



Pre-service teachers' beliefs about literature integration in English language teaching classrooms

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Abstract

In late 1990s, teacher cognition has emerged as an important field of inquiry as more and more research studies have demonstrated that teachers' cognitions influence their instructional decisions and activities (Borg, 2003). In the case of pre-service teachers, their beliefs are mainly influenced by their prior experience as learners while these beliefs also act as a filtering mechanism to process new information presented in teacher education programs (Borg, 2009). This study investigated changes in the beliefs about the use of literary texts in English language teaching (ELT) of 65 pre-service teachers enrolled at the teacher education department of a state university in Istanbul, Turkey. The inclusion of literature in ELT classrooms has been viewed as a beneficial process as it contributes to students' linguistic development, appreciation of different cultures, personal involvement, and individual growth (Carter & Long, 1991). To that extent, ELT teacher education programs in Turkey have been offering courses to equip pre-service teachers with the knowledge and skills on how to integrate literature into language teaching. The present study explored prior experiences and beliefs of pre-service English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers about literature integration and compared them with those formed after the completion of a two-semester course on teaching English through literature. Data were collected through open-ended questionnaires administered before and after the course and subjected to content analysis as suggested by Weber (1990). Results showed that pre-service teachers had positive beliefs about literature integration while the course had some limited impact on their prior beliefs.

Keywords: pre-service teacher education; literature integration in ELT; teachers' beliefs

1. Introduction

Literature has been viewed as a valuable resource for foreign language classrooms for over two decades (Collie & Slater, 1987; Hall, 2005). The use of literary texts contributes to students' linguistic development, appreciation of different cultures, personal involvement, and individual growth (Carter & Long, 1991; Lazar, 1993). All these benefits can be achieved if language teachers know how to utilize these texts and design effective lessons and activities to engage their learners. To develop such a skill, teachers should receive training support either at the pre-service or in-service stage. Studies indicated that teachers' classroom decisions are strongly influenced by their core beliefs, which are shaped mainly

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by their prior experiences as learners (Borg, 2003). Thus teacher education programs should tap into those core beliefs to identify how these conceptions are formed and where necessary encourage pre-service teachers (PTs) to reformulate those beliefs during training. Considering the need for identifying PTs' beliefs both for their professional growth and the improvement of training provided in teacher education, this study aimed at identifying PTs' beliefs about the use of literary texts in teaching English before and after they took a two-semester course on the integration of literature.

1.1. Theoretical background

This section provides theoretical background on the benefits of using literature in language teaching, the notion of teacher beliefs and its role in teachers' pedagogical practices, and a review of studies conducted on teacher beliefs and literature integration.

1.1.1. Benefits of Using Literature in Foreign Language Classrooms

The contribution of literary texts to learners' development is multi-dimensional. Clearly, one of these contributions is linguistic development as literary texts offer authentic contexts for a wide range of interactive linguistic activities that are tailored for general comprehension, text focus, and vocabulary study. Students can then respond to the language and content of the texts through personal response tasks such as interpreting, inferring to distinguish between literal and implied meaning. Their personal reactions can turn into literature-based group discussion, promoting communication ability. Literature also facilitates written language production as it serves as a good model for writing. Students can be familiarized with different features of written language like cohesion and coherence, and literary devices such as irony, narration, and argumentation. (Carter & Long, 1990; Parkinson & Reid Thomas, 2000; Alam, 2007).

A second major benefit of literature is that it functions as a gateway to other cultures, their value systems, norms, and behaviors. Although the world of literature is an imaginary one, it still holds reflections of complex and dynamic human nature. In literary texts, many universal human aspects are presented through interesting and vivid characters and dialogues through which learners can discover new thoughts, feelings, and customs. Learners can become familiar with other cultures and view the world from different perspectives, resulting in heightened cultural awareness and knowledge (Collie & Slater, 1987; Hismanoglu, 2005).

Another significant contribution of literature is that it fosters personal involvement of the reader. Providing that language teachers use texts that are interesting and relevant, and activities that promote involvement, learners take an active role in solving the plot. They develop deeper connections with the text such as accepting or reacting against the characters and their actions. This type of intellectual and emotional involvement motivates them. Also, the more learners are personally involved and imaginatively engaged with literature, the more their creativity and imagination increase (Collie & Slater, 1987; Ur, 1996; Hirvela & Belcher, 2001; Hismanoglu, 2005).

The fourth equally important benefit of literature is that it serves as a platform for individual growth. Learners become more tolerant and sensible towards others' differences and develop a sense of empathy as they read literary texts. Moreover, through self-reflection they develop a better understanding of their own society, culture, and themselves in accordance with others. Thus, their self-concept is reinforced. As such, literature educates the whole person and helps learners grow personally (Carter & Long, 1991; Van, 2009; Yeasmin et al., 2011).

While literary texts are available for language teachers to integrate into their practice to create a rich learning environment, if teachers believe that they are irrelevant or challenging for their learners or that they believe they cannot utilize such texts effectively, these beliefs will have a negative impact on their

teaching decisions. As Borg (2011) comments, the notion of teacher beliefs is a key element in teacher learning and thus is a very valuable area of research.

