

Implementing Literature-Based Approaches in ESL: Thematic Synthesis

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VINCENT BOY M. FERNANDEZ

No. 2 Qo'shtepa District, Fergana Region, Uzbekistan
fvincentboy@gmail.com

ANGELINE S. SAURO

No. 30 Fergana City District, Fergana Region, Uzbekistan
angeline.sauro05@gmail.com

RABIA ABDULRAHIM

International Leadership of Texas (Liberty High School), USA
rabiaabduhrahim37@gmail.com

KIM DERRY S. MAQUILING

Sunchild School, Canada
maquilingkimds@gmail.com

FLOR JUNEMA C. MABUTIN

Ruidoso High School, USA
fjunema@gmail.com

Abstract:

Traditional ESL instruction in private international schools has long emphasized grammar-based and communicative approaches aimed primarily at achieving standardized test proficiency. However, emerging pedagogical perspectives highlight the value of literature-based instruction in promoting “textual immersion,” enabling learners to move beyond rote memorization toward meaningful linguistic and cultural engagement. This study employs a qualitative thematic analysis to explore how adult ESL learners perceive their language acquisition and cultural fluency when interacting with literary texts. Data were collected from learner responses, classroom observations, and course evaluations, and were analyzed to identify recurring patterns in students’ experiences. The findings reveal three central themes: increased communicative confidence, the naturalization of second language (L2) audiation or inner narration, and enhanced socio-cultural identification. Participants reported greater self-expression, deeper engagement with language structures, and improved understanding of cultural contexts embedded in literary works. These outcomes suggest that literature-based instruction fosters not only functional language competence but also authentic communicative ability and cultural awareness. The study concludes that integrating literary texts into adult ESL instruction provides a critical bridge between mechanical language learning and holistic language development, supporting learners in achieving meaningful and contextually grounded fluency.

Keywords: Literature-based instruction, ESL, thematic analysis, textual immersion, communicative confidence

Introduction:

In the globalized economy, English certification has developed into a multibillion-dollar industry in which language learning is frequently reduced to discrete grammatical components and functional competencies aimed at standardized assessment success. Many adult private ESL institutions prioritize grammar-based and form-focused instruction designed to prepare learners for high-stakes examinations, often emphasizing mechanical accuracy over meaningful communication. While such approaches may develop structural competence, they tend to overlook the aesthetic, cultural, and affective dimensions of language that contribute to authentic communicative ability and intercultural understanding.

Recent pedagogical perspectives, however, advocate for the integration of literature into ESL instruction as a means of fostering deeper linguistic engagement and contextualized learning. Literature-based instruction has been shown to enhance language proficiency, cultural awareness, and learner motivation by situating language within meaningful social and cultural contexts (Khatib & Nourzadeh, 2011; Sheikh et al., 2019).

Studies suggest that literary texts promote communicative competence, creative expression, and critical thinking while supporting the development of speaking and writing skills (Mart, 2019; Muthusamy et al., 2010). Furthermore, literature provides opportunities for learners to engage with authentic discourse and cultural narratives, facilitating both linguistic development and intercultural sensitivity (Darmawati et al., 2020; Hussein & Abuelnour, 2025).

The integration of literature in ESL classrooms has also been associated with improved contextual understanding of grammar and vocabulary, as well as enhanced learner engagement through meaningful interaction with texts (Rygiel, 2016). Systematic and integrated approaches to literature-based instruction further emphasize the reciprocal relationship between language acquisition and cultural interpretation, positioning literary engagement as a comprehensive pedagogical strategy for ESL learners (Mercado, 2025). These perspectives highlight literature not merely as instructional content but as a medium through which learners construct meaning, negotiate identity, and develop communicative confidence.

Drawing on the hypothesis that literature-based instruction enhances grammatical competence while fostering cultural sensitivity, this study seeks to explore the lived experiences of adult ESL learners in a literature-intensive classroom. Literature is conceptualized as a tool for expanding contextual awareness and promoting language fluency through meaningful engagement with texts. By focusing on the process of meaning-making and experiential learning, this research investigates whether textual immersion can provide the cultural and communicative framework often absent in conventional grammar-driven instruction.

Literature Review

The integration of literature into English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction has gained increasing attention as an approach that supports both linguistic and cultural development. Traditionally, language instruction emphasized grammar-based and form-focused learning; however, contemporary pedagogical perspectives recognize literature as a powerful medium for contextualized language learning and meaningful communication.

