Teachers' Perspectives on using Literature to Teach English to Engineering Students

Badhan Moni
Assistant Professor, Department of English
Gopalganj Science & Technology University, Bangladesh
https://orcid.org/0009-0002-1589-4935

Iffat Jahan Suchona
Lecturer, Department of English, University of Asia Pacific, Bangladesh
https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5325-6278

Abstract

English is a universally acknowledged medium for education, employment, and communication. In Bangladesh, the instruction of English as a foreign language (EFL) presents challenges, particularly for non-English majors in technical disciplines, such as engineering. This study examined the application of literature as a pedagogical instrument to improve the English learning experience of engineering students. This study examined English teachers' perceptions of the use of literary texts to enhance core language skills - listening, speaking, reading, and writing - while simultaneously improving vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar. A mixed-methods approach was employed to collect quantitative data from 65 English teachers at eight Bangladeshi universities and provide qualitative insights through written interviews with five teachers. These findings indicate that literary texts can substantially improve students' engagement and language proficiency. Over 80% of the participants agreed that literature is a powerful tool for language development. Approximately 85% of respondents concur that literature cultivates critical thinking and advances the objectives of liberal education, including cultural awareness and ethical sensitivity. Teachers favoured short stories and poems because of their accessibility and universal themes, especially literature in English, from various global contexts. Despite these advantages, challenges include the selection of appropriate texts, insufficient teacher training, and a lack of institutional support. The research indicates that the literature possesses significant potential in EFL classrooms for non-majoring students and advocates for systematic implementation alongside appropriate professional development and curriculum alignment.

Keywords: Literary Texts, Engineering Students, Bangladeshi Classrooms, Teachers, English Language Teaching

Introduction

Literature plays a significant role in language learning, particularly in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in Bangladesh. Researchers have highlighted the value of literary texts in enhancing language skills while offering learners exposure to culture, history, philosophy, art, and a diverse worldview. Since its emergence, English instruction at the tertiary level has been a consistent feature in both public and private universities, with English offered as a core or non-major subject (Nusrat; Hossen and Musayeb). While English departments typically offer courses in both language and literature, students from other disciplines, such as engineering, must take only a single 3-credit English language course in their first undergraduate year, as outlined in the National Education Policy.

Although English education is well established, the curriculum primarily emphasises functional language skills, often excluding literary texts from instructional practices. This gap is particularly notable in technical disciplines,

where the pedagogical potential of literature remains underexplored. Globally, the literature is recognised for its effectiveness in language instruction, yet limited research has been conducted on its application in teaching English to engineering students in Bangladesh. To address this gap, this study investigates English teachers' perspectives on incorporating literary texts into EFL instruction for engineering students, focusing on both benefits and challenges.

This paper begins with the background of the study and the problem statement, followed by the research question. Additionally, the literature review section highlights the teaching literature in language classrooms, referencing several studies from international and local contexts. The research methodology section describes the research design, details of the participants, and the process of sampling, data collection, and analysis. The study additionally incorporated the metrics of validity and reliability. Then, detailed data analysis and interpretation are presented. This study acknowledges its limitations. This study also provides recommendations for different stakeholders, followed by a conclusion.

Research Questions

This study investigated teachers' perceptions of incorporating literary texts into English language classrooms for Bangladeshi engineering students, focusing on their value, role, and potential for fostering critical thinking. Considering the objectives of the present study, the following questions were formulated:

1. What are the teachers' perceptions of including literary texts in English language classrooms for Bangladeshi engineering students?
2. How do teachers perceive the role of literature in enhancing language skills and fostering critical thinking, creativity, and cultural awareness among undergraduate engineering students?