1.1.2. Theoretical background on teachers' beliefs

Teacher cognition research explores what teachers think, know and believe (Borg, 2009). To date, relevant studies have demonstrated that teachers' cognitions have an impact on their decision-making processes and teaching actions. As an important component of teacher cognition, teacher beliefs have been defined as psychologically held propositions that individuals consider to be true and use to make judgments and guide their actions (Richardson, 1996; Borg, 2006). These beliefs, which are essentially an amalgam of views, values and thoughts about teaching and learning, shape teachers' planning and instructional activities and thus have an impact on students' learning experiences (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996; Altan, 2006; Borg, 2006).

1.1.3. Sources of language teachers' beliefs

Language teachers' beliefs derive from multiple sources. While a major source is their own second language learning experiences (Pajares, 1992; Borg, 2004; Ellis, 2006; Zheng, 2009), other sources such as teacher training programs (Cabaroğlu & Roberts, 2000; Popko, 2005), teaching experience (Stuart & Thurlow, 2000; Mattheoudakis, 2007; Tang et al., 2012), school settings and colleagues, and personality factors (Richards & Lockhart, 1994) also have an impact on teachers' belief systems.

Although teachers' beliefs can be dynamic and flexible, some beliefs are deeply rooted and resistant to change. Following Pajares (1992), scholars categorize teachers' beliefs as core and peripheral; core referring to those beliefs formed from a younger age, particularly through observation and experience as learners, and therefore resistant to change, while peripheral beliefs are those formed relatively recently through teacher education programs and not tested in actual teaching contexts (Phipps & Borg, 2009; Alexander, 2012). Core beliefs have stronger influence on teacher behavior than peripheral beliefs and may therefore cause conflict in teachers' actions; hence, for researchers and teacher educators, the challenge to distinguish between these categories of beliefs in relation to teachers' actions can be fruitful in our understanding of teachers' behavior (Phipps & Borg, 2009).

1.1.4. The importance of investigating pre-service teachers' beliefs

While classroom practice provides context for in-service teachers to test and review their beliefs and actions towards developing a more sophisticated pedagogy, at the pre-service level, teacher education programs aim to refine PTs' beliefs in order to improve the effectiveness of future teaching decisions and actions. Teacher education programs can do that by investigating beliefs that PTs already hold when they enroll into the programs, identifying misconceptions and challenging those by providing new perspectives, with the optimism about causing positive changes in PTs' pedagogical beliefs. As Borg (2011) also hypothesized "teacher education is more likely to impact on what teachers do if it also impacts on their beliefs" (p.370). Moreover, investigating PTs' beliefs and the impact of teacher education programs on those beliefs could provide valuable data to make any necessary improvements in the program content (Wright, 2010).

1.1.5. Studies on pre-service language teachers' beliefs

In relation to PTs' beliefs and teacher education contexts, some research studies have focused on identifying sources of PTs' existing beliefs, while others aimed at examining changes in beliefs, and related to this change, the impact of teacher education programs and practicum teaching on pre-service teachers' evolving beliefs.

PTs' core beliefs were mainly attributed to their background as language learners, as various studies have demonstrated that PTs already hold strong beliefs as they enter teacher education programs (Levin & He, 2008; Busch, 2010) These pre-existing beliefs are likely to determine which elements of

professional training will be accepted or rejected in the process of constructing a knowledge base (Pajares, 1992; Cabaroglu & Roberts, 2000; Mattheoudakis, 2007; Busch, 2010)

With regards to the impact of teacher education on PTs' existing beliefs, studies have yielded mixed results. There are a number of studies that showed positive changes in PTs' beliefs. For example, Busch (2010) investigated beliefs of 381 PTs before they took an SLA course and identified a number of misconceptions, which were mainly shaped by their learning experiences in high-school foreign language classes. After the SLA course, Busch (2010) found significant changes in PTs' beliefs about language learning. Yuan and Lee (2014) focused on the belief change of three EFL PTs during a 10-week teaching practicum. Their results indicated a range of belief change processes about language teaching and self-understanding as teachers, as well as identifying certain beliefs that "deepened" and "expanded" (p.9). Similarly, Cabaroglu and Roberts (2000) followed belief changes of 20 PTs of Modern Languages enrolled in a one-year PGCE training program. Through regular interviews, they identified belief changes in 19 out of 20 participants, and that those changes occurred in the form of reconstruction, reordering, renaming, rejection of concepts and beliefs. Cabaroglu and Roberts (2000) suggest that teacher education programs should acknowledge the cumulative and evolutionary nature of beliefs, and address existing beliefs from the early stages of training. Similarly, Mattheoudakis (2007) tracked changes in EFL student teachers' beliefs in a three-year teacher education program, and found that majority of participants beliefs developed gradually. She also emphasizes that PTs need time to review and modify their preconceptions and beliefs.

On the other hand, there are other studies that found little or no effect of teacher education on PTs' beliefs. Peacock (2001) conducted a longitudinal study to track language learning beliefs of 146 trainee teachers of English as a Second Language (ESL) during a three-year program. At the end of the study, although there was some change in beliefs, key beliefs about language learning with emphasis on grammar and vocabulary changed very little after three years. Kunt and Ozdemir (2010) compared beliefs of first and fourth year PTs who took methodology courses. They also found that beliefs remained the same or changed only to a small extent. Altan's (2012) study involving 217 PTs' of ELT from 7 different state universities of Turkey similarly indicated no significant difference between language learning beliefs of participants regardless of their year of study in teacher education programs. Likewise, Capan's (2014) study aiming to identify and track changes in beliefs of PTs of EFL about grammar instruction through questionnaires, interviews, and field observations also revealed no statistically significant changes between participants' pre- and post-practicum beliefs.

