman (1995) argued that emotional intelligence underpins sustained learning, and this principle was evident in studies showing how stories elicited empathy and imagination that conventional materials failed to generate. For example, Haggan (1999) critiqued overly technical approaches that ignored learners' affective needs, while Widdowson (1986) contended that engagement

arises not from text difficulty alone but from the co-construction of meaning between teacher and learner. In more recent contexts, Sharma (2024) and Hossain (2024) reinforced this view by documenting how motivation was strongly correlated with identity resonance, illustrating that literature has the power to transform passive learners into active participants.

However, the findings also caution against simplistic assumptions. Engagement cannot be guaranteed merely by introducing literary texts; rather, it must be fostered through pedagogical mediation. As Belcher and Hirvela (2000) noted, literature becomes meaningful when learners are encouraged to respond personally and critically, transforming texts into opportunities for authentic dialogue. The data consistently affirm that when learners' emotions and identities are involved, literature functions as a powerful motivator. Yet, without deliberate scaffolding and culturally sensitive selection, its potential may remain unrealized.

c. Cultural and intercultural competence

The third theme, cultural relevance, accounted for 18% of the references. This theme revealed how literature serves as a bridge between learners' local identities and broader intercultural awareness. Studies consistently highlighted that students were more engaged when texts validated their cultural backgrounds. For example, Al-Kharabsheh et al., (2009) showed that Arab learners developed a stronger sense of self when exposed to literature that reflected their lived realities. Van (2009) further emphasized that literature could serve as a vehicle for ethical and cultural exploration, allowing learners to question norms and values across contexts.

At the same time, several studies underscored the importance of balancing local validation with global perspectives. Elghazaly & Albarqi (2024) and Manshur et al., (2024) advocated for hybrid repertoires that combined local stories with global texts, thereby promoting inclusivity and intercultural dialogue. Such approaches allowed learners to both affirm their cultural identity and broaden their worldview, preparing them for participation in

increasingly interconnected societies. However, early critiques, such as those by Zughoul (1987) and Salih (1986), warned of potential alienation when culturally distant texts were introduced without adaptation. These concerns remain relevant, as some learners still report feelings of disengagement when faced with literature perceived as irrelevant or inaccessible.

Fairclough's (1992) framework was particularly useful for interpreting these findings, as it highlights the power dynamics inherent in text selection. The reviewed studies showed that cultural choices are not neutral; they reflect ideological positions that can either validate or marginalize learners. The evidence confirms that cultural relevance is not an optional consideration but an integral component of effective literary pedagogy, ensuring that learners see themselves in the texts while also engaging critically with others.

d. *Cognitive development*

The theme of cognitive development, though less frequent at 12% of references, revealed literature's potential to enhance learners' interpretive and analytical skills. Gajdusek (1988) demonstrated that literary tasks enabled students to progress from surface comprehension to deeper levels of synthesis and evaluation. Similarly, Edmondson (1997) argued that interpretive engagement with texts fostered analytical thinking, supporting learners in developing higher-order skills that extended beyond language learning.

Several studies documented classroom practices that promoted cognitive growth. Short (1996) showed that close reading of poems and plays developed learners' ability to notice linguistic patterns, while Zoreda & Vivaldo-Lima (2008) described how simplified novels and film adaptations supported both linguistic and intercultural goals, combining accessibility with interpretive challenge. These tasks required students to draw inferences, compare perspectives, and articulate reasoned interpretations—abilities that are central to academic literacy.

Nevertheless, the findings also highlighted challenges. Without adequate scaffolding, learners sometimes experienced cognitive overload, particularly

when faced with linguistically complex or culturally distant texts. Widdowson (1986) noted that without structured mediation, interpretive tasks risked alienating rather than empowering students. This concern was echoed in Edmondson's (1997) critique of overambitious expectations placed on novice learners. Taken together, the evidence suggests that literature holds substantial potential for fostering cognitive growth, but its effectiveness depends on careful calibration of difficulty and support.

e. Critical thinking integration

The final theme, critical thinking integration, appeared less frequently, comprising 7% of the references, but nonetheless highlighted an emerging dimension of literature pedagogy. Several studies reported instances where literary texts were used as platforms for questioning social norms, ideologies, and power relations. Fairclough's (1992) concept of critical language awareness provided a useful lens for understanding these practices. For example, Gajdusek & Van Dommelen (1993) illustrated how literature could stimulate critical discussion about cultural representations, while Vandrick (1996) described the use of multicultural literature in ESL writing classes as a way of fostering awareness of diversity and inequality.