Literature exposes learners to authentic language use, cultural perspectives, and diverse forms of expression, thereby enhancing communicative competence and intercultural awareness. Scholars argue that literature-based instruction provides learners with opportunities to engage with language beyond structural accuracy, facilitating deeper cognitive and affective engagement in the learning process.

Early studies emphasize the pedagogical value of literature in promoting language acquisition and cultural understanding. Khatib and Nourzadeh (2011) recommend integrating literature into ESL/EFL classrooms through carefully selected texts that align with learners' linguistic proficiency and cultural backgrounds. Their work highlights that literary texts provide authentic linguistic input and stimulate critical thinking, creativity, and interpretive skills. Similarly, Karuna (2016) describes literature as an effective tool for language teaching because it enhances vocabulary development, reading comprehension, and cultural awareness. These perspectives position literature as a multidimensional resource that supports both language proficiency and holistic learner development.

Research also demonstrates that literature-based instruction enhances learners' communicative competence and expressive abilities. Sheikh et al. (2019) argue that literary texts encourage meaningful language use by engaging learners in discussion, interpretation, and reflection. Through exposure to narrative structures and authentic discourse, learners develop communicative skills and gain confidence in language production.

Supporting this claim, Muthusamy et al. (2010) found that literature-based instruction significantly enhances writing creativity by encouraging learners to experiment with language, develop original ideas, and express personal

experiences. These findings suggest that literature fosters productive language skills by providing meaningful contexts for communication.

Beyond linguistic development, literature-based instruction supports integrated language learning by connecting reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills. Darmawati et al. (2020) emphasize that teaching English through literature promotes an integrated approach in which language and content are learned simultaneously. Their findings indicate that literary engagement encourages learners to analyze texts, participate in discussions, and express interpretations, thereby strengthening both receptive and productive skills.

Rygiel (2016) further highlights the value of reading-based instruction in ESL classrooms, emphasizing that structured literary activities promote comprehension, vocabulary acquisition, and contextual understanding of language forms. Such approaches underscore the role of literature in creating meaningful and interactive learning environments.

The effectiveness of literature-based instruction has also been examined in comparison with traditional teaching approaches. Mart (2019) compared form-focused, content-based, and mixed approaches to literature-based instruction and found that mixed approaches combining linguistic focus and content engagement produced the most significant improvements in learners' speaking skills.

This finding suggests that literature serves as a bridge between structural language knowledge and communicative performance. Similarly, Zhai and Razali (2023) highlight the importance of genre-based and integrated instructional approaches, emphasizing that exposure to diverse literary genres supports learners' writing development and rhetorical awareness. These studies reinforce the pedagogical value of combining language instruction with literary engagement.

Recent systematic reviews provide further support for the effectiveness of literature-based instruction. Mercado (2025) identifies integrated teaching approaches as effective in promoting language proficiency, cultural awareness, and learner motivation. The review emphasizes that literature fosters meaningful interaction with language while encouraging critical interpretation and cultural understanding.

Hussein and Abuelnour (2025) similarly argue that incorporating literature into ESL classrooms enhances learners' engagement and supports the development of higher-order thinking skills. These findings suggest that literature-based pedagogy facilitates deeper learning by connecting linguistic knowledge with cultural and cognitive development.

Despite its benefits, the implementation of literature-based instruction presents several challenges. Sylvester and Aziz (2022) identify common difficulties, including limited teacher preparation, inadequate instructional resources, and challenges in selecting appropriate texts for diverse learners. Xerri and Xerri Agius (2012) further note that teachers often struggle to balance linguistic objectives with literary interpretation, which may affect the effectiveness of literature integration. However, these challenges also highlight the need for pedagogical training and curriculum development to support effective implementation of literature-based approaches.

Teacher and practitioner perspectives provide further insight into the application of literature-based instruction in educational settings. Febriani et al. (2022) report that lecturers generally perceive literature as beneficial for developing students' language skills and critical thinking abilities, although they emphasize the importance of pedagogical strategies and contextual adaptation. Similarly, Utami and Mahardika (2023) document teachers' experiences in implementing literature-based instruction, revealing that while the approach enhances student engagement and participation, it requires careful planning and instructional flexibility. These findings suggest that successful implementation depends on teacher competence and institutional support.

In addition to linguistic and pedagogical benefits, literature-based instruction contributes to learners' intercultural competence and critical thinking development. Sha and Andi (2024) demonstrate that engagement with literary texts enhances learners' understanding of cultural perspectives and encourages critical reflection on social issues. Literature provides opportunities for learners to interpret cultural meanings, negotiate identities, and develop empathy toward diverse viewpoints. Such outcomes align with contemporary views of language learning as a socially situated process that involves both linguistic and cultural competence.

The existing literature consistently supports the value of literature-based instruction as a comprehensive approach to language learning that integrates linguistic, cognitive, and cultural dimensions. While challenges remain in implementation, research indicates that literature enhances communicative competence, creativity, intercultural awareness, and learner engagement.

However, there remains limited qualitative research examining learners' lived experiences and subjective perceptions of literature-intensive ESL instruction, particularly among adult learners. Addressing this gap, the present study investigates how adult ESL learners experience textual immersion and how literature-based instruction influences their communicative confidence and cultural fluency.

Methodology:

This study employed a qualitative research design using thematic analysis to explore the experiential dimensions of literature-based instruction among adult ESL learners. In contrast to quantitative experimental approaches that measure language acquisition through standardized testing outcomes, the present study focused on learners' subjective experiences and the development of less empirically measurable competencies, such as communicative confidence, cultural understanding, and internal language processing emerging from literature-based learning. The qualitative approach enabled an in-depth examination of participants' perceptions, interpretations, and responses to textual immersion within an authentic classroom setting.

The participants consisted of fourteen intermediate-level adult ESL learners enrolled at an international language school in Vancouver. The sample represented diverse nationalities, age groups, and educational backgrounds, allowing for a range of perspectives on literature-based instruction. Participants were selected based on their enrollment in a literature-intensive ESL course and their willingness to participate in the study. The instructional setting emphasized engagement with literary texts and interactive learning activities designed to promote language development through contextualized and culturally embedded experiences.

Data were collected over an eight-week instructional period using multiple qualitative sources to ensure depth and triangulation. These included students' creative written responses to literary texts such as *Animal Farm* and *The Snows of Kilimanjaro*, which provided insight into learners' interpretive processes and expressive language use. Additional data were obtained from end-of-course evaluations, where students provided qualitative feedback regarding their learning experiences, perceived language development, and engagement with literary materials. Classroom observations conducted by a third-party observer further documented patterns of interaction, participation, and project-based performances, offering contextual evidence of learner engagement and communicative behavior.

The collected data were analyzed using the thematic analysis framework developed by Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke. The analysis involved systematic familiarization with the data, initial coding of student responses and observation notes, and the identification of recurring patterns related to learners' experiences of textual immersion and reciprocal learning. Codes were subsequently organized into broader themes, which were reviewed, refined, and defined to ensure coherence and conceptual clarity. This analytic process enabled the identification of key themes reflecting the impact of literature-based instruction on learners' communicative confidence, internal language development, and socio-cultural engagement.

Findings and Discussion:

Theme 1: Communicative Confidence and "Coming Out of the Shell"

The findings of this study reveal that literature-based instruction significantly enhanced learners' communicative confidence, which emerged as a central theme described as "coming out of the shell." Participants consistently reported a remarkable increase in their willingness to speak, participate in discussions, and express ideas in English. Unlike traditional grammar-focused activities, which often generated anxiety and fear of error, engagement with literary texts created a supportive environment that encouraged self-expression and meaningful communication.

Students described literature-based activities as less intimidating and more engaging, allowing them to use language creatively rather than focusing solely on structural accuracy. Classroom observations further supported these

perceptions of increased communicative confidence. Learners who were previously passive demonstrated higher levels of participation, frequently engaging in group discussions, oral presentations, and collaborative tasks.

The literature curriculum fostered active learning behaviors, with students showing sustained interest in reading and interpreting texts. This heightened engagement contributed to the development of expressive language abilities characterized by imaginative and playful language use. Such findings align with earlier research emphasizing literature as a motivating instructional resource that promotes authentic communication and learner autonomy (Paran, 2008; Xerri & Xerri Agius, 2012).