As presented above, regarding the impact of teacher education programs on PTs' beliefs, studies indicate mixed results. Nonetheless, these programs should work towards exploring PTs' existing beliefs and encouraging them to address any unrealistic beliefs or misconceptions they might hold. Because, even though belief change may be very limited during teacher education, the perspectives and knowledge base provided by teacher education programs will have planted seeds, which may become more meaningful and relevant as these individuals face realities of teaching, gain more teaching experience, and accordingly refine their beliefs.

1.1.6. Studies on beliefs of teachers about literature use in language teaching

In-service teachers' beliefs about teaching English through literature have also been investigated by different researchers, in different language teaching and learning contexts (Akyel & Yalcin, 1990; Katz, 2001; Minkoff, 2006; Paran, 2008; Nusrat, 2015; Isikli & Tarakcioglu, 2017). The overall findings revealed that language teachers hold positive beliefs about using literature and are aware of the benefits of it, yet they also have some reservations about using literary texts in teaching English. Inadequacy of appropriate classroom techniques and activities, language learners' skepticism and low motivation are some of the factors that negatively influence teachers' beliefs. Learners' low motivation poses

challenges for teachers as low motivation results in learners' unenthusiastic class participation and involvement (Hall, 2003; Yeasmin et al., 2011). Other predominant factors that affect teachers' beliefs are insufficient or total lack of teacher training on literature integration (Kramersch, 1993; Belcher & Hirvela, 2000; Katz, 2001; Ganakumaran et al., 2003; Paran, 2008; Karci & Vural, 2011), cultural unfamiliarity of the text creating a barrier for learners (Tasneen, 1996; Nusrat, 2015), and proficiency level of learners (Akyel & Yalcin, 1990; Arvidson & Blanco, 2004; Buyukyavuz & Inal, 2008; Isikli & Tarakcioglu, 2017). According to the studies above, teachers believe that they would feel professionally more competent if they received training on how to use literary texts. They also believe that language learners feel more confident and comfortable with culture-friendly texts such as English translations of locally known folk tales or translations of popular stories, and poems written by famous writers of their nation. They are also inclined to conduct teacher-centered instruction to compensate for the low proficiency and literature competence of their learners.

A review of existing studies reporting PTs' beliefs about using literature in language teaching revealed that there are only a few studies that have tapped this area of investigation (Arikan, 2005; Cirakli & Kilickaya, 2011; Tuncer & Kizildag, 2014). These studies have found that PTs also view literature integration is necessary and intend to utilize literary texts in the future. However, they also add that they do not get any opportunities to use literary texts during their practicum.

The limited number of existing studies paved way for the present study, which had a twofold aim: to explore PTs' prior experiences and beliefs about literature integration in language classrooms, and to compare initial beliefs with those formed after the completion of a two-semester course on teaching English through literature.

1.2. Research Questions

In line with the aim above, the following research questions were formulated:

1. What are PTs' beliefs about the use of literary texts in teaching English before they took a two-semester course on the integration of literature?
2. Are there any changes in PTs' beliefs about the use of literary texts in teaching English after the completion of the course?

2. Methodology

As the purpose of the study was to explore past learning experiences and changes in participants' beliefs, qualitative research design was followed. This section provides details with regards to the participants, context, and data collection and analysis stages of the present study.

2.1. Participants and Context

65 pre-service teachers enrolled in the third year of the teacher-training program of ELT at a highly competitive state university in Istanbul, Turkey participated in the present study.

Department of ELT is a four-year undergraduate program that aims at equipping prospective English language teachers with theoretical and practical aspects of teaching profession. Main components of the program consist of courses such as *Second Language Acquisition*, *Linguistics*, *Methods and Approaches to Language Teaching*, and other professional courses. In addition to providing courses in methodology, the program also organizes practicum in various selected schools for PTs to acquire adequate practical skills for teaching English as a foreign language in their final year of study.

One of the core courses for PTs studying in year three is *Teaching English through Literature*. It is offered through Fall and Spring semesters for three hours a week. This two-semester course aims at equipping PTs with knowledge and skills on how to integrate literature into language teaching both at theoretical and practical level. Within the course, the definition of literature encompasses canonical texts as well as popular fiction, by not just English or American writers but writers from a diverse range of countries and cultures. The course promotes the idea that any literary text appropriate to use with learners, and that can engage students emotionally and intellectually can be utilized by teachers.

