

# LEARNING ENGLISH LITERATURE: PERSPECTIVES OF VIETNAMESE UNIVERSITY STUDENTS AND TEACHERS

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**Abstract:** This study investigated the perception of students of English at Can Tho University (CTU) in learning literature in English. The study also sought teachers' opinions and recommendations for more effective literary learning. Seventy-nine students and two teachers teaching literature were invited to participate in the study. The students were asked to complete a questionnaire survey while the two teachers were interviewed. The results from the questionnaire and the interviews revealed that while the students recognized the importance of literature in their studies, they had low motivation and faced a number of challenges. The difficulties included a lack of literary knowledge and experience, literary terminology, and linguistic competence for the subject. Additionally, the teachers' suggestions focused on two major measures, namely, (1) encouraging a habit of extensive reading and (2) creating opportunities for students to express opinions and get engaged in discussions about literature.

*Keywords:* Challenges; English-American literature; learner perception; literature courses; teacher recommendations

## 1. Introduction

Literature is an indispensable component in the curriculum for language studies in universities. It is literary acquisition and literary competence that demonstrate learners' deep understanding and mastery of a language. Languages are different and so the literary works attached to particular languages are also different in several aspects. These differences often generate obstacles in the learning process of a foreign language learner. In turn, the difficulties may entail low motivation and negative attitudes towards literature courses among students. In reality, issues related to literary study were not sufficiently attended. A review of the literature showed that only a limited number of studies were conducted to obtain insights about the teaching and learning of literature in a foreign language. Furthermore, most studies approached the issues from the perspective of the teacher and mainly done in the Arabian contexts. This left us with many questions unanswered about how students themselves viewed their literary learning and what challenges they conceived as important and in need of solutions.

This study, therefore, aims at gaining more understanding about how students of English majors at Can Tho University perceived the role of literature courses in their programs. Specifically, this research had the following objectives. First, it investigated the students' perceptions about the literature courses, regarding their attitudes, motivation, and challenges in learning. Also, it aimed to seek answers to address the issues involved in the literature courses for English majors at Can Tho University in Vietnam.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1 The significance of literature courses

English literature is one of the core subjects for students majoring in the English language studies. Do Thi Quy (2002), Tran Thanh Du (2022), Nguyen and Thai (2022) argue that literary knowledge is an inevitable part of the study of a language. What literature courses bring about is learners' development both aesthetically and linguistically, as well as a number of other skills. Through the courses in literature, students learn to sense and appreciate the beauty of literary works and their content, and understand cultural values. Kaya (2018) and Baba (2022) summarize a number of authors' opinions (e.g. Lazar, 1993a; Parkinson & Thomas, 2000; McKay, 1982) about the benefits that literature study brings to students. Generally, literature is believed to provide authentic language input, enrich cultural knowledge, develop personal involvement, motivate students, and maintain critical thinking.

In second language reading, the use of authentic materials is encouraged. In this respect, literary works are highly satisfying for their level of authenticity. Unlike texts adapted for learning purposes found in course books, literary works are produced to serve the realistic needs of communication between the authors and the readers. Literature is termed as "genuine and undistorted" texts (Collie & Slater, 1987, p. 6). By using unmodified, unabridged texts, learners are more likely to focus on meaning and absorb content, rather than consciously learn linguistic details.

In terms of raising students' cultural awareness and cross-culture understanding, literature appears to be an effective tool. It is considered as one of the best means to achieve this cultural target (Bobkina & Domingues, 2014). One cannot imagine a piece of literature that is completely free of any socio-cultural elements. Thus, with literature, learners are exposed to paramount cultural values and traditions, and this allows them to make comparison with and reflect on their own culture. All this may result in students widening and justifying their view of the world.

As for language development, literary works empower learners to a larger extent in comparison to other means. With literary texts, students can attain various linguistic aspects at different levels (Haniya, 2019). Linguistic benefits include increasing lexical and syntactical ranges, constructing meaning at textual and discourse levels, understanding figurative and stylistic language, etc. At the same time, students can practice with reading skills from the basics such as skimming, scanning, guessing meaning from context to advanced skills such as reading between the lines, making inferences, recognizing the writer's intention, and so on.

