

## Revitalising the Role of Literature in the Contemporary EFL Secondary Classroom: A Small-scale Study

Paula Romo-Mayor<sup>1</sup>; Silvia Pellicer-Ortín<sup>2</sup>

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**Abstract.** It can be asserted that nowadays a vast proportion of the world's population needs to develop communicative competence in English to participate in transnational societies. Although there is still some reticence to use literature in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context, our main claim is that literary resources may be a powerful tool for the development of intercultural communicative competence in English. In particular, the main purpose of this article is to examine the extent to which literary resources are used in EFL teaching and analyse which literary genres are more attractive and appropriate for teenagers. In this study we have observed the extent to which literature is currently used in the teaching of EFL in the stage of secondary education in the region of Aragón. For that, the method to follow has been based on the development of different surveys used to gather information about the popularity of literature in some Aragonese classrooms. In addition to this, the literary genres which are more appropriate for teenagers have been examined through the creation of a checklist, and these data have supported the design, creation and partial implementation of an innovative project in the secondary-education classroom. The results of this implementation have led us to demonstrate that the development of communicative competence in our younger generations can be enhanced through literary texts if the selection and methodology used in the classroom are adequate.

**Keywords:** Secondary education; English as a Foreign Language; Literary genres; Communicative Language Teaching; Project Based Learning.

### [es] La revalorización del papel de la literatura en el aula de secundaria de inglés como lengua extranjera en la actualidad: Un estudio a pequeña escala

**Resumen.** Podemos afirmar que en la actualidad una gran proporción de la población mundial necesita desarrollar cierta competencia comunicativa en inglés para participar en las sociedades transnacionales. Aunque todavía hay cierta reticencia a la hora de utilizar la literatura en el contexto de la enseñanza del inglés como lengua extranjera, nuestro principal argumento es que los recursos literarios pueden ser una herramienta muy valiosa para el desarrollo de la competencia comunicativa intercultural. En particular, el objetivo principal de este artículo es observar en qué medida los recursos literarios se utilizan en la enseñanza del inglés como lengua extranjera y analizar qué géneros literarios son más atractivos y apropiados para la población adolescente. En este estudio hemos observado hasta qué punto la literatura se emplea en la enseñanza de inglés en Educación Secundaria en la región de Aragón. Para ello, el método a seguir ha consistido en la realización de diferentes encuestas que recopilan información sobre la popularidad de la literatura en algunas aulas aragonesas. Además, se han examinado los géneros literarios que son más adecuados en esta etapa educativa mediante la creación de una lista de control, y estos datos han respaldado el diseño, la creación e implementación parcial de un proyecto innovador en el aula de secundaria. Los resultados de tal implementación nos ayudan a demostrar que se puede mejorar el desarrollo de la competencia comunicativa en nuestras generaciones más jóvenes a través de los textos literarios si su selección y la metodología utilizada en el aula son las adecuadas.

**Palabras clave:** Educación Secundaria; Inglés como lengua extranjera; Géneros literarios; Enseñanza comunicativa de lenguas; Aprendizaje basado en proyectos.

<sup>1</sup> Departamento de Filología Inglesa y Alemana, Universidad de Zaragoza  
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6499-963X>  
E-mail: [paularmg@unizar.es](mailto:paularmg@unizar.es)

<sup>2</sup> Departamento de Filología Inglesa y Alemana, Universidad de Zaragoza  
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8928-7295>  
E-mail: [spellice@unizar.es](mailto:spellice@unizar.es)

## [fr] La revitalisation du rôle de la littérature dans la classe secondaire d'anglais langue étrangère aujourd'hui: Une étude à petite échelle

**Résumé.** On peut affirmer qu'actuellement une grande partie de la population mondiale a besoin de développer la compétence communicative en anglais pour participer aux sociétés transnationales. Bien qu'il y ait encore quelque réticence à utiliser la littérature dans le contexte de l'anglais langue étrangère, notre principale affirmation est que les ressources littéraires peuvent être un outil vigoureux pour le développement de la compétence communicative interculturelle en anglais. Particulièrement, le but principal de cet article est d'observer dans quelle mesure les ressources littéraires sont utilisées dans l'enseignement de l'anglais comme langue étrangère et analyser quels genres littéraires sont les plus attrayants et appropriés pour la population adolescente. Dans cette étude, nous avons observé dans quelle mesure la littérature est actuellement utilisée pour l'enseignement d'anglais dans la région d'Aragon dans l'enseignement secondaire. Pour cela, la méthode à suivre a été basée sur l'élaboration de différentes enquêtes utilisées pour recueillir des informations sur la popularité de la littérature dans certaines classes aragonaises. En plus de cela, les genres littéraires les plus appropriés pour les adolescents ont été examinés à travers la création d'une liste de contrôle, et ces données ont soutenu la conception, la création et la mise en œuvre partielle d'un projet innovant dans la classe du secondaire. Les résultats de cette mise en œuvre nous ont amenés à démontrer que le développement de la compétence communicative de la part de nos jeunes générations peut être amélioré à travers des textes littéraires si la sélection et la méthodologie utilisée en classe sont adéquates.

**Mots-clés:** Education secondaire; Anglais langue étrangère; Genres littéraires; Enseignement des langues communicatives; Apprentissage par projet.

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### 1. Introduction

Our global times, characterised by the development of the information society and the increase in immigration, have witnessed the emergence of a growing need for developing communicative competence in English. However, some experts contend that never before has there "been a greater tension between what is taught in the classroom and what the students will need in the real world once they have left the classroom" (Kramsch, 2014, 296). Accordingly, active methodologies in Foreign Language Teaching (FLT) have recently made their way into the classroom, turning the learning of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) into a learner-centred experience. Their main aim is to boost the students' self-confidence so that they can become autonomous learners and participate in real-world environments. In this sense, learners' acquisition of practical communicative skills has been prioritised, relegating the role of literature to a somewhat debatable position on the assumption that it makes a limited contribution to the development of communicative competence. Yet, the interest in the didactic potential of literary resources has been rekindled in the last decades, drawing attention to the benefits of literary resources for not only language improvement in the EFL classroom but also personal, cultural and ethical enrichment.

Considering the heterogeneity that characterises any contemporary classroom, the main purpose of this study is to demonstrate that literature can be effectively used in the communicative EFL classroom, mainly in the context of secondary education. Thus, our main research aims are i) to observe the extent to which literature is currently used in Aragonese EFL classrooms, since our initial contention is that there is still some reticence to use it for EFL purposes; ii) to study which literary genres are more appropriate for teenagers, bearing in mind linguistic, intercultural and content-related aspects; iii) to design and partially implement a project whose guiding thread is literature but which also manages to foster communicative, intercultural, social and thinking skills, among others. In order to prove our initial hypothesis about the scarce use of literature in the EFL field, a survey was conducted to gather information about the popularity of literature in some Aragonese secondary-education classrooms. In addition to this, the literary genres which are more suitable for this educative stage have been discussed and examined, and these data have supported the design and partial implementation of an innovative project aimed at demonstrating that the development of the communicative competence in our younger generations can be positively enhanced by relying on literary texts. Accordingly, this article starts by offering a theoretical overview of the benefits and challenges implied in the use of literature in EFL teaching as well as reflecting on the particularities of different literary genres aimed at that purpose. Then, the methodology used is discussed and the results – concerning the teachers' answers, and the design and implementation of a literary EFL

project – are offered. Finally, the conclusions help us confirm our initial claim that literature can enhance our teenage students' communicative and intercultural skills if texts are appropriately chosen and the resources, tasks and outcomes are motivating enough through the design of innovative projects such as the one presented here.