In the Fall semester, one of the course goals is to raise PTs' awareness of why literature is beneficial in the language learning process especially focusing on language and cultural enrichment along with personal involvement and individual growth (Collie & Slater, 1987). Then, the course presents theories about the possible approaches including language-based approach, stylistics, and literature as content to draw on when using literature with their learners (Lazar, 1993; Kodama, 2012). In addition, PTs improve their understanding of how they select appropriate and relevant literary texts based on the set of criteria suggested by Lazar (1993), i.e., type of course (length, intensity, etc.), type of students (interests, linguistic proficiency, etc.), and text-related factors (availability, exploitability, etc.). To develop their practical skills, PTs are asked to evaluate appropriateness of different literary materials by using the criteria and also create their own evaluation rubric to demonstrate their understanding. Furthermore, they are offered various techniques and activities to using literature in language classrooms (Collie & Slater, 1987; McKay, 1987; Lazar, 1993). They are expected to design activities employing a combination of language-based approach and stylistic analysis based on a selected short story (*The Kiss*) and a book (*The Amazing Story of Adolphus Tips*). In the Spring semester, PTs continue putting the theoretical knowledge into practice by preparing lesson plans and activities for fables, play extracts, poems and a novel (*The Giver*). PTs are reminded that these lesson designs should offer their prospective students language support and practice in relation to the unabridged, authentic, literary text in hand along with appreciation of literature, personal involvement, and individual growth. By the end of the academic year, PTs are expected to have developed the skill and confidence in utilizing literary texts to expand their prospective students' language awareness, interpretative and reflective abilities, and appreciation of literature to a satisfactory degree.

2.2. Instrument

Data collection instrument for the present study was an open-ended questionnaire that included a section to gather background information from participants. The questionnaire asked PTs whether and how literary texts were integrated and what type of texts were used while they were learning English; whether they found the integration of literary texts beneficial for learners, what type of texts they would prefer to use and how, advantages and disadvantages of using literary texts, challenges they anticipate, and factors they would consider in planning a literature-integrated lesson.

2.3. Data Collection Procedure

Data were collected in the 2016-2017 academic year via the questionnaires administered on the first week and the final week of the two-semester course. The aim was to be able to compare PTs' prior experiences and beliefs about literature integration with those formed after they have taken the course.

2.4. Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using content analysis technique (Weber, 1990). Responses of the participants were classified into codes in terms of the purpose of the study. Then, similar codes were gathered into more conceptual categories. Finally, interpretive themes emerged from these categories. To ensure

consistency and inter-rater reliability, both researchers coded the data separately and compared their categories. For that comparison, following Miles and Huberman's (1994) inter-rater formula, each rater's coding was grouped into 'agree' and 'disagree' categories. When the reliability formula ($\text{reliability} = \frac{\text{number of agreement}}{\text{total number of agreement} + \text{disagreement}} \times 100$) was applied, reliability co-efficiency was found to be .89. The consistency level was high as the raters grouped similar codes under similar categories.

3. Results

This study explored the background experiences of PTs of English about the use of literary texts when they were learning English, with the purpose of understanding their beliefs prior to taking a two-semester course titled *Teaching English through Literature*. Participants' post-course beliefs were also examined and compared with their initial beliefs.

3.1. Background experiences of PTs in literature integration

One of the aims of this study was to understand PTs' background experiences as learners in relation to the use of literature in English classrooms. The questionnaire revealed that 40 out of 65 participating PTs were exposed to literary texts while the remaining 25 PTs were not. The 40 PTs indicated that the genre(s) of the literary texts that were used in their language learning process were mostly abridged books (N=29), short stories (N=24), followed by novels (N=17). Poems (N=9), plays (N=3) and fables (N=2) were less frequently used genres as sources of language teaching material. More than half of the participants expressed that those texts were read in the classroom only (N=24; 60%). The other participants stated the texts were assigned as home reading only (N=9; 22,5%) or were studied in both settings (N=7; 17,5%). In terms of the type of in-class activities they experienced, out of 40 PTs, 26 (65%) wrote that comprehension activities such as scanning, identifying key points, true/false or multiple-choice questions were the most common type used by their English teachers. Vocabulary activities such as fill-in-the-blanks, synonyms, and antonyms were the second frequently used type as mentioned by 18 PTs (45%). Contrary to expectations, closer text analysis involving identifying themes and symbols, making inferences, analyzing characters was rarely utilized by English teachers as indicated only by 4 PTs.

3.2. PTs' beliefs related to literary texts

The participants in this study were asked to state whether they experience any difficulties in understanding the author's intended message while they are reading literary texts. The pre-and post-course findings displayed identical responses with 46 of PTs (71%) stating that they sometimes have difficulty, 14 PTs (22%) never have difficulty and 5 PTs (7%) often experience difficulty.

Additionally, PTs were asked to indicate whether they found using literary texts in teaching English necessary or unnecessary. According to the results, 59 (91%) out of 65 PTs thought literature integration was necessary which suggested that PTs already had positive perceptions about using literary texts even before they took the course. Their post-course beliefs were similarly positive (N=61; 94%). A closer analysis of results showed no difference between PTs who had previous experience with literary texts as learners and those without prior experience.

Participants were also asked to indicate which literary text genres they would prefer to use as language teaching material when they start teaching. In their answers, they were asked to put the given options (short story, abridged book, novel, poetry, drama, and fable) in order of preference. Before taking the course, PTs favored short stories (N=34; 52%), closely followed by abridged books (N=30;

46%) and novels (N=20; 31%). The least preferred genres were plays (N=8; 12%), fables (N=6; %9), and poems (N=2; 3%). Analysis of the post-questionnaires yielded very similar results showing that literary text preferences of PTs did not change after having studied *Teaching English through Literature* for two semesters. The first three preferences of PTs remained the same: short stories (N=33; 51%) and abridged books (N=28; 43%), followed by novels (23/35%). Likewise, plays (N=9; 14%), fables (N=6; %9), and poems (N=4; 6%) were still among the least preferred genres. Contrary to the emphasis given on poetry during the two-semester course through interpretation activities and lesson design practices with peer and instructor feedback, PTs still avoid poetry. This suggests that their prior experiences might have stronger influence on their beliefs as their text genre preferences echo those utilized by their English teachers.