Finally, literature is seen to be motivating, engaging, and developing critical thinking and high order thinking skills for learners (Baba, 2022). The various themes, characters, and plots found in literary masterpieces, on the one hand, catch students' interest because they are realistic, familiar, and relevant to students' daily lives. On the other hand, alien, exotic and peculiar themes and characters in the case of fiction for example, may appeal to students a curiosity to read and to explore. It could be said that the aesthetic nature of literature *per se* is already attractive to most audiences. Furthermore, the analyzing and interpreting of literary works requires students to practice higher order thinking, be critical, and collaborative in group discussions, which in turn results in more rounded learners.

## 2.2 Five approaches to literature instruction

Literary instruction has been implemented in two basic modes. Literature can be either taught in separate stand-alone courses in specialization programs, or embedded in the general language curriculum for non-majored students. According to Jabeen and Sarifa (2022), there are five approaches to learning literature.

The most traditional is the teacher-centered approach, in which the teacher is someone literally prolific who transmits knowledge to students. This approach also reflects the realities in the educational contexts where tests and examinations are the focus. Common methods of instructions include mainly the teacher lecturing, explaining, and demonstrating. Students are passive receivers of knowledge, not motivated and frequently experience boredom (Jabeen & Sarifa, 2022).

The second approach is known as the stylistic approach. According to Lazar (1993b), this approach involves careful selection of materials for the literary courses. Stylistic Approach is characterized by an encouragement to develop learners' deep understanding of the literary texts and at the same time build up their confidence through exchanging opinions in discussions.

The third approach is the learner-centered approach advocated by Maley (2012). Learner-centeredness underpinned in the approach is realized in that it aims to develop students' critical thinking and a holistic growth for individuals. The approach also encourages personal creativity, imagination, and emotional response from the part of students. Maley (2012) argues that this approach does not pose literature to a threat of losing values, but on the contrary, learner centeredness facilitates students' critical understanding which is essential in a complex and ever-changing world.

The paraphrastic approach refers to a curriculum that employs translated or abridged versions of literary works. It is argued that such an approach is beneficial for learners with low levels of language proficiency. However, the major limitation of the approach is concerned with the students' little or no authentic exposure to literary terms, imagery, and concepts (Jabeen & Sarifa, 2022).

The fifth approach is the culture-based approach (Jabeen & Sarifa, 2022). This widely adopted approach is based on the cultural information attached to the target language. It places emphasis on the historical and cultural values and traditions associated with particular works. This approach is valued by most researchers and educators because culture is an inseparable component from literary and language acquisition.

In practice, literary curricula do not strictly follow a single approach, but rather a combination of them instead. For instance, a combination of culture- and genre-based approaches could be appropriate for literature courses at university level.

## 2.3 Challenges in studying literature

### *Insufficient linguistic preparedness*

In studying literature courses, students face a variety of challenges. A great number of these difficulties are due to limited language abilities and skills (McKay, 1982). Not all students have sufficient lexical and syntactic knowledge to understand literary texts. When there is a discrepancy between students' current language knowledge and the texts' complexity level, this

issue becomes more critical (Krishnasamay, 2015; Violetta-Irene; 2015). Besides, because literary courses require reading extensively, poor reading skills could also be attributed to the challenges.

### *Difficulties connected to literary texts*

*Abundance of literary language plus text length.* In addition to high linguistic requirements, the literary texts themselves are also the sources of problems for learners. In literature, texts are normally lengthy and contain abundant language elements that are “too difficult and complicated” (Sivapalan & Subramaniam, 2008, p.56). Literary texts are packed with figures of speech that the learner should be aware of. They are simile, metaphor, personification, hyperbole, pun, synecdoche, tautology, oxymoron, alliteration, assonance, onomatopoeia, refrain, and so on (Alkadi & Hezam, 2021, p.4).

*Unfamiliar cultural elements.* Problems may arise when students read literary texts that are culturally distant from theirs (Al-mahrooqi, 2012). It is not simple to understand the cultural aspects tied to idioms, proverbs, slangs, colloquial language, and dialects found in literature. A lack of cultural awareness and background knowledge on the learner’s part and even the teacher’s side could obviously pose comprehension problems.

