



University of Bahrain

College of Arts

Department of English Language and Literature

The Impact of Literature on Enhancing 21st Century Skills: The Case of University EFL Learners

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Master's Degree in Applied English Language Studies

Prepared by

Mohamed Jasim Qambar

ID number: 20125894

Supervised by

Dr. Abdul Aziz Mohamed Bulaila

Associate Professor

University of Bahrain

Kingdom of Bahrain

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Defense Committee's Approval Page

Student **Mohamed Qambar** ID number **20125894** defended her thesis by which he fulfilled the requirements for the Master's degree in Applied English Language Studies entitled “**The Impact of Literature on Enhancing 21st Century Skills: The Case of University EFL Learners**” on this day of **13/02/2025**.

Thus, the committee recommends awarding of M.A. Degree with the grade of:

Defense Committee	Signature
1. Dr. Abdul Aziz Bulaila	
2. Dr. Madani Othman	
3. Dr. Nuri Ageli	

Abstract

This study investigates the influence of literature on the development of key 21st-century skills—specifically problem-solving, critical thinking, and cultural awareness—among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students in Bahrain. A mixed-methods approach was employed, utilizing three methodologies for a comprehensive analysis. A quantitative assessment of 120 past literary papers from both Level 1 and Level 4 courses at a Bahraini university demonstrated students' development of 21st-century skills. In addition, interviews with literature professors provided insights into course design aimed at fostering these skills, while interviews with literature graduates captured perceptions of literature's impact on their development. Findings indicate that engagement with literature significantly enhances students' cultural awareness, critical thinking, and problem-solving abilities, promoting emotional engagement and critical discourse. The urgency of curriculum integration of diverse literary works addressing complex ethical and cultural issues through active learning strategies is emphasized. This research underscores literature's essential role in equipping EFL students to navigate the complexities of the modern world. However, the limited scope of the study suggests the need for further research to explore the broader implications of literature in education. Additional studies with larger sample sizes will enhance the generalizability of the results and contribute to understanding literature's impact on skill development in diverse learning contexts.

Dedication



With deep appreciation, I dedicate this study to my family and friends, whose unwavering encouragement and support have been essential to this research process. My pillar of support during the hardest times has been your everlasting patience and faith in me.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Chapter One

Introduction

1. Overview

The world is undergoing rapid transformation, becoming more integrated and interconnected with each passing day. This shift underscores the importance of embracing a "glocal" mindset—being mindful of local conditions while engaging with global perspectives. For students, particularly those enrolled in bachelor's programs, acquiring global skills is essential to thrive in our ever-evolving landscape.

At the forefront of these global competencies are the 21st-century skills—specifically problem-solving, cultural awareness, and critical thinking. Nearly all university programs recognize the significance of these skills, as they not only enhance employability but also empower graduates to excel in diverse fields, including those focusing on international contexts (Boe, 2013). Mastering these essential abilities can significantly enhance job prospects, enabling graduates to meet and exceed various employment requirements and elevate their professional performance.

As many experts assert, education must evolve to equip students with the necessary tools to navigate this complex world (Young, 2023; Soghomonyan & Karapetyan, 2023). Coupling these 21st-century skills with a major in a specific discipline creates a powerful foundation for future success. Literature, in particular, plays a vital role in developing these skills. When students engage with texts—be it a story, poem, or play—they are not just passively absorbing information; they are actively analyzing and interpreting intricate layers of meaning. Take, for example, Kate Chopin's "The Story of an Hour." Students who study this narrative are tasked with

delving into the elements of fiction, such as character, setting, and plot structure. To fully appreciate and critique the work, they must read between the lines and draw deeper insights—this intellectual exercise is made possible by the critical thinking skills cultivated throughout their education. Initially, the story may seem straightforward, but as students explore its depths, they realize its profound implications on themes of freedom and identity (Fong et al., 2016).

In conclusion, fostering 21st-century skills through literature and other disciplines not only enriches the educational experience but also prepares students to navigate the complexities of contemporary society. By honing these capabilities, they become thoughtful, informed citizens capable of making impactful contributions to their communities and the world at large.

2. Statement of the Problem

In today's evolving educational landscape, the need for students to acquire essential 21st-century skills—such as critical thinking, problem-solving, and cultural awareness—has never been more urgent (Van Laar et al., 2020). While literature has long been recognized as a powerful tool for intellectual and emotional development, its role in fostering these specific skills among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students remains underexplored. The connection between engaging with literature and developing these critical competencies is complex, yet research addressing this relationship within the context of EFL education is still limited. This study seeks to address this gap by investigating how literature can serve as a meaningful vehicle for cultivating problem-solving abilities, critical thinking, and cultural awareness in university-level EFL students majoring in Literature. In doing so, it aims to deepen our understanding of literature's

impact on modern education and its potential to prepare students for the challenges of the 21st century.

3. Significance of the Chosen Skills

Critical thinking, problem-solving, and cultural awareness are essential 21st-century skills. To prepare students for classroom, workplace, and personal success, 21st-century skills are becoming increasingly important in English and Literature education. By examining how literature fosters critical thinking, problem-solving, and cultural awareness, this research can add to the conversation on incorporating literature into the curriculum and supporting lifelong learning (Rahman, 2019). The significance of the study topic is further highlighted by the need society has for people with these skills to manage a constantly changing global environment (Alsaleh, 2020). They are necessary for flexibility, navigating a world that is becoming more complicated and linked, and encouraging well-informed decision-making in various situations. Through an analysis of the ways in which literature aids in the growth of various skills, the study offers insightful information on the overall advantages of engaging with literature.

4. Objectives of the Study

The purpose of this study is to better understand and explore how engaging with literature could enhance the critical thinking, problem-solving, and cultural awareness of EFL students. By looking into this topic, the study offers enlightening information about how literature may encourage the growth of 21st-century skills required for success in the contemporary world. The research aims to provide an in-depth exploration of how literary engagement actively contributes to the development of these crucial 21st-

century skills among EFL students, going beyond merely acknowledging the potential influence of literature.

5. Research Questions

This study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. To what extent does engagement with literature contribute to developing EFL students' critical thinking, problem-solving, and cultural awareness skills?
2. What are university EFL students' perceptions and experiences with the effect of literature on developing their critical thinking, problem-solving, and cultural awareness skills?
3. How do literature instructors view and incorporate 21st-century skills in their teaching materials and instruction?

6. Research Significance

The significance of this study is underscored by its potential impact on EFL literature teaching methods, and curriculum development. Educators can refine their instructional approaches by investigating the intricate relationship between literature and 21st-century skills. This could prepare students for the dynamic demands of the contemporary job market (Kim et al., 2019; Miller et al., 2023). This research aims to offer actionable insights for educators, potentially altering the landscape of educational approaches.

8. Limitations

This study specifically focused on three 21st-century skills: cultural awareness, critical thinking and problem solving. While there are numerous

21st-century skills essential for EFL learners, the scope of this research was limited due to time constraints. A comprehensive analysis of all these skills would require a much broader investigation, which was not feasible within the given timeframe. Therefore, this limitation should be considered when interpreting the findings, as the study does not encompass the full range of 21st-century competencies but rather provides insight into a select few. Future research could expand on this by exploring additional skills to gain a more holistic understanding of their impact on EFL university students.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Chapter Two

Literature Review

2.1. Overview

In today's educational landscape, there's a growing emphasis on equipping students with 21st-century skills essential for navigating a rapidly changing world. This literature review focuses on critical thinking, problem-solving, and cultural awareness — skills that are increasingly recognized as vital for student success (Kim et al., 2019; Thornhill-Miller et al., 2023). The review begins by defining these core competencies and outlining how they can be fostered through the study of English language and literature. It discusses key theories like Constructivist Learning Theory, which emphasizes active engagement through literature, and Critical Thinking Theory, which highlights the complexities presented in literary texts that encourage deeper analysis. A significant part of the discussion centers on how literature helps develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Engaging with complex narratives enables students to confront ethical dilemmas and think creatively about solutions (Subhash et al., 2022; Algouzi et al., 2023). Additionally, literature plays a crucial role in enhancing cultural awareness, as it introduces students to diverse perspectives and fosters empathy for different cultural experiences (Ouhiba, 2022). Overall, this review underscores the value of literature as a powerful tool for cultivating critical skills necessary for 21st-century learners, providing insights that can inform more effective teaching practices.

2.2 Critical Thinking in Literature

Critical thinking in literature refers to the ability to analyze, interpret, and evaluate texts thoughtfully. It involves active engagement with the narrative, fostering skills to question assumptions, examine meanings, and consider alternative perspectives. Literary devices, such as intricate storylines and character development, effectively challenge students to engage critically with texts. By exploring the relationships between multiple storylines and the motivations behind characters' actions, students are prompted to delve into the psychology of human behavior (Joynes, 2019). Moreover, ambiguous plots significantly enhance critical thinking, encouraging students to develop a more complex comprehension of the material (Thornhill-Miller et al., 2023). Texts with diverse narrative voices urge critical consideration of various viewpoints, allowing students to engage with their assumptions and biases. For example, works like David Mitchell's "Cloud Atlas" and Amy Tan's "The Joy Luck Club" exemplify how complex narratives foster critical engagement and deepen students' understanding of human experience and cultural dynamics (Eve, 2018; He, 2014). Additionally, postmodern literary trends, characterized by self-reflexivity and deconstruction of narrative conventions, invite critical examination of authorship and storytelling. Genres such as satire compel students to interpret intended meanings, which helps them scrutinize societal norms and issues beyond the surface—thus catalyzing critical thought (Sellars et al., 2018).