3.3. PTs' beliefs about the advantages of using literature

The participants of the study were asked to comment on the advantages of using literature when teaching English, both before and after the course study. Table 1 below demonstrates the advantages that participants put forward before taking the course.

Table 1. PTs' beliefs on the advantages of using literature before the course study

Themes	Categories	Codes
Linguistic development	Overall proficiency (20)	L*. improves language
		L. offers various structures
	Vocabulary gain (16)	L. presents new words
	Reading habit (15)	Ss**. read for pleasure
	Meaningful language use (7)	Ss. communicate own thoughts
		Ss. focus on message
Appreciation of different cultures	Wider perspective (36)	Ss. make sense of the text
		L. provides authentic context
	L. increases general culture	
Personal involvement	Interesting and fun (10)	L. broadens perspectives
		L. makes lessons interesting
Individual growth	Self-development and awareness (3)	Ss. enjoy the lesson
		Ss. become aware of own values
	Creativity (2)	L. increases imagination

L*: Literature Ss**: Students

Note: The numbers in brackets refer to the number of PTs

The analysis of codes led into more conceptual categories, which then led to themes that echoed the benefits of using literature as highlighted in the literature review section of this paper. The most predominant advantages of using literature were related to appreciation of culture and linguistic development with most commonly mentioned categories being 'wider perspective', 'overall proficiency', and 'vocabulary gain'. The advantage that literature helps learners gain wider perspective about other cultures was mentioned by 36 PTs out of 65, and most of these PTs were the ones who had prior language learning experience with literary texts. The following quotations are helpful in understanding this category better:

“Using literary texts as sources will help students travel to new, different worlds, contributing to their general cultural knowledge.” (PT39)

“Literary texts are good samples of cultural reflections. Students learn new concepts and perspectives so this broadens their perspectives.” (PT52)

As the second major advantage, PTs believed that literature helps improve overall proficiency of language learners (N=20) without clearly stating what specific language skills or how, as the following statements show:

“Using literature can be helpful in learning English and in improving some areas of the language.” (PT10)

“Literary texts can be advantageous in increasing students’ proficiency.” (PT41)

The third most dominant advantage of using literature was vocabulary gain for PTs (N=16) but they did not focus on the teaching aspect of vocabulary. Some statements of PTs about this category are as follows:

“Students can learn new vocabulary items that they have not seen before. This will help them acquire a wider range of vocabulary.” (PT3)

“Increasing vocabulary knowledge is one of the advantages of using literature.” (PT20)

Personal involvement and individual growth were the least mentioned advantages of using literature. While personal involvement such as being imaginatively engaged with the text was mentioned by 10 PTs, the least mentioned advantage was individual growth with only 5 PTs considering its effect on a person’s self-awareness. A further exploration of answers showed that PTs who lacked prior experience of learning English through literary texts did not mention these two advantages.

After taking the two-semester course, PTs were again asked to comment on the advantages of using literature with language learners. Their answers are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. PTs’ beliefs on the advantages of using literature after the course study

Themes	Categories	Codes
Linguistic development	Contextualized language (35)	L. language is not formulaic
		L. helps vocabulary retention
		L. helps vocabulary retention
	Reading habit/skills (11)	Ss process information faster
		L. enhances reading habit
	Overall proficiency (11)	L. improves reading & writing
	Ss model complex writing	
	Meaningful language use (10)	L. helps self-expression
	Grammar teaching (9)	Ss learn grammar topics

	Interpretation skills (6)	Ss identify symbols and themes Ss analyze characters & motives
Appreciation of different cultures	Wider perspective (21)	L. broadens perspectives
		L. establishes empathy
		L. increases cultural familiarity
		L. increases cultural awareness
Personal involvement	Interesting and fun (19)	L. removes cultural barriers
		L. makes lessons less cliché
		Ss motivated towards English
		L. makes lessons more effective
Individual growth	Creativity (3)	L. offers quality time
		L. encourages being creative
	Self-development and awareness (2)	Ss use imaginative thinking
		L. improves critical thinking
		Ss understand themselves better

Note: The numbers in brackets refer to the number of PTs

After the two-semester course study, for PTs, the most predominant advantages of using literature were related to linguistic development, appreciation of culture and personal involvement. Again, individual growth remained as the least mentioned theme. Within the emphasized themes, the most commonly identified categories were literature providing ‘contextualized language’, ‘wider perspective’ referring to culture, and engaging learners’ by being ‘interesting and fun’. The following quotations illustrate PTs’ beliefs:

“They will view English from a different perspective, by not focusing on grammar but rather on meaning.” (PT7) (*contextualized language*)

“They will retain vocabulary better. Also they see the English they have formally learned in real contexts.” (PT53) (*contextualized language*)

“As a teacher, my students and I can keep on discovering world cultures; we can gain new ideas and perspectives. My students can learn to be tolerant to others’ view points and critically evaluate them.” (PT24) (*wider perspective*)

“Literary texts are mirrors into other cultures. Through them we have access to others’ languages, cultures, history, instead of just seeing things from our own lenses.” (PT34) (*wider perspective*)

“Using literature can make lessons more fruitful and interesting.” (PT4) (*interesting & fun*)

“When we choose the right type of stories, I believe students will have quality and fun time in the lesson.” (PT19) (*interesting & fun*)

A comparison of results displayed in Table 1 and Table 2 reveals some similarities and differences. In the pre-data, although PTs’ foremost belief was that literature is a means for a wider cultural

perspective, their statements did not demonstrate any deeper description of the concept. They mostly wrote the term “wider perspective” or “general cultural knowledge” without elaborating on how it may be achieved inside or outside the classroom setting. In the post-data, PTs mentioned gaining “wider perspective” again as the second most common advantage, but this time demonstrating more specific understanding as explicit in the range of identified codes.