## 2. Theoretical overview

### 2.1. Literature as a Tool for EFL Teaching

The advent of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in the late 1970s meant a major emphasis on spoken language in EFL teaching and a subsequent rejection of literature. However, by the mid-1980s, the reintegration of literature in the EFL classroom started to be considered to address the limited content knowledge and skills observed in students (Bobkina, 2014). The revalorisation of the role of literary resources in FLT programs that ensued in the 1990s regarded literature as a catalyst for the development of the four main skills within a relevant cultural context, for personal expression in a foreign language, and for students' motivation (Albaladejo, 2007).

Despite its didactic possibilities, EFL teachers still wonder whether literature actually has a positive impact on their instruction. For some scholars, several structures, lexical forms and semantic systems in literature have been devised for aesthetic purposes and, thus, deviate from daily linguistic expressions (Cook, 1986; McKay, 1986). However, numerous pedagogues still vouch for the benefits of its linguistic richness, which provides students with examples of various genres, styles and registers. Collie and Slater (1990) assert that however subtle and elaborated the grammar is, this material will help students to master all language skills as it broadens their linguistic knowledge. In this line, Albaladejo (2007) and Borham and González (2012) argue that the development of literary competence within a communicative context allows students to explore different ways in which language can be used.

Many secondary-school EFL teachers remain reticent about the introduction of literature because of its problematic relationship with curricular restrictions (Ortells, 2013). Consequently, many have resorted to the use of textbooks, which frequently leads to “grammatical and repetitive structural activities of a rather mechanical character” (Criado and Sánchez, 2009, 8). Another aspect of discussion is that literary texts only contribute to developing reading comprehension strategies within a CLT approach. Nevertheless, being in the ‘postmethod era’ (Kumaravadivelu, 2006), it is the instructors' responsibility to design activities that enhance the potential of literature to develop communicative competence. There are plenty of language activities based on texts (e.g. discussions, role-plays, essays) where the transaction from reception of input to production of output may support the students' functional use of language (Littlewood, 1986) as well as offer room for a balance between fluency and accuracy.

In terms of motivation, there is the contention that using literature might not help EFL students achieve their academic goals (McKay, 1986). However, as Gilroy and Parkinson (1996) state, literature educates the person in his/her entirety since it creates a space for self-expression, creative thinking, and the development of critical-thinking skills and emotional awareness. Indeed, literature may motivate the students as they interact with a meaningful text, increase their reading ability and submerge themselves in a foreign culture. This takes us to the widespread assumption that it reflects a particular cultural perspective, thus adding conceptual difficulty to tasks (McKay, 1986). Nevertheless, the cultural value of literary texts is something to be praised. For Michael Byram (1989), the development of Intercultural Communicative Competence can offer students “a viewpoint from which to perceive their own experience and selves as social beings, to relativize and contextualise their own culture by experience of another” (49). Additionally, literature widens the perception of the target cultures and boosts more empathic stances towards the diverse (Littlewood, 1986; Borham and González, 2012).

All these things considered, the use of literature in the EFL classroom will be effective, especially for secondary education – a period characterised by the uncertainty of in-betweenness. It is a moment in life where students develop their own personality according to the relationship they establish with society. In keeping with this, Ortells (2013) describes literature as “a medium to provide our students with the critical apparatus to question the established system” (91). These special qualities can be successfully exploited in the EFL context, where the connection between the native and the target culture invites students to broaden their worldviews. Moreover, literature will serve as a tool for the teaching of communicative skills but also cross-curricular elements, as long as teaching and learning procedures allow some freedom and creativity.

### 2.2. Selecting Appropriate Texts for the EFL Classroom

The importance of text selection lies in the growing awareness that the accrual of certain textual characteristics favours the promotion of learners' communicative competence. Amongst them we may find the necessity for a text to provide what Krashen (1981) referred to as comprehensible input, that is, information that is slightly beyond the level of the students but constitutes an optimal challenge for them. With this respect, Littlewood (1986) recommends the selection of a style that is relatable to everyday language. The potential to derive interactive activities where the integration of many skills is feasible, and the presence of sociocultural connotations and relevant topics for the students are preferable in so that they are powerful stimulators of their motivation (Albaladejo, 2007).

While there exists a general consensus about the aspects that the literary text should promote within the CLT framework, this is not the case when it comes to deciding between graded texts and authentic texts. Some pedagogues consider that graded readings dilute information, depleting the originals of their aesthetic and linguistic essence (McKay, 1986) and providing an input that is devoid of the naturalness of real-world speech (Albaladejo, 2007). However, specialists such as Vincent (1986) conceive that simplification allows students to follow an adaptation of a real text, which can be motivating with less proficient learners. In this vein, Littlewood (1986) recommends using authentic texts only at upper-intermediate and advanced levels. The use of simplified texts in lower levels can increase the chances of developing literary-like behaviour for the future. An alternative set of views is that authentic reading materials are appropriate at all levels since they expose learners to real language in use, fulfilling social and cultural purposes in a given community (Tamo, 2009). Also, these texts keep students updated on what happens in the world; confront them with a wide variety of text types and styles; produce a sense of achievement when they accomplish a real-life task; and encourage them to read for pleasure. In this regard, Albaladejo (2007) vouches for the introduction of original literary texts from the initial phases. The inconvenience caused by the linguistic, conceptual, and procedural difficulties can be minimised by means of pedagogical support or a careful selection, which, in her view, should be done taking into account the text's accessibility, readability, relevance and motivational factors.

With the rehabilitation of literature as an integral part of FLT programs, studies on the benefits of different literary genres to language learning have been published. For example, drama confers to the learning experience a dynamism and multisensory involvement that improves comprehension and cultivates empathy (Hişmanoğlu, 2005) and also the opportunity to familiarise learners with the communication system in English (e.g. pronunciation, suprasegmental features, non-verbal language, etc.). As regards novels, those that suit the students' cognitive and emotional levels, contain fast-paced plots, enigmatic characters, and inspiring themes are more likely to succeed in the EFL classroom (Hişmanoğlu, 2005). In particular, Ortells (2013) identifies young-adult literature as a popular genre among teenagers since it displays a less complex style and syntax, helping the reader focus on the narrative. Given that they frequently render young protagonists who overcome problems of personal growth, it allows for an intimate connection between the story and the learner's experiences. However, the length of dramatic plays and novels is the chief objection to their use in the EFL classroom. A practical solution may be to select significant excerpts from literary works. Yet, for these materials to be effective, they should correspond to the beginning of the whole text to avoid allusions to previous episodes (Cook, 1986) or have an internal mood to stand independently.

In contrast to lengthy novels and plays, the compression of the short story lowers the affective filter and increases self-confidence, since learners realise that they are able to understand and finish an original text. Its condition as a genre that explores real and symbolic sides of common life invites students to go beyond the textual realm and stimulate their cognition and creativity (Hişmanoğlu, 2005). In addition to this, Maley and Duff (1989) consider poetry as the most adequate genre in the EFL classroom. Its aesthetic deviation from linguistic rules can broaden students' knowledge (Collie and Slater, 1990) and its oral nature can be used to work on phonetics and phonology. The nonnecessity of a correct interpretation of the text validates any contribution and maximises interaction. Moreover, Hişmanoğlu (2005) praises poetry's influence in emotional and intercultural education since it sometimes displays ideas that are untranslatable into our language or culture. When it comes to the graphic novel, Templar (2009) highlights its capacity to "explor[e] significant historical events and their human impact, foregrounding personal narratives fused with striking graphic art" (para. 6). This explains its popularity among teachers to develop students' democratic and ethical values. Furthermore, it is an "important multimodal learning tool" (para. 14) that lightens the cognitive load and sharpens the visual literacy of the students.