Literature Review
Teaching Literature in Language Classrooms

Proponents of a language-based approach to literature believe in the close connection between literature and language in educational settings (Carter and Long; Lazar). Literary texts have several advantages in language activities (Babaee and Yahya; Duff and Maley). First, they encompass diverse arrays of styles and registers. Second, they are open to multiple interpretations, making them ideal for stimulating classroom discussion. Third, they revolve around genuinely intriguing and motivating topics that enhance their learning experience in the classroom. Fourth, they are crucial for instructing essential language abilities such as speaking, listening, reading, and writing. (Carter) stated that "language-based approaches are student-centered, activity-based and process-oriented." (Harari) emphasised the importance of communicating the latest scientific theories to the general public through the skilful use of art and fiction. He highlighted the potential of science fiction to explore contemporary issues, such as AI, bioengineering, and climate change, suggesting that it plays a vital role in shaping societal understanding.

Related Studies Abroad

Literature integration in language classrooms enhances linguistic and critical thinking skills, allowing learners to explore authentic language use, cultural perspectives, and personal connections using various models and approaches. A review of several relevant studies is provided below:

Researchers overseas have conducted several studies on the use of literature in language classes, especially for students not majoring in English. (Ganesan et al.) used Jane Austen's Pride and Prejudice to teach English to a group of 50 technical students. The findings of this quasi-experimental study revealed that using the novel as a tool piqued learners' curiosity about foreign cultures and demonstrated that the novel's innovative application enhanced their language skills.

(Kaowiwattanakul) investigated the effectiveness of literature circles in improving English speaking skills among 60 third-year electrical engineering students in an English for Specific Purposes classroom at a Thai public university. The study found that the use of literature circles significantly improved students' English-speaking abilities, and they held positive attitudes toward using them in teaching English speaking skills.

Related Works in Bangladesh

(Yeasmin et al.) conducted a study at ASA University, Bangladesh on using literature in teaching English. They found that incorporating literary texts in the classroom enhanced students' linguistic skills, communication, confidence, critical thinking, and overall language understanding. They also found that stories, particularly narratives, are highly engaging educational resources that facilitate collaborative and interactive activities, such as group work, role-plays, and PowerPoint presentations.

(Nusrat) conducted an empirical study to examine the possibilities and limitations of using literature as a teaching tool for language instruction at the university level in Bangladesh. This study focuses on language students enrolled in Functional Course (FC) and English Major (EM) programs. Nusrat illustrated how literary texts can enhance English abilities, cultivate critical thinking, and promote creative language usage.

In a qualitative study, (Ashrafuzzaman et al.) explored the role of English literature in developing language skills and other aspects of language such as vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation among undergraduate English learners in Bangladesh. Data were collected from university students and teachers, using a qualitative approach. The study found that reading literature significantly helps English language learners develop four skills: vocabulary, analytical and interpretive skills, and understanding inner meaning. It provides authentic context, enriches vocabulary, and encourages learners to use authentic models for language use. Additionally, reading literature helps learners to understand their inner meanings.

(Hossen and Musayeb) did mixed-methods research in the Cumilla region of Bangladesh to assess the effectiveness of using literature as an educational tool for enhancing several student skills, including listening, speaking, reading, writing, vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar. The results indicated that most students believed that including literary texts was crucial for enhancing their language proficiency. A considerable proportion of the students preferred literary works. The research has also discovered that including literary content enhances learners' comprehension of grammatical diversity, vocabulary articulation, and unfamiliar cultural aspects.

While considerable research exists on the use of literary texts to teach language to students in English departments, studies that focus on employing literature for engineering students in Bangladesh are scarce. Considering the paucity of research in this field, it is imperative to conduct research in this area.

Research Methodology

Research Design

The research employed a mixed-method approach to gather significant insights from English teachers regarding their use of literature for teaching language in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context at the tertiary level. Creswell and Creswell defined a mixed-methods design as the process of gathering, merging, and analysing both quantitative and qualitative data to obtain more comprehensive and reliable information from diverse sources and gain a more thorough understanding of the study subject.

Participants

The survey was conducted across both public and private universities in Bangladesh, with 65 English teachers (male and female) randomly selected as participants. Most teachers were chosen based on their experience of teaching English in various engineering departments at the tertiary level. Five teachers were selected from this group for written interviews in order to gain more profound insights. The participants were chosen based on their ability to provide in-depth accounts, explanations, and reflections that extended beyond the survey responses. The selection also considered their willingness to participate, ensuring a more engaged and informative contribution to the qualitative component of the study.

