

## RECONCEPTUALIZING “GOOD LITERATURE” IN EFL EDUCATION: CRITERIA AND TEACHER COMPETENCIES FROM LECTURERS’ PERSPECTIVES

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### Abstract

This research aims to explore literature lecturers’ perspectives on the criteria of literary works that are appropriate for use in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms and the competencies required of teachers to effectively integrate literature into the teaching and learning process. This study is grounded in the theories of literature integration in language learning, literary literacy, and a humanistic pedagogical approach that emphasizes cultural values, critical reflection, and character development through literary texts. This research employed a qualitative design with a descriptive-interpretative approach. The data were collected through semi-structured interviews with two expert lecturers from the Faculty of Literature who specialize in literary studies and have extensive experience in teaching literature. The data were then analyzed using thematic analysis to identify patterns of meaning and major themes. The findings reveal two main results. First, literary works are considered pedagogically appropriate for fulfilling three essential aspects: cultural enrichment, conformity with civilization, and pedagogical adaptability. Second, the effectiveness of using literature largely depends on teachers’ competencies, including literary literacy, contextual knowledge enrichment, a humanistic approach, and public speaking and storytelling skills. This study concludes that literature can serve as a contextual, reflective, and meaningful medium for language learning when mediated by teachers with adequate literary and pedagogical competencies.

**Keywords:** *literature-based learning, EFL, pedagogical competence, literary literacy, teacher education.*

### INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, attention to the role of literature in English language education has increased, especially in the context of teaching English as a foreign language (EFL). Literature is not only viewed as entertainment or art, but also as a window for learners to understand language, culture, human values, and individual and collective expression (Kisi, 2023). Amid the complexities of the modern world and the challenges in language education, an important question arises: what kind of literary works are ideal for English teachers to use as teaching materials? This question becomes increasingly relevant when we realize that not all literary works are suitable for the classroom context, let alone to meet the ever-changing pedagogical needs.

In Indonesian English language education, literature remains optional and less structured, with teachers often relying on functional texts that lack the emotional, cultural, and reflective depth of literary works, even though literature can simultaneously enhance language competence and foster morality, identity awareness, and critical literacy (Goodwyn et al., 2022; Utami & Hasanah, 2020), and literature lecturers emphasize that suitable texts should embed meaningful social values, address contemporary issues, and be adaptable to diverse pedagogies, supported by teachers' strong literary literacy and approaches such as Critical Literature Pedagogy (CLP), which has been shown to strengthen pedagogical competence and position learners as critical agents in society (Gelal et al., 2025; Durante, 2025).

Recent studies highlight the central role of teachers' literary, cultural, and pedagogical competencies in effective EFL literature instruction, as understanding the social and cultural contexts of texts enables more meaningful discussions on identity, values, and intercultural dialogue rather than language alone (Listyani et al., 2024). This role is reinforced by a humanistic approach that promotes empathy, responsibility, and respect, enhancing students' motivation, engagement, and intercultural sensitivity (Amini et al., 2025), as well as by teachers' public speaking and storytelling skills, which animate literature and improve learners' reading, writing, and social abilities (Spencer & Pierce, 2023). However, literature remains marginalized in Indonesian education due to curriculum pressures, limited teacher confidence, and perceptions of abstraction (Lestari et al., 2024), positioning teachers as essential cultural mediators who must integrate literature creatively and critically, supported by strong critical thinking skills (Yamin et al., 2022).

On top of that, this study aims to explore the concept of good literature from the perspectives of English literature lecturers and to identify the competencies teachers need to effectively integrate literary works into English language teaching. By drawing on expert insights, the study seeks to contribute to the development of meaningful, relevant, and contextual learning materials at secondary and tertiary levels, while promoting the understanding that language learning extends beyond grammar to include humanistic reflection embedded in texts. Literature enables learners to engage with diverse values, conflicts, and identities, and when supported by appropriate text selection and adequate teacher competence, English learning becomes more dynamic, meaning-oriented, and character-forming. This research also underscores the importance of collaboration between literature and language education, positioning the classroom not merely as a site of knowledge transmission but as a space for cultural dialogue and self-reflection, and thus offers a modest contribution to the enrichment of future language education. Based on the background above, the following research questions are proposed:

1. What aspects are suggested by English literature lecturers in choosing literary works that are worth studying for English education students?
2. What kind of literary competence do English teachers need to have to be able to effectively integrate literary works in the language learning process?

## METHOD(S)

### Research design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive-interpretive design to explore participants' in-depth perspectives on the criteria of "good literature" and the competencies required of English teachers, focusing on meanings, beliefs, and values rather than numerical measurement. Incorporating elements of a case study, it examined English literature lecturers within Indonesia's English education context to generate rich narratives and connect them to broader educational issues.

### Data and Source of the Data

The data were derived from semi-structured online interviews with two participants, both lecturers specializing in literary studies. Both participants were purposively selected for their academic expertise and extensive teaching experience in literature, positioning them as key informants capable of providing in-depth, reflective insights.

The decision to involve only two participants was grounded in the qualitative nature of this study, which prioritizes depth of understanding rather than generalizability. Specifically, the participants were selected for their rich professional backgrounds and their ability to articulate nuanced perspectives on the integration of literature in EFL contexts. Therefore, the small number of participants allowed for a more focused and intensive exploration of the phenomenon under investigation. Their experience in teaching literature served as a primary consideration in the selection process. Detailed information about the participants is presented in Table 1 below.

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**Table 1.** *Informants' Data*

No	Source	Gender	Expertise	Academic position	Year of experience	Area of Focus in Literature
1.	G	Male	English Literature, Literary Criticism	Lecturer	15 Years	Contemporary Literature, Literary Theory, Critical Literacy
2.	H	Female	Comparative Literature, Cultural Studies	Senior Lecturer	15 Years	World Literature, Postcolonial Studies, Intercultural Literature

All research data, including the audio, the original interview transcripts, the translated versions of the interviews, as well as the data that have been categorized through the coding process, can be accessed through this link: <https://bit.ly/ThesisDatasw>.

### Data collection technique

The main data collection technique was semi-structured interviews, in-depth perspectives, and subjective experiences. This technique was chosen because it allows for targeted questions but still gives participants the freedom to elaborate on their views. An

interview blueprint was prepared for this research instrument. The researcher prepared 5 main questions, which are fully described in the table below.

### **Data analysis**

The data in this study were analyzed using thematic analysis, as this method enables the researcher to identify, examine, and interpret patterns related to the benefits of literature for English teachers. The process began with familiarization, where the researcher repeatedly read the interview transcripts to understand the participants' responses. This was followed by coding significant statements, particularly those related to literary aspects and teacher competence. The codes were then grouped into broader themes, reviewed for consistency with the original data, and refined into two main domains: aspects of literary works and pedagogical competencies.

### **Data Validity and Ethical Considerations**

This qualitative study ensures trustworthiness and academic integrity by following Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, alongside ethical principles. Credibility was established through prolonged engagement and member checking, while transferability was supported by rich contextual descriptions. Dependability was ensured through systematic documentation of the research process, and confirmability through data-based interpretations and researcher reflexivity. Ethically, the study upheld originality, proper citation, informed consent, confidentiality through pseudonyms, and secure data storage. Together, these measures reflect the study's commitment to methodological rigor and the protection of participants' rights.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### **FINDINGS**

This study analyzes interview data from two literature lecturers (Lecturer G and Lecturer H) regarding the criteria of suitable literary works for English Education students and the literary competencies required of prospective English teachers, with the findings organized into two main focuses:

#### **1. Aspects**

In the Aspect section, three points form the analytical framework for examining how literary works can contribute to cultural enrichment, harmony with civilizational values, and pedagogical flexibility in teaching practices, as follows:

##### **a. Cultural Enrichment**

The aspect of cultural enrichment emphasizes the role of literary works as a medium that not only presents stories but also represents the social and cultural realities that exist within society. Through literary narratives, readers, especially students, can recognize cultural values, social norms, and practices that reflect local and global conditions. Thus, literary works serve as a means of enriching cultural insight that is relevant in the context of literary learning.

This view is in line with the statement made by source G, who emphasized that literary works always contain representations of reality behind their narratives. He stated that in literary stories, readers can find depictions of social life that reflect the culture of a particular society. Source G explained that *"Well, that's where the science is. We can see representations of reality behind literary narratives. For example, there is the story of Timun Mas, who was in debt"* (G, Q1, p. 1). As an example, he mentions the folk tale of Timun Mas, which not only functions as

a fairy tale but also represents social relations, moral values, and cultural practices that exist in society.