The development of communicative confidence can be attributed to the meaningful context provided by literary texts. Literature offers authentic language input and situational contexts that encourage learners to interpret meaning, respond emotionally, and engage in dialogue. As learners interact with narratives and characters, they are encouraged to articulate personal interpretations and perspectives, thereby strengthening their communicative competence. This finding supports the view that literature-based instruction fosters meaningful language use by connecting linguistic form with content and interpretation (Thakarar, 2015; Iswahyudi, n.d.). Such contextualized learning environments enable learners to move beyond mechanical language practice toward more natural and spontaneous communication.

The results also demonstrate that literature-based instruction enhances linguistic competence, particularly in vocabulary development and expressive language skills. Participants reported improved lexical knowledge and greater flexibility in language use as a result of exposure to diverse literary expressions. These findings correspond with research indicating that literature-based instruction improves vocabulary acquisition and critical language awareness through exposure to rich linguistic input (Azeem et al., 2024). Similarly, systematic reviews highlight that genre-based and literature-informed approaches support writing development and rhetorical awareness by exposing learners to varied textual structures and discourse patterns (Zhai & Razali, 2023).

Beyond linguistic improvement, the findings suggest that literature-based instruction fosters higher-order cognitive skills, including critical thinking and interpretive ability. Participants engaged in analyzing themes, evaluating characters' actions, and connecting textual events to real-life experiences. This process encouraged reflective thinking and deeper cognitive engagement with language.

Previous studies support this outcome, noting that literary texts stimulate analytical thinking and intercultural reflection by presenting complex social and cultural issues for discussion (Sha & Andi, 2024; Babayeva, 2025). These results indicate that literature serves not only as a linguistic resource but also as a medium for intellectual and personal development. The findings also reveal that literature-based instruction enhances learners' cultural awareness and socio-cultural understanding. Through engagement with literary narratives, participants developed insights into cultural values, social norms, and perspectives embedded in the target language.

This exposure contributed to learners' sense of cultural connection and improved their ability to interpret meaning within broader social contexts. Such results align with research emphasizing literature's role in promoting intercultural competence and cultural sensitivity through exposure to diverse cultural representations (Hasby et al., 2025; Satriani et al., 2024). Literature thus functions as a bridge between language learning and cultural understanding.

Despite these benefits, the findings acknowledge certain challenges associated with literature-based instruction. Some participants initially experienced difficulty interpreting complex texts or unfamiliar cultural references, which required additional instructional support. This observation is consistent with previous studies that identify challenges in implementing literature-based pedagogy, including text selection, learner readiness, and teacher preparedness (Sylvester & Aziz, 2022). Teacher experiences also indicate that successful implementation requires careful planning, scaffolding strategies, and adaptive teaching methods to ensure meaningful engagement with literary content (Utami & Mahardika, 2023).

The findings support the view that literature-based instruction provides a comprehensive approach to language learning by integrating linguistic, cognitive, and socio-cultural development. The observed increase in communicative confidence, expressive ability, and cultural awareness suggests that literature offers a meaningful alternative to traditional grammar-focused instruction. Consistent with earlier evidence highlighting the multifaceted role of

literature in language education (Paran, 2008), the results demonstrate that literature fosters not only language proficiency but also learner engagement, critical thinking, and cultural understanding. These outcomes reinforce the pedagogical value of literature as a transformative tool for promoting authentic language use and holistic language development in ESL contexts.

Theme 2: Naturalization of L2 Audiation

A second major theme that emerged from the analysis was the naturalization of second language (L2) audiation, understood as private verbal cognition or the development of an internalized “inner voice” in the target language. Participants reported that literature-based instruction, particularly activities such as reading aloud, dramatic enactment, and interpretive discussion, facilitated the emergence of a “silent inner narrator” that reflected the rhythm, tone, and stylistic features of English. Unlike traditional language exercises that isolate linguistic structures, engagement with literary texts enabled learners to internalize the melodic and expressive qualities of the target language, thereby strengthening cognitive processing and linguistic fluency.

The findings suggest that literary engagement supports the development of internal speech by exposing learners to authentic discourse and stylistic language use. Through repeated interaction with narratives, dialogue, and descriptive passages, students began to reproduce the cadence and structure of the language internally, which many described as a cognitive mechanism that aided memory and comprehension. This process aligns with research indicating that literature provides rich linguistic input that supports language internalization and deeper processing of linguistic features (Paran, 2008; Xerri & Xerri Agius, 2012).