### *Low motivation and negative attitude*

Linguistic and cultural barriers that hinder students’ understanding of literature can result in another challenge: low motivation and negative attitudes. Novianti (2016) points out that students may only learn literature for the sake of literature only and with a doubt that this learning has little relevance to their prospects such as getting a job or interacting with other English users at work or in business.

### *Teaching methods and material selection*

Researchers draw attention to improper choice of delivery methods as well as content selection in literature courses. McKay (1982) notices that any chosen literary texts must be relevant to students’ needs, levels, and interests. Contrary to the proponents’ support for linguistic benefits of literature, Robson (1989) argues that with syntactic and lexical complexity, literature does “little or nothing to help students to become competent users of the target language” (p. 25). He maintains that literary works were not meant for linguistic practices. Consequently, inadequacies are unavoidable.

The choice of genres to include in the courses also matters. Studies indicate an existence of large differences in students’ preference and identification of genres that fit their learning styles (Akyel & Yalçın, 1990; Hirvela & Boyle, 1988; Yılmaz, 2011). Learners in these studies show a favor of novels and dramas over poetry, and this leads to a suggestion that prose should be introduced prior to poetry.

As for teaching methods, any approach with heavy content and exam-oriented is seen as not proper. Ujjwala (2013) claims that in most contexts, teachers employ the “traditional method of lecturing on topics like theme, characterization, plot, motifs directly without giving any emphasis on the linguistic/stylistic aspect of the literary text they teach” (p. 1). In a similar vein, Haniya (2019) states that realities revealed a “mismatch between literature as a content-based subject and literature as a rich authentic material used in language classes” (p. 2).

## 2.4 Related studies

A substantial body of research in different aspects of literary programs has been conducted. This line of research results in various findings and conclusions. In general, many researchers have shown a consensus on the difficulties of the literary works, the mismatch between students' language proficiency and the requirement for literary understanding, and other curriculum-related issues.

In the context of Turkey, Ogeyik (2007) found that learners held positive attitudes about literary learning, because it benefited them in terms of cultural, linguistic, and personal development. In the Japanese context, Fogal (2010) found similar positive attitudes among university students. They enjoyed comfort with literary analysis, and acknowledged its role in accommodating their language development and personal involvement. In the Malaysian high school context, students preferred the literary types of mysteries, adventures, and life experiences (Ghazali et al., 2009). This highlighted the importance of carefully selecting materials to meet the needs and interests of the learners.

In Vietnam, there has been a scarcity of research on English literature related issues. Our little understanding is only based on the three papers we found so far: studies by Do Thi Quy (2002), Tran Thanh Du (2022), and Nguyen Thai Hoai Sang and Thai Cong Dan (2022).

Do Thi Quy (2002) investigated the difficulties the school students experienced with literature programs. The reported challenges included students' low English proficiency, limited cultural knowledge, language barriers, and stylistic devices that hinder their comprehension of literary works. The study also found that instructional methods played an important role in motivating students to learn. The author recommended a number of useful techniques to employ in literary classes, namely project-based learning, inquiry-based learning, playing games, role-playing, group discussions, movie time, and think-pair-share classroom activities. It is worth noting that this study was done with Vietnamese learners of English, but the participants were students in a school in Canada, where English is a second language, a context incompatible with Vietnam.

In his investigation of some problems of learning and teaching literature in the English language curricula in Vietnam, Tran Thanh Du (2022) involved 150 students and 10 lecturers across five universities. Focusing on the content of the curricula and students' perception of the challenges, the study identified the key sources of the problems, including limited experience of mother tongue literature, limited experience with literary language, limited experience with British and American literature, and limited experience and knowledge of the world, life, and people. Teaching methodologies and possible solutions were not touched upon in this research.

Nguyen Thai Hoai Sang and Thai Cong Dan (2022) investigated students' evaluation of their experiences with seven classroom activities for learning literature. Students' reported varying levels of effectiveness corresponding to these activities. This showed a meaningful initiation and creativeness on the teacher's part in motivating students in the literary courses. The task-based activities as named by the authors included (1) making films, (2) making portfolios, (3) group presentation, (4) library search, (5) wallpaper display, (6) making a literary gift, and (7) literary gala.