Data Collection

Data were collected using a quantitative survey questionnaire and qualitative interview questions. The survey questionnaire comprised 24 items, with 23 presented in a 5-point Likert scale format ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." Responses were scored as follows: strongly

agree = 5, agree = 4, neutral = 3, disagree = 2, and strongly disagree = 1. The data were analysed using percentage rates. The remaining items provided options for participants to choose. The questionnaire (survey and interview) administered for this study is attached to Appendices A and B.

The interview questionnaire comprised six open-ended questions and was analysed thematically. The survey design was inspired by Hossen and Musayeb. However, the researchers adapted and modified the original questionnaire to suit the context of this study better. Additionally, interview questions were developed based on the teaching experience of both researchers.

The survey questionnaire, which included a consent form, was emailed to the teachers using Google Forms. Participants were given two options: to proceed with the survey or not. Sufficient time was provided for the respondents to complete the questionnaire. Additionally, a written interview questionnaire, also a Google Form, was emailed to five teachers who agreed to participate in the interviews. The interviewees were referred to as T1, T2, T3, T4, and T5 to protect participants' anonymity and uphold research ethics.

Validity and Reliability Measures

Appropriate measures were taken to address both validity and reliability and ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the research findings. Content validity was established for the quantitative component by adapting survey items from a previously validated questionnaire developed by Hossen and Musayeb. These items were carefully reviewed and modified to align with the specific contexts of engineering students at Bangladeshi universities. Expert validation was sought from two university faculty members experienced in EFL pedagogy who evaluated the relevance, clarity, and comprehensiveness of the questionnaire items.

Purposive sampling and participant consent enhanced the credibility of the qualitative components. Five interviewees were selected based on their teaching experience and willingness to provide detailed insights. Thematic analysis was applied to the open-ended responses and researcher triangulation was employed to ensure consistency

in coding and interpretation. Furthermore, member checking was conducted by sharing preliminary interpretations with participants to confirm the accuracy and authenticity of the findings.

The reliability of the survey instrument was reinforced through consistency in item construction and clarity of language, which helped minimise ambiguity and ensure uniform understanding among participants. Additionally, the structured Likert scale format contributed to the consistency of the responses. To further strengthen reliability, a standardised data collection process was followed, including a consistent administration procedure using Google Forms, allowing all participants equal time and access to complete the survey.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

The 23 items (I) presented using a 5-point Likert scale format are shown below with percentage rates from the respondents. For the last item, I-24, teachers were asked to give their preferences for categories of literary texts in language classrooms, such as Bangladeshi, South Asian, and diverse global literature.

The data obtained from the survey questionnaire were analysed using Google Sheets. Qualitative responses were thematically interpreted after transfer from Google Forms to an Excel spreadsheet. Both quantitative and qualitative interpretations are provided below.

Section 1: Interpretations of Quantitative Data
I1 - I4: Literature in the Curriculum

The curriculum's absence of prescribed literary texts demotivates many instructors from independently using the literature in their classrooms. Despite this, approximately 40% of instructors indicated that they had already incorporated literature into their classes. There is a strong agreement (approximately 80%) that language and literature are interrelated rather than separate entities, and a significant majority (75%) believe that more literature should be included in the syllabus.

I5 - I10: Relevance of Literary Texts

Most instructors (70%) found selecting texts that aligned with engineering students' interests

and needs challenging. However, approximately 30% view reading literature as a waste of time for engineering students. Over 80% agreed that literature is a powerful tool for language development, and 72% felt that texts with universal themes help students express emotions effectively. Additionally, two-thirds of the respondents believed that students were more comfortable sharing opinions on literary texts than real-life issues.

I11 - I15: Literature's Role in Engagement and Skills

Most (85%) believed that incorporating literature makes classrooms more engaging. Approximately 80% felt that literary texts enhanced vocabulary learning in context, while 75% agreed that literature helped improve reading skills. Additionally, 70% felt that discussing literary texts reduced their anxiety and enhanced their speaking skills, and 65% found that listening to stories and poems improved their pronunciation and listening skills.

I16 - I20: Fostering Creativity and Awareness

Approximately 78% believed that learning grammar through literary texts was more engaging than through traditional methods. A similar percentage agrees that literature fosters creativity and allows students the freedom to express unique perspectives in writing. Approximately 75% felt that literature promotes cultural understanding and acculturation. Moreover, 70% thought that it sparked curiosity, while 68% believed it developed students' creative abilities.

I21 - I23: Broader Educational Benefits

Nearly 80% of the respondents felt that the literature developed critical thinking skills applicable across disciplines. A significant majority (85%) believed that it fulfils the objectives of liberal education by broadening perspectives, cultivating awareness, and increasing sensitivity. Furthermore, 78% think literature fosters moral and ethical development, and 70% feel it strengthens their ideological and philosophical understanding.

I24 - Preferred Categories of Literary Texts

In response to I24, teachers showed their preferences for categories of literary texts in language classrooms, such as Bangladeshi, South Asian, and diverse global literature. Their predominant preference was 'Literature written in English in diverse world contexts'.
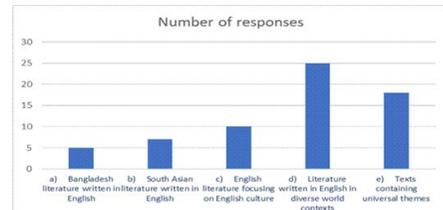

Figure 1 Bar Chart Showing How Teachers Opted for their Choice of Literary Texts

The findings revealed that the lack of required literary texts in the curriculum discourages many instructors from independently using the literature in their classrooms, although foundational courses offer some exposure. A significant majority viewed literature as integral to language development, with many advocating its increased inclusion in the syllabus. However, most instructors did not find it feasible to select texts that were relevant to engineering students.

Instructors also recognised the role of literature in fostering creativity, cultural understanding, and critical thinking, aligning with broader educational goals such as liberal education and ethical development. Therefore, the preferred categories are literature from diverse global contexts and texts with universal themes. At the same time, short stories and poems are the top choices among literary forms valued for their accessibility and versatility. Overall, the findings highlight the pedagogical potential of literature in enhancing both language and broader cognitive skills in engineering students.

Section 2: Interpretations of Qualitative Data

The qualitative data were analysed based on themes, including perceptions of using literature, language skill development, critical thinking skill development, preferred texts, challenges, and suggestions. The five participants were classified as T1, T2, T3, T4, and T5. Selected participant comments are provided below along with interpretations aligned with these themes.

Perceptions of Using Literature

Teachers participating in the interviews think incorporating literature is essential, potential, effective, and manageable because of its diverse benefits. T1 mentioned, *"I think it's important for it allows them to engage with different materials."* Similarly, T4 articulated the advantages of employing literature in language classrooms for engineering students as it *"can enhance critical thinking, language skills, and cultural awareness."*

Developing Language Skills

The participants of this study believed that using literature helps students develop their language skills. It enhances reading comprehension, improves vocabulary, and fosters writing skills. It also promotes speaking and listening through discussion and classroom activities. As T2 pointed out, *"A Literary text has a wide range of diction and meaningful sentences. So, that can be utilized for reading and writing purposes."* T5 commented, *"Using literature heightens engineering students' language skills by refining vocabulary, fostering critical reading, filtering writing, and boosting meaningful discussions for better speaking and listening."* These findings are consistent with those of (Hismanoglu). In his paper, he highlighted the significance of utilising literature as a widely accepted method for teaching fundamental language abilities, such as reading, writing, listening, and speaking, as well as linguistic domains, including vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation.