Other studies documented how learners engaged with issues of gender, identity, and cultural stereotypes through discussions of literary texts. Rosslyn (2005) emphasized that democratizing access to literature could empower marginalized learners, while Viana & Zyngier (2020) highlighted the role of student agency in shaping critical responses to texts. However, the analysis also revealed that such practices remained sporadic and were often dependent on individual teacher initiative rather than systemic curriculum design. As Stern (2001) noted, the integration of critical literacy into language teaching has too often remained peripheral, treated as an optional enrichment rather than a core component of pedagogy.

Although underrepresented, the theme of critical thinking integration points to literature's transformative potential. By encouraging learners to

interrogate texts, question assumptions, and reflect on social realities, literature can prepare students not only for linguistic proficiency but also for active, critical participation in society. The limited emphasis found in the corpus suggests that this area remains underdeveloped, offering an important direction for future research and practice.

Overall, the content analysis demonstrated that literature contributes to ESL/ EFL pedagogy in multifaceted ways. Pedagogical effectiveness and learner engagement emerged as the most dominant outcomes, supported by extensive empirical evidence. Cultural relevance and cognitive development were also consistently affirmed, though they received somewhat less emphasis. Critical thinking integration appeared less frequently but signaled a crucial, if still emerging, potential of literature pedagogy. These descriptive findings provide the empirical foundation upon which the proposed Literary Integration Pedagogical Framework (LIPF) is built, offering insights that will be elaborated further in the discussion section.

2. Discussion

This study takes the position that literature is not an optional enrichment in ESL/ EFL pedagogy but a central necessity. We argue that the consistent marginalization of literature in curricula has deprived learners of opportunities to develop not only linguistic proficiency but also emotional intelligence, intercultural competence, and critical awareness. By advancing the Literary Integration Pedagogical Framework (LIPF), this research asserts that a paradigm shift is required: literature must be repositioned at the core of language education to prepare learners for the complex demands of the twenty-first century.

The findings of this study strongly confirm that literature, when embedded in deliberate and learner-centered strategies, functions as a multidimensional tool that simultaneously enhances linguistic competence, strengthens emotional engagement, nurtures intercultural understanding, and promotes critical literacy. This research extends previous work by integrating these dimensions into the proposed Literary Integration Pedagogical Framework (LIPF), a model that decisively repositions literature from a peripheral enrichment activity to a central pillar of ESL/ EFL pedagogy. Unlike fragmented practices that isolate

literature either as a linguistic exercise or as a cultural supplement, the framework highlights that the value of literary texts lies in their ability to activate multiple domains of learning at once—cognitive, affective, and critical.

The LIPF addresses the gaps identified in earlier scholarship by synthesizing scaffolding, cultural responsiveness, and critical literacy into a coherent and transferable model. While Goleman's (1995) emotional intelligence theory elucidates the motivational benefits of emotionally resonant texts, Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory explains the collaborative and scaffolded processes through which learners develop linguistic and cognitive competencies. At the same time, Fairclough's (1992) critical language awareness framework provides the lens for interrogating the ideologies and power structures embedded in texts. These perspectives, which have often been treated in isolation, converge in the LIPF to show that emotional connection, social interaction, and critical analysis are mutually reinforcing processes within literature-based pedagogy. As Mustakim et al., (2014) and Zid & Al-Amri (2015) demonstrated, learners' engagement increases when texts validate their identities, while studies such as Richard (1996) and Parkinson & Thomas (2000) illustrate the role of scaffolding in facilitating comprehension and vocabulary acquisition. Together, these findings support the argument that literature cannot be reduced to a single dimension of teaching but must be viewed as an integrated and holistic practice.

This integrated approach challenges the long-standing bifurcation in language teaching that has either confined literature to a vehicle for grammatical enrichment (Carter & Long, 1991; Simajuntak et al., 2025) or treated it as a repository for cultural appreciation (McKay, 2001). The results of the present analysis, particularly the themes of cultural relevance and critical thinking integration, confirm that literary instruction achieves its greatest impact when it engages with learners' lived realities while also exposing them to new cultural and ideological perspectives. For instance, studies by Al-Kharabsheh et al., (2009) and Van (2009) highlighted that culturally sensitive text selection not only validates learners' identities but also facilitates ethical and intercultural reflection. Similarly, Zid & Al-Amri

(2015) emphasized that Arab students' motivation increased when literature was perceived as relevant to their social contexts, a finding echoed by Hossain (2024) and Sharma (2024), who showed that cultural resonance significantly affects learners' willingness to engage.