Overall, these ideas demonstrate that the literary text can be a powerful centrepiece for the learning of EFL. Any text level or literary genre can act as a facilitator of holistic learning as long as it poses an optimal challenge and its strengths are exploited: the text can be initially approached through basic comprehension and later through higher-order thinking tasks involving analysis, synthesis and evaluation. There is a need for an active role of the teachers in the preparation stages, whereby they will have to make a diagnosis of the learning context, apply a treatment and undertake continuous assessment in order to adapt to the students' linguistic and cognitive needs.

### 3. Methodology

Our study is part of a final Master's dissertation carried out during the academic year 2017/2018 in which all the aspects highlighted in this article were further detailed. The preliminary steps consisted of the elaboration and distribution of a questionnaire among secondary-education English teachers in order to investigate the presence of literature in our academic context, and the creation of a checklist to determine specific teaching points that could be addressed during the text selection. Then, considering the results obtained from the previous reflection process, an innovative project was designed following CLT principles. Due to time limitations, only some sessions could be implemented and analysed. The didactic effectiveness of the teaching proposal was measured with an observation tool created for the particular context under analysis and pre- and post-teaching questionnaires. The latter were also meant to elucidate its effect on the students' attitudes towards reading in general and English literature in particular. All these data were finally used to answer our initial research questions about the current use of literature in our secondary educa-

tion classrooms and the positive impact its introduction may have on our students' development of communicative and intercultural competences.

### 3.1. Teachers' Questionnaire and Checklist for Text Selection

As has been explained, in order to gather updated information about the use of literature as a didactic tool in some EFL classrooms of Aragón, a survey was conducted during the academic year 2017/2018 to determine the degree of popularity of this resource, and which type of texts and genres were more favourably regarded. The participants, twelve secondary-school teachers working in state (6) and charter schools (6) in Zaragoza (10) and Aragonese towns (2), were asked to provide information related to the school where they worked and the teaching procedures followed, as well as give examples of specific literary resources they used and reflect upon their future intentions<sup>3</sup>.

Additionally, a checklist for materials was created with the aim of making the process of text selection easier for us and for those EFL teachers interested in introducing literary texts in their lessons, a need we identified in the teacher's answers to the questionnaires. This tool provides a series of criteria when choosing literary texts for didactic purposes within the CLT framework and groups them in six differentiated sections depending on the textual factors they consider (Table 1). These standards derive from theories about CLT and, particularly, the use of literature in the EFL classroom reviewed in Section 2. The more criteria the text meets, the more appropriate and complete it is for the EFL classroom. The data collated in this checklist were also used for our selection of literary texts to be included in the EFL project that will be presented in the following pages.

Table 1. Checklist for text selection

Suitability of content					
	Text 1	Text 2	Text 3	Text 4	Text 5
The subject matter (themes and topics) of the text is relatable to curricular or cross-curricular contents					
The content of the text is relevant for secondary-school students, i.e. it is connected with their own experiences and emotions					
The content of the text is engaging, interesting and enjoyable					
The text presents social and cultural components					
Readability					
	Text 1	Text 2	Text 3	Text 4	Text 5
The text is readable and provides comprehensible input according to the students' level and stage, i.e. renders lexical and structural difficulties that will challenge the students without overwhelming them					
The text displays rich and significant input, reflecting natural and everyday speech					
Accessibility					
The teacher will need to resort to the curriculum to consider the items in this section.					
	Text 1	Text 2	Text 3	Text 4	Text 5
The level of difficulty of the text is appropriate to the language level of the year/grade					
The level of difficulty of the text complies with the evaluation criteria and standards of the year/grade					
The content enables the students to meet learning objectives					

<sup>3</sup> The original version of the teachers' questionnaire is available in: [https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLScEYHgCfUCMcD8RNICwjp7pj-GP5W-iCTQufXozWfcp\\_3xpzjw/viewform?usp=sf\\_link](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLScEYHgCfUCMcD8RNICwjp7pj-GP5W-iCTQufXozWfcp_3xpzjw/viewform?usp=sf_link).

Exploitability within the CLT framework					
	Text 1	Text 2	Text 3	Text 4	Text 5
The material enables or can be adapted for the successful meeting of individual learning needs and styles					
The material has the potential to derive communicative and interactive activities, favouring a more real, meaningful, contextualised and integrative approach to EFL					
The material can be integrated to work on different skills and subskills					
The material has the potential to stimulate students cognitively, critically and creatively					
The material has the potential to derive both accuracy-oriented and fluency-oriented activities					
The material allows for a balance between linguistic, conceptual and procedural demands					
The material provides opportunities for task-based learning and cooperative learning, promoting the students' learning autonomy					
The material provides opportunities for cooperative learning, promoting the students' learning autonomy					

Didactic possibilities					
	Text 1	Text 2	Text 3	Text 4	Text 5
The material presents information in appealing ways					
The material provides flexibility in its use and implementation					

Literary learning					
	Text 1	Text 2	Text 3	Text 4	Text 5
The material promotes intercultural competence, i.e. it equips the students with cultural awareness and useful tools for cross-cultural communication					
The material endorses the cultural appreciation of the target language					
The material establishes connections between native culture and the target culture					
The material has the potential to develop the students' democratic and ethical values; i.e. empathy, respect and awareness of others					
The material cultivates the appreciation of literature and its different literary genres					

Source: self made

### 3.2. Design of the Teaching Proposal

After diagnosing, thanks to the data collected in the teachers' questionnaire, mainly the need for tools to introduce literature in the EFL classroom on the part of the teachers and a lack of enthusiasm when dealing with this type of resource on the part of the students (see details in Section 4.1.), a teaching proposal was created with the intention of demonstrating that literary texts can be effectively employed to train secondary-school students' communicative and intercultural competences in an engaging way. In following the doctrines of CLT, it attempted to favour a meaningful approach to the English language, integrating as many skills and sub-skills as possible and including both accuracy- and fluency-oriented activities. More specifically, it was grounded on principles of Task-Based Instruction, Cooperative Learning and Project-Based Language Learning (PBL), which facilitate the adaptation to students' in-

dividual needs, their cognitive, critical and creative stimulation, the promotion of learning autonomy, the cultivation of self-reflection and responsibility, and the maintenance of a balance between linguistic, conceptual and procedural demands.

The didactic proposal was aligned with the LOMCE, the Aragonese Curriculum and the specific provisions for EFL while it includes all essential project design elements (Larmer, Mergendoller, and Boss, 2015). Likewise, it was structured in seven different stages (Table 2) devised by Gil (2018) to ensure gradual and effective learning processes. The learning journey started by presenting a challenge that the students needed to address by working in teams and producing a piece of writing in order to revive literature among their fellow adolescents. The challenge involved cognitive and learning processes that would be demonstrated in the final product.