2.3 Problem-Solving in Literature

Problem-solving in literature involves identifying, analyzing, and resolving conflicts and dilemmas faced by characters. Students apply critical thinking skills to navigate obstacles, make decisions, and achieve goals within

the narrative context. Literature showcases a diverse range of problem-solving scenarios that reflect real-life challenges. Characters' struggles—whether social, personal, or fantastical—provide students with insights into human complexity and decision-making processes (Markušić & Sabljčić, 2019). Within literary narratives, students encounter decision-making dynamics that mirror real-life scenarios. The narrative theory posits that exposure to varied story structures influences individuals' approaches to problem-solving. Cognitive flexibility and adaptability emerge as key skills within these contexts, as students engage with the varied challenges characters encounter. This immersion enables students to develop creativity and innovative thought in their problem-solving approaches.

Empirical research, such as that by Bal and Veltkamp (2013), reinforces the link between literature and enhanced social cognition, suggesting that engagement with complex narratives can positively impact cognitive functions, including problem-solving. Active engagement with intricate plots encourages evaluation of characters' choices and consequences, facilitating broader cognitive skill development applicable to real-world situations.

2.4. Cultural Awareness in Literature

Literature serves as a powerful vehicle for cultural representation, providing students with insights into diverse practices, trends and perspectives. Through evocative storytelling, authors explore the richness and complexity of various cultures, thereby promoting intercultural understanding. Literary works encapsulate cultural identities, examining the interplay between personal and cultural factors while highlighting the challenges that arise from cross-cultural interactions (Thevenot, 2012; Pulimeno et al., 2020). For instance, literature vividly illustrates the struggles of protagonists navigating

dual cultural identities, offering profound insights into the immigrant experience (Ouhiba, 2022). Furthermore, literature provides a platform for investigating identity formation, emphasizing how cultural heritage influences personal relationships and life choices. Each narrative presents opportunities for students to engage deeply with cultural contexts, leading to a greater appreciation for and understanding of the complexities influencing human experiences across different cultural backgrounds (Yurtsever & Özel, 2021). By addressing themes of identity, cross-cultural relationships, and cultural practices, literary works foster a rich understanding of diversity.

In alignment with theoretical models emphasizing the necessity of developing cultural awareness, Bennett's Intercultural Awareness Model advocates that exposure to diverse cultural narratives in literature helps individuals progress through stages of sensitivity to cultural differences—from denial to adaptation and integration (Bobkina & Stefanova, 2016). Cultural Intelligence theory similarly highlights the importance of literature in cultivating cultural awareness, understanding, and behavioral flexibility. Through literature, students develop empathy by identifying with characters' experiences and emotions, enhancing their ability to appreciate differing opinions and perspectives.

Empirical studies further substantiate the transformative effects of literature on cultural awareness. Research by Towairesh (2021) illustrates how literary engagement fosters cultural consciousness, enabling individuals to navigate cultural differences and develop cross-cultural competencies such as flexibility, conflict resolution, and effective communication. Additionally, Adhikari (2019) found a correlation between reading literary fiction and higher empathy scores, indicating literature's pivotal role in expanding

students' emotional and social intelligence. Bobkina and Stefanova (2016) endorse the significance of multicultural literature in teacher education, revealing that exposure to diverse narratives enhances cultural skills critical for successful communication across cultures.

2.5. Understanding of Critical Thinking, Problem-Solving, and Cultural Awareness

Students who get literature instruction that integrates critical thinking, problem-solving, and cultural sensitivity are better equipped with the core knowledge and perspectives needed to thrive in the contemporary world. Iyer (2019) emphasizes that the main objective of promoting critical thinking in the classroom is to enhance students' analytical and critical thinking abilities. When students engage in educational practices that cultivate these abilities, they are better prepared to navigate the complexities of contemporary society and approach problems with a more critical and discriminating viewpoint. In addition to assisting students in achieving academic success, this comprehensive approach to literary education cultivates a well-rounded perspective that is critical for personal growth and success in a variety of social and professional contexts. Yu and Zin (2023) agree with Liang and Fung (2021) that theoretical knowledge and practical abilities involving critical thinking and problem-solving must be combined in order to address challenges in the actual world. For instance, conducting experiments and evaluating the results can be part of applying critical thinking to a scientific problem (Alsaleh, 2020). The simultaneous development of critical thinking and problem-solving skills could be encouraged by an all-encompassing approach to literature instruction. For example, this process can be greatly

improved by experiential learning, hands-on projects, and chances for students to apply abstract ideas to actual circumstances (Howatt & Smith, 2014). Effective collaboration involves working with university graduates from diverse cultural backgrounds, which calls for an understanding of cultural differences in order to foster positive connections.

Likewise, embracing cultural variety is essential to literature instruction. The goal of inclusive practices is to create classroom environments that respect and value the range of student identities, backgrounds, and experiences. This promotes equity in education and a sense of belonging. Culturally responsive teaching methods are being used by universities today to recognize and take advantage of the cultural resources that students engage with in the classroom (Bakay, 2022). This approach raises the relevance of literature education and enhances good learning results for students from diverse cultural backgrounds. A comprehensive literary education recognizes the importance of preparing students for diverse and intercultural contexts. Students may navigate global challenges with empathy and respect when cultural sensitivity is integrated into instructional strategies. There is a close relationship between problem-solving, critical thinking, and cultural understanding (Hazaea, 2020). In today's digitally connected world, university graduates need to critically evaluate information from a variety of sources, including those with different cultural viewpoints (Kim et al., 2019). A thorough English and literature education that integrates critical thinking, problem-solving, and cultural awareness better equips students to navigate an information-rich environment (Gong, 2023). It encourages recent college graduates to appreciate other viewpoints and take the cultural background of the subject matter into account. Furthermore, the literature's variety of points

of view encourages students to think critically and battle with opposing ideas, which provides a rich environment for problem-solving.

Students are forced to face difficult societal concerns and ethical conundrums when they come with characters from various historical or cultural origins (van Laar et al., 2020). Take, for example, the novels that give pupils a complex representation of several traditional civilizations. Students are forced to negotiate the conflict between conventional ideals and outside influences through the protagonist's perspective, which encourages critical thinking and problem-solving. By exploring the motivations of characters and interpreting symbolism, students cultivate critical thinking abilities (Wale & Bishaw, 2020). The readers are given a variety of perspectives. This promotes tolerance and a more sophisticated understanding of cultural awareness. Reading literature helps people become more empathetic and conscious of the subtle differences in other people's lives. Additionally, by focusing on employability, global citizenship, and a dedication to social responsibility, these skills help students get ready for the workforce. As a result, students who use literary exploration to develop their core 21st-century abilities—such as critical thinking, problem-solving, and cultural awareness—are better prepared to face the challenges of the contemporary world and make significant contributions to society as involved citizens and problem-solvers.

2.6. Relevance of Critical Thinking, Problem-Solving, and Cultural Awareness in the 21st-Century Learning Environment

The demand for 21st-century skills has become increasingly apparent in today's rapidly evolving world. This has prompted higher educational institutions to adapt their teaching methodologies to equip learners with the tools necessary for success in an ever-changing landscape. This shift

underscores the transformative impact of critical thinking, problem-solving, and cultural awareness, which are pivotal in personal and professional domains. Investigating the applicability of critical thinking, cultural awareness, and problem-solving in modern English and literature education reveals the theoretical value of these skills and their real-world implementation in meeting the complex needs of a globalized society (Hazaea, 2020). However, it is essential to explore how these skills manifest in practical scenarios and their significance in addressing the multifaceted challenges of a globalized society. In the modern era, where information overload is rampant, analyzing, evaluating, and synthesizing information has become indispensable. For instance, a student researching a contentious topic online requires critical thinking skills to discern credible sources from misinformation, critically evaluate arguments, and form well-reasoned opinions. This capacity empowers individuals to navigate the complexities of the digital age, and fosters informed decision-making in various facets of life, from personal choices to civic engagement.

Similarly, problem-solving skills are essential for addressing the challenges encountered in today's interconnected world. Whether devising solutions to environmental sustainability issues or navigating the complexities of cross-cultural communication in a global business context, the ability to approach problems methodically and creatively is paramount. For example, imagine a team of engineers developing renewable energy solutions. They leverage their diverse perspectives and expertise through collaborative problem-solving to design innovative technologies that mitigate environmental impact and meet societal needs. Moreover, cultural awareness is increasingly recognized as a cornerstone of success in diverse workplaces and communities (Alsaleh, 2020). In an era of globalization, individuals must

navigate cultural nuances and embrace diversity to foster inclusive environments and effective collaboration. For instance, consider a healthcare student working as an intern in a multicultural setting. Cultural awareness enables them to understand and respect diverse beliefs and practices, enhancing patient care and building trust within the community.

Critical thinking, problem-solving, and cultural awareness have grown increasingly important in response to the changing needs of the modern labor and educational system. These cognitive talents enable students to analyze information, comprehend complexities, and make sound decisions. Given the expanding variety and interconnectedness of organizations, a culturally responsive workforce is becoming increasingly important (Van Laar et al., 2020; Rahman, 2019). To satisfy these objectives, educational curricula increasingly embrace project-based learning and real-world settings. This method not only provides students with practical experience but also stimulates the application of theoretical information to real-world problems. Thornhill-Miller et al. (2023) emphasize that students must also have the skills to critically analyze the dependability, applicability, and potential biases inherent in the massive volume of information they encounter daily. To effectively cultivate these skills, educational curricula are evolving to emphasize experiential learning and real-world applications. Project-based learning, for example, immerses students in authentic, hands-on experiences that mirror the complexities of professional environments. By tackling real-world challenges, students acquire practical skills and develop a deeper understanding of how their academic knowledge translates into tangible solutions.