In short, the review of previous research suggests that there is a need to conduct a study on English literary learning in the Vietnamese context. The theoretical backgrounds discussed

earlier help to shed light on the research design and research question formation presented in the following sections.

### 3. The study

#### 3.1 The context

This study was conducted in the Vietnamese higher education context at Can Tho University in the Mekong Delta. Students’ perceptions were explored with a participation of the students of English in the School of Foreign Languages. The literary courses that they already took are Introduction to Literature and Introduction to Literary Criticism.

The first course is Introduction to Literature which introduces the basic knowledge for understanding fiction, nonfiction, and poetry. According to the course description, students are equipped with the basic literary devices and literary theories which familiarize them with some major critical approaches to literature. These approaches help students construct their interpretation and critical thinking towards literary texts. Students are also facilitated to create their own stories or poems as a part of creative writing activity.

The second course (Introduction to Literary Criticism) provides students with an introduction to the theory of literary criticism. Basic critical approaches include Formalism (New Criticism), Reader-Response Criticism, Marxist Criticism, Feminist Criticism, Psychological Criticism, and Cultural Studies focusing on New Historicism. The course also consists of a practical component. After being familiarized with the theoretical frameworks, students have a chance to put theory into practice by analyzing selected novels, stories, plays, and poems written by famous British and American authors.

**Table 1.** Literary works included in the courses

| <i>Introduction to Literature</i>              | <i>Introduction to Literary Criticism</i>      |
|--|--|
| A Case of Suspicion                            | Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening, R. Frost |
| Marionettes, Inc.                              | Wandered Lonely As a Cloud, W. Wordsworth      |
| The Lady, or the Tiger?                        | In Another Country, E. Hemingway               |
| Roman Fever                                    | The Old Man at the Bridge, E. Hemingway        |
| A Clean, Well-Lighted Place                    | A Rose for Emily, William Faulkner             |
| The Gift of the Magi                           | Wuthering Heights, Emily Bronte                |
| The Necklace                                   | Trifles, Susan Glaspell                        |
| A Letter to Mrs. Bixby                         | The Awakening, Kate Chopin                     |
| A Letter from Thomas Jefferson to His Daughter | Lonely Hearts, Wendy Cope                      |
| From Diary of a Young Girl                     |  |

#### 3.2 Research methodology

##### *Research questions*

This study aims to investigate students’ perceptions of the role of the English literature courses and the challenges connected to these courses in the Vietnamese context of Can Tho University. In particular, the authors attempt to answer the following three research questions (RQ).

**RQ1** What are the perceptions of CTU’s English majors about the role of literature courses?

**RQ2** What are the difficulties faced by these students when studying literary works in English?

**RQ3** What are the suggestions to overcome the challenges involved?

### *Participants*

Participants included 79 students from the English Studies programs at Can Tho University. The English proficiency varied to some extent, because they were from three different cohorts: second-year (N = 9), third-year (N = 64), and fourth-year (N = 6), but all of them had taken the literature courses.

Besides, two teachers were involved in the study as informants. Both of them were female, in their 50s, and had a teaching experience of over 25 years. They were the principal faculty in charge of the literary courses at the school.

### *Instruments*

This descriptive research was primarily based on two methods of collecting data from the respondents: a questionnaire for the students and an interview for the teachers.

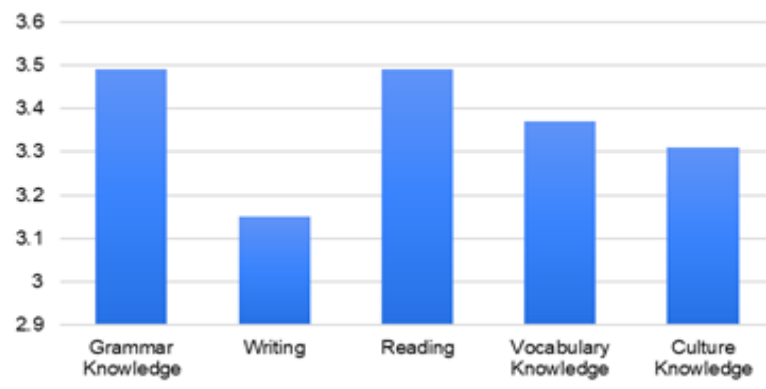
*Questionnaire.* The questionnaire consisted of 33 items on a 5-point Likert-type scale based on the studies of Alkadi and Hezam (2021) and Kaya (2018). The first 9 items of the questionnaire were meant to probe the students' self-rated English levels and preferred modes of learning. The remaining items asked the students on how they perceived the importance of literary study (14 items) and what they considered as the challenges involved in such a study (10 items). Prior to administering, the questionnaire was consulted with two experienced teachers who were research supervisors of the school for clarity and content validity. The reliability quotient of the questionnaire was yielded by SPSS test with Cronbach alpha = .908.