Table 2. Stages of the project

Stages	Purpose
ACTIVATION	Questionnaire to gather information related to students' attitude towards literature
	Presentation of the challenge: Nowadays, teenagers are not very keen on reading or writing literature, so the target students' involvement in this project is key to promote literature among their school peers.
	Getting started by making students think about what they <i>need</i> to complete the challenge, what <i>worries</i> them about the challenge, what <i>excites</i> them about meeting the challenge, what <i>suggestions</i> they would make to meet this challenge
	Activation of schematic knowledge on the topic through a brainstorm of students' ideas on literary texts and characteristics teenagers look for when reading
	Signing the project team contract
DISCOVERY	Discovering the short story through Edgar Allan Poe's "The Tell-Tale Heart"
	Discovering poems through Frances Cornford's "Childhood"
	Discovering poems through Langston Hughes' "I, Too"
	Discovering plays through Oscar Wilde's <i>The Importance of Being Earnest</i> (exc. from Act I)
	Review of genre characteristics and reflection
DEEPENING	Research on teenagers' literary interests and synthesis of new information
	Deepening into a literary genre of their choice
	Pushing creative thinking
PLANNING	Selecting requirements for own literary creations
	Pre-writing by completing templates that help students organise the content of their texts
CREATION	Writing (composition, revision, edition)
	Making the product more appealing by creating a cover page or illustration
PUBLISHING	Making the products public on the school's webpage
ASSESSMENT, REFLECTION AND CELEBRATION OF LEARNING	Promoting the product through group oral presentations
	Assessment of learning process
	Assessment of result
	Self-assessment
	Assessment of students' attitude, behaviour and participation

Source: self made

The collection of texts around which the EFL project was designed was selected with the aid of the checklist presented above. It included Edgar Allan Poe's "The Tale-Tell Heart" (1843), Frances Cornford's "Childhood" (1954), Langston Hughes' "I, Too" (1925) and an excerpt of Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895). Classic literature was preferred for several reasons. First, working with them in the EFL classroom through an innovative approach would demystify the reading of classics. Second, their reading might hone the students' critical-thinking and literary skills as they adopt the perspective of different characters and begin to understand what it must have been like to live in a different time and place. Third, the universal nature of these readings could promote a deeper under-

standing of why we are who we are today. Moreover, the classics display a clearer array of literary genre conventions as compared to contemporary readings, which are often the result of the merging of elements belonging to different genres. Provided that students would be asked to produce their own texts after discovering the conventions of short stories, poetry and drama, this particularity facilitated the task.

### 3.3. Pre- and Post-teaching Questionnaires and Observation Checklist

Two lessons of the project were brought to a real EFL classroom of seventeen students aged between fifteen and seventeen. These sessions fell into the discovery stage (Table 2), as they could be isolated from the whole project easily and, therefore, there was no need for giving the students a preceding state of affairs. Moreover, they integrated more skills than the rest, providing more opportunities for students to develop their abilities in meaningful ways with a literary text as the basis. Before the implementation of the first lesson, some questionnaires were conducted to collect reliable information related to the students' attitudes when reading in English<sup>4</sup>. A post-teaching survey was distributed with a view to observing whether the students had changed their attitude towards literature and its use in the EFL classroom and whether the teaching had had an impact on their learning<sup>5</sup>. In addition to this, an observation checklist (Table 3) was completed during the implementation to see whether the objectives of the lessons were successfully met.

Table 3. Observation checklist

Lesson 1: "Writing Back to America"						
Date:	Classroom:	Number of students:				
		1	2	3	4	5
Language was used in a meaningful context						
Students resorted to their previous knowledge to succeed in the performance of the activities						
The balance between linguistic, conceptual and procedural demands enabled students to perform successfully						
Students were able to follow the class and if they were not, they asked the teacher						
Students were stimulated cognitively, critically and creatively						
Students stayed focused during the three stages of the task						
Students showed motivation and interest in the topic						
The participation rate was high (e.g. volunteering, following the routine, participating in discussion, etc.)						
Students were actively engaged in individual and in group tasks						
Students enriched their set of values						
Students appreciated the text aesthetically						

Source: self made

## 4. Results and discussion

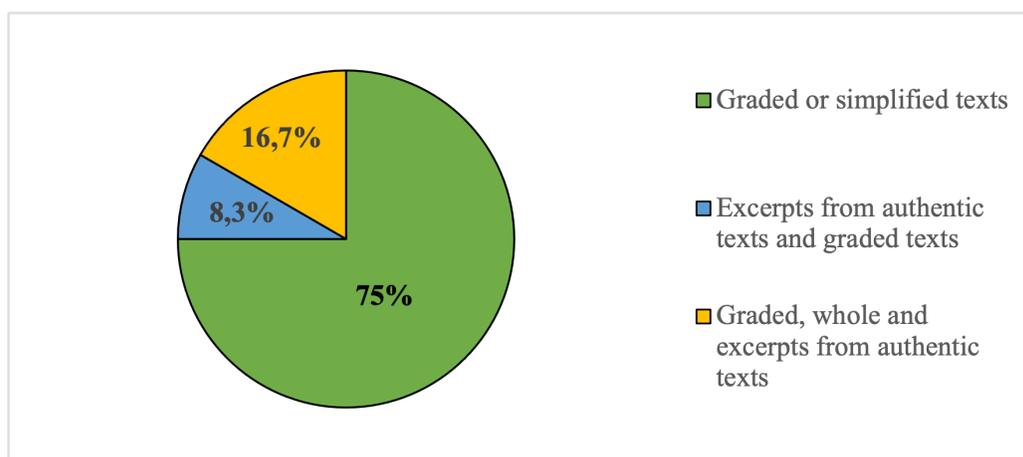
### 4.1. Teachers' Questionnaire

The questionnaires were answered by twelve EFL teachers from Aragonese secondary schools. The whole lot upheld that they employed literary resources in their EFL lessons; however, not everyone used the same type of text. As can be seen in *Figure 1*, most of them opted for using at least graded texts to teach English. One teacher combined them with excerpts from authentic texts and two utilised graded, excerpts and whole original texts.

<sup>4</sup> The original version of the pre-teaching questionnaire is available in: [https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSd6HBnIyFJWlJmkmVLOv-Mr-gemCZYBTKgz\\_IrpeMLbb-ePLQw/viewform?usp=sf\\_link](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSd6HBnIyFJWlJmkmVLOv-Mr-gemCZYBTKgz_IrpeMLbb-ePLQw/viewform?usp=sf_link)

<sup>5</sup> The original version of the post-teaching questionnaire is available in: [https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSeAaR459dB1dWQP7AP4Wi-IBxkJpZMjHGhdAhCKoMLG8AukQhg/viewform?usp=sf\\_link](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSeAaR459dB1dWQP7AP4Wi-IBxkJpZMjHGhdAhCKoMLG8AukQhg/viewform?usp=sf_link)

Figure 1. Use of text types in the EFL classroom



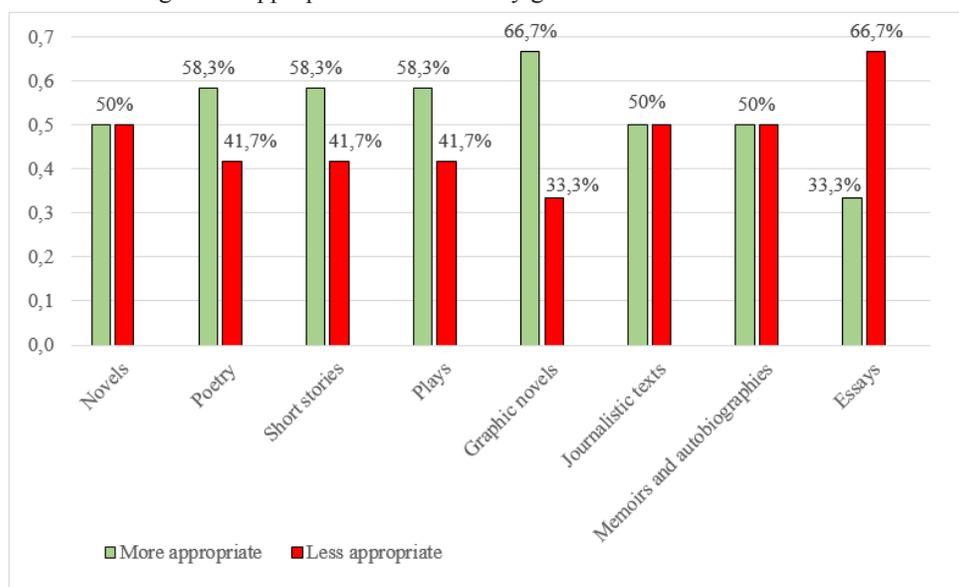
Source: self made

Among those who exclusively made use of graded texts, four teachers mentioned that they used adapted versions of the classics. Within the authentic texts specified, the participants resorted to both traditional and contemporary literature. Nine responded that students adopted the same attitude as with the rest of the methodology, and only two claimed that their motivation increased. Not coincidentally, one of the teachers in the latter case engaged students with not only graded texts but also whole authentic ones. None of the teachers resorted to literary texts more than once or twice a month, except from one.

Results also showed that in eleven cases the teacher chose the texts according to different criteria. A total of four mentioned that they took the legislation into account, while three looked at the topics. Those who marked “Other” (4) stated that either they had other criteria, or they combined more than one option. One of these added that they allowed their gifted students to choose the texts they liked. Those who mentioned taking into account students’ tastes (3), however, had previously answered that students adopted the same disposition as when using usual resources. This may suggest that the way these texts were approached in the EFL lessons was not so motivating for students.

The graph in *Figure 2* reveals that there was no consensus on which genre was the most appropriate for EFL. The graphic novel was the highest-ranked genre, which echoes Templer’s (2009) claims about its growing popularity in education. Its attractiveness possibly lies in its capacity for stimulating visual literacy. Novels, journalistic texts, memoirs and autobiographies had the same number of detractors as advocates. While the number of votes for memoirs and autobiographies was expected to be lower, that of novels was higher. The reasons that might explain both results are that the advantage of working with the former is that students read about others’ lives and historical landmarks; while the disadvantage of the latter is the length. Being short stories, poetry and plays conceived as the candidates to score higher in this question, it is interesting to observe that the difference between its advocates and its detractors was not substantial.

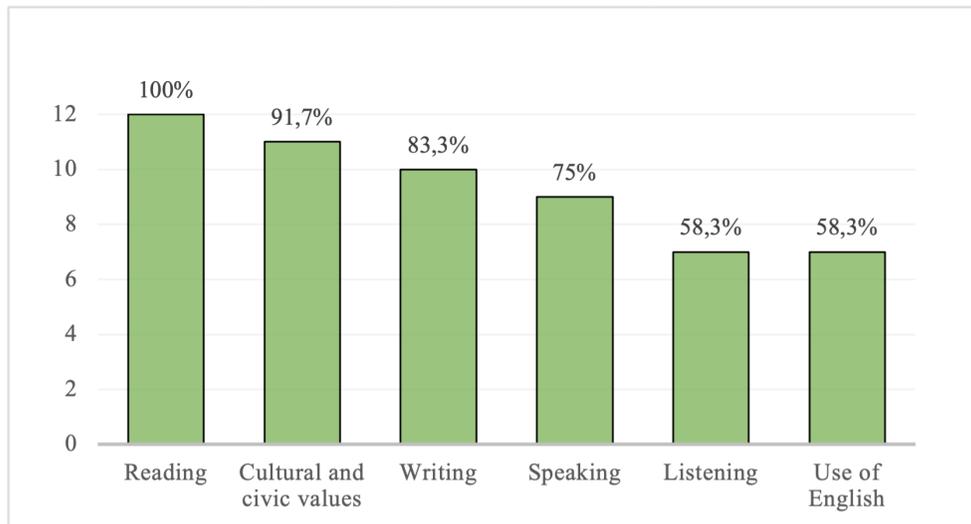
Figure 2. Appropriateness of literary genres for the EFL classroom



Source: self made

As expected, the entire group of participants used literary texts to foster their students' reading comprehension, and eleven of them took advantage of their themes to develop values. Written (10) and oral production (9) also scored high, confirming that it is popular to encourage students' production of output when dealing with literature in EFL lessons. The promotion of listening skills, although above average, was the least worked together with vocabulary and grammar.

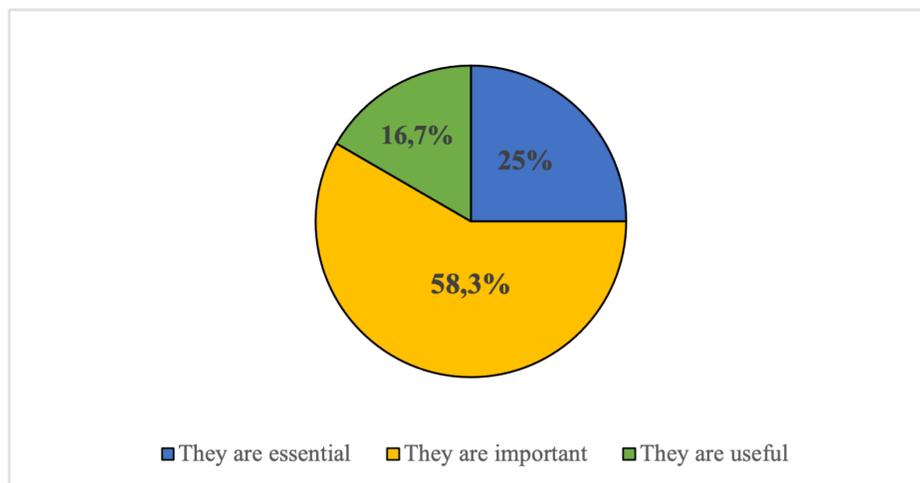
Figure 3. Skills promoted while working with texts



Source: self made

As illustrated in *Figure 4*, all these teachers considered literary texts to be quite relevant in their students' learning processes. Regarding the evaluation, eleven teachers included literary resources in the assessment process, their weight varying from 10% (4), to around 20% (2) or even 40% (2) of the final mark. The rest commented that they had "little" consideration or "the same as regular tests".

Figure 4. Relevance of literary resources according to EFL teachers



Source: self made

When asked to reflect upon their future teaching, one respondent annotated that they would continue integrating literary texts in the EFL classroom since "they believe[d] they are an integral part to the language and can be an eye-opener, especially on these days when reading for fun is in crisis" (personal communication, January 29, 2018).

## 4.2. EFL Project: "Let's Make Literature Great Again!"

### 4.2.1. Context

Cristo Rey Escolapios School is a charter school in the north of Zaragoza where local upper-middle-class students predominate. The group of Fourth of ESO in question was constituted by seventeen students aged between fifteen

and seventeen. Having started learning English when they were three years old, the learners were expected to reach a B1.2 level by the end of the academic year 2017/2018. Due to their habit of giving oral presentations, they were accustomed to expressing themselves in public and performing fluency-oriented tasks. However, this was not the case with reading comprehension or written production. By the time this project was implemented, students were working on how to make predictions, express possibilities, make hypotheses, make suggestions for improvement and give an opinion about something by resorting to the use of the future simple and the future continuous, modal verbs and adverbs of degree and manner.

#### 4.2.2. Expected Learning Outcomes

The project was designed around several learning objectives (Table 4), elaborated out of the curricular evaluation indicators.

Table 4. Expected learning outcomes

Expected Learning Outcomes	
By the end of this project learners are would be able to:	
Obj. 1	Aesthetically appreciate literature and its different literary genres
Obj. 2	Express hypotheses, possibilities and predictions about the content of a literary text by making use of structures such as <i>it's likely/unlikely that, I wouldn't be surprised if, I think it would be great to, the way I see it</i> and modal verbs like <i>might have, may have and must have</i>
Obj. 3	Recognise the use of modal verbs and adverbs and explain their function in a text
Obj. 4	Use the future simple and the future continuous to express future plans in a meaningful context
Obj. 5	Understand gist, details and further implications of a short story, two poems and a play
Obj. 6	Identify similar sound clusters in a poem
Obj. 7	Extract information from the reading aloud or performance of literary texts and demonstrate understanding of their content and/or implications
Obj. 8	Recognise the main elements of short stories, poems and plays and their importance by completing organisers
Obj. 9	Understand written texts about the characteristics that teenagers are looking for in literature (e.g. the capacity to awaken interest from the very beginning, relatable characters and themes, a fast pace), and demonstrate understanding by applying these to their own texts
Obj. 10	Make suggestions for improving others' products using language structures such as <i>how about, why don't you, maybe you should, I'd recommend, have you thought about</i>
Obj. 11	Design, plan and create their own short story, poem, or play following the conventions of the literary genre and considering teenagers' literary interests
Obj. 12	Plan and produce oral presentations promoting the uniqueness of their products making use of persuasive and assertive phrases such as <i>everyone knows that, the time has come to, most people would agree that, a sensible idea would be to, etc.</i>
Obj. 13	Evaluate their classmates' performances by filling out assessment forms and surveys about their oral performances when promoting their products

Source: self made

#### 4.2.3. Methodology

The teaching-learning process was learner-centred, attending to students' own needs and motivations to promote their autonomous learning and enhance their own talents. Simultaneously, the teacher would promote the use of ICTs and learning by discovering, inviting the students to make use of their knowledge, skills, and values for both the completion of tasks and the development of Key Competences. Cooperative learning would be prioritised in order to create opportunities for interaction. The lessons would therefore have an active and meaningful nature, and would be focused on teaching for understanding, which may enable students to develop their English communica-

tive competence progressively. Learners would be asked to carry out tasks and activities whereby they can develop problem-solving strategies through different interaction patterns, environments that create opportunities for them to develop learning autonomy. Most of these tasks and activities were characterised by the integration of skills, involved communicative situations that engaged students in cognitive processes and made them comply with a non-linguistic outcome.

In line with contentions by McKay (1986), Albaladejo (2007) or Tamo (2009), all the resources hereby proposed, whether printed or digital, were authentic with a view to strengthening students' motivation and, subsequently, guaranteeing successful learning processes. Original literary texts by Poe, Cornford, Hughes and Wilde would be used for the exploration of literary genres, which would also be supported by authentic audio-visual texts such as *The Great Debaters* (2007) and *The Importance of Being Earnest* (2002). Being the texts authentic, students would be provided with the teacher's scaffolding to help them succeed in the tasks (see *Figure 5*). ICTs would be required for the creation of online word clouds (*AnswerGarden*), cover pages or illustrations (*Canva*), the viewing of film clips (*YouTube* or video player), the research on teenagers' literary interests (*Google*) and the presentation of their texts to the rest of the class (*PowerPoint*, *Piktochart*, *Canva*).

Figure 5. Organiser for writing a one-act play

The image is a green-themed planning template titled "PRE-WRITING A ONE-ACT PLAY". It features a "Planning" label in a green arrow on the top left. The main content is organized into several sections: a "Title:" input field at the top; a "Character list" section with a large white box; a "Setting" section with a light green box; a "Plot" section with a light green box; and an "Action" section with a white box containing a bulleted list: "Exposition", "Rising action", "Climax", "Falling action", and "Dénouement/Ending". At the bottom right, there is a warning icon and the text "Don't forget about stage directions".

Source: self made

As for groupings, students would be arranged in three groups of four students and one group of five with different levels of proficiency to guarantee a proper learning process through interaction and cooperation. Depending on the nature of the task, students could be required to work individually or within their group. Occasionally, they could be also asked to actively participate in whole-class discussions. When working cooperatively, each group member would be assigned a role to make everyone responsible for the work. This would allow for positive interdependence and equal participation. As group success would depend on the efforts made by everyone involved (Kagan, 1999), a project team contract would be signed in the activation stage with a view to setting rules and increasing the effectiveness of the team. Moreover, group work would allow for scaffolding to be carried out first by the students themselves and then by the teacher, who could adapt the basic contents of the project for students with difficulties.

#### 4.2.4. Evaluation and Assessment

The evaluation section was devised according to the specification in the *Orden ECD/489/2016* whereby Curricular Evaluation Criteria and Indicators must integrate the Key Competences. At the beginning of the project, there would be a diagnostic evaluation, similar to the one carried out during the implementation, to detect the students' degree of knowledge of and attitude towards the topic of the project. Moreover, the assessment of the learning process would be continuous, formative and integrative, enabling the teacher to focus on the learner's progress. Evaluation would, therefore, aim at providing students with the necessary resources according to their needs and learning styles to exploit their strengths and overcome their weaknesses. Accordingly, the assessment would consider different items, namely the literary text created and the oral presentation promoting the text, which were designed to be done cooperatively, a portfolio compiling the classroom work and drafts completed individually and in a group throughout the different stages of the project and the degree of participation and attitude together with assessment forms for evaluating both cooperative work and their individual work in the team. The grading criteria (Table 5), aligned with the curricular contents and objectives developed with the project, would be provided to the students.

Table 5. Grading criteria

Item to be assessed	Weight	
Final product: the literary text created in groups	25%	
Oral presentation promoting their creations	25%	20% (peer-assessed)
		80% (teacher-assessed)
Portfolio	40%	
Participation, attitude and self-assessment	10%	

Source: self made

As for the instruments of evaluation, the interactive character of the tasks in the classroom allows for the assessment of the learner’s performance and participation through the teacher’s observation. Specific rubrics (see Table 6) would be used for the examination of the literary texts and the oral presentations. Peer-assessment would be introduced for students to learn how to give and receive feedback as well as to make them reflect on their learning processes. The portfolios, collected by the teacher at the end of the project, would be assessed by means of a user-friendly checklist. The marks obtained after working on this project would carry 30% of the weight of the final mark in the term.