Meanwhile, source H highlighted the subjectivity in understanding aesthetic value and balance in literary works. According to her, the perception of beauty and meaning in literary works is highly dependent on the reader's background and preferences. She stated that *“Ideal balance? Isn't that something very subjective? In my opinion, aesthetic value is something very subjective. It's like we can't say, for example, that I think this literary work lacks aesthetic value and could be improved. Whereas for other people, their standard of aesthetic value or their preferences are different from mine. So, when we talk about balance, who is reading it? It's like that”* (H, Q1, p. 2), and this cannot be standardized because each reader has different standards and cultural experiences.

#### **b. Civilisation Conformity**

The aspect of civilization conformity emphasizes that literary works should ideally be in line with broader civilizational values, such as humanity, social ethics, justice, and tolerance. In the context of learning, literature serves not only as entertainment or an aesthetic product but also as a means of shaping the character of students so that they become civilized individuals who are able to adapt to the changing times.

Source G believes that literature has never truly disappeared, but rather undergone changes, especially in terms of its medium of delivery. He emphasizes that generational changes and technological advances cannot be separated from the development of literature itself. According to him, *“Literature will never disappear. But perhaps its medium will change. Especially now that the current generation is not a generation of readers. I won't blame the generation because that's just how it is. Because of technology and so on. We can't ignore technology and so on. That's why we have to adapt”* (G, Q2, p. 5).

In line with this view, source H emphasized the inseparable relationship between language and literature. He stated that *“As long as there is language, there will be literature. As long as there is literature, there will be language. The two are inseparable. From the past to the present and even in the future, this will always be relevant. But if we connect it with technology, we are automatically talking about the medium. Where literature develops its medium”* (H, Q3, p. 4).

According to him, the relevance of literature will continue to be maintained from time to time because. Source H also emphasized that every form of literary work, whether in conventional or digital media, has its own contribution and role. *“And each work of literature has its own contribution. So, I can't say that one replaces the other. Both have their own roles and benefits”* (H, Q3 p. 4).

#### **c. Pedagogical Adaptability**

The aspect of pedagogical adaptability emphasizes that good literary works must be flexible and adaptable to various learning strategies. This flexibility is important so that literary works can be used effectively for both beginner and advanced learners, and can be tailored to the needs, interests, and characteristics of students in the context of language and literature learning.

Informant G emphasized that the selection of literary works in learning cannot be determined unilaterally by teachers, but must take into account the conditions and preferences of students. He stated that *“We cannot choose it. But we look at the students. So, the students choose. So, I usually see the selection from the students. And how do I decide? I usually ask them about movies first”* (G, Q2, p. 9). Source G explained that he usually starts by exploring the students' interest in media that is close to their lives, such as movies, before directing them to literary works.

In line with this, source H believes that literature has enormous potential to be adapted as a learning material, especially in language teaching. He emphasizes that “*Well, as far as I'm concerned, literature will be very useful to be adapted as learning material, especially as I said earlier, in language learning*” (H, Q2, p. 9). According to informant H, literary works can be used effectively in language learning because they are able to present an authentic and meaningful context for language use.

## **2. Pedagogical Competencies**

The Pedagogical Competencies section is divided into four main points: literary literacy, knowledge enrichment, humanistic approach, & public speaking and storytelling. Those are elaborated as follows:

### **a. Literary Literacy**

Literary literacy refers to the ability of educators to understand and manage the aesthetic quality, style of language, and narrative power of a literary work so that it can be used as a rich and reflective context for language learning. This competency requires English teachers to not only master literary texts, but also be able to present them in an interesting and meaningful way to students.

Informant G emphasized that the most important first step in teaching literature is to foster students' interest in literature itself. According to him, learning will be more effective when students have an intrinsic interest in the material being studied. He stated that “*The first thing I do is to make students enjoy literature first. Because the key is that when we enjoy something, then learning will take place voluntarily*” (G, Q5, p. 14). This view shows that literary literacy is not only related to text comprehension, but also to pedagogical strategies in building students' emotional involvement with literary works.

In line with this view, source H explained that one strategy to foster students' interest is to begin learning from works that are familiar to them. She mentioned that “*Therefore, I start with works that they are familiar with, such as popular novels, comics, webtoons, or even works from popular culture such as Naruto, before moving on to more canonical literature*” (H, Q4, p. 12). This approach is taken so that students feel close to the literary context being studied and do not feel alienated from the text from the outset. Furthermore, source H emphasized that “*I usually start with popular literature first. The goal is to attract students so that they feel familiar with the context of the literary works being discussed*” (H, Q4, p. 13).

### **b. Knowledge Enrichment**

Knowledge enrichment emphasizes the importance of teachers' mastery of the content, context, and meaning of literary works so that the learning process can take place in a critical and inspiring manner. In this case, English teachers are required to understand literature not only as aesthetic texts, but also as cultural products that intersect with various disciplines and social realities.

Informant G views literature as a multi-discursive field. According to him, “*Literature is actually multi-discursive, not only moving in the realm of literature, but can be drawn into more practical realms such as history, politics, and even technology*” (G, Q3, p. 10). This view shows that enriching teachers' knowledge is key to guiding students to read literature more critically and contextually. Furthermore, “*We must understand the context of literary works, such as the author's background, era, and social conditions*” (G, Q2, p. 5). Understanding the social and historical context of literary works enables teachers to reveal deeper meanings behind the text.

In line with this, source H explained that in teaching literature, she does not start directly from literary theory. “*The social conditions surrounding the students. Literature itself can be understood as the collective memory of a community regarding what has happened to them.*”

*Thus, literature not only adds to knowledge, but also helps students understand the social reality they face” (H, Q1, p. 6).*

This approach allows students to see literature as a reflection of social reality, not just fictional texts that are detached from everyday life. Source H also added, *“In my opinion, good literary works for high school students are those that can increase their general knowledge and encourage them to think critically. It should not only focus on romantic stories, but also encourage students to understand the social realities around them in preparation for higher education” (H, Q1, p. 2).* This is considered important as preparation for students in facing higher education and more complex social realities.

### **c. Humanistic Approach**

The humanistic approach in literature learning emphasizes the importance of empathy, emotional experience, and understanding of the human side of students. In the context of English language teaching, literature serves as a medium that not only develops cognitive abilities but also shapes students' sensitivity, human values, and emotional awareness.

Source G emphasized that *“For language teachers, appreciation of literature is, in my opinion, no longer important, but essential, especially since we call ourselves teachers” (G, Q4, p. 11).* According to him, literature plays an important role in enlivening the learning process so that it is not dry and mechanical. Furthermore, *“Literature without teaching will result in dry teaching. Humanity must be imbued with spirituality. So, that must be absorbed there. Well, one way to absorb it is through knowledge, namely an understanding of literature. Then, we give that understanding to students in a simpler context” (G, Q4, p. 13).* This view shows that the humanistic approach requires teachers not only to transfer knowledge but also to present literature as a space for reflection on humanity.

In line with this, source H emphasized the importance of high language sensitivity for language teachers. According to her, *“Language teachers must have a high level of linguistic sensitivity. This sensitivity is important so that teachers are able to understand the meaning of literary works and convey it back to students in a way that can be understood. Without this sensitivity, the message contained in literary works will be difficult for students to accept.” (H, Q4, p. 11).* In line with this, source H emphasized the importance of high linguistic sensitivity for language teachers. According to her, *“Language teachers must have high linguistic sensitivity. This sensitivity is important so that teachers are able to understand the meaning of literary works and convey it back to students in a way that can be understood. Without this sensitivity, the message contained in literary works will be difficult for students to accept” (H, Q4, p. 11).*

### **d. Public Speaking and Storytelling**

Public speaking and storytelling skills are important pedagogical competencies for English teachers in delivering literary works in an interesting, lively, and communicative manner. Through these skills, teachers can bring literary narratives to life in the classroom, build emotional engagement among students, and help students understand the meaning of literary works more deeply.

Source G emphasized that *“storytelling skills play a crucial role in literary learning. The ability to tell stories is very important to make it suitable for our activities, how it suits our love” (G, Q5, p. 15).* He stated that *“Ability to tell stories is a skill that needs practice. How does the ability to speak and tell stories, storytelling by teachers, make literature teaching livelier and more interesting in the classroom? This view shows that storytelling not only functions as a technique for delivering material, but also as a means of conveying the teacher's enthusiasm and love for literature to students. Thus, literature can be presented as a dynamic and meaningful learning experience” (G, Q5, p. 16).*

In line with this, source H believes that *“In my opinion, communication skills are the most important thing for teachers. These skills include how teachers speak, convey messages, respond to students' questions, and are open to criticism. Without good communication skills, students will find it difficult to understand the objectives of literature learning”* (H, Q5, p. 15). Furthermore, source H emphasized that *“Teachers' speaking and storytelling skills play a significant role in making literature learning livelier and more interesting. When teachers can tell stories well, the material will be easier for students to understand and create emotional engagement in the classroom”* (H, Q5, p. 16).

