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Prospective English language teachers' views on literature-oriented courses at Akdeniz University's ELT department

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Abstract

Using literary texts in English as a foreign language (hereafter EFL) context is beneficial for learners since they provide authentic properties of the target language and culture. The Ministry of National Education supports the use of literary texts to teach English effectively in primary and high schools. Hence, most of the ELT departments in Turkey include literature-oriented courses in their curricula. The aim of the study is to reveal prospective teachers' views on literature-oriented courses along with their suggestions so as to improve English language teacher education curricula. In order to collect prospective English teachers' views on literature-oriented courses, a Likert-type scale with 28 items was applied to 59 fourth-grade ELT students at Akdeniz University. The results showed that the literature-oriented course were essential for prospective teachers since these courses help improve teaching skills, critical thinking. Besides, according to the students literary texts provide language enrichment, improve reading ability and give cultural information about the target language.

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1. Introduction

The use of literature plays a significant role in foreign language teaching since it offers a bountiful and extremely varied written authentic material which is 'important' in the sense that it says something about fundamental human issues, and which is enduring rather than ephemeral (Collie & Slater, 2006). Literature as a source of authentic material in foreign language teaching came to prominence with the

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well-acceptance of communicative language teaching since it regards authenticity as a virtue (Picken, 2007) through which language learners are exposed to genuine and undistorted target language, and thus they gain familiarity with many different linguistic uses, forms and conversations of written forms such as irony, narration and argument (Collie & Slater, 2006). In addition to authenticity and language enrichment, literature provides learners with access to target language culture because literary texts include and exemplify cultural aspects (Lazar, 2005; Chamber & Gregory 2006; Nieto, 2010). On the other hand, it promotes intercultural experiences as well. Since English has become a *lingua franca*, today's world literature provides many literary texts which are either written in English by non-native authors or are translated into English. These literary texts offer various foreign cultures rather than target language culture along with different example of language use (Hall, 2005). Motivation is a key factor in learning, and language teaching materials are among the factors that can affect motivation in a positive or negative way (Picken, 2007). Dörnyei (2001) suggests that materials that were developed according to learners' needs, goals and interest, along with their everyday experiences and backgrounds are motivating. Collie & Slater (2006) and Picken (2007) state that learners can relate the fundamental human issues to their own lives and experiences through literature. In this sense, well-selected literary texts as a source of language teaching material are motivational in language classrooms. Lastly, literary texts are often successful way of promoting interactive activities in which learners need to share their own feelings, opinions and thoughts discussions and group works (Lazar, 2005).

Depending on the fact that the use of literature provides language learners various benefits, literature-oriented courses play significant role in the English Language Teaching Departments (hereafter ELT) where prospective teachers learn what and how to teach. After the Higher Education Council's adoption of the a curriculum for all departments in Faculties of Education in an effort to both upgrade and unify curriculum structure across the country (Çelik, 2000), the importance of literature in the language teaching curriculum in Turkey, at all levels of instruction, began to lose its importance (Arikan, 2005) whereas it should have been considered as a significant aspect of foreign language learning (Türker, 1998). Through the literature-oriented courses, it is intended that prospective teachers learn necessary literary background and critical thinking ability, and essential approaches about how to use and manipulate literary texts according to learners' needs, interests and goals. The literature-oriented courses that the Higher Education Council adapted are English Literature I-II and Literature and Language Teaching I-II (YOK, n.d.). However, the fact that the scopes of these courses are too wide yields to impracticability. For instance, the scope of English Literature I course determined by the Higher Education Council is as follows:

Cultural history of British and American literature and literary works written in English; fundamental terms and techniques; major genres and styles in literature; movements and periods in literature in English; the content and style of various literary texts such as short story, poem, drama and novel representing different periods and genres of English literature; literature's contribution to our understanding of life; literary tools to analyze and critically evaluate literary works and critical perspectives towards the texts; literary arts used in texts so as to make deductions, inferences and evaluations (YOK, n.d).

This example shows that it does not seem viable to deal with those subjects mentioned above considering the limited weekly course hour (3 hour per week), and crowded classes. Besides, the scope of the course covers almost each course of English language and literature departments. However, English Literature I-II courses are essential for the ELT students so that they can gain fundamental background for the courses Literature and Language Teaching I-II which aims to teach students what to use and how to use literary texts in language teaching. Yet, the scopes of Literature and Language Teaching I-II courses are too wide as well. The scope of the Literature and Language Teaching I course is as follows:

... different approaches to using literature with teenage and adult learners at all levels; examining ways in which the teaching of literature and language in these two genres (short story and novel), exploring theoretical and practical dimensions of this integration; analysis of literary texts as content and as context; culture teaching through short stories and novel in the following domains: comparison and contrast between objects or products that exist in the target and native culture; proverbs, idioms, formulaic expressions which embody cultural values; social structures, roles and relationships; customs/ rituals/ traditions; beliefs, values, taboos and superstitions; political, historic and economic background; cultural institutions; metaphorical/ connotative meanings, use of humour (YOK, n.d).