In summary, developing these skills by engaging with literature can play a significant role in preparing individuals for the varied demands of today's

world, where adaptability and discernment are required for success. The ability to evaluate the credibility of sources, formulate insightful questions, and recognize underlying assumptions in diverse narratives is essential for effective critical thinking. Evaluating credibility involves assessing the reliability and authority of information, an increasingly important skill in an era where misinformation is prevalent. Crafting thoughtful questions encourages deeper exploration and analysis of topics, prompting critical thinkers to look beyond surface-level information. Additionally, identifying underlying assumptions helps reveal the biases that shape narratives, allowing for a clearer understanding of differing perspectives. In a world filled with information, using good judgement helps people manage complicated situations and make well-informed decisions, improving their choices in both personal and professional life (Alsaleh, 2020).

As educational institutions become increasingly conscious of this requirement, problem-solving and critical thinking skills need to be incorporated into all subject area curricula (Sadri et al., 2019). Real-world scenarios, cooperative problem-solving activities, and project-based learning strategies are beginning to proliferate across the educational system. This change stems from the realization that these skills are critical to students' overall success because they prepare them for a world in which their capacity for creativity, adaptation, and adept handling of complex information will determine their success in both their personal and professional spheres.

The prevalence of critical thinking, cultural awareness, and problem-solving skills in contemporary society indicates their significance. These skills enable students to tackle complex problems by recognizing problems novelly, determining their underlying causes, and developing workable solutions (Algouzi et al., 2023). The capacity to think critically and solve problems

becomes essential in a culture where frequent difficulties and disruptions occur. This is especially clear when dealing with problems arising from converging different contexts and knowledge (Van Laar et al., 2020). Individuals with these skills can traverse a complex web of opportunities and challenges in diverse fields, from assessing ethical implications to optimizing potential. Furthermore, cultural awareness holds significant importance in the workplace in the current era of globalized virtual collaboration and communication. Working often involves individuals from diverse nations and cultural backgrounds. Hence, university students must be cognizant and tolerant of how people work and communicate (Hazaea, 2020). Lack of cultural awareness may lead to misinterpretations, hindering cooperative efforts and impacting cohesiveness and productivity.

2.7. Literature as a Pedagogical Tool

This review looks at the various ways that literature can be utilized to teach language learning and investigates its critical impacts on students' ability to think critically, solve problems, and be aware of different cultures. Bóbkina and Radoulska (2016) illustrate that students frequently realize the difficulties posed by complex literary works and how exploring sophisticated plots and character motives improves their ability to think critically. When students read literature, a recurring topic is cultural awareness, which broadens their perspective on civilizations and develops empathy by exposing them to various cultures, practices, and historical contexts. Integrating English and literature into language learning methodologies, such as content-based education and task-based language teaching, is beneficial and essential for fostering students' critical thinking and cultural awareness skills. The theoretical underpinnings supporting this integration highlight literature's immense value in facilitating advanced language learning. Incorporating

English and literature into language learning is a pedagogical tool for transformative learning experiences. Therefore, by nurturing critical thinking, problem-solving, and cultural awareness skills, literature plays a pivotal role in shaping well-rounded and proficient language learners capable of navigating the complexities of today's globalized world.

2.7.1. Role of Literature in Language Learning

Literature plays a pivotal role in language learning for university students by fostering linguistic proficiency through problem-solving, critical thinking, and cultural awareness skills. Literature sparks creativity and imagination, inviting students to envision vivid settings, empathize with diverse characters, and explore alternative worlds. For instance, by engaging with imaginative storytelling, students develop their creative thinking skills and broaden their horizons beyond everyday reality. Examining other viewpoints and challenging presumptions in literature dramatically enhances students' capacity for critical thought and in-depth information interpretation. For instance, in a study conducted by Khatib and Shakouri (2012) on the development of critical thinking through literature reading, it was found that students' encounters with ambiguity within literary narratives directly contributed to refining their problem-solving skills. Complex narratives and multifaceted character motivations require analytical thinking, prompting students to engage in deeper textual analysis and consider alternative perspectives. Students must delve deeper into the text by engaging with these complexities, questioning assumptions, and considering alternative perspectives. This process contributes significantly to the cultivation of critical thinking skills. This implies that problem-solving skills are developed by exposure to complex issues in literature, which also promotes adaptation and creativity (Siti et al., 2014). For instance, by examining how characters in

literature confront and resolve challenges, students gain valuable problem-solving strategies that can be applied in real-world situations. This practical toolkit derived from engagement with literature equips students with transferable skills across various contexts, from academic endeavors to professional pursuits. Students also understand how information from literature may be applied practically to real-world situations, giving them a valuable toolkit for solving problems outside fiction.

Students develop theoretical problem-solving, critical thinking, and cultural awareness skills and acquire a practical toolkit derived from their engagement with literature. This implies that the insights gained from literary analysis have tangible applications beyond the realm of fiction, equipping students with valuable skills applicable in various contexts. In students' exploration of literature, the three crucial skills of critical thinking, problem-solving, and cultural awareness emerge as focal points. Through exposure to diverse cultures, customs, and historical settings, students expand their understanding of civilizations and hone these essential skills integral to language learning. Literary works that incorporate cultural understanding are pivotal in enhancing language learning. By immersing students in the traditions, customs, and social norms of the depicted civilizations, literature contextualizes cultural nuances within the narrative framework. This cultural immersion broadens students' perspectives and equips them with the sensitivity and awareness necessary for navigating real-world encounters with finesse.

Moreover, interacting with characters from diverse backgrounds fosters empathy and deepens students' comprehension of cultural differences. By engaging with the experiences and perspectives of characters, students develop a nuanced understanding of cultural dynamics and cultivate an

unbiased outlook toward diverse cultures (Algouzi et al., 2023). Interacting with characters from diverse backgrounds cultivates empathy and a more profound comprehension of cultural awareness, promoting an unbiased perspective and attentiveness to the intricacies of diverse cultures. Literature is essential to language learning because it provides learners with real-world language situations, cultural insights, and chances for critical analysis. Literary works expose students to various vocabulary, colloquial idioms, and grammatical structures, offering a rich and genuine linguistic experience. Through exposure to language in various settings, learners can experience language's dynamic character beyond the controlled language found in textbooks. Literature has an impact beyond academic development; it shapes students' identities and feelings of global citizenship (Yeganeh & Raeesi, 2015). Students exhibit a desire to constructively contribute to a globalized society through their engagement with characters from other origins. This motivation is inspired by the cultural insights gained through literary inquiry. Literature can be viewed as a transforming tool that improves EFL students critical thinking, problem-solving, and cultural awareness skills, equipping them for the challenges of a globally interconnected and culturally diverse society.

2.8. Historical perspective on using literature in language education

There have been significant turning points in how literature has been incorporated into language instruction, each reflecting a change in pedagogical ideas and methods (Gamage, 2020). The historical viewpoint on literature's function in language instruction offers an engrossing trip through pedagogically developing approaches. Literature was crucial during the

Grammar-Translation Method's heyday in the 18th and 19th centuries, when students read classical books to comprehend grammatical principles and structures (Gamage, 2020). During this time, literature was emphasized as necessary for giving linguistic input and serving as an example of proper language usage. Literature functioned as the primary source of linguistic input, introducing students to complex and well-structured language and setting the stage for later acceptance of its importance in language instruction.

A change occurred in the early to mid-1900s when communicative language education approaches became popular. Oral communication and pattern practices were prioritized above books in the Direct Method and Audio-Lingual Method (Gamage, 2020). Nonetheless, there was a resurgence of interest in Communicative Approach literature in the late 20th Century. A resurgence of literature as a crucial element of language education has exposed students to various cultural contexts and actual language usage. This significant event recognized how literature may improve language skills and provide a more nuanced comprehension of cultural aspects. Text-based and task-based language learning gained popularity in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. This momentous occasion exposed the use of authentic materials—like literary texts—in language teaching. Literary works have developed into useful tools for language tasks, providing students with a dynamic and contextualized method of language discovery. With literature becoming a crucial component of these cutting-edge language teaching techniques, there was a clear trend towards more participatory and exciting learning experiences (Talukder, 2023).

Literature can be incorporated into language learning techniques, including task-based language teaching and content-based training, to foster critical thinking, problem-solving, and cultural awareness. Literary works

encourage students to participate in critical analysis, decipher symbolism, and consider other points of view because of their intricate storylines and varied cast of characters (Rahman, 2019). This process enhances critical thinking skills and encourages a deeper understanding of cultural contexts embedded in the texts. Literature poses linguistic challenges that call for problem-solving skills in language usage and understanding. According to Joynes (2019), interacting with individuals from other backgrounds and cultural contexts fosters empathy and enhances cultural awareness. Literature can be a valuable tool for language learners in this digital age. It offers a purposeful method for fostering the growth of critical thinking, problem-solving, and cultural awareness skills.

2.9. 21st Century Skills in the Educational Context

There is a rising recognition in the dynamic field of education of how important it is to equip students with 21st-century skills. According to Ali et al. (2022), this will adequately prepare students to meet the opportunities and difficulties of our fast-paced environment. These skills include problem-solving, critical thinking, and cultural awareness. This recognition is not confined to specific regions but has become a global commitment among educational systems in all learning institutions like universities. As Bakay (2022) notes, the value of incorporating critical thinking, problem-solving, and cultural awareness into educational frameworks is essential. With the globe becoming more interconnected, students should learn these fundamental skills. The ensuing investigation looks at the concepts and frameworks of critical thinking, problem-solving, and cultural awareness, illuminating how each contributes to giving students the self-assurance and flexibility needed to successfully negotiate the challenges of the twenty-first century.

2.10. Definition and Framework

Higher educational institutions worldwide recognize the vital need to incorporate critical 21st-century skills into their curricula, ensuring that students are well-prepared to face the complex opportunities and challenges of the twenty-first century. This move aims to cultivate well-rounded learners who possess not only subject content knowledge but also essential skills like critical thinking, problem-solving, and cultural awareness. Engaging with literary texts serves as a powerful avenue for developing these competencies. Students are encouraged to analyze and interpret complex narratives, fostering their ability to question assumptions and explore diverse perspectives. Through discussions and analyses of intricate characters and moral dilemmas, students navigate ambiguity and enhance their reasoning skills, thereby augmenting their comprehension of the world around them.

Literature instructors understand the importance of integrating these 21st-century skills within their teaching materials. They design curricula that promote critical dialogue, collaborative learning, and cultural exploration, using literature as a tool to prepare students for the global job market. This intentional focus ensures that students not only gain knowledge but also develop the essential skills required to thrive in a rapidly changing world, enhancing their readiness to engage thoughtfully in both academic and professional contexts (Kim et al., 2019). As Thornhill-Miller et al. (2023) note, engaging students' imagination facilitates the use of critical thinking, allowing students to build arguments and resolve problems creatively.

To establish a robust understanding of the theoretical framework, key terms must be clearly defined. Critical thinking involves the capacity to examine, comprehend, and assess data, fostering active engagement with

challenging stories and diverse viewpoints found in literature. Problem-solving encompasses the ability to identify, characterize, and systematically address obstacles while formulating creative solutions. Exposure to varied problem-solving situations in literary works inspires adaptability and innovative thought. Finally, cultural awareness involves appreciating and understanding the diversity of cultures, viewpoints, and experiences, thereby fostering inclusivity and enhancing intercultural communication (Heggernes, 2021; Yurtsever & Özel, 2021). These definitions form the foundation for further analysis.

2.11. Theoretical Framework: The Impact of Literature on 21st-Century Skills

The acquisition of 21st-century skills—critical thinking, problem-solving, and cultural awareness—is essential for students to navigate the complexities of a global society. Literature, as a cornerstone of English and language instruction, offers a unique setting for developing these abilities. This study utilizes three interrelated theories: Constructivist Learning Theory, Critical Thinking Theory, and Bennett's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity to comprehend how literature fosters these skills.

2.11.1. Constructivist Learning Theory

Constructivist learning, as posited by Piaget (1973) and Vygotsky (1978), suggests that students actively construct their understanding through interactions with their environment. Literature, with its rich narratives and diverse perspectives, is an ideal medium to encourage this type of active

learning. Engaging with literary texts requires students to undertake complex cognitive tasks, vital for nurturing problem-solving and critical thinking. Piaget's theory emphasizes that deeper cognitive engagement results from comprehending and synthesizing information from multiple viewpoints. Vygotsky's social constructivism highlights the significance of social interaction in learning. In literary classrooms, group projects and discussions allow students to reflect on their views while learning from peers, ultimately refining their critical thinking and problem-solving abilities in a collaborative environment.

2.11.2. Critical Thinking Theory

Critical thinking is central to 21st-century skills and is significantly developed through literature. Paul and Elder (2001) define critical thinking as systematic analysis, evaluation, and synthesis of knowledge. Through literature, students critique character motivations, recognize themes, and analyze narrative structures, fostering an environment conducive to cultivating critical thinking skills. Literary texts often present moral dilemmas and complex scenarios that challenge students to confront their preconceptions, thereby enabling them to apply critical thinking in practical problem-solving situations. The ability to analyze literature translates into broader academic and professional competencies.

2.11.3. Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS)

Bennett's (1993) Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity provides a framework to understand how literature enhances cultural awareness. This model illustrates stages from ethnocentrism, where individuals perceive their culture as superior, to ethnorelativism, where they

embrace and accommodate cultural differences. Exposure to diverse cultural narratives in literature equips students with the tools to appreciate various perspectives, thus promoting empathy and respect. Bennett asserts that literature not only facilitates cultural understanding but also prepares students for effective intercultural communication and global citizenship.

2.13. Theoretical Foundations supporting the Integration of Literature in Language Learning

The theoretical foundations supporting the integration of literature into language learning are robust and multifaceted, emphasizing the profound benefits that literature offers in enhancing language education. For instance, literature provides authentic contexts for language use, enabling students to encounter real-life dialogues, idiomatic expressions, and diverse cultural references that textbooks often lack. By engaging with narratives, students improve their vocabulary and comprehension skills as they encounter varied sentence structures and rich linguistic nuances. Additionally, analyzing stories, characters, themes, and symbolism fosters critical thinking and problem-solving abilities. For example, when students dissect a character's motivations or evaluate the impact of societal norms in a literary work, they develop the ability to analyze complex situations and draw connections to real-world issues. This analytical approach not only enhances linguistic learning but also equips students with essential skills for interpreting information and making reasoned judgments. Moreover, reading literature that explores complex moral, social, or philosophical dilemmas encourages students to consider multiple perspectives. Engaging with works that depict conflicting viewpoints on issues like justice, identity, or ethics allows learners to develop empathy and a deeper understanding of societal complexities. This

exposure enhances their critical thinking skills and fosters intellectual growth, as students learn to appreciate diverse opinions and challenge their assumptions (Subhash et al., 2022). Ultimately, the integration of literature in language learning cultivates not just language proficiency but also critical, reflective, and culturally aware individuals.

A noteworthy development in contemporary language learning is the acknowledgment of literature as a crucial element in developing critical thinking, problem-solving, and cultural awareness skills. According to Yagneh and Raeesi (2015), stronger bonds between EFL learners and the language are created by the emotional engagement that literary works elicit. Moreover, learners are more likely to retain language structures and expressions when presented in an engaging narrative since literature frequently relates to personal experiences and elicits strong emotional reactions. This emotional link makes language learning more enjoyable and durable by enhancing students' intrinsic motivation.

2.15. Conclusion

In conclusion, this review has delved into the multifaceted relationship between literature and essential 21st-century critical thinking skills, problem-solving, and cultural awareness skills. This critical engagement is further heightened by the ambiguity inherent in specific literary works, fostering a more intricate comprehension of the material. Ultimately, literature became a potent tool for cultural representation, offering deep insights into various civilizations, traditions, and points of view. This investigation demonstrates how the literature dynamic impacts the development of critical thinking, problem-solving, and cultural awareness skills, enabling university graduates and students to manage the complexity of our modern world with depth and nuance.

The identified research gap concerns the need for a comprehensive and all-encompassing study on this critical topic. While it is well acknowledged that literature plays a crucial role in developing 21st-century skills such as critical thinking, problem-solving, and cultural awareness, few comprehensive studies have systematically examined the depth and complexity of this relationship. Although some facets of the subject have been discussed in earlier publications, a thorough and focused investigation has yet to look into the nuances of how literature fosters these skills. This research attempts to close this gap by thoroughly analyzing previously published articles from academic literature and offering a sophisticated understanding of how literature improves critical thinking, problem-solving, and cultural awareness. This research aims to contribute substantially to the corpus of current knowledge by providing insightful information that can guide instructional strategies and illuminate the transforming power of literature in forming critical skills for the challenges of the twenty-first century. In the future, the process will entail a thorough analysis of previous papers from college literary courses to identify cases in which students demonstrate their proficiency in critical thinking, problem-solving, and cultural awareness. By scrutinizing students' responses, the research aims to substantiate the hypothesis that literature enhances these three essential skills. This meticulous approach provides valuable insights into the intricate relationship between literature and the development of crucial 21st-century skills.

The methodology chapter will detail the sampling, instrumentation, data collection techniques, and ethical considerations guiding the overall research design.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Chapter Three

Methodology

3.1. Overview

This chapter outlines the research methodology used to determine the impact of literature on three critical 21st-century skills—problem-solving, critical thinking, and cultural awareness. The study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining the analysis of students’ past literature papers, interviews with literature professors, and interviews with literature graduates. The analysis of 60 archived past papers from Bahraini university English departments, comprising 60 papers from a Level 4 British Novels course and 60 papers from a Level 1 Introduction to Literature course, provides a quantitative basis for evaluating the development of these skills. A standardized rubric was used to assign grades and ratings to assess students’ problem-solving, critical thinking, and cultural awareness skills. To complement this, interviews with literature professors offer expert insights into how literature courses are structured to foster these abilities, while interviews with graduates provide a firsthand perspective on their experiences and the role literature has played in shaping their competencies. This triangulated approach ensures a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted relationship between literature and the acquisition of these essential skills. This chapter further extends to providing the sampling, instrumentation, data collection, and data analysis methods, followed by ethical considerations used in the overall research design of this study.

3.2. Research Design

This study utilizes a mixed-methods approach to explore how literature contributes to developing critical 21st-century skills—specifically problem-solving, critical thinking, and cultural awareness—among EFL students in Bahrain. The quantitative aspect involves analyzing 60 literature papers from Bahraini university English departments, including 60 papers from a Level 4 British Novels course and 60 papers from a Level 1 Introduction to Literature course. A rubric is utilized to assess students' skills in problem-solving, critical thinking, and cultural awareness. Meanwhile, the qualitative component gathers insights through interviews with literature professors and students. These interviews explore how literature courses are designed to enhance these skills and how students perceive their development. This comprehensive approach allows for a nuanced understanding of the impact of literature on skill development in academic settings.

3.3. Participants and Sample Size

This study utilizes a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques to explore the impact of literature on the development of 21st-century skills. The study begins with the analysis of 60 literature papers submitted in 2024 for a Level 4 British Novels course and 60 papers for a Level 1 Introduction to Literature course within the English department at a Bahraini university. The papers were graded by three assessors, including the researcher and two independent raters, using a self-developed rubric designed to evaluate students' problem-solving, critical thinking, and cultural awareness skills. This quantitative analysis of students' past literature papers forms the first component of the study. In addition to the quantitative analysis, the study also incorporates two qualitative

methodologies. The second component involves interviews with literature professors, who provide expert insights into how literature courses are structured to foster these critical skills. Finally, the study includes interviews with literature graduates to capture their experiences and perceptions of how literature has contributed to their development of problem-solving, critical thinking, and cultural awareness. By combining these methodologies, the study ensures a triangulated approach, providing a comprehensive understanding of the role literature plays in developing essential 21st-century skills in EFL students.

3.4. Procedure of Data Collection

The data for this study was collected using a combination of assessment analysis and qualitative interviews. First, each selected literature paper was graded using predeveloped rubrics designed to measure students' problem-solving, critical thinking, and cultural awareness skills. After accessing each paper, the researcher created an Excel file to assign a specific code to each student, ensuring that the papers were deidentified and student anonymity was maintained. In addition to the rubric-based grading, data from the interviews with literature professors and students were also compiled. These qualitative data were recorded and analyzed to gain deeper insights into how literature courses and student engagement with literature contribute to the development of 21st-century skills. An Excel file was maintained throughout the data collection process to organize and store both quantitative and qualitative data. This file includes the assessment results from each of the three raters (the researcher and two independent assessors) who graded the selected student papers, as well as data from the interviews. This comprehensive dataset

facilitated the subsequent analysis of the impact of literature on students' critical skills.

3.5. Instrument

This study employs a mixed-methods approach, utilizing three self-developed rubrics and qualitative interviews to assess the impact of literature on students' 21st-century skills—specifically problem-solving, critical thinking, and cultural awareness.

3.6. Rubrics for Quantitative Analysis

The study uses three self-developed rubrics to evaluate students' skills based on their submitted literary papers. These rubrics measure problem-solving, critical thinking, and cultural awareness, with students being graded on a scale from Expert to Novice. Each rubric assesses the following competencies:

- **Problem-Solving Skills:** Evaluates the ability to identify, analyze, and resolve interpretative issues within literary texts, including identifying and understanding problems, generating solutions, evaluating and selecting the most plausible interpretations, and implementing evidence-based arguments.
- **Critical Thinking Skills:** Assesses the ability to engage deeply with texts through conceptualizing, analyzing, synthesizing, and evaluating literary works. This includes formulating clear interpretations, applying literary theories, breaking down complex literary elements, integrating insights, and evaluating critical arguments.

- **Cultural Awareness Skills:** Measures the understanding and appreciation of the cultural contexts of literary works, including awareness of historical and cultural contexts, sensitivity to cultural differences, adaptability in approach, empathy for diverse perspectives, and engagement in discussions that explore cultural diversity.

3.7. Qualitative Interviews with Professors and Graduates

In addition to the rubric-based grading, two sets of qualitative interviews provide further insights into how literature impacts the development of 21st-century skills:

- **Interviews with 7 Literature Professors:** These interviews offer expert perspectives on how literature courses are designed to cultivate problem-solving, critical thinking, and cultural awareness. Professors share their experiences, teaching methods, and observations regarding student engagement with literary texts and the development of these skills in the classroom.
- **Interviews with 15 Literature Graduates:** These interviews capture graduates' personal experiences and perceptions of how literature has contributed to their development of problem-solving, critical thinking, and cultural awareness. Graduates provide insight into how they engage with literature, their reflections on the skills they've developed, and how these skills have influenced their academic and personal growth.

3.8. Data Analysis

The quantitative data collected from the rubric-based assessments are averaged to calculate mean scores for each skill (problem-solving, critical thinking, and cultural awareness). Descriptive statistics are then used to analyze these scores and summarize student performance. The qualitative data from the interviews with professors and students are analyzed thematically to identify common patterns and insights regarding how literature contributes to the development of these skills. By combining these quantitative and qualitative approaches, the study offers a comprehensive understanding of the role of literature in fostering essential 21st-century skills.

3.9. Ethical Considerations

This study uses primary data from literary papers that students had previously submitted to the university archive, ensuring that the use of their work does not affect their grades. Permission was obtained from the university to access the archived papers, and the students' work was deidentified to protect their confidentiality. Additionally, interviews with professors and students were conducted with informed consent, ensuring that their participation was voluntary and that their anonymity was maintained. The deidentification of both the papers and interview data ensures that the study adheres to ethical guidelines while focusing on addressing the research objectives rather than evaluating individual students.

3.10. Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the research methodology used to explore the impact of literature on the development of critical 21st-century skills—

problem-solving, critical thinking, and cultural awareness—among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students. A mixed-methods approach was adopted to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the topic. The quantitative aspect of the study involved the analysis of 60 literature papers from Bahraini university students, including 60 papers from a Level 4 British Novels course and 60 papers from a Level 1 Introduction to Literature course. These papers were graded using self-developed rubrics designed to assess the targeted skills of problem-solving, critical thinking, and cultural awareness. This provided measurable data on the students' academic performance in relation to their engagement with literature. In addition to the rubric-based evaluation, qualitative data were gathered through interviews with literature professors and students. These interviews offered valuable insights into the perspectives of educators and learners, providing a richer context for understanding how literature fosters skill development beyond what is captured in written assessments. The triangulation of these three methodologies—rubric-based assessments, professor interviews, and student interviews—ensures the reliability and depth of the study's findings. The ethical considerations were rigorously addressed by obtaining permission to access archived student papers, deidentifying all data to ensure anonymity, and conducting interviews with informed consent. The methodology designed for this study allows for a well-rounded exploration of the ways in which literature contributes to the development of essential 21st-century skills, while also adhering to ethical research standards. This mixed-methods approach provides both quantitative evidence and qualitative insights, laying the groundwork for a nuanced understanding of literature's role in preparing EFL students for the challenges of the modern world.

The next chapter will present the results of the data analysis and discuss the implications of these findings in relation to existing literature.

Chapter 4: Findings

Chapter Four

Findings

4.1. Overview

This chapter presents the findings based on the grade scores provided by each assessor, supplemented by the qualitative data gathered from interviews with literature professors and students. The analysis begins with a detailed descriptive overview of the students' performance, highlighting trends in the mean grades for problem-solving, critical thinking, and cultural awareness. By integrating both the quantitative assessment of student papers and the qualitative insights from interviews, the findings offer a comprehensive understanding of how literature contributes to the development of these 21st-century skills. The chapter concludes with a summary of the results, setting the stage for a deeper discussion in the next chapter.

4.2. Analysis of Level 1 Literature Past Papers

The analysis of the Level 1 course, an introductory literature course for first-year students, reveals a concerning trend in student performance. The evaluation of 60 past literature papers shows that the mean, median, and mode scores are around 1.7, indicating that most students are performing at the novice level. The scores range from 1 to 3 and exhibit minimal variation, as evidenced by a standard deviation of approximately 0.37. These findings underscore a significant deficiency in the development of problem-solving, critical thinking, and cultural awareness skills among students at this initial stage of their literary education. Appendix D presents the mean grades calculated from problem-solving, critical thinking, and cultural awareness

scores provided by three assessors. A 5-point grading scale was used: 5 (Proficient), 4 (Expert), 3 (Intermediate), 2 (Basic), and 1 (Novice).

4.2.1. Descriptive Statistics

The statistics for problem-solving (PS), critical thinking (CT), cultural awareness (CA), and average grades indicate that students' performance is generally low, with most scores falling within the lower range of the grading scale. The mean, median, and mode for all variables approach a value of 1.7, indicating that most students are performing at the novice or basic level, with an overall score of 1.67. The coefficient of variation is also relatively low, suggesting minimal differences in student performance; the majority achieve similar scores. It is important to note that the possible scores range from the absolute minimum of 1 to higher values estimated between 2.67 and 3. However, these scores are still significantly below the maximum achievable value of 5, highlighting a substantial potential for improvement among students.

Table (1): Grading Scores

Descriptives	PS	CT	CA	Average Grades
Mean	1.73	1.76	1.71	1.73
Median	1.67	1.67	1.67	1.67
Mode	1.67	1.67	1.67	1.67
Std. Deviation	0.36	0.38	0.38	0.37
Minimum	1	1	1	1

Maximum	2.67	3	2.67	2.78
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The results for Level 1 indicate a critically low performance level, with mean, median, and mode scores averaging around 1.7. This finding suggests that the majority of students are functioning at the novice level. The scores range from 1 to 3, exhibiting minimal variation, as indicated by a standard deviation of approximately 0.37. These results highlight a significant deficiency in the advancement of problem-solving (PS), critical thinking (CT), and cultural awareness (CA) skills among the students.

Table (2): Grading Scores

Grade	Number	Percentage
Basic	14	23.33%
Novice	46	76.67%

Observations from Table 2 reveal that a significant 76.67% of students fall into the Novice category, with only 23% reaching the Basic level. This distribution underscores a troubling trend: the majority of students exhibit low competence in the assessed skills. Such findings point to the necessity for targeted interventions to enhance skill development and ensure that students have a solid foundation for their continued learning.

Figure (1): Percentage of Students' Average Grades

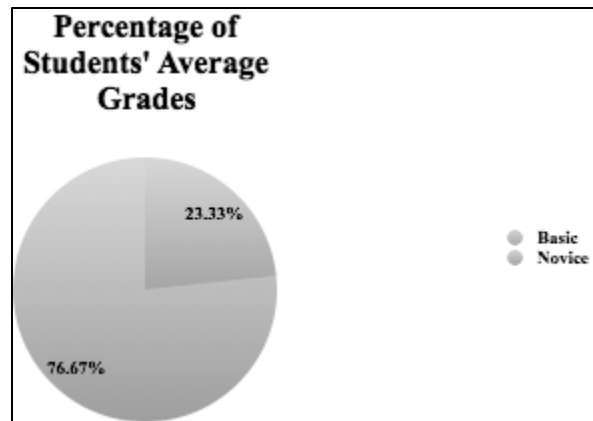


Figure 1 visually represents the distribution of various skills and average grades among Level 1 students. The data indicates that only 23.33% of learners achieved a Basic level score, while a substantial 76.67% are categorized at the Novice level. This distribution clearly illustrates that most students lack proficiency in the assessed skills, highlighting the need for increased practice and support. The stark contrast between these two groups suggests that many Level 1 learners face considerable challenges in mastering foundational skills. Additionally, issues related to content delivery or overall performance may contribute to these difficulties, particularly as students embark on their academic journey.

4.2.2. Summary of Findings

The following hypotheses are derived from the descriptive statistics and frequency table results, which indicate that overall student performance is predominantly fair to poor, with most students falling into the novice to basic levels. The mean, median, and mode scores around 1.7 for problem-solving (PS), critical thinking (CT), and cultural awareness (CA) suggest that the majority of students are at the novice level. The low standard deviations reflect minimal variation among the student population, indicating that most students

perform slightly below these averages. This finding is further reinforced by the frequency table, showing that 76.67% of students are categorized as novice, while only 23.33% are classified as basic. Very few students achieve higher scores, as evidenced by the maximum scores, which are significantly distant from the possible maximum of 5. This analysis highlights an urgent need to address the shortcomings in the classroom to enhance students' problem-solving, critical thinking, and cultural awareness skills, as more than half of the students fall below the intermediate benchmark.

4.3. Analysis of Level 4 Literature Past Papers

The evaluation of the Level 4 course, which focuses on Victorian novels for fourth-year students preparing to graduate, demonstrates markedly improved student performance. The analysis of 60 past literature papers reveals mean scores for problem-solving, critical thinking, and cultural awareness that indicate a transition to proficient and expert levels of achievement. The results reflect the development of analytical and interpretative skills gained through sustained engagement with complex literary texts. This progression illustrates the positive impact of literature study throughout their education, highlighting how deep engagement with literature substantially enhances essential 21st-century skills. Appendix E presents the mean grades calculated from problem-solving, critical thinking, and cultural awareness scores provided by three assessors. A 5-point grading scale was used: 5 (Proficient), 4 (Expert), 3 (Intermediate), 2 (Basic), and 1 (Novice).

4.3.1. Descriptive Statistics

The findings from the descriptive statistics represent three variables: problem solving (PS), critical thinking (CT), and cultural awareness (CA), and overall average grades. The mean scores for PS, CT, and CA were 4.17 (SD = 0.46), 4.27 (SD = 0.49), and 4.51 (SD = 0.43), respectively. The mean average grade was 4.23 (SD = 0.56). Similarly, median scores for PS, CT, and CA were 4.33, 4.33, and 4.67, respectively, with an overall median of 4.00. The mode values were found to be consistent with the highest frequencies for PS (Mode = 4.67), CT (Mode = 4.33), CA (Mode = 4.67), and the overall average (Mode = 4.00). The minimum values for PS, CT, and CA were 3.33, 3.33, and 3.67, respectively, with an overall minimum value of 3.00, suggesting that students scored Intermediate grade at the minimum with the maximum value being 5.00, representing Proficient grade. The findings from descriptive statistics are provided in Table 3.

Table (3): *Descriptive Statistics*

Descriptives	PS	CT	CA	Average Grades
Mean	4.16	4.26	4.51	4.23
Median	4.33	4.33	4.66	4.00
Mode	4.67	4.33	4.67	4.00
Std. Deviation	.45	.48	.43	.56
Minimum	3.33	3.33	3.67	3.00

Maximum	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00
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Table (4): *Frequency Distribution*

Grade	Number	Percentage
Intermediate	4	6.7%
Expert	38	63.3%
Proficient	18	30%

The findings presented in Table 4 reveal that, out of the 60 students surveyed, 63.3% were graded as expert in problem-solving, critical thinking, and cultural awareness. This indicates a strong level of competency in these areas among the majority of the participants. In comparison, 30% of the students achieved an proficient rating, demonstrating a higher level of mastery, while only 6.7% were graded intermediate. These results suggest that most students have a solid understanding of the key concepts, with a smaller proportion demonstrating advanced expertise.

Figure (2): *Percentage of Students' Average Grades*

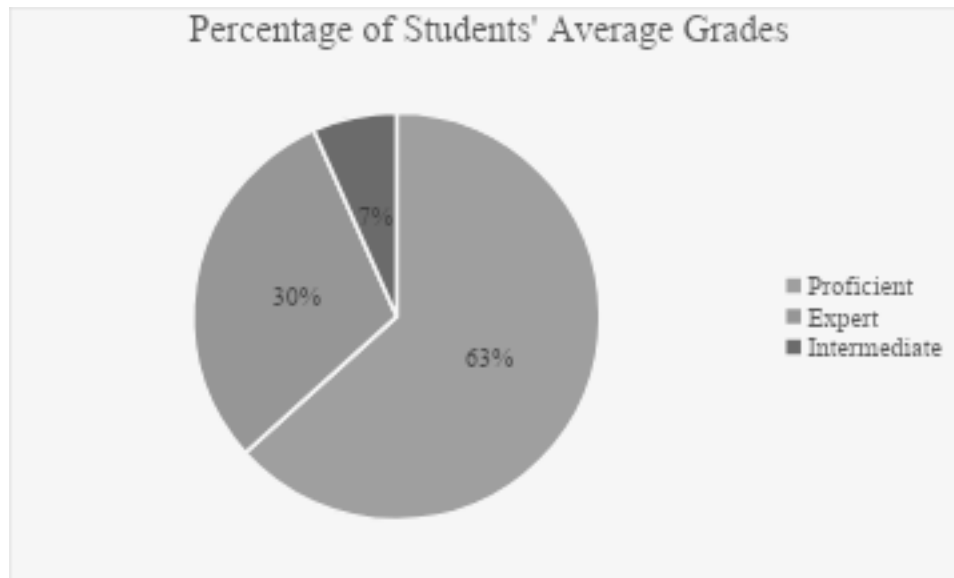


Figure 2 visually represents the distribution of student grades in problem-solving, critical thinking, and cultural awareness. The chart clearly illustrates that the majority of students (63%) were graded proficient, while a smaller percentage, 30%, reached the expert level. The intermediate category, represented by just 7% of the students, highlights that only a few individuals were in need of improvement. This graphical representation reinforces the quantitative data found in Table 3, offering a clearer understanding of the distribution of grades across the different levels of competency.

4.3.2. Summary of Findings

The overall results indicate that literature effectively contributes to developing EFL students' critical thinking, problem-solving, and cultural awareness skills. Among these skills, cultural awareness ($M = 4.51$, $SD = 0.43$) showed the highest mean, suggesting that engagement with literature had a prominent impact on enhancing students' understanding of different cultures. Similarly, critical thinking ($M = 4.27$, $SD = 0.49$) and problem-solving ($M = 4.17$, $SD = 0.47$) also indicate strong development, suggesting

that literary analysis and interpretative tasks significantly contribute to developing cognitive and analytical skills among students. All in all, the high mean scores of all the abilities, including critical thinking, problem-solving, and cultural awareness, effectively promote the development of 21st-century skills in EFL students, with cultural awareness receiving the highest impact of literature.

4.4. Comparison between Level 1 and Level 4 Past Papers

The analysis of literature examination tests, graded by three different assessors, focused on the comparison of skill development between first-year students enrolled in a Level 1 course and fourth-year students enrolled in a Level 4 course. This comparison provides a clear illustration of how engagement with literature influences the development of essential skills over time.

The outcomes of the Level 1 course revealed that the majority of students performed at low levels, with mean scores of 1.739 for problem-solving (PS), 1.767 for critical thinking (CT), and 1.711 for cultural awareness (CA). The median and mode scores for overall skill levels were 1.67, indicating that most students clustered in the novice category. The frequency analysis showed that 76.67% of students scored at the novice level, while 23.33% ranked at the basic level. These results, characterized by low mean scores and minimal variation, demonstrate that students struggled to exhibit adequate mastery of literature-related skills at the introductory level.

In contrast, the results for the Level 4 course indicated significantly improved performance. The mean scores for this group were 4.17 for PS, 4.27 for CT, and 4.51 for CA, showing that most students achieved levels ranging from proficient to expert. Correspondingly, the median and mode scores were

higher, and the standard deviation values (0.43 to 0.49) indicated less spread in the scores, suggesting greater homogeneity in skill development compared to Level 1, which exhibited considerable variation. Notably, no Level 4 students scored below the passing grade of 3, highlighting substantial improvement in skill proficiency.

The statistical comparison between the Level 1 and Level 4 datasets provides robust evidence of skill development over time. The significant increase in mean scores across all assessed skills, combined with a decrease in score variance at Level 4, underscores the positive impact of years of engagement with literature on the development of critical thinking, problem-solving, and cultural awareness. The considerable numerical differences between the two levels reinforce the correlation between the duration of study and proficiency in literature-related skills. This progression illustrates that sustained engagement with literature significantly contributes to the enhancement of 21st-century skills, affirming the importance of literature in academic curricula.

Table (5): Comparison of Mean Scores

Course level	Problem Solving	Critical Thinking	Cultural Awareness
1	Mean: 1.73	Mean: 1.76	Mean: 1.71
4	Mean: 4.17	Mean: 4.27	Mean: 4.51

Based on the mean scores of Level 1 and Level 4 students, a clear progression in 21st-century skills can be observed. Using the provided grading scale:

Table (6): Grading Scale

1 - 2.33	Low
2.34 - 3.67	Medium
3.68 - 5	High

For Level 1 students, all three skill areas—problem-solving (1.73), critical thinking (1.76), and cultural awareness (1.71)—fall within the low category. This suggests that students at the beginning of their English major have limited proficiency in these essential skills. By contrast, Level 4 students show a significant increase, with problem-solving (4.17), critical thinking (4.27), and cultural awareness (4.51) all categorized as high. This drastic improvement demonstrates that by the time students reach advanced coursework, they have developed these skills to a much stronger level.

This data serves as empirical and factual evidence that students naturally develop 21st-century skills as they engage with literature throughout their academic journey. The substantial increase in scores from Level 1 to Level 4 suggests that exposure to literary texts, analytical discussions, and critical writing assignments contribute directly to enhancing problem-solving, critical thinking, and cultural awareness. Since this pattern is consistent across all

three measured skills, it reinforces the argument that literature-based learning plays a crucial role in shaping students' intellectual and analytical abilities over time. Future research could explore how specific literary genres or teaching methodologies further influence this progression.

4.4.1 Conclusion

In conclusion, this analysis underscores the vital role that engagement with literature plays in developing essential skills among students throughout their academic journey. The marked disparity in performance between first-year and fourth-year students highlights the critical need for sustained exposure to literary studies. The Level 1 results, characterized by low mean scores in problem-solving, critical thinking, and cultural awareness, reveal that many students enter their literary education lacking fundamental skills. In contrast, the significant improvement demonstrated by Level 4 students, with high mean scores and greater homogeneity in skill levels, illustrates the transformative impact of continuous engagement with literature. The statistical findings affirm the positive correlation between the duration of study and proficiency in literature-related abilities, emphasizing that a robust literary curriculum not only enhances academic performance but also equips students with vital 21st-century skills. This research advocates for the integration of literature into educational frameworks to foster critical thinking, problem-solving, and cultural awareness, ultimately preparing students for success in an increasingly complex world.

4.5. Insights from Literature Professors

In order to understand how literature instruction contributes to the development of problem-solving, critical thinking, and cultural awareness, a

group of literature professors from universities in Bahrain were interviewed. The feedback provided by these educators revealed several key themes in their teaching methods, questioning strategies, and assessment techniques, all of which serve to nurture essential skills in their students. Their responses highlighted the intentional efforts made in literature classrooms to integrate these 21st-century competencies and the various ways they gauge student growth in these areas. Below, these themes are expanded based on their collective insights.

4.5.1. Teaching Methods

The professors identified several effective teaching methods that aim to foster critical thinking, problem-solving, and cultural awareness among students through their engagement with literature:

- **Open-Ended Questions**

One of the most commonly used techniques in these classrooms is the use of open-ended questions that encourage students to think critically about themes, characters, and narrative structures. The professors emphasized that such questions not only prompt students to delve deeper into the text but also challenge them to develop their own interpretations. By doing so, students are encouraged to look beyond surface-level readings and engage with the literature in a more thoughtful, nuanced way. This method fosters critical thinking as students are required to justify their answers with evidence from the text, encouraging a deeper understanding and analysis.

- **Group Discussions and Debates**

Another key method highlighted by the professors was the use of group discussions and debates. In these sessions, students are asked to explore different literary themes in a collaborative setting. These discussions serve as a platform for students to hear diverse perspectives, refine their own ideas, and engage in respectful dialogue—a critical skill in our increasingly multicultural world. By sharing their thoughts and listening to others, students not only improve their communication skills but also gain a deeper cultural awareness as they engage with different viewpoints.

- **Problem-Solving Activities**

Professors also design problem-solving activities rooted in literary texts, where students are tasked with exploring alternative outcomes or decisions within a story. These activities encourage students to think creatively and evaluate potential consequences. The aim is to help students practice problem-solving by considering what could have happened had characters made different choices or the plot taken an alternate direction. Such exercises challenge students to think critically about the text and its implications, applying their problem-solving skills in a literary context.

- **Projects Reflecting Cultural Perspectives**

Professors emphasized assignments that require students to analyze cultural themes within literature. For example, students may be tasked with comparing characters from different cultural backgrounds or analyzing how specific literary themes reflect societal values. These projects help students develop a broader understanding of cultural diversity, while simultaneously honing their analytical abilities. The

ability to examine literature through a cultural lens fosters empathy and awareness, encouraging students to appreciate perspectives beyond their own.

4.5.2. Questioning Strategies

The professors' questioning strategies are particularly designed to encourage deeper engagement with texts and the development of critical thinking skills:

- **Socratic Questioning**

One of the most effective methods discussed was Socratic questioning, which professors use to guide students in exploring complex ideas. This approach encourages students to engage with the material more deeply and to make connections between literature and real-world issues. By continually asking probing questions, the professors aim to stimulate independent thought and self-reflection, helping students to develop their analytical abilities and problem-solving skills.

- **Critical Thinking Prompts**

Professors noted the importance of critical thinking prompts that push students to analyze characters' motivations, predict outcomes, or deconstruct literary themes. These questions go beyond basic comprehension and require students to engage in higher-order thinking. By analyzing a character's motivations or a theme's deeper meaning, students are encouraged to develop a more sophisticated understanding of the text and enhance their ability to think critically.

- **Diversity-Focused Questions**

Another strategy the professors used involved asking questions that centered on cultural backgrounds, societal norms, or moral dilemmas within the text. These questions prompt students to consider perspectives that may differ from their own, fostering empathy and cultural awareness. By exploring the diverse worldviews presented in literature, students gain an appreciation for the complexity of different cultures and perspectives, enhancing their global awareness.

4.5.3. Assessments

A range of assessment techniques were discussed by the professors, all of which are geared toward evaluating students' growth in problem-solving, critical thinking, and cultural awareness:

- **Analytical Essays**

Analytical essays remain a cornerstone of literature assessments, as they require students to construct arguments, support them with textual evidence, and engage in in-depth analysis of literary themes. These essays challenge students to think critically and organize their thoughts in a coherent and structured manner. The professors noted that these assignments are valuable in assessing students' critical thinking skills, as they force students to examine texts through various lenses and make connections between different ideas.

- **Group Projects on Cultural Themes**

Professors also utilize group projects to assess students' cultural awareness and collaboration skills. In these projects, students may

analyze cultural symbols, explore social issues depicted in literature, or present historical contexts relevant to a particular text. These projects not only encourage teamwork but also deepen students' understanding of diverse cultural perspectives. By working collaboratively, students learn to value different viewpoints and develop their ability to engage critically with the cultural dimensions of literature.

- **Peer Assessments and Group Feedback**

Peer assessments were highlighted as a valuable tool for enhancing critical thinking. In these exercises, students evaluate each other's interpretations and provide constructive feedback. This process allows students to reflect on their own analyses while considering alternative viewpoints. It also helps students refine their critical thinking skills as they assess and critique the work of their peers.

- **Creative Assignments**

Creative assignments, such as rewriting scenes from different perspectives or imagining alternate plotlines, were mentioned as effective ways to promote problem-solving. These tasks encourage students to think creatively, explore multiple perspectives, and engage with the text in a more flexible and innovative way. Through such assignments, students not only enhance their problem-solving abilities but also their adaptability and ability to think outside the box.

- **Oral Presentations**

Oral presentations were cited as an important tool for assessing students' cultural awareness and communication skills. By presenting their interpretations of literary works, students are able to articulate complex ideas and demonstrate their understanding of cultural themes.

These presentations allow professors to assess both the depth of students' cultural insights and their ability to communicate their findings clearly and confidently.

4.6. Conclusion

The feedback from literature professors reveals a strong commitment to integrating 21st-century skills into literature instruction. Through a combination of open-ended questions, group discussions, problem-solving activities, and culturally-focused projects, these educators are not only fostering a deeper understanding of literature but also equipping students with the critical thinking, problem-solving, and cultural awareness skills necessary for success in the modern world. Their use of diverse assessment methods ensures that these skills are effectively measured and developed, providing students with the tools they need to engage with literature—and the world—more meaningfully.

4.7. Insights from Students

In order to gain a deeper understanding of how literature courses contribute to the development of 21st-century skills, interviews were conducted with a focus group of 10 graduates from the University of Bahrain, each holding a BA in English Language and Literature. These students were selected to provide reflections on their academic experiences and offer perspectives on how literature courses influenced the development of critical thinking, cultural awareness, and problem-solving skills. The following themes emerged from their feedback, revealing the impact of literature instruction on the cultivation of essential skills.

4.8. Literature Courses and 21st-Century Skills

The students provided compelling insights into the role literature plays in shaping key 21st-century skills such as critical thinking, problem-solving, and cultural awareness. Overall, the students expressed a strong belief that literature courses helped them develop these skills, though the extent varied based on teaching approaches and personal engagement with the material.

- **Critical Thinking**

Many students emphasized that literature courses helped sharpen their critical thinking skills. As one student noted, "Literature makes you think critically and problem-solve by making sense of complex ideas." Students were particularly drawn to the challenge of interpreting abstract themes, analyzing characters' motivations, and evaluating narrative structures. Poetry, in particular, was cited as an effective genre for developing critical thinking due to its figurative language and layered meanings. "You have to figure out what the author is trying to say, and that really builds critical thinking skills," one student remarked.

- **Cultural Awareness**

Another key benefit highlighted was the development of cultural awareness. Several students reflected on how reading literature from diverse cultures broadened their perspectives. One student shared, "Literature helps me understand people better... it's about relating to different cultures or perspectives." Students appreciated how literature exposed them to different lifestyles, values, and worldviews, particularly through novels, plays, and historical narratives. "Drama

shows different cultures and social backgrounds. You get to see how people interact and deal with conflicts based on their culture," one student explained, underscoring the value of drama in fostering empathy and understanding.

- **Problem-Solving**

Literature's role in developing problem-solving skills was also frequently mentioned. Through literary texts, students were able to engage with characters facing complex dilemmas, which, in turn, inspired them to think about how they might solve similar challenges in real life. "Sometimes I find myself thinking, 'How would this character deal with this problem?'" one student stated. Fictional works, in particular, were viewed as valuable for teaching problem-solving, as they often present characters navigating difficult situations and finding creative solutions.

4.8.1. The Role of Teachers and Teaching Styles

A central theme in the students' responses was the significant role teachers play in facilitating the development of 21st-century skills. While students agreed that literature courses can foster critical thinking, cultural awareness, and problem-solving, they also highlighted the impact of teaching methods in achieving these outcomes.

- **Effective Teaching Methods**

Group discussions and interactive lessons were among the most favored methods for encouraging the development of these skills. One student noted, "Group work is good because we learn from each other's

perspectives." The ability to discuss and debate literary themes with peers helped students refine their thinking and gain insights from different viewpoints. Others emphasized the importance of teacher-guided discussions, where instructors led the conversation but allowed students to explore ideas independently. "I like it when the teacher leads a bit but lets us work through things on our own. It feels more hands-on," a student explained. Such methods were seen as vital for building critical thinking and collaboration skills.

- **Teacher-Driven Focus**

While students appreciated a variety of teaching styles, there was a consensus that direct guidance from teachers was crucial in building these skills. Students expressed that some instructors were better than others at fostering a deeper understanding of literature through questioning techniques and structured activities. "Some teachers guide us to think critically by asking the right questions," a student remarked. These open-ended questions and prompts challenged students to engage with the material at a deeper level, helping them develop the analytical skills necessary for tackling complex literary texts.

- **Indirect Skill Development**

Some students also discussed the value of learning skills indirectly through literature reading and discussion. As one student mentioned, "Some teachers focus more on discussing skills directly, while others just let us discover them through reading." This kind of indirect learning, where students engage with literature and draw their own conclusions, was seen as an effective way to develop problem-solving and critical thinking. "When we're involved, we learn these

skills better," a student explained, suggesting that the active participation in literature classes enhances skill development.

4.8.2. Preferences for Teaching Approaches

Student preferences for teaching methods varied, with some favoring structured, teacher-led instruction and others preferring more student-centered approaches. However, a common thread emerged around the importance of engagement and interactivity in the learning process.

- **Group Discussions and Peer Learning**

Group discussions were consistently cited as the most effective method for engaging with the material and developing skills. These discussions allowed students to exchange ideas, challenge one another's perspectives, and collaboratively interpret complex literary themes. "We get to hear different ideas, which makes us think more critically," one student stated. In these discussions, students not only refined their ideas but also gained an appreciation for diverse viewpoints, particularly regarding cultural differences.

- **Balancing Teacher Leadership and Student Independence**

Students also expressed a preference for a balance between teacher guidance and independent exploration. While they valued teachers who encouraged critical thought and posed challenging questions, they also appreciated the freedom to interpret texts and engage in personal reflection. "Some teachers focus on discussing skills directly, while others let us discover them through reading," said one

student, indicating that both methods were important for fostering a comprehensive understanding of literature and the skills it cultivates.

4.9. Conclusion

The feedback from the student interviews highlights the significant impact of literature courses in the development of essential 21st-century skills. Through critical thinking, cultural awareness, and problem-solving activities embedded within the literature curriculum, students gained valuable insights into diverse cultures and learned to engage with complex ideas in a meaningful way. Teachers played a crucial role in facilitating this skill development through diverse teaching methods, with group discussions, teacher-guided inquiry, and independent exploration emerging as key strategies. As the students' responses demonstrate, literature not only enhances academic learning but also fosters personal growth and prepares students for success in an increasingly interconnected world.

The next chapter will discuss the findings of the study, focusing on how literature enhances critical thinking, problem-solving, and cultural awareness skills in EFL students through an analysis of assessments, interviews with graduates, and insights from professors.

Chapter Five: Discussion

Chapter Five

Discussion

5.1. Overview

This chapter presents a detailed discussion of the findings of the study, with an emphasis on how literature contributes to the development of critical thinking, problem-solving, and cultural awareness skills in EFL students. The study investigated three key research questions, each explored using different methodologies: analyzing past assessments of first and fourth year literature students to identify instances of skill development, conducting interviews with literature graduates to understand their perceptions, and interviewing literature professors to understand how 21st-century skills are incorporated into teaching materials and practices. The findings from these methodologies are discussed below, followed by a synthesis of the results with relevant literature from the review in Chapter 2.

5.2. Research Question 1: To What Extent Does Engagement with Literature Contribute to Developing EFL Students' Critical Thinking, Problem-Solving, and Cultural Awareness Skills?

Methodology: Analyzing Past Papers by Assessors

In addressing the first research question, a thorough analysis of past student assessments was undertaken to explore the degree to which engagement with literature fosters critical thinking, problem-solving, and cultural awareness. By expanding the study to include both introductory and advanced literature courses, a broader perspective on the progression of these

skills over an academic trajectory was achieved. Three independent assessors evaluated the papers, specifically seeking evidence of student engagement with these skills across different levels of study.

The results were illuminating. The study revealed a stark contrast in skill demonstration between first-year and fourth-year students. In the introductory literature course, first-year students consistently performed at the novice (1) or basic (2) levels according to the rubrics. For problem-solving, many students struggled to recognize and understand interpretative issues, generating few interpretations and requiring extensive guidance. In critical thinking, their analyses reflected limited conceptualization and evaluation skills, often providing unclear interpretations that lacked integration of critical perspectives. Cultural awareness among first-year students also fell short, with many displaying minimal knowledge of cultural contexts and rarely demonstrating sensitivity to cultural differences.

Conversely, fourth-year students showcased significantly enhanced skills across all three areas. In problem-solving, the majority reached the proficient (4) level, demonstrating a strong understanding of interpretative issues, generating multiple plausible interpretations, and constructing well-supported arguments while effectively evaluating options and reflecting on feedback. Their performances in critical thinking also predominated at the proficient (4) level, as they exhibited strong analysis, synthesis, and evaluation skills. These students provided clear, rational interpretations and effectively integrated various critical perspectives while regularly reflecting on and improving their analytical processes. In terms of cultural awareness, the advanced students demonstrated strong knowledge of cultural contexts, frequently showing sensitivity and respect for cultural differences. They

engaged empathetically in discussions of cultural matters and adapted their analytical approaches effectively.

Among the evidence, critical thinking was frequently identified in the students' nuanced ability to dissect characters' actions, assess moral choices, and critique societal constructs within the narratives. This aligns with Ennis's (1987) assertion that critical thinking involves evaluating evidence and reasoning. The literature provides ripe ground for such exploration, enabling students to exercise higher-order thinking skills as they question the motives and ethics within literary constructs.

As for problem-solving, the advanced students utilized literature as a lens through which to approach and resolve conflicts presented in the texts. Their analyses often included creative solutions to characters' challenges, showcasing their ability to apply theoretical problem-solving techniques learned throughout their studies. This supports the findings of Anaktototy (2023) and aligns with the educational theories of Piaget (1973) and Vygotsky (1978), emphasizing how literature encourages constructivist learning by prompting students to actively engage with cognitive tasks.

Cultural awareness was demonstrated as students analyzed diverse characters and settings, developing an understanding of various cultural perspectives. For example, they explored themes of inequality and cultural identity in works set in different historical or geographical contexts, highlighting their growing ability to empathize with characters from varied backgrounds. This aligns with Fikray and Habil's (2022) argument that literature provides an effective platform for engaging with cultural diversity and gaining a deeper understanding of global issues. Such engagement

promotes movement along Bennett's (1993) Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity, encouraging students to transition from an ethnocentric to a more inclusive, ethnorelative viewpoint.

In conclusion, this expanded analysis clearly illustrates the pivotal role of literature in nurturing key 21st-century skills among EFL students. From the foundational level through to advanced study, literature acts as a powerful mediator of cognitive and intercultural development, thereby preparing students to navigate complex ideas and settings beyond the classroom. This study underscores the necessity of integrating literature deeply into educational curricula to maximize its potential in skill development.

5.3. Research Question 2: What Are University EFL Students' Perceptions and Experiences with the Effect of Literature on Developing Their Critical Thinking, Problem-Solving, and Cultural Awareness Skills?

Methodology: Interviews with Literature Graduates

The second research question was addressed through interviews with literature graduates, who were asked about their perceptions of how literature has helped them develop critical thinking, problem-solving, and cultural awareness. These graduates' experiences provided valuable insights into how engagement with literature has influenced their cognitive and emotional growth.

The majority of students reported that literature played a pivotal role in shaping their critical thinking abilