Methodological Approaches To Developing Literary Competence In Higher Education

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Abstract: This article examines methodological approaches to developing literary competence in higher education, with a particular focus on students majoring in English and related educational fields. Literary competence is understood as a multidimensional construct encompassing linguistic, interpretive, contextual, aesthetic, and critical-reading skills necessary for meaningful engagement with literary texts. Drawing on competence-based education principles and aligned with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), the study analyzes contemporary pedagogical methods that foster students' ability to comprehend, interpret, and evaluate literary works. The article explores a range of instructional approaches, including text-centered analysis, reader-response methodology, contextual and cultural interpretation, critical literacy practices, and blended learning strategies. Special attention is given to interactive and student-centered techniques that promote active participation, reflective thinking, and interdisciplinary integration. The findings suggest that the systematic application of these methodologies significantly enhances students' literary competence and contributes to their professional development as future language educators. The article concludes by outlining methodological conditions and pedagogical recommendations for effectively integrating literary competence development into higher education curricula.

Introduction: In the context of competence-based higher education, literary competence is regarded as a key component in the professional training of future language teachers and philologists. It involves a combination of linguistic, interpretive, contextual, aesthetic, and critical skills that enable students to engage meaningfully with literary texts and to interpret them within cultural and educational contexts.

The importance of literary competence is reinforced by international educational standards, particularly the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), which emphasizes critical reading, interpretation, and intercultural awareness. Literature therefore functions not only as a source of authentic language input but also as a means of developing higher-order thinking and cultural literacy.

However, traditional approaches to teaching literature in higher education often remain teacher-centered and focus mainly on factual knowledge, limiting students' interpretive engagement. This has led to increased interest in student-centered and innovative methodologies, including reader-response, text-centered, contextual, and blended learning approaches. Accordingly, this article aims to analyze effective methodological approaches to developing literary competence in higher education and to identify pedagogical conditions that support this process.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The notion of literary competence has been explored in literary theory and educational research from different perspectives. One of the earliest reader-oriented foundations was proposed by Wolfgang Iser (1978), who argued that meaning in literary texts emerges through the active interaction between the reader and the text. According to Iser, literary understanding

depends on the reader's ability to fill textual gaps and construct meaning, which directly relates to the development of interpretive and analytical skills. Similarly, Hans Robert Jauss (1982) introduced the concept of the horizon of expectations, emphasizing that readers' cultural and historical backgrounds shape literary interpretation.

In the field of language education, literary competence has been increasingly associated with communicative and competence-based approaches. The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Council of Europe, 2001; 2018) does not explicitly define literary competence; however, it highlights interpretative reading, critical evaluation, and intercultural awareness as key learning outcomes. Researchers argue that these components form the core of literary competence in foreign language education and justify the inclusion of literary texts in higher education curricula.

Methodological research identifies several approaches to developing literary competence. Text-centered approaches emphasize close reading, stylistic analysis, and genre awareness (Carter & Long, 1991). These methods focus on linguistic form, narrative structure, and literary devices, enabling students to develop analytical precision. However, scholars note that excessive reliance on text-centered analysis may reduce learners' personal engagement with literature.

An alternative perspective is provided by reader-response theory, particularly in the works of Louise Rosenblatt (1978), who viewed reading as a transactional process between the reader and the text. Rosenblatt distinguished between efferent and aesthetic reading, emphasizing emotional and experiential involvement in literary interpretation. Empirical studies (Beach, 1993; Paran, 2008) demonstrate that reader-response approaches increase motivation, encourage independent thinking, and support deeper comprehension among university students.

Contextual and cultural approaches further contribute to the development of literary competence by situating texts within their historical, social, and ideological contexts (Byram, 1997). Such approaches enhance learners' intercultural awareness and enable them to interpret themes, symbols, and values more accurately.

Closely related to this is the critical literacy approach, which encourages students to question power relations and ideological assumptions embedded in literary texts (Fairclough, 1995; Luke, 2012), thereby strengthening evaluative and critical dimensions of literary competence.

Recent studies emphasize the role of blended and technology-enhanced learning in literary education. Research shows that digital platforms, online discussions, and multimedia resources support collaborative interpretation and reflective reading practices (Lai, 2017; Xerri, 2019). The integration of traditional literary analysis with digital tools has been found to increase student engagement and promote sustainable development of literary competence in higher education.

Overall, the literature indicates that literary competence is a multidimensional construct that requires an integrated methodological approach. Scholars increasingly agree that combining text-centered, reader-response, contextual, critical, and technology-supported methodologies is essential for effectively developing literary competence in higher education.

METHOD

A qualitative-dominant mixed-method research design was employed to investigate the effectiveness of selected methodological approaches in developing students' literary competence in higher education. The pedagogical intervention was implemented over one academic semester (10 weeks) within an English literature course at a pedagogical university.

The participants consisted of 130 undergraduate students majoring in English language education. The students' language proficiency ranged from B1 to B2, as defined by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Council of Europe, 2001; 2018). All participants had prior experience with literary texts but had not previously received systematic instruction explicitly aimed at developing literary competence.

To develop and assess literary competence, three key methodological instruments were applied:

1.Text-Centered Literary Analysis Tasks.

Students engaged in guided close reading activities

focusing on narrative structure, stylistic devices, characterization, and thematic development. These tasks required learners to analyze excerpts from literary texts, identify linguistic and stylistic features, and explain their functional and aesthetic significance. Structured analytical questions were provided to scaffold interpretation and support the development of linguistic and analytical components of literary competence.

2. Reader-Response and Reflective Writing Activities.

Students maintained reflective reading journals in which they recorded personal responses to literary texts, including emotional reactions, interpretive insights, and connections to personal or cultural experience. These reflections encouraged aesthetic reading and subjective meaning-making, following reader-response principles (Rosenblatt, 1978). Over time, students were guided to move from descriptive responses toward more analytical and evaluative interpretations, strengthening interpretive and critical dimensions of literary competence.

3. Contextual and Collaborative Interpretation Sessions

Contextual analysis tasks were integrated through seminars and online discussions, where students explored historical, cultural, and ideological backgrounds of literary works. Collaborative interpretation was facilitated via digital platforms, enabling peer discussion, joint analysis, and feedback exchange. These sessions supported the development of contextual awareness, intercultural understanding, and critical literacy skills.

The methodological intervention was organized into the following stages:

Weeks 1–2: Introduction to literary competence; orientation on analytical, interpretive, and reflective reading strategies.

Weeks 3–7: Systematic implementation of text-centered analysis, reader-response journals, and contextual interpretation tasks.

Weeks 8–9: Collaborative discussions, peer feedback, and critical reflection on literary texts.

Week 10: Final assessment and reflective evaluation of literary competence development.

Data collection instruments included diagnostic and final literary analysis tests, reflective journals, observation notes, and semi-structured interviews. Qualitative data were analyzed through thematic content analysis to identify patterns in students' interpretive development, while quantitative data from pre- and post-assessments were analyzed descriptively to measure progress in literary competence components.

The combination of these methods ensured methodological validity and provided a comprehensive evaluation of how integrated pedagogical approaches contribute to the development of literary competence in higher education.

RESULTS

1. Development of Literary Interpretive Skills. Analysis of students' literary analysis tasks and reflective reading journals demonstrated noticeable improvement in interpretive abilities. At the initial stage, many students' responses were largely descriptive, focusing on plot summary or surface-level character identification (e.g., "The story is about a conflict between two characters"). By the end of the intervention, students produced more analytical interpretations, addressing themes, symbolism, narrative perspective, and stylistic devices (e.g., "The conflict symbolizes the tension between individual desire and social norms, reinforced through ironic narration"). This progression reflects a shift from basic comprehension to interpretive and analytical reading, consistent with reader-response and text-centered methodological principles (Rosenblatt, 1978).

2. Growth in Contextual and Cultural Awareness. Results from contextual analysis tasks and collaborative discussions revealed a significant increase in students' ability to relate literary texts to their historical, social, and cultural backgrounds. Initially, only a limited number of students referenced contextual factors when interpreting texts. Following the intervention, the majority of participants incorporated cultural and historical perspectives into their analyses, demonstrating improved intercultural awareness, in line with the interpretive reading descriptors of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Council of Europe, 2001; 2018).

3. Enhanced Critical and Evaluative Thinking. Data from reflective journals and seminar discussions indicated

that students became more confident in expressing evaluative judgments about literary texts. Over time, learners increasingly questioned authorial perspectives, ideological assumptions, and character motivations. This development suggests that the integration of critical literacy elements supported higher levels of critical thinking and strengthened the evaluative component of literary competence.

4. Increased Student Engagement and Autonomy. Observation notes and interview data showed a marked increase in student engagement and autonomous learning behavior. Students reported greater motivation to read literary texts independently and to participate actively in discussions. Many learners noted that reflective reading journals helped them monitor their interpretive progress and identify personal strengths and weaknesses in literary analysis.

5. Challenges Identified during the Intervention. Despite the overall positive outcomes, several challenges were observed. At the initial stage, students experienced difficulty moving beyond summary-based responses toward analytical interpretation. Some learners also required additional guidance in integrating contextual information effectively. These findings highlight the need for sustained scaffolding and methodological support when developing literary competence in higher education.

The results indicate that the systematic application of text-centered, reader-response, contextual, and collaborative methodologies contributes significantly to the development of literary competence among higher education students.

CONCLUSION

The study confirms that the effective development of literary competence in higher education requires an integrated methodological approach. The combination of text-centered analysis, reader-response activities, contextual interpretation, and collaborative discussion enables students to move beyond surface-level comprehension toward deeper analytical, cultural, and critical engagement with literary texts.

The findings demonstrate that student-centered and reflective methodologies significantly enhance interpretive skills, critical thinking, and learner autonomy. Aligning literature instruction with the principles of the Common European Framework of

Reference for Languages (CEFR) also supports clearer learning outcomes and more consistent assessment practices.

The research highlights the importance of systematic methodological scaffolding in literature courses and confirms that an integrated pedagogical framework is essential for developing literary competence in higher education and preparing future English language teachers.

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