It can be inferred from the scope that the Literature and Language Teaching I-II courses aim to teach the approaches how to use literature for different purposes such as culture teaching, specific language uses etc. However, 3-hour course duration in a week leaves inadequate room for micro-teaching activities which focus on sharpening and developing specific teaching skills and eliminating errors along with providing expert supervision, a constructive feedback and repeated practice without adverse consequences to teachers or their students (Ananthakrishnan, 1993). At the issues that are discussed above, the purpose of the study is to examine the 4th grade students' views from English Language Teaching Department (ELT) at Akdeniz University towards literature-oriented courses.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

The study was carried out in the second term of the 2011-2012 academic year. 59 4th year students from the ELT department of Akdeniz University participated in this study. Only 4th year students were included in the study because they completed all literature-oriented courses given at the end of their third years.

2.2. Data Analysis

The purpose of the survey was to investigate the views of the fourth year students of English Language Teaching Department at Akdeniz University towards literature teaching. The survey tried to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the 4th grade ELT students' perceptions of literature-oriented courses?
2. Is there any relationship between the 4th grade ELT students' reading habits and literature-oriented courses?
3. What are the 4th grade ELT students' reading habits in both native and target languages?

For data collection, a 28-item questionnaire was used. 18 items of the questionnaire were taken, with minor changes, from the scale that Ögeyik (2007) used in her study about literature teaching. Additionally, 9 items were added to the questionnaire according to the aims of the research questions. Cronbach's Alpha coefficient item reliability is 0,772.

3. Results

Table 1. Language Enrichment

Items	Agree %	Agree <i>f</i>	Undecided %	Undecided <i>f</i>	Disagree %	Disagree <i>f</i>
1. Literature teaching is beneficial for foreign language learning.	89.8	53	8.5	5	1.7	1
6. Learning vocabulary through literary texts is not possible.	10.2	6	5.1	3	84.7	50
16. Reading literary texts is useful for vocabulary enrichment.	91.5	54	6.8	4	1.7	1
19. I study the dialogues and language structures used in literary texts and try to use them.	56	33	18.6	11	25.4	15

Table 1 reveals that most of the students find literature teaching beneficial for foreign language learning (89.8%). This is probably due to the fact that literary texts promote opportunities for vocabulary enrichment (91.5%). Besides, more than half of the students state that they study dialogues and language structures that they encounter while reading literary texts (56%). It can be inferred from that they regard literary texts as a way of learning vocabulary and specific language uses. My Van (2009) articulates that literature introduces a profound range of vocabulary, dialogues, and prose all of which help learners in foreign language learning.

Table 2. Reading Ability

Items	Agree %	Agree <i>f</i>	Undecided %	Undecided <i>f</i>	Disagree %	Disagree <i>f</i>
3. Reading short story affects reading ability positively.	98.3	58	1.7	1	-	-
5. Reading literary text does not enhance creativity in language use.	10.2	6	11.9	7	77.9	46
7. Reading poetry affects reading ability positively.	76.3	45	15.3	9	8.4	5
13. In the classroom, it is useful to analyze how language is used in literary texts for comprehension.	88.1	52	6.8	4	5.1	3
18. Reading drama affects reading ability positively.	78	46	13.6	8	8.4	5
25. Reading novel affects reading ability positively.	91.5	54	8.5	5	-	-

Table 2 shows that great majority of the students consider reading short story (98.3%), poetry (76.3%), drama (78%) and novel (91.5) as useful means for developing reading abilities. The reason why poetry and drama are not at the same level with the other genres can be explained that students find reading and understanding short story and novel easier than poetry and drama since they may contain subtle statements and more specific language use, demand reading between lines along with more critical thinking (Chamber

& Gregory, 2006). Besides, most of the students find literary texts as a way of creativity enhancement (77.9%). It can be inferred from this item that studying dialogues and language structures yield to improvements in students' creativity.

Table 3. Culture

Items	Agree %	Agree <i>f</i>	Undecided %	Undecided <i>f</i>	Disagree %	Disagree <i>f</i>
2. Cultural competence is extended by means of literature teaching.	100	59	-	-	-	-
4. Reading literary texts from American and English literature does not give much information about both cultures.	6.8	4	8.5	5	84.7	50

Table 3 shows that 84.7% of the students find much information about both American and English cultures. In other words, literary texts promote learning the target language culture, and literature teaching create opportunities for extending their cultural competence which is essential for communicating since as result of communicative approach language learners need the ability to use the language in socially and culturally appropriate ways (Byram et al., 2002) lest the shared values and beliefs held by social groups such as religious beliefs, taboos, etc. in target language culture do not hinder communication (Council of Europe, 2001).