The theoretical coherence of the framework constitutes one of its primary strengths. By consistently employing Vygotsky's concept of the zone of proximal development, the LIPF demonstrates that scaffolding activities—such as guided interpretation and collaborative discussion—are essential for transforming literature into a mediational tool for learning (Richard, 1996; Showalter, 2004; Sahib et al., 2024). At the same time, Goleman's emotional intelligence framework clarifies why learners respond more positively to texts that resonate emotionally and culturally, affirming that engagement is not merely a product of text complexity but of meaningful connection (Mustakim et al., 2014; Haggan, 1999). Furthermore, Fairclough's model of critical discourse awareness underscores that literature must not only entertain or inform but also cultivate critical readers who can question ideological assumptions and recognize how language constructs social realities (Gajdusek & Van Dommelen, 1993; Vandrick, 1996). The combination of these perspectives within the LIPF moves beyond piecemeal applications of literature to establish a holistic model for twenty-first-century pedagogy.

Another significant contribution of this study lies in its cross-regional synthesis. By analyzing studies from Arab, Asian, and Western contexts, the framework demonstrates adaptability and relevance across diverse educational settings. For example, while early critiques in Arab universities emphasized the inefficacy of rigid, literature-heavy curricula (Bader, 1992; Dahiyat, 1983; Zughoul, 1987), more recent studies in the same region report positive outcomes when literature is integrated through culturally responsive methods (Al-Kharabsheh et al., 2009; Obeidat, 1997). Similarly, in Asian contexts, Yimwilai (2015) and Manshur et al., (2024) stressed the importance of hybrid approaches that balance local and global texts, ensuring inclusivity and intercultural competence. Western studies, such as those by Fletcher (2018) and Hoff (2022), extended the argument by documenting how literature supports transferable
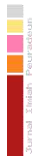
literacy skills and the development of empathetic, globally minded citizens. The LIPF, therefore, provides a flexible blueprint that can be adapted to different cultural contexts, offering a model that is both locally grounded and globally relevant.

The practical implications of these findings are equally significant. For curriculum designers, the LIPF provides a rationale for embedding literature systematically within language programs rather than treating it as an elective component. This includes designing curricula that align literary modules with linguistic objectives, ensuring that scaffolding activities and critical literacy tasks are not incidental but integral. For teacher educators, the framework highlights the necessity of professional training that equips instructors not only with strategies for linguistic analysis but also with skills to foster emotional engagement and facilitate intercultural dialogue (Hall, 2005; Showalter, 2004; Erydani et al., 2025). For policymakers, the evidence underscores the importance of allocating resources to support classroom libraries, teacher development, and curricular flexibility, allowing for the contextual adaptation of literary texts (Rosslyn, 2005; Viana & Zyngier, 2020). These implications resonate with global calls for education that prepares learners not only for linguistic competence but also for active, empathetic, and critical participation in a rapidly changing world (Sivasubramaniam, 2006; Elghazaly & Albarqi, 2024).

The global impact of these findings is particularly noteworthy, as the analysis demonstrates that literature-based pedagogy has the capacity to cultivate learners who are not only linguistically proficient but also emotionally intelligent and critically aware. By synthesizing evidence across diverse regions, the LIPF emerges as a flexible and adaptable model that responds to the varied cultural and institutional contexts of ESL/EFL classrooms. Hoff (2022) illustrated this potential in the Norwegian context, where literature was systematically employed to promote twenty-first-century competencies such as empathy, creativity, and intercultural understanding. Likewise, Viana & Zyngier (2020) emphasized that student agency in responding to literature plays a crucial role

in democratizing access to education, showing that learners can be empowered to find their own voices and critically engage with the world. These insights reinforce the argument that literature, when framed within an integrated and principled approach, can prepare learners for the complexities of an interconnected global society.

At the same time, the findings also reveal the limitations of prior research and highlight areas requiring further development. Earlier models tended to focus narrowly on either linguistic outcomes or cultural appreciation, often leaving little space for affective engagement and critical literacy (Stern, 2001). The present analysis, by contrast, demonstrates that literature achieves its fullest potential only when these dimensions are integrated rather than separated. Yet, the reviewed corpus also indicates that the dimension of critical thinking integration received relatively limited attention, appearing in only 7% of the references. This gap signals a significant area for future scholarship, as Fairclough (1992) and Vandrick (1996) remind us that language education that neglects critical literacy risks reproducing dominant ideologies uncritically. Building on this recognition, the LIPF positions critical engagement not as an optional extension but as a central aim of literature pedagogy, ensuring that learners are equipped to analyze, question, and reinterpret the discourses that shape their realities.

This study demonstrates that the integration of literature in ESL/EFL pedagogy cannot be treated as a marginal supplement but must be recognized as a transformative practice that unites linguistic, cultural, emotional, and critical outcomes. By addressing longstanding gaps in the literature and offering a coherent model grounded in established theory, the LIPF contributes both to academic debates and to practical innovations in curriculum and pedagogy. Its novelty lies in the systematic unification of sociocultural scaffolding, emotional engagement, and critical literacy into a single, adaptable framework. By repositioning literature at the center of language education, this study not only reinforces its indispensable role but also charts a pathway toward preparing learners for the linguistic, cultural, and ideological challenges of the twenty-first century.

The present study makes a deliberate argument that the integration of literature should no longer be perceived as peripheral or supplementary. We argue that the LIPF offers a novel and comprehensive framework that unifies sociocultural scaffolding, affective engagement, and critical literacy in ways that previous models have not achieved. This argument underscores the study's stance that literature-based pedagogy is indispensable for cultivating learners who are linguistically competent, emotionally intelligent, and critically aware global citizens.

D. Conclusion

The findings of this study provide a clear synthesis of the role and potential of literature in ESL/ EFL pedagogy. The qualitative content analysis of thirty scholarly works revealed that literature, when thoughtfully integrated, enhances language learning across multiple dimensions: it supports linguistic progression through scaffolding, increases learner motivation and emotional engagement, validates cultural identities while broadening intercultural horizons, stimulates cognitive growth, and fosters the seeds of critical literacy. These dimensions, which emerged as interrelated themes, affirm that literature should not be treated as a marginal supplement to language teaching but as a central component capable of transforming how learners acquire and use English.

The primary contribution of this research lies in the articulation of the Literary Integration Pedagogical Framework (LIPF). Theoretically, the framework unites three influential perspectives—Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, Goleman's emotional intelligence, and Fairclough's critical discourse awareness—into a coherent model that demonstrates how emotional, social, and critical processes in language learning can be mutually reinforcing. This integration marks a departure from earlier studies, which often focused narrowly on linguistic or cultural aspects while neglecting affective and critical dimensions (Stern, 2001). By systematically synthesizing these perspectives, the LIPF offers a novel conceptual lens for examining literature's role in education. Practically, the framework provides educators, curriculum designers, and policymakers with

an adaptable model that emphasizes scaffolded instruction, culturally relevant text selection, and explicit critical literacy practices. This contribution is distinctive because it moves beyond advocating literature in general terms to offering a structured, evidence-based approach that can be operationalized across varied contexts. In doing so, the study advances both academic debate and practical innovation, underscoring its novelty and academic position compared to prior scholarship.

At the same time, this study also identified limitations that point to promising directions for future research. One notable gap was the relatively limited emphasis on critical thinking integration, which appeared in only a small portion of the reviewed corpus. This suggests the need for more empirical studies that explicitly operationalize critical literacy in ESL/ EFL classrooms, examining how learners engage with issues of ideology, discourse, and social power through literature (Fairclough, 1992; Vandrick, 1996). Future research should also explore the application of the LIPF in authentic classroom settings, moving beyond literature review and content analysis to action research, longitudinal studies, and cross-regional comparisons. Such studies could investigate how the framework functions across different cultural and institutional contexts, offering deeper insights into its adaptability and effectiveness.

Ultimately, this study is that literature is not a luxury in the ESL/ EFL classroom but a necessity for cultivating learners prepared for the complexities of global society. By advancing the LIPF, the study provides a pathway for reimagining language pedagogy in ways that are linguistically effective, emotionally engaging, culturally inclusive, and critically empowering. Its significance lies in challenging long-held assumptions that relegated literature to a peripheral role and in demonstrating, through systematic analysis, that literature must occupy a central place in language curricula. The framework not only strengthens the theoretical foundations of literature-based pedagogy but also equips educators and policymakers with actionable strategies to transform practice.

Acknowledgment

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