*Interview.* The interviews with the teachers were conducted in person and audio-recorded. Each interview lasted for approximately 20 minutes. The interviews were semi-structured, with a set of 5 open-ended questions around students' motivation and attitudes, problems they face, and suggestions for improvement in literary courses (see Appendix for full interview questions). The recordings of the teachers' responses were transcribed and analyzed thematically.

## **4. Findings**

### **4.1 Results from the questionnaire**

*Students' self-perceived English abilities.* Figure 1 presents the participants' evaluation of their English levels realized in five categories: grammar, writing, reading, vocabulary, and cultural knowledge. Overall, the means in all five areas are above 3.1. Writing skill is the lowest (M = 3.1) while knowledge of culture and vocabulary is moderate. Reading and grammar are two areas with the highest means approximately equal to 3.5.



**Figure 1.** Students' self-rated level of English

*Students' perception of the importance of literary study.* Table 2 presents the mean scores showing how the students perceive the role of literature courses in developing (1) their language and academic skills and (2) their culture and world knowledge and other practical skills.

As for language and learning skill development, the language area that the literary courses are believed to highly facilitate is vocabulary (M = 4.38), followed by other language areas such as syntax and language use, reading skills, free choice of reading topics, and learning ideas, the means of which are all above 4.

Lower but still higher than the scale average (2.5) are those mean values associated with understanding underlying meanings, expressing personal opinions, and motivation for further reading. The means of these three areas are 3.72; 3.79; and 3.92 respectively.

**Table 2.** Students' perception of the role of literature

| Roles of Literary Study   |    | Min | Max | Mean  | SD    |
|---|----|-----|-----|-------|-------|
| <i>In developing academic and language skills</i>                       |    |     |     |       |       |
| 2 expressing opinion  | 79 | 1.0 | 5.0 | 3.797 | .9525 |
| 3 understanding underlying meaning                                      | 79 | 2.0 | 5.0 | 3.722 | .7834 |
| 4 choosing what to read   | 79 | 2.0 | 5.0 | 4.089 | .7876 |
| 7 improving reading skill   | 79 | 1.0 | 5.0 | 4.367 | .8035 |
| 9 improving learning ideas  | 79 | 1.0 | 5.0 | 4.013 | .9673 |
| 11 improving syntax and language usage                                  | 79 | 1.0 | 5.0 | 4.063 | .9384 |
| 12 pursuing additional readings   | 79 | 2.0 | 5.0 | 3.924 | .8285 |
| 13 enriching the vocabulary   | 79 | 1.0 | 5.0 | 4.380 | .7391 |
| <i>In developing culture/world knowledge and other practical skills</i> |    |     |     |       |       |
| 1 personally rewarding  | 79 | 1.0 | 5.0 | 4.190 | .8332 |
| 5 knowing people and experiences  | 79 | 2.0 | 5.0 | 3.810 | .9484 |
| 6 useful for future career  | 79 | 1.0 | 5.0 | 3.506 | .9320 |
| 8 changing view about the world   | 79 | 1.0 | 5.0 | 4.089 | .9363 |
| 10 appreciating other cultures  | 79 | 1.0 | 5.0 | 4.139 | .9437 |
| 14 thinking over aspects of life  | 79 | 1.0 | 5.0 | 4.241 | .8199 |



In practical skills for life and culture understanding, the students rate relatively high scores for the benefits that literary courses bring about. Mean score for appreciating other cultures is 4.13; for knowing people and experiences: 3.81; for thinking over aspects of life: 4.24; and for changing view about the world: 4.08. Interestingly the students see the courses as personally rewarding, with a rating mean of 4.19. However, the rating for relevance of the course to their future jobs is modest with a mean score of only 3.50.