In the pre-questionnaires, as the second and third important advantages PTs thought that use of literature benefits ‘overall proficiency’ and ‘vocabulary gains’, again without providing sufficient detail in terms of skills, strategies, or teaching techniques. However, in the post-data the majority of PTs believed literature “contextualizes language” and stated that it makes lessons “interesting and fun” as the third most common advantage. Their open-ended responses in the post-course questionnaires are more specific and informed. In addition, in the pre-course data, PTs did not mention any advantages of literature use for teachers but thought about the advantages only from learners’ aspect, which changed slightly in the post-course beliefs as PTs emphasized mutual enjoyment and benefits of cultural enrichment.

3.4. PTs’ beliefs about the disadvantages of using literature

Both before and after taking the two-semester course the participants were asked to indicate their beliefs about any disadvantages of using literature when teaching English. The first two commonly expressed disadvantages of using literature by PTs before and after the two-semester course study are interestingly the same: the students might find such texts “boring or irrelevant” (N=23 pre-course; N=25 post-course) and their “language or content difficult” (N=19 pre-course; N=17 post-course). In both stages they believed some students might not enjoy literature and consider literary texts irrelevant to language study. They were also concerned that if students find a literary text above their language proficiency level, they might be demotivated towards the lesson. The following quotations illuminate the findings:

“Students may show some reactions such as ‘why do we have to do work on this?’” (PT59 – Pre-course)

“Some students might find the text boring and they may not like the course any more.” (PT14 –Post-course)

“Students might encounter some problems and difficulties in understanding intense texts.” (PT3 – Pre-course)

“A literary text that is very long and that has a difficult language can distract and demotivate a student. S/he might have difficulty in comprehension.” (PT22 – Post-course)

The third most commonly stated disadvantage was different in pre- and post-course data. In the pre-questionnaires, participants stated that using literature requires time and there is usually “insufficient teaching time” for literature (N=10). As PT29 puts it, “Time can be a problem because of syllabus requirements such as grammar work we need to cover”. PTs’ concerns about time might be related to their previous experience in literature-integrated English lessons, in which most of the text reading was conducted in the classroom. This might have limited the time that could be dedicated to useful interactive classroom work; thus, negatively influencing PTs’ beliefs. In comparison, PTs wrote that there were “no disadvantages” of using literature in the post-course data, which constitutes the third most common category (N=9). These PTs might be more confident about using literary texts in their future practice.

As a final point, answers of PTs with and without literature experience in language learning were very similar on this question.

3.5. PTs' beliefs about the future challenges of using literature

The following section will outline the findings regarding the challenges that PTs anticipate about integrating literature in language classes. As the table reveals, PTs mentioned similar challenging factors before and after the course.

Table 3. Challenging factors

	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
Pre-data	Text difficulty/proficiency level (19)	Literary texts: boring (16)	Students' negative attitudes towards literature (10)
Post-data	Text difficulty/proficiency level (21)	Limited teaching time (15)	Students' negative attitudes towards literature (12)

Before taking the course, PTs believed that the difficulty level of literary texts might be the most challenging factor during classroom practice (N=19). Secondly, participants were concerned that learners might find literary texts boring (N=16); and thirdly, they anticipated that learners might have negative attitudes towards literature (N=10). Overall, text difficulty, learners' prejudices against literature, their lack of enthusiasm and interest towards literary texts were anticipated as challenging aspects.

Likewise, after the course, text difficulty remained as the most concerning factor that might challenge PTs (N=21). Limited teaching time because of the syllabus and curriculum load was listed as the second most challenging factor (N=15). Any negative attitudes learners' might have towards literature were again the third most commonly mentioned challenge (N=12).

Previous studies with in-service teachers found insufficient training, cultural unfamiliarity, and proficiency level of students as the most challenging factors (Karci & Vural, 2011; Nusrat, 2015; Isikli & Tarakcioglu, 2017). In this study, none of the participants indicated that their training was insufficient for implementation of literary texts in teaching English. While proficiency level was a similar concern, cultural remoteness of texts did not emerge as a challenging factor.

3.6. Factors that PTs' would consider when designing literature integrated lessons

Participants were asked to comment about what factors they would consider in their future lesson planning. Interestingly, all the factors they mentioned were text based.

Table 4. Factors considered in lesson design

	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
Pre-data	Text appropriacy for proficiency level (42)	Choosing appealing texts (22)	Choosing texts from familiar cultures/topics (10)
Post-data	Choosing appealing texts (33)	Text appropriacy for proficiency level (32)	Texts that have positive messages (12)

Both before and after the course, choosing literary materials that are appropriate for the linguistic level of learners (N=42 pre-course; N=32 post-course) and appealing to learners (N=22 pre-course; N=33 post-course) were two major factors PTs would prioritize in their lesson designs. Although before the course, they believed in the usefulness of culturally familiar texts (N=10), this belief seemed to have lost its significance after the course. On the other hand, after the course, PTs mentioned that they would prefer to use literary texts that have positive messages and that encourage positive thinking (N=12).