Such exposure allows learners to experience language as a dynamic and expressive system rather than a set of isolated grammatical forms. Participants also emphasized the importance of performative activities in developing L2 audiation. Reading texts aloud and engaging in dramatization enabled learners to experiment with pronunciation, intonation, and expressive delivery, thereby reinforcing auditory and cognitive processing of language patterns.

These findings support literature-based approaches that emphasize interactive and experiential learning, where learners actively construct meaning through engagement with texts (Thakarar, 2015; Iswahyudi, n.d.). The performative dimension of literary engagement thus facilitates the integration of listening, speaking, and cognitive processing skills, contributing to more natural language acquisition.

The naturalization of L2 audiation also contributed to improvements in vocabulary acquisition and linguistic awareness. Exposure to varied lexical and syntactic patterns within literary texts enabled learners to recognize and internalize contextualized language use, enhancing both comprehension and expressive ability. Research demonstrates that literature-based instruction promotes vocabulary development and linguistic sensitivity by providing meaningful contexts for language use and encouraging deeper engagement with textual content (Azeem et al., 2024; Hasby et al., 2025). These findings suggest that the internalization of language patterns through literary exposure supports long-term language retention and retrieval.

Furthermore, the development of an internalized voice in the target language was associated with enhanced cognitive engagement and critical thinking. Participants reported that their ability to “think in English” improved as they engaged with complex narratives and interpretive tasks. This process encouraged reflective analysis and interpretive reasoning, supporting higher-order cognitive development. Previous studies similarly indicate that literature-based instruction promotes critical thinking and reflective learning by encouraging learners to interpret meaning, analyze themes, and engage with multiple perspectives (Sha & Andi, 2024; Babayeva, 2025).

The findings also highlight the role of literature in promoting a holistic approach to language learning by integrating cognitive, linguistic, and affective dimensions. Literature provides opportunities for learners to connect emotional responses with linguistic expression, thereby strengthening internal language processing. This holistic perspective is supported by research emphasizing literature-based instruction as a comprehensive approach that integrates language skills, cultural understanding, and personal engagement (Mart, 2021; Shermila, 2011).

Such integration facilitates deeper immersion in the target language and supports the development of internal linguistic competence. Despite these benefits, the development of L2 audiation through literature-based instruction may present

certain challenges. Some learners initially experienced difficulty processing complex literary language or unfamiliar stylistic features, which required instructional scaffolding and guided interpretation.

Previous research identifies similar challenges in implementing literature-based pedagogy, particularly in selecting appropriate texts and designing activities that support diverse learner needs (Satriani et al., 2024; Suliman et al., 2019). These challenges underscore the importance of careful instructional design and adaptive teaching strategies to maximize the benefits of literary engagement.

Thus, literature-based instruction plays a significant role in facilitating the naturalization of L2 audiation by promoting internal language processing, linguistic awareness, and cognitive engagement. Through sustained exposure to authentic discourse and performative learning activities, learners develop an internalized representation of the target language that supports comprehension, expression, and memory. Consistent with previous research highlighting the multifaceted benefits of literature in language learning (de Caleyá Dalmau et al., 2012; Momani, 2024; Muthusamy et al., 2010), the results suggest that literary engagement fosters not only external communicative competence but also the internal cognitive mechanisms essential for language acquisition and fluency.

Theme 3: Socio-Cultural Identification and Immersion

A third theme that emerged from the findings was socio-cultural identification and immersion, reflecting learners' growing awareness of the cultural dimensions embedded in language use. Participants reported that literature provided a "cultural roadmap" that traditional grammar-based instruction often lacked. Through engagement with literary texts, students explored the social practices, values, and perspectives associated with English-speaking communities, enabling them to understand language within its broader cultural context. This exposure allowed learners to move beyond structural knowledge toward a more meaningful understanding of how language functions within social interactions and cultural narratives.

Textual immersion facilitated learners' exploration of the "social fabric" of the target culture by exposing them to authentic representations of human experiences, relationships, and societal norms. Participants described how literary narratives allowed them to interpret characters' actions, motivations, and cultural behaviors, which enhanced their understanding of cultural meaning and communication patterns. This finding supports research suggesting that literature provides authentic cultural input and promotes intercultural awareness by presenting language within socially situated contexts (Khan & Alasmari, 2018; Thakarar, 2015). Such engagement enables learners to interpret cultural nuances that are often absent in decontextualized language exercises.