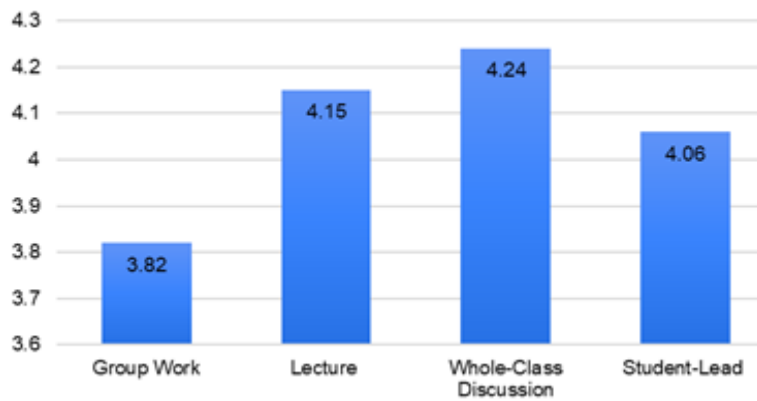
*Students’ perceived challenges.* The students’ responses show that the challenges they face are due to a number of sources (See Table 3). The following are internal personal factors, in a decreasing order of rating: limited experience with foreign language literature (M = 3.77), lack of vocabulary (M = 3.67), inadequate knowledge of English literature (M = 3.59), lack of interest (M = 3.54), and limited experience with first language literature (M = 3.16).

Influencing factors from outside are long literary texts (M = 3.84), lack of clear aims (M = 3.69), lack of references and inappropriate methods (M = 3.94 for both). The high standard deviations in items 5, 7, and 10 indicate that the students are different to a large extent in literary interest, experience with literature in their mother tongue, and preference of text length.

**Table 3.** Students’ perceived difficulties with literary courses

| Challenges                                   | N  | Min | Max | Mean  | SD     |
|--|----|-----|-----|-------|--------|
| <i>Internal factors</i>                      |    |     |     |       |        |
| 1 inadequate knowledge of English literature | 79 | 1.0 | 5.0 | 3.595 | .8990  |
| 2 a lack of vocabulary                       | 79 | 1.0 | 5.0 | 3.671 | .9436  |
| 5 a lack of interest                         | 79 | 1.0 | 5.0 | 3.544 | 1.0718 |
| 7 limited experience of L1 literature        | 79 | 1.0 | 5.0 | 3.165 | 1.1371 |
| 8 limited experience of L2 literature        | 79 | 1.0 | 5.0 | 3.772 | .9601  |
| 9 limited knowledge of cultures              | 79 | 1.0 | 5.0 | 3.342 | .9985  |
| <i>External factors</i>                      |    |     |     |       |        |
| 3 a lack of references                       | 79 | 1.0 | 5.0 | 3.494 | .9724  |
| 4 a lack of clear aims                       | 79 | 2.0 | 5.0 | 3.696 | .9521  |
| 6 inappropriate methods                      | 79 | 1.0 | 5.0 | 3.494 | .9984  |
| 10 long texts                                | 79 | 1.0 | 5.0 | 3.848 | 1.0871 |

*Students’ preference of learning modes.* According to the results, the students value whole-class discussion (M = 4.24) more than any other teaching methods (See figure 2). However, they are not in favor of group work (M = 3.82). In addition, respondents show their preference for the other two interaction modes: teacher lecturing and student-led discussion with fairly high means (4.15 and 4.06 respectively).



**Figure 2.** Students preferred learning modes

#### 4.2 Results from the interviews

This section presents the results of the interviews conducted with two teachers teaching literature courses. The teachers gave detailed comments based on their observations on the students’ attitude and motivation as well as the challenges they faced in the courses. The two teachers also made helpful suggestions to improve the teaching quality and learning effectiveness.

The analysis of the teachers' responses revealed that the English literature courses are challenging but they are an important part because they are mandatory in the curriculum. The difficult nature of the courses partly explains why most students are reluctant to participate and do not perform well in the learning activities and tasks. However, most teachers believe that some students have a good attitude towards learning. They show outstanding performance and meet the requirements of the courses. They have a deep understanding of the elements of the plots of literary works and actively engage in related learning activities.