3.7. *PTs' preferences of activity types to exploit literary texts*

The participants were asked to indicate what types of activities they would be willing to use in the future to exploit literary texts. According to pre-course data, vocabulary activities (N=24), question-answer type comprehension activities (N=17), and dramatized reading-aloud (N=15) were favored respectively. This reflected their prior experiences as they also indicated that their language teachers mainly focused on comprehension and vocabulary when using literary texts. In the post-course data, vocabulary activities (N=25), comprehension activities (N=24), and text-interpretation (N=23) were listed as PTs' activity choices. Although in the pre-course data, PTs mainly wrote 'vocabulary activities' without elaborating on the types of tasks, in the post-data PTs wrote specific vocabulary activities they could utilize such as word puzzles, games, matching, drawing, and preparing word-cards. Likewise, in the pre-data PTs only wrote 'comprehension activities' or 'question-answer' for comprehension work, while their repertoire of comprehension activities expanded in the post-data as they wrote true/false, multiple-choice, question-answer, summarizing, completing sentences and putting events in an order as their likely activity choices. The third choice in pre-course data was 'dramatized read-aloud' as mentioned above, whereas the third choice in post-course data was 'text interpretation', which involved strategies such as making inferences, analyzing characters, identifying the tone and the style of the author, and discussing the plot. Finally, no meaningful difference was found between the responses of PTs with and without literature experience in language learning.

As post-course data revealed, PTs still approach literary texts as any reading material by primarily focusing on comprehension and vocabulary that reflects a linguistic development perspective. They neglect cultural enrichment, personal involvement and individual growth benefits of literature to a large degree as these activity types were scarcely mentioned in their responses. Finally, no meaningful difference was found between the responses of PTs with and without literature experience in language learning.

3.8. *PTs' beliefs about their competence in using literature*

In both pre- and post-course questionnaires, as the final question, participants were asked whether they believe to have enough training to effectively explore literary texts by choosing from one of three options provided; that is, yes, no, partially. There was also a space provided for them to write further comments if they preferred. In the pre-course data, 2 PTs stated they had sufficient training, 18 PTs

stated they had no training and 45 PTs indicated that they are partially prepared for effectively exploiting a literary text. No further comments or explanations were provided in the given space. The post-data showed similar responses (Yes, N=4; No, N=16; Partially, N=45). However, there were detailed comments explaining these answers.

In the comments section, PTs indicated that training helped them in certain ways including raising awareness of issues around lesson planning, making learning more concrete, conceptualizing of pre-, while- and post-reading stages better, and utilizing of the right type of activities for specific teaching goals. Moreover, a limited number of PTs also reported changes in certain beliefs they had held prior to taking the course. Some PTs (N=4) believed that literature could not be used with students of younger age or limited proficiency, literature was boring or hard (N=3), and a few others (N=3) were prejudiced against using poetry. They stated that taking the course altered these preconceptions. Some illustrative quotes are below:

“I had previous experience of literary text usage in language classrooms, and saw many different activities, but they were not like the ones we did in this course. My previous experience made me think literature integration is only boring and hard for students. But seeing the range of activities we covered, I now think that with the right kind of activities literature use can be both fun and beneficial for students.” (PT24)

“As a student, I did not see any effective role-models in literature integration. Therefore, I was concerned about how I might develop this skill. However, working with different texts and preparing lesson plans and materials, receiving feedback on my work increased my confidence.” (PT63)

“This was one of the most practical courses I have attended in the department. I felt that I’ve become a person who can think well, set goals, and accordingly create materials. The course boosted my self-confidence and motivation.” (PT52)

“I did not think literature could be used with students of younger age or limited proficiency. This course changed my perception.” (PT12)

“This course is one of the courses that I feel really contributed to me. The course really adds to you if you do not want to be a traditional teacher.” (PT8)

Some PTs also commented that they needed further training to feel more competent in using literature. The further training needs they pointed out were more practical work on how to use plays and how to analyze texts, increasing knowledge of literary styles and techniques, and developing the skill to interpret poems. The following quotes vividly represent PTs’ beliefs:

“Because most of us were not educated in a way that encouraged developing our interpretation, analysis and deeper thinking skills, I feel that this negatively affects our ability and performance. Maybe the course can further train us or give guidance in order to develop our deeper thinking skills (analysis, interpretation etc.)” (PT17)

“It is difficult to understand poems. I need to understand them first in order to be able to design a lesson. Grammar teaching on the other hand makes one

feel safe. I guess this is because we do not give much importance to thinking in our education system. Laziness to think and question keeps us away from literary texts.” (PT33)

4. Discussion

The present study echoed the major benefits of using literature in language classrooms as also presented in relevant literature (Collie & Slater, 1987; Carter & Long, 1991). PTs believed that literature contributed to learners’ linguistic development, appreciation of different cultures, personal involvement, and individual growth. Among these benefits, language improvement and cultural enrichment were predominantly emphasized; whereas, personal involvement and individual growth were given far less consideration.

This study also helped identify several misconceptions that PTs held in relation to literature integration in teaching English:

- literature use can be boring for or perceived irrelevant by students (pre- and post-course)
- the language of literary texts can be inappropriate for lower proficiency levels (pre- and post-course)
- poems are difficult materials to use (pre- and post-course)
- insufficient teaching time due to syllabus demands (pre-course)

These findings are consistent with Buyukyavuz and Inal (2008) and Isikli and Tarakcioglu (2017) who found that low proficiency level of students and lack of motivation were among the major concerns for teachers in literature integration.

Identifying these misconceptions are important because teacher education programs should aim to challenge those in order to cause positive changes in PTs’ beliefs, which might affect their future teaching decisions and students’ in-class learning experiences (Borg, 2011).

The results of the study showed that taking the two-semester course entitled *Teaching English through Literature* had some limited impact on PTs’ prior beliefs while most beliefs remained unchanged, which reflects the findings of various studies conducted on this issue (Peacock, 2001; Kunt & Ozdemir, 2010; Capan, 2014). The limited impact was seen in PTs’ deepened and expanded consideration of advantages of using literary texts and choice of classroom activities, as well as increased awareness of the demands of preparing literature-based lessons. However, there was no impact of the two-semester course on PTs’ certain beliefs. Although the course encouraged PTs to prepare lessons for a wide range of genres, their selection of text type reflected their past teachers’ choices. Moreover, 71% of the PTs pointed out that they experienced difficulties in text interpretation, particularly poems; and accordingly, their choice showed that they would avoid using poetry. The reported challenges they experience in text interpretation and analysis also limited them in their approach to exploiting literary materials as they mainly focused on utilizing comprehension and vocabulary activities.

5. Conclusion

To conclude, taking the two-semester course titled *Teaching English through Literature* had limited impact on PTs’ beliefs about literary texts and their use in language teaching. PTs pointed out that their English teachers did not encourage the development of analytic and interpretative skills; therefore, they found it hard to approach texts from such an angle. This resulted in their avoidance of text genres and

activities that require deeper analysis. This finding concerns not only the teacher-training program that is the context of the current study but also pre-university educational settings. Before the university level, starting at a young age, individuals should be equipped with analytical, interpretative, and evaluative skills so that when these skills are needed individuals can apply them effectively and effortlessly. In our course design, we ought to offer more guidance and practice opportunities to apply and improve these fundamental skills.

Furthermore, despite the course's explicit focus on text selection that involves discussions and practical activities on choosing texts based on criteria such as learners' interest, proficiency levels, and text exploitability, PTs' concerns seem not to change about text selection. Therefore, during the course more time can be dedicated to address these aspects to eliminate misconceptions stemming from them.

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Öğretmen adaylarının İngilizce derslerine edebiyat dahil edilmesiyle ilgili inanışları

Öz

Öğretmenlerin bilişlerinin öğretime dair kararlarını ve aktivitelerini etkilediği bir çok bilimsel çalışma tarafından gösterildiğinden, 1990'ların sonuna doğru öğretmen bilişi konusu önemli bir araştırma alanı olarak öne çıkmıştır (Borg, 2003). Söz konusu öğretmen adayları olduğunda, inanışlarının çoğunlukla kendi öğrenim deneyimlerine dayandığı, ve bu inanışların onlara öğretmen eğitimi veren programlarda sunulan yeni bilgileri işlerken ve anlamlandırırken, bir filtreleme görevi gördüğü bulunmuştur (Borg, 2009). Bu çalışma İstanbul Türkiye'de bulunan bir devlet üniversitesinde İngilizce öğretmenliği eğitimi alan 65 öğretmen adayının yabancı dil eğitiminde edebi metin kullanımı ile ilgili inanışlarındaki değişiklikleri incelemiştir. İngilizce öğretiminde edebi metinlere yer verilmesinin öğrencilerin dil gelişimlerine, farklı kültürlerin zenginliklerini fark etmelerine ve kişisel gelişimlerine yaptığı katkılara uzun zamandır dikkat çekilmektedir (Carter & Long, 1991). Bu bağlamda, Türkiye'deki İngilizce öğretmenliği programları da öğretmen adaylarının edebiyatı derslerine nasıl dahil edebilecekleri konusunda bilgi ve becerileri kazandırmak amaçlı dersler sunmaktadır. Söz konusu çalışma İngilizce öğretmen adaylarının iki sömestr süren Edebiyat Yoluyla İngilizce Öğretimi dersini almadan önce yabancı dil öğretiminde edebiyat kullanımıyla ilgili deneyimlerini ve inanışlarını irdelemiş, ve bunları ders sonrası

inanişlarıyla karşılaştırmıştır. Çalışmanın verileri ders öncesi ve sonrasında uygulanan açık uçlu bir anket ile toplanmış ve toplanan verilere içerik analizi yapılmıştır (Weber, 1990). Çalışma, öğretmen adaylarının İngilizce öğretiminde edebiyat kullanılması ile ilgili olumlu inanişlara sahip olduğunu; bununla beraber, ilgili dersin öğretmen adaylarının inanişları üzerindeki etkisinin sınırlı olduğunu göstermiştir.

Anahtar sözcükler: öğretmen adayı eğitimi; İngilizce öğretiminde edebiyat kullanımı; öğretmen inanişları

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