Table 6. Teacher’s rubric for evaluating the students’ literary text

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Needs improvement
<b>Layout</b>	Creative layout and effective text structure, with paragraphs, stanza or script unified around a main point or idea	Neat and clean layout, with generally correct paragraph, stanza or script structure	Mostly neat, with margins and some attempt at paragraph, stanza or script structure	Generally untidy, no margins or paragraphs, stanzas or character interventions marked
<b>Organisation</b>	Ideas organised to support desired effect	Ideas organised in a linear fashion	Ideas generally organised, but with some confusion	Ideas disorganised and contents confusing
<b>Connection of ideas</b>	Variety of linking words and signposting expressions	Suitable linking words	Simple linking words	Linking words used rarely or not at all
<b>Language accuracy</b>	Good use of a wide range of basic and complex grammatical structures and vocabulary; minimal errors	Good use of basic and some complex grammatical structures and vocabulary; some errors that do not interfere with understanding	Good use of basic grammatical structures and vocabulary and some attempts at complex ones; errors in complex structures that may be difficult to understand	Very limited basic grammatical structures and vocabulary; too many errors due to interference with first language
<b>Genre conventions</b>	Good use of the conventions appropriate to the literary genre, demonstrating understanding of how it works	Some genre conventions have been used but others have been disregarded	Poor use of genre conventions, demonstrating lack of understanding of how it works	Genre conventions have not been considered
<b>Teenage-appropriateness</b>	Entirely appropriate for teenagers according to their literary interests	Appropriate for teenagers according to their literary interests	Teen’s literary interests have been slightly taken into account	Teen’s literary interests have not been taken into account at all
<b>Originality</b>	Keeps reader engaged from beginning to end through original and interesting use of ideas, language, plot, character development, imagery, dialogues, etc.	Engages reader most of the way through the piece with mostly original and interesting use of ideas, language, plot, character development, imagery, dialogues, etc.	Offers little originality in ideas, language, plot, imagery, etc. Reader may lose interest	Lacks originality in ideas, language, plot, imagery, etc. reader will lose interest from the very beginning

Source: self made

In order to assess the teaching process and the accomplishment of the learning outcomes, three assessment procedures were designed. The first one entails keeping a teaching journal. The second procedure involves using a rubric for observing whether PBL principles are followed and, thus, reflecting upon the teaching practice and increasing professional growth. The third procedure consists of an exit ticket to be filled out individually and anonymously by the students once the project has concluded. These procedures would not only provide feedback on the teaching process but would also allow the teacher to improve the project in the future.

### 4.3. Implementation of Two Sessions of the Project

As has been mentioned in the methodological sections, two lessons within this project were finally implemented in a group of seventeen students belonging to Fourth of ESO. This section includes the lesson plans for both sessions as well as a brief discussion of the results obtained from the students' questionnaires and the teacher's checklist.

#### 4.3.1. Lesson Plans for the Two Sessions

Table 7. Lesson plan for the first lesson

Lesson 1: "Writing Back to America"			
Activities		Interaction pattern	Resources and materials
Filling up questionnaires		SS	Printed version of questionnaire
Pre-task	1. Students read the questions before the clip is played	SS	<i>PowerPoint</i> presentation
	2. Viewing of the clip, where the protagonist recites Langston Hughes' poem "I, Too"	SS	Downloaded scene from <i>The Great Debaters</i> (2007)
	3. Check understanding with comprehension questions	T-Ss	<i>PowerPoint</i> presentation
While-task	1. Dictogloss of Langston Hughes' poem "I, Too"	SS	
	2. Sharing answers in group	Ss-Ss	
	3. Comparing with original poem	SS	<i>PowerPoint</i> presentation
Post-task	1. Language focus and literary awareness	T-Ss	<i>PowerPoint</i> presentation
	2. Discussion of figurative meaning	T-Ss	<i>PowerPoint</i> presentation
	3. Entitle the poem in groups and share with class	Ss-Ss and S-Ss	<i>PowerPoint</i> presentation

Source: self made

Table 8. Lesson plan for the second lesson

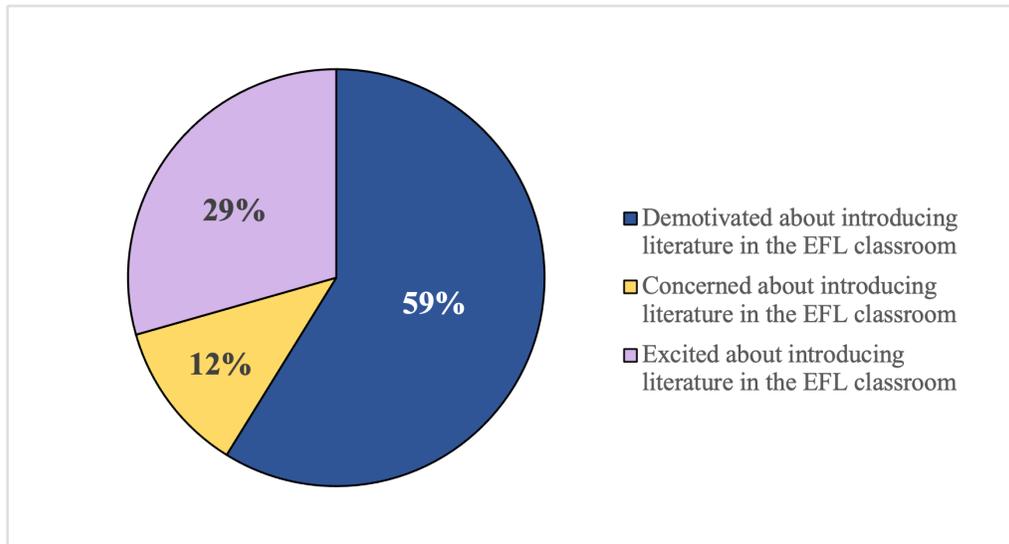
Lesson 2: “Let’s Make a Drama Out of This”			
Activities		Interaction pattern	Resources and materials
Stage Zero: Discussing the idiom ‘let’s make a drama out of this’		T-Ss	<i>PowerPoint</i> presentation
Pre-task	Predicting the content of the play by looking at the title <i>The Importance of Being Earnest</i>	S-Ss	<i>PowerPoint</i> presentation
While-task	1. ‘Scrambled story’: re-ordering a fragment taken from <i>The Importance of Being Earnest</i> (Act I) accompanied by a glossary	Ss-Ss	Fragment of <i>The Importance of Being Earnest</i> (Act I) and glossary
	2. Sharing with whole class and demonstrating that they understand how the text fits together	S-Ss	
	3. Summarising the fragment orally	S-Ss	
Post-task	1. Language focus: register, use of adverbs	S-Ss	<i>PowerPoint</i> presentation and text
	2. Viewing the clip, which corresponds to the scenes read in the While-task	SS	Downloaded scene from <i>The Importance of Being Earnest</i> (2002)
	3. Literary awareness by comparing the differences between film and theatre	T-Ss and S-Ss	
	4. Related to the topic of the fragment, students have to make up funny excuses to evade their responsibilities	S-Ss	<i>PowerPoint</i> presentation
Filling up questionnaires		SS	Printed version of questionnaire

Source: self made

#### 4.3.2. Pre-teaching Questionnaire

The pre-teaching survey revealed that there were nine students out of seventeen who liked reading, which implied that nearly half of them had either a negative or an indifferent attitude towards literature. Moreover, only five students claimed to have read literary texts in English, of which, surprisingly enough, all were authentic and four of them had been read during their leisure time. Students mentioned having read comics, short stories and young adult novels. Irrespective of having read texts in English or not, ten out of the seventeen students felt demotivated about dealing with literature in the EFL classroom claiming that they “[didn’t] like literature and less in English” (personal communication, May 9, 2018), that it was boring or that they preferred to do funnier things. The rest mentioned feeling excited about the idea of doing something that they loved in the subject; however, two of them were also concerned about the difficulty of introducing literature in the classroom (*Figure 6*). These results influenced the implementation of the two sessions, which aimed, amongst other things, to change their attitudes towards literature.