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Literature in English**

The findings show that literary works extend beyond aesthetic expression to function as media for cultural enrichment, the transmission of civilizational values, and adaptive learning, reinforcing their strategic pedagogical role. Literature reflects social and cultural realities through language that embodies traditions, beliefs, and norms (Imran, 2024), while its meanings are shaped by readers' backgrounds, aligning with reader-response perspectives that emphasize active negotiation of values (Ilyas et al. 2025; Parke, 2024) and positioning literature as a dialogic space for reflection. Moreover, the shift from print to digital formats does not diminish these values; instead, digitization enables multimodal, interactive, and participatory forms that broaden access and strengthen the dissemination of cultural and civilizational meanings, making literature more relevant within contemporary technological contexts (Artajaya, 2025). The enduring relevance of literature lies in its relationship with language as a system of social meaning that represents human experience and transmits cultural values (Albertus et al., 2025), reflecting societal norms and universal human values beyond specific forms or media. In education, literature shows strong pedagogical adaptability, especially through digital multimodal formats such as e-books, webtoons, and podcasts that enhance students' critical literacy, motivation, and 21st-century learning engagement (Fradana et al., 2025), with research confirming that critical literacy and multimodal approaches broaden linguistic, visual, and auditory interaction with texts. Moreover, literature provides authentic language input that strengthens linguistic competence, communication skills, cultural awareness, and learner engagement in EFL contexts (Calafato & Hunstadbråten, 2025), making it most effective when treated not merely as an object of structural analysis but as a flexible, socially responsive medium, ultimately positioning literature as an adaptive, contextual, and sustainable cultural and pedagogical resource for meaningful contemporary learning.

### **Traditional Literature**

Research shows that the effectiveness of traditional literature in English language learning depends largely on teachers' pedagogical competence, as folk tales, legends, and local narratives function not only as reading materials but also as representations of cultural values, social norms, and collective memory. Their relevance in EFL lies not in their age but in teachers' ability to contextualize and adapt them to learners' needs, since appropriate mediation enhances cultural understanding, engagement, and pedagogical value (Simanungkalit et al., 2025). This requires strong literary literacy, including the ability to interpret symbols, narrative structures, and moral messages, enabling reflective rather than superficial reading. Starting with familiar or culturally close texts also fosters emotional engagement, which supports interpretation skills, as literary competence and reader involvement significantly influence EFL learners' understanding (Calafato & Hunstadbråten, 2025). Therefore, teachers' literary literacy is essential for making traditional literature a meaningful, critical, and culturally rich medium for contextual language learning (Utami & Mahardika, 2023).

Furthermore, a humanistic approach is essential in teaching traditional literature, as folktales present moral conflicts and human values that require empathy and thus demand safe, inclusive, and low-anxiety classrooms where students can express emotional and personal reflections; such approaches have been shown to enhance motivation, engagement, intercultural sensitivity, communication skills, and active participation in EFL contexts (Amini et al., 2025; Fauzi et al., 2025; Yudha et al., 2025). Given their roots in oral traditions, traditional stories also align with storytelling, dramatization, and digital narrative practices that foster experiential learning, with research indicating that digital storytelling and multimodal media significantly improve learners' motivation, confidence, speaking skills, and engagement (Murad & Assadi, 2023; Azkiya, 2025). Overall, the effectiveness of traditional literature depends less on text selection than on teachers' pedagogical competence in interpreting, contextualizing, and animating texts, supported by literary literacy, humanistic practices, and storytelling skills to simultaneously develop language proficiency, cultural awareness, and character formation.

## CONCLUSION

This study aims to explore the perspectives of literature lecturers on the criteria for literary works suitable for study by English Education students and the competencies required of teachers to integrate literature into EFL learning. Based on a thematic analysis of interviews with two literature lecturers (G and H), it was found that literary works considered suitable for prospective teachers generally fulfill three main aspects: (1) cultural enrichment, namely works that can represent cultural values, social norms, and social realities; (2) civilization conformity, meaning that the work contains human values and remains relevant even though the medium of literature has changed (print or digital); and (3) pedagogical adaptability, meaning that the work is flexible enough to be adapted to learning strategies such as discussion, dramatization, or technology integration.

In addition to textual aspects, this study emphasizes that the effective use of literature is largely determined by teachers' competence. Four competencies are considered important: literary literacy, knowledge enrichment, humanistic approach, and public speaking and storytelling. Thus, literature can be an effective medium for language development as well as the formation of cultural awareness and human values when mediated by competent teachers.

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