*“This is a subject in the mandatory training program and most of the students are too sluggish to participate. They don't like to study it, so they don't do well in this course. However, there are still some students who excel in this course and fulfill all the requirements. These students have a strong understanding of the plot's elements and develop many wonderful learning activities.”* (Teacher Y)

However, the teachers expressed concern that some students have encountered difficulties while studying these courses. They disclosed repeatedly that their students perceive literature as a challenging subject. Most teachers identified students’ lack of extensive vocabulary as the main difficulty. One of them mentioned that it is a subject with a wide range of advanced vocabulary, including different types of lexical knowledge to understand various literary genres such as fiction, non-fiction, or poetry. Therefore, these courses require learners to have a good command of words to be able to analyze and grasp the content of the works as well as the author's implications.

*“When they come to learn English literature, the problem is with vocabulary. When we learn about literature, we learn about fiction, nonfiction or poetry, then we have pages full of words and words. It's hard for students to feel the writer's implications, or some kinds of literary devices need to be analyzed in depth, and students get a headache with those obstacles”.* (Teacher X)

The teachers mentioned another challenge that students face, which is their lack of interest in reading. Limited reading practice may result in unfamiliarity and poor comprehension of the literary devices employed in literature.

*“When I had some informal discussions with them, I recognized their big problem. That is their hatred for reading. They may love some kinds of comics because there are many pictures”.*  
(Teacher X)

Both teachers associated the issue of students’ low interest in reading books with inappropriate learning methods and approaches.

The teachers suggested a number of solutions to help students become more interested in studying English literature. First, it is necessary to create a comfortable learning environment for their students by offering diverse activities that are motivating, meaningful, and related to the subject for students to participate in.

*“Making diverse activities is another solution. For my subject, students not only read and report about what they understand, but they can also participate in other extracurricular activities like literary fair, literary gala, arts display (Wall paper, for example), and book review. Movie making is my favorite activity in which many students can create their script and they take part in the film like actors or actresses with the slogan “chance for change, change for chance.”* (Teacher X)

Another solution suggested by the teachers is to encourage the students to express their opinions during the learning process, and to give feedback on grammar or vocabulary mistakes by the students only occasionally. They also believe that students should spend more time reading books to improve their vocabulary and at the same time make little changes in the way they read.

*“Think learning is fun, and they need to spend time reading. Using the dictionary is quite bad since new words are abundant. Instead, they should try to sit at one place and read one work from the beginning to the end at least twice. Discuss with partners to share ideas, or then refer to other materials for further explanations. Some websites like Sparknote are informative”*  
(Teacher Y)

One of the teachers emphasized the importance of understanding the objectives and valuing theory as they form a foundation for students to analyze the literary works. The teachers also suggested that students should study in groups because it gives them more opportunities to discuss the content and develop critical thinking skills. Additionally, students can engage in further discussions with their teachers and friends beyond the classroom door.

## 5. Discussion

The findings of the study have shown that most students recognize the importance of studying English literature. Up to 53% of the students agree that studying literature in English is very beneficial. However, it is also revealed that students have encountered some difficulties when studying literary works in English. These results demonstrate a consistency with previous research for example Kaya (2018) and Tran Thanh Du (2022). As the study has indicated, 46% of the students believe that their knowledge of English literature is insufficient. Additionally, both the interviewed teachers and the students agree that a common difficulty most students face is a lack of vocabulary to read and understand literary works, which is supported by most studies (Hussein & Al-Emami, 2016; Kaya, 2018; Alkida & Hazem, 2021; Baba, 2022). Furthermore, up to 30% of the students agree that long texts are the most challenging part. In addition, students also encounter other difficulties such as a lack of reference materials, unclear objectives, lack of interest in studying literature, inappropriate learning methods, limited experience or knowledge about the world, life, people, and culture. The data from the study also shows that students mostly prefer whole-class discussions, although other teaching methods and classroom forms of

interaction are also appropriate. Students' English proficiency is found to have strong impacts on their study of English literature. A majority of the students rate their vocabulary knowledge as average and 50% of them rate their knowledge of English-speaking countries' cultures as relatively limited.