Developing Critical Thinking, Imagination and Cultural Awareness

All teacher participants were positive about using literary texts to foster critical thinking, creativity, and cultural awareness. This encourages students to interpret and analyse ideas from various perspectives. T1 commented, T2 believed that open-ended questions based on literary texts can *"promote critical thinking and some innovative tasks can be given to foster creativity among students."* T5 said it developed learners' *"critical thinking by offering complex ideas, inspires creativity through imaginative exploration, and builds cultural awareness by revealing students to diverse viewpoints and values."* The literature offers valuable insights into the culture of a particular place and allows students to enhance their imaginations, critical thinking, and independent judgments. (Prasad) lists "cultural and value enrichment" as one advantage of incorporating literature into ELT. This advantage is especially pertinent considering the growing interest in cross-cultural communication (Puig).

Preferred Genres

In response to the question of what types of literary texts or genres they think work well for engineering students, they developed a wide variety of literary texts, such as short stories, short poems, essays, science fiction, and fantasy. Short stories and poems are the top choices among literary forms valued for their accessibility and versatility. Four participants preferred to use short stories for brevity and to engage in nature. As T4 commented, *"Short stories, poems work well for engineering students because they are concise, engaging, and provide clear language examples."* Further, T5 claimed that science fiction worked *"well for engineering students as they are engaging, thought-provoking, and often attached to technology and invention."*

Challenges

However, the teacher participants identified several significant challenges in implementing literature in language classrooms, such as text complexity and relevance, lack of interest, time constraints, and learners' diverse proficiency levels. According to T3, *"The challenge was to make them read the literary text."* T5 mentioned, *"Challenges include students' lack of interest in literature and difficulty connecting texts to engineering."*

Suggestions

The participants in this study suggested organising workshops and training in selecting relevant texts, designing engaging activities to effectively integrate literature, and connecting literature to engineering contexts to maximise impact. T2 highlighted the importance of training as *"teachers need to know how they can effectively integrate literary texts with Engineering students and how tasks should be implemented."*

In sum, most teachers regarded literature as a powerful means of enhancing language skills, nurturing creativity, deepening cultural understanding, and developing critical thinking skills. Nonetheless, all participants suggested workshops and training for teachers to learn more about incorporating suitable texts and creating activities that connect literature to engineering contexts, addressing challenges, such as text complexity and student engagement.

Limitations

The researchers noted several limitations that may have influenced the scope and depth of this study. First, although 65 teachers participated in the survey, a larger and more diverse sample could strengthen the quantitative analysis and enhance the generalisability of the findings. The limited number of participants was partly due to time constraints and availability of respondents from different institutions. Second, the study did not include classroom observations, which could have provided richer qualitative data on how literature is implemented in EFL classrooms in engineering departments. Observations would allow researchers to triangulate data and gain practical insights into teaching strategies, student engagement, and classroom dynamics. Despite these constraints, this study offers valuable initial insights and a foundation for future research in the Bangladeshi context.

Recommendation

To improve English language teaching for engineering students in Bangladesh, we suggest recommendations for different stakeholders.

First, curriculum designers should revise existing English syllabi at the tertiary level to include literature-based modules, particularly short stories, poems, and plays, that align with students' linguistic levels and professional contexts. Furthermore, university administrators should support literature-based teaching initiatives that include access to literary texts, teaching aids, and digital platforms. They also need to facilitate collaboration between English and engineering faculties to design interdisciplinary modules that make the literature relevant to technical disciplines. Additionally, English teachers should incorporate diverse literary texts into classroom practice to improve students' language proficiency, cultural awareness, and critical thinking skills. Moreover, expert instructors should provide specialised training programs to help EFL teachers who do not teach English literature effectively in their classes. They should also give teachers tools and advice on how to identify and change literary texts that are appropriate for the students' age, reflect on their academic background, like engineering, and are easy for them to grasp in English. Finally, future researchers can conduct long-term and large-scale studies to determine how the use of literature in technical disciplines influences language development. They can also design customized teaching materials that are based on literary texts that are culturally and linguistically appropriate for Bangladeshi engineering students.