Figure 6. Students' attitudes before the implementation



Source: self made

### 4.3.3. Observation during Implementation

The teacher's checklist presented in Section 3.3. allowed us to consider whether the objectives for both lessons were met or not. All the items received a high rate in the first lesson. The balance between linguistic, conceptual and procedural demands motivated students to stay focused and perform successfully by resorting to previous knowledge or voicing their doubts. The level of participation was significant, and their interventions showed that they were interested in the topic and they appreciated the text aesthetically. The classroom atmosphere was welcoming enough to invite them to ask for clarification. All this, together with their engagement in individual and group tasks, allowed for language to be used meaningfully. The designed tasks and the positive attitude of the students played a crucial role in stimulating cognition, criticism and creativity.

The high values achieved during the first lesson decreased in the second, especially in the case of participation. The general impression was that, although engaged and focused on the tasks, students did not read the entire text during the while-task or were unable to understand the plotline, which was indispensable to follow the lesson. Due to time limitations, this possibility was overlooked and the result was that the balance between different demands was altered from then onwards. Language was still used in a meaningful context, but the opportunities to observe whether they had enriched their values or appreciated the text aesthetically were less than in the previous session.

### 4.3.4. Post-teaching Questionnaire

When asked about what they used to think about EFL and reading in English before the two lessons and what they thought afterwards, two out of the sixteen students that attended both lessons stated that they felt that the subject of English was boring, but that after the sessions they had a better opinion. Ten students claimed that they thought that reading in English was tedious and, while eight of them had realised that it can be fun and interesting, there were still two who had not changed their minds. The remaining four expressed their disquietude about the way literature was to be integrated into the lessons, adding later on that it exceeded their expectations.

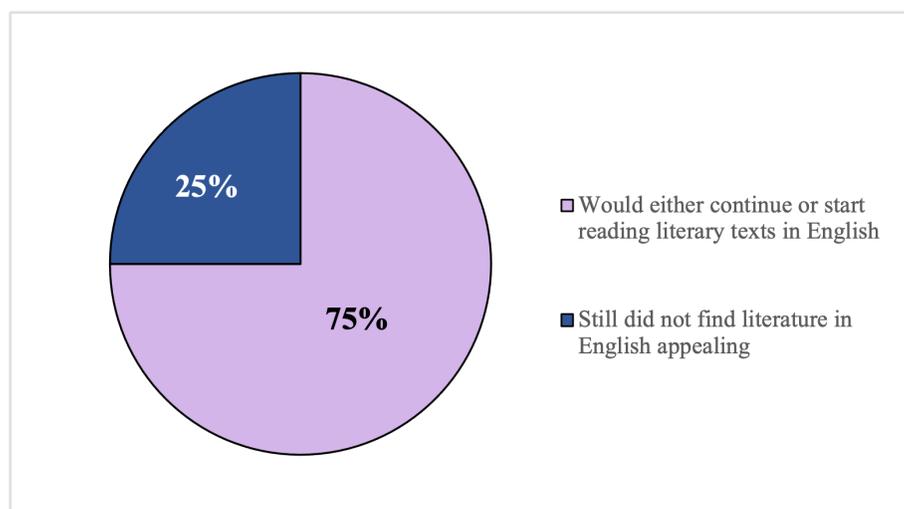
Fifteen students stated that they had enjoyed the activities proposed, adding that they were very original. Among the things that they had learned, students generally agreed that they had started to appreciate literature, particularly poetry and theatre; that they had acquired new vocabulary and grammatical structures and that they had discovered a different way to train their listening skills. The fact that students were conscious of having enriched their knowledge and valued it denies McKay's (1986) hypothesis that the use of literature might have a negative impact on students' predisposition and motivation to learn.

The most popular aspect in both lessons, with seven votes, was the use of videos to contextualise or illustrate the literary works. While five students declared having enjoyed the most "the first lesson", three had liked "the second lesson" more, which might explain the lower values achieved during the second lesson in the observation checklist. One student praised the way things were described and explained during the implementation. There was no clear consensus about the least popular item. While both the first lesson and the second obtained four votes, the activity on ordering the fragments of the play got two and the use of videos received one. In the rest of the answers provided (5), students explained that they could not think of anything because they had enjoyed everything. The fact that nearly half of the students preferred the audio-visual material confirms that this generation expresses a preference for

the visual, the brief and the immediate. However, the greater length and reading difficulty of the dramatic fragment, as compared to the poem, did not rise significantly the negative votes for the second lesson. This might imply that sometimes students are not as concerned about the length as we think they are (Vincent, 1986), but rather with how we make them approach the text. As suggested above, this may affect the way students follow the plot of the work and perform in subsequent activities.

The final question revealed that most of these students' attitudes towards reading literature in English had changed after the two sessions (*Figure 7*). The five students who had already read literature in English stated that they would continue doing it. Among the twelve students who did not like reading initially, seven would like to take up this activity now. Therefore, the implications of this implementation are quite positive in the sense that nearly  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the students either maintained or adopted a positive attitude towards reading in English.

Figure 7. Students' attitudes after the implementation



Source: self made

## 5. Conclusion

The main aims of this study were to examine the extent to which literary resources are used in EFL teaching, analyse which literary genres are more attractive and appropriate for teenagers, and design and implement a project that could foster the students' interest in reading literature in English as well as their communicative and intercultural competences. The results of the questionnaire that was distributed to EFL teachers in Aragonese secondary schools confirmed that they were interested in the didactic nature of literature and they used some literary texts in their teaching practice. Nevertheless, the low frequency with which these were used, together with the notable absence of authentic texts and the reticence to exploit them for the development of the main skills, components and cultural values, indicated that there is still room for improvement. Regarding literary genres, no agreement was reached; however, the graphic novel was the most widely advocated, reflecting the need to adapt to the traits of this new generation of teenagers. Furthermore, a checklist was designed upon which EFL teachers could rely when selecting literary texts for their lessons, as the questionnaire had shown teachers had great difficulties when doing this. This tool was also employed in the creation of a teaching proposal presented in our study, targeted at demonstrating that literary resources could be exploited for the development of students' communicative competence.

The students' feedback after the implementation of two sessions was more positive than our initial expectations, because it demonstrated that students' learning process as well as their motivation had been enriched as they used the language meaningfully. In spite of these encouraging results, the small size of the sample for the teachers' questionnaire might decrease the validity of the survey, especially if we consider that the participants contributed to the study because they already regarded the use of literature in EFL favourably. The same happens with the sample of students, whose responses cannot be considered representative enough. Time and program limitations also constituted a disadvantage in the teaching practice.

Accordingly, although the findings in this research can be useful within the context of EFL teaching in Aragón and for the development of similar innovation projects, future research on the use of literary resources in the EFL classroom should consider the attitudes and teaching practices of wider samples of teachers. It should also gather more data from students, providing further information about their actual learning and testing the didactic efficacy of literature. Greater availability of time to develop the whole project would also be useful for considering additional improvements in its design. All in all, we can answer our main initial question and confirm that literature, when

introduced through meaningful and motivating resources such as those provided by PBL, definitely enriches the learning journey of EFL students, enhancing their acquisition of contents and achievement of objectives along with the (re)definition of their identity and values.

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