According to interview results, the teachers show their beliefs that most students have a positive learning attitude; however, since literature is a difficult subject that requires students to have a rich vocabulary repertoire, they have encountered some difficulties in studying these courses. Furthermore, students' lack of interest in reading books also leads to a lack of interest in studying literary works in English. The interviewed lecturers have proposed some solutions to help students improve their learning in this subject. They believe that students need to spend more time reading books and expanding their vocabulary. Moreover, students need to study in groups to be able to discuss with friends, to learn to be confident, unafraid to speak up, and express their opinions. Teachers also need to create a friendly and comfortable learning environment and provide various learning activities for students to participate in.

## 6. Conclusion

In conclusion, the role of studying literature in language education can neither be overstated nor understated. This study investigated students and teachers' perception of literature courses in the context of a Vietnamese higher education. It concentrated on a few challenges that students frequently encounter when studying English literature and looked at some methods to help them overcome those challenges.

The study revealed that while Vietnamese students recognized the importance of literary courses, they had low motivation and experienced a number of difficulties. The difficulties included lack of literary knowledge and experience, lack of literary vocabulary, and insufficient linguistic readiness for the subject. It is argued that literature teachers and course designers need to take these challenges into consideration. It is crucial to motivate students with meaningful and engaging activities and at the same time raise in them an awareness of the relevance literature courses have in contributing to their academic as well as personal growth. In addition, learners should be prepared linguistically and culturally prior to participating in literary courses, perhaps by upgrading their English proficiency with effective general language courses. Additionally, the measures suggested by the participant teachers are believed to be helpful. Specifically, students are encouraged to form a habit of reading extensively to expand their vocabulary and knowledge of the world. On the other hand, teachers in general or in specialized courses alike, need to create optimal opportunities for students to express their opinions and get engaged in peer and whole class discussions about the world, culture-related, and literary issues as much as they are able to.

Finally, limitations are inevitable in the current study. Due to a restriction in scope, we did not include an examination of how the course assessment practices affect students' learning. Also, the study restricted itself in the university context. Teaching and learning literary works at school level is still under-researched. These areas of limitations are worth overcoming in future studies on similar topics.

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## HỌC VĂN CHƯƠNG TIẾNG ANH: GÓC NHÌN CỦA SINH VIÊN VÀ GIẢNG VIÊN

**Tóm tắt:** Bài viết này tìm hiểu về nhận thức của sinh viên chuyên ngành tiếng Anh ở Trường Đại học Cần Thơ đối với việc học các môn văn chương tiếng Anh. Nghiên cứu cũng tìm hiểu ý kiến và đề xuất của giảng viên về việc học tập đạt hiệu quả. Bảy mươi chín sinh viên chuyên Anh và hai giảng viên tham gia vào nghiên cứu. Để thu thập số liệu, chúng tôi phát phiếu điều tra đối với sinh viên và thực hiện phỏng vấn với các giảng viên. Kết quả cho thấy mặc dù sinh viên nhận thức được tầm quan trọng của các môn học văn học bằng tiếng Anh, họ chưa có động lực cao và vướng phải một vài thách thức. Các khó khăn bao gồm thiếu vốn kiến thức và kinh nghiệm với văn học, vốn từ vựng văn chương hạn chế, khả năng ngôn ngữ chưa đủ sẵn sàng. Các đề xuất của giảng viên có thể tóm gọn vào hai biện pháp cụ thể: (1) khuyến khích thói quen đọc nhiều và (2) tạo nhiều cơ hội hơn để sinh viên thể hiện quan điểm, tham gia thảo luận các chủ đề về văn học.

**Từ khóa:** Thách thức, văn học Anh Mỹ, nhận thức của người học, học phần văn chương, đề xuất của giảng viên

**Appendix Interview Questions (with Teachers)**

1/ What are your comments on students' attitudes towards learning English literature?

2/ According to your observation, what challenges do students often face when learning English literature works?

3/ Why do you think some learners are not motivated to study English literature? Mention as many reasons as possible.

4/ How can students become interested in learning English literature works? Can you give us some advice?

5/ What other solutions do you suggest for students to overcome difficulties and problems with the English-American literature courses?