Conclusion

The role of literature as a source of authentic material in fostering creative and critical English learning, while promoting cultural awareness and critical thinking, has been highlighted in several studies (Canagarajah; Collie and Slater). Building on this, the current study investigated the perspectives of English teachers in Bangladesh on the use of literature in English classes, notably in the engineering departments of higher education. Our findings are consistent with those of previous research, validating the premise that the literature provides numerous benefits for language instruction. Overall, the findings imply that with the right assistance and resources, literature can improve English language skills and cultural awareness for engineering students, resulting in more effective learning opportunities.

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Appendix A
Survey Questionnaire
Demographic information
A. Teaching experience (in years) _____
B. Gender: Male / Female / Prefer not to say
C. Which Departments of Engineering faculty have you taught? _____
D. Type of institution that you are teaching at Public / Private

S. No	Items	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neutral (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
		Responses				
1	Since there are no prescribed literary texts (e.g., poems, short stories, novels, plays) in the course content, language instructors feel demotivated to use any literary text on their own in the language classrooms.					
2	I use literature in my language classrooms.					
3	The relationship between language and literature should not be seen as a dichotomy; rather, they are interrelated.					
4	Literature/ more literature should be included in the Foundational Course syllabus.					
5	Finding texts that match engineering students' interests and needs is not a challenge.					
6	It is a waste of time for engineering students to read literary texts in English language classrooms.					
7	The English language can be developed by using literature written in English as a tool in classrooms.					
8	Literary texts containing universal themes motivate students to express personal emotions easily.					
9	Students feel more comfortable expressing opinions on issues based on literary texts than issues in real life.					
10	Incorporating literature can make language classrooms more interesting.					
11	Reading literary texts exposes students to a wide range of vocabulary and new words contextually.					
12	Utilising literature might be an advantageous option for enhancing learners' reading proficiency.					
13	When participating in discussions on literary texts as opposed to non-literary works, learners feel less anxiety, which improves their speaking skills.					
14	Listening to short stories and poems helps students develop pronunciation as well as listening skills.					
15	Learning grammatical structures and their contextual use by studying literary texts seems more interesting than learning the rules of grammar directly.					
16	Students feel free to create responses to the questions based on literary texts because there are no right or incorrect answers in literature—rather, it depends on individual perspectives—which helps develop students' writing skills.					
17	By reading literary texts written in English based on or focusing on different cultures, contexts, traditions, and histories of the world, a sense of acculturation among students is developed.					
18	Using literary texts helps to develop students' curiosity.					
19	Reading literature develops students' creative faculties.					
20	It helps to develop critical thinking abilities that can be incorporated into learners' respective fields of knowledge.					

21	Exposure to literature can fulfil the objectives of liberal education, such as broadening perspectives, expanding one's worldview, increasing sensitivity, and cultivating greater awareness.					
22	Literature develops virtuous human qualities that contribute to the development of responsible and moral individuals.					
23	Reading literary texts makes students sound ideologically and philosophically.					

24. Which types of literary texts do you prefer to use in language classrooms?
(Select all that apply and/or add something new)

    Bangladeshi literature written in English
    South Asian literature written in English
    English literature focusing on English culture
    Literature written in English with diverse global contexts
    Texts containing universal themes

Appendix B
Interview Questions

1. How do you feel about incorporating literary texts into English language classrooms for engineering students in Bangladesh?

2. In your experience, how does using literature help develop engineering students' language skills (speaking, listening, writing, reading, or vocabulary)?

3. How does literature encourage critical thinking, creativity, or cultural awareness among engineering students?

4 . What challenges do you face when using literary texts in English classes for engineering students?

5. What types of literary texts or genres do you think will work well for engineering students?

6. What support or training does teachers need to effectively incorporate literary texts into language classrooms for engineering students?

Author Details

Badhan Moni, *Assistant Professor, Department of English, Gopalganj Science & Technology University, Bangladesh*
Email ID: badhanmoniphd23@efluniveristy.ac.in

Iffat Jahan Suchona, *Lecturer, Department of English, University of Asia Pacific, Bangladesh*
Email ID: iffatjahanphdele22@efluniversity.ac.in