The findings further indicate that literature-based instruction fosters cultural fluency by encouraging learners to position themselves within the text. Students reported feeling that they were "acting and reacting" within literary narratives, engaging with characters and situations as active participants rather than passive observers. This immersive experience enabled learners to negotiate meaning and develop empathy toward diverse cultural perspectives. Previous studies highlight that literary engagement supports cultural identification by encouraging learners to reflect on social issues and interpret multiple viewpoints (Kim, 2009; Babayeva, 2025). Through such processes, literature promotes deeper cultural understanding and personal connection with the target language.

Socio-cultural immersion also contributed to the development of critical thinking and interpretive skills. Participants engaged in analyzing themes, questioning cultural assumptions, and reflecting on the social implications of literary texts. This process encouraged learners to evaluate cultural differences and similarities, thereby strengthening intercultural competence. Research indicates that literature-based instruction enhances critical thinking by encouraging learners to analyze complex cultural and social issues presented in texts (Azeem et al., 2024; Satriani et al., 2024). Such engagement supports the development of higher-order cognitive skills alongside linguistic competence.

The integration of cultural and linguistic learning observed in this study reflects the holistic nature of literature-based instruction. Literature provides opportunities for learners to simultaneously develop language skills and cultural awareness, reinforcing the interdependence of language and culture. Scholars emphasize that literature-based approaches promote comprehensive language development by integrating cognitive, affective, and socio-cultural

dimensions of learning (Iswahyudi, n.d.; Mart, 2021). This holistic engagement enables learners to internalize language not only as a system of communication but also as a medium of cultural expression.

Furthermore, participants reported increased motivation and engagement as a result of cultural immersion through literary texts. Exposure to culturally rich narratives stimulated curiosity and encouraged learners to explore unfamiliar cultural practices and perspectives. Studies have shown that literature enhances learning motivation by providing meaningful content and promoting personal relevance in language learning (Mardiani & Baharuddin, 2023; Shermila, 2011). By fostering emotional and intellectual engagement, literature creates a supportive learning environment that promotes sustained interest in language acquisition.

Despite the benefits of socio-cultural immersion, the findings also revealed certain challenges in interpreting culturally complex texts. Some learners initially struggled to understand unfamiliar cultural references, social norms, or historical contexts embedded in literary works. These challenges highlight the importance of instructional scaffolding and culturally responsive teaching strategies to support learners' comprehension and engagement. Previous research similarly identifies the need for careful text selection and guided instruction to ensure meaningful cultural learning in literature-based classrooms (Suliman et al., 2019; de Caleyá Dalmau et al., 2012).

Hence, through engagement with authentic narratives, learners develop cultural awareness, interpretive competence, and a sense of participation within the target language community. Consistent with prior research emphasizing the multifaceted benefits of literature in language education (Adam, 2025; Momani, 2024), the results suggest that literature serves as a powerful tool for fostering cultural fluency and meaningful language use. By integrating linguistic and cultural learning, literature-based instruction supports learners' ability to navigate both the communicative and socio-cultural dimensions of language acquisition.

The Role of Listening and Style

Statistical trends from the original study identified listening skills as a primary predictor of overall language acquisition, highlighting the central role of auditory processing in second language development. The present thematic analysis supports this finding by demonstrating that performative engagement with stylistic literary texts significantly influences how learners perceive, process, and articulate language.

Through activities such as reading aloud, listening to narrative discourse, and engaging in interpretive discussions, learners developed heightened sensitivity to linguistic features such as rhythm, tone, and expressive nuance. Literature-based instruction thus strengthens learners' capacity to internalize the auditory qualities of language, contributing to more accurate and confident language production.

The findings reveal that literature fosters a reciprocal relationship between receptive and productive language skills. Exposure to stylistically rich texts enhances learners' listening and reading comprehension, which subsequently informs their speaking and writing abilities. This reciprocity of learning reflects the interconnected nature of language skills, where input-based activities provide the foundation for expressive competence. Research emphasizes that literature-based instruction promotes integrated language development by simultaneously engaging multiple linguistic processes, including listening, reading, speaking, and writing (Mart, 2021; Shermila, 2011). Such integration supports more natural and holistic language acquisition.

Performative engagement with literary texts also enhances learners' ability to "audit" language, or process linguistic input through attentive listening. Participants reported that listening to narratives and engaging in oral reading activities improved their awareness of pronunciation, intonation, and discourse patterns. These findings align with studies demonstrating that literature provides authentic language exposure and promotes deeper understanding of language use in context (Hişmanoğlu, 2005; Khan & Alasmari, 2018). Through repeated exposure to expressive language forms, learners develop sensitivity to stylistic variation and communicative intent, which strengthens both comprehension and articulation.

Furthermore, stylistic engagement with literature contributes to the development of expressive language skills. By analyzing narrative voice, dialogue, and descriptive language, learners gain insight into how language conveys meaning, emotion, and perspective. This process enhances learners' ability to articulate ideas effectively and creatively

in the target language. Studies highlight that literature-based instruction promotes expressive competence by encouraging learners to experiment with language structures and stylistic forms (Dhillon & Mogan, 2014; Momani, 2024). Such engagement supports the development of communicative fluency and rhetorical awareness.

The role of listening in literature-based instruction is further supported by pedagogical models that emphasize creative and interactive learning strategies. Instructional approaches that incorporate storytelling, dramatization, and interpretive performance encourage learners to actively engage with language through auditory and expressive channels. Research suggests that such approaches strengthen language socialization and support the development of communicative competence through scaffolded interaction (Hur, 2016; Kaharuddin, 2021). These methods provide learners with meaningful opportunities to practice language use in authentic and socially situated contexts.

In addition, literature-based instruction fosters motivation and learner engagement, which further enhances the development of listening and expressive skills. Exposure to meaningful narratives and culturally relevant texts encourages sustained attention and deeper cognitive processing of linguistic input. Studies indicate that literature-based learning environments increase learner motivation and participation, leading to improved language outcomes and greater communicative confidence (Mardiani & Baharuddin, 2023; Adam, 2025). The affective engagement generated by literary texts thus supports both receptive and productive language development.

Thus, listening and stylistic engagement play a crucial role in language acquisition within literature-based instruction. Through sustained interaction with expressive texts, learners develop the ability to process language auditorily, internalize stylistic features, and translate receptive knowledge into productive competence. Consistent with previous research highlighting the integrative and communicative benefits of literature in language education (Kim, 2009; Ahmad et al., 2019), the results suggest that literature fosters a dynamic relationship between listening, interpretation, and expression. This reciprocal process enhances both linguistic proficiency and communicative effectiveness, reinforcing the pedagogical value of literature in ESL instruction.

Conclusion:

This thematic analysis affirms that literature-based instruction serves as a vital and transformative learning tool in the adult ESL context. Rather than reducing language learning to mechanical drills or the mere completion of linguistic structures, literature-based pedagogy provides a rich, meaningful, and content-driven environment that deepens learners' engagement with the target language. Through sustained exposure to authentic texts, learners are not simply "walking the blank" or filling in isolated grammatical forms; instead, they participate in an immersive process that activates the innate and organic dimensions of language acquisition. Literature invites learners to interpret meaning, negotiate understanding, and express personal responses, thereby promoting deeper cognitive processing and sustained linguistic development.

The findings highlight that literary texts foster learner confidence by creating opportunities for self-expression and critical reflection. As students interact with complex narratives, characters, and themes, they develop a stronger sense of agency in using English to articulate their thoughts and emotions. This process contributes to the naturalization of inner speech, enabling learners to internalize language structures in ways that feel authentic and personally meaningful. Moreover, literature provides valuable cultural insights that extend beyond vocabulary and grammar, allowing learners to engage with the social, historical, and ideological contexts embedded in language use. Such cultural exposure enhances communicative competence by helping students understand not only how language functions structurally but also how it operates within diverse human experiences.

Furthermore, literature-based instruction encourages reciprocal learning within the classroom, where dialogue, interpretation, and collaborative meaning-making become central components of the learning process. This interactive environment supports the development of critical thinking, interpretive skills, and intercultural awareness, all of which are essential for effective language use in real-world contexts. By positioning language as a dynamic medium for expression rather than a static system of rules, literature transforms the ESL classroom into a space for holistic language development.

Hence, this study concludes that literature enables adult ESL learners to move beyond mastering the “nuts and bolts” of English toward inhabiting the language as a living and evolving system of communication. Through its capacity to cultivate linguistic competence, cultural understanding, and personal engagement, literature-based instruction supports a more comprehensive and meaningful approach to language learning, positioning English not merely as an academic subject but as a living, growing organism that learners actively experience and embody.

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