Table 4. Reading Habit

Items	Agree %	Agree <i>f</i>	Undecided %	Undecided <i>f</i>	Disagree %	Disagree <i>f</i>
9. The more I read Turkish literature the easier I understand literature in English.	62.8	37	20.2	12	17	10
14. I do not have difficulty in reading and understanding a literary text in English.	33.9	20	22	13	44.1	26
17. I'm currently reading a literary text (novel, drama, short story, poetry).	52.5	31	10.2	6	37.3	22
21. I often read literary texts written in English.	30.5	18	25.4	15	44.1	26
22. I prefer reading literary texts in Turkish to English.	52.5	31	27.1	16	20.4	12
23. I often benefit from the Internet while reading literary texts in English.	62.8	37	18.6	11	18.6	11
24. The literary texts I read in high school aroused my interest to literature.	47.5	28	23.7	14	28.8	17
28. I often read literary texts in Turkish	67.8	40	13.6	8	18.6	11

Table 4 shows that more than half of the students prefer reading literary texts in their native languages (67.8%) rather than reading in target language (44.1%) although half of the students state that they are currently reading a literary text in different genres (52.5%). This explains why they have difficulty in understanding literary texts written in English (44.1%) because they mostly read in their native language. On the other hand, more than half of the students prefer benefitting from the Internet while reading literature in English (62.8%) due largely to get some help from the Internet such as electronic dictionaries, web sites about literary analysis etc. The Internet offers rapid multi-channel and multi-referential environments enriched with various visuals to students for studying literature (Arikan, 2008; Kartal & Arikan, 2010).

Table 5. Literature course related

Items	Agree %	Agree <i>f</i>	Undecided %	Undecided <i>f</i>	Disagree %	Disagree <i>f</i>
8. Reading literary texts is more enjoyable than reading other types of reading.	56	33	20.3	12	23.7	14
10. Literary analysis in the classroom is enjoyable.	69.4	41	13.6	8	17	10
11. There should be elective literature courses in our curriculum.	72.8	43	17	10	10.2	6
12. Watching movie or TV series version of literary texts is beneficial to understand literature-oriented courses.	89.8	53	5.1	3	5.1	3
15. Literature-oriented courses should be supported with movies or TV series adaptations of literary texts.	74.5	44	13.6	8	11.9	7
20. Literature-oriented courses are useful for the development of critical thinking.	86.4	51	11.9	7	1.7	1
26. Literature-oriented courses are essential for prospective teachers.	88.2	52	8.4	5	3.4	2
27. Literature-oriented courses are helpful for improving teaching skills.	78	46	8.4	5	13.6	8

Table 5 shows that more than half of the students find reading literary texts enjoyable (56%), and almost 70% of the students enjoy literary analysis in the classroom. Dörnyei (2001) elucidates that making learning enjoyable promotes motivation for learning. In this sense, the fact that the students enjoy reading literary texts and literary analysis improve their motivation for literature-oriented courses. On the other hand, most of the students demand elective literature courses in the curriculum (72.8%) from which it can be inferred that existing literature-oriented courses in the curriculum of the ELT department of Akdeniz University are not enough for meeting students' needs. Besides students demand literature-oriented courses are supported with movies and TV series adaptation of literary texts (74.5%) since the great majority regard these adaptations as beneficial for understanding literature-oriented courses (89.8%). The students' responses showed that literature-oriented courses are essential for prospective teachers (88.2%)

due to the fact that these courses are useful for critical thinking (86.4%) and helpful for improving teaching skills (78%).

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The result of the study showed that the 4th grade students perceived literature-oriented courses enjoyable and essential for themselves since these courses promote teaching skills and critical thinking. However, they demanded elective literature-oriented courses. Since the scopes of these courses are too wide and the weekly course hours are not adequate to learn the wide range of subjects, the students are expected to learn numerous subjects in a limited time. Therefore, the scope of these courses should be narrowed and the curriculum of the ELT departments should be enriched with elective literature-oriented course. The students also demanded that literature-oriented courses were supported with movies or TV series adaptations of literary texts. Using such resources enhance students' motivations, attract their attention and make these courses more enjoyable. Besides, the Internet makes it easier to access such resources and the technological devices such as computers and projectors make it possible to use such sources in the classroom environment. From the students' reading habits it can be inferred that there is a directly proportional relationship between reading habit and literature-oriented courses. This is probably because the students regard literary texts as tool for language enrichment along with accessing cultural information of the target language. As for the students' reading habits in both native and the target language, the results showed that they preferred reading literary texts in Turkish rather than in English. This might have been resulted from the difficulty they had in understanding these texts written in English. In addition, they regarded literary analysis in the classroom useful. Therefore, literary texts selection and the role of the teacher in the classroom play significant role in understanding literary texts and the students are provided with guidance in the classroom so that they learn how to use literary texts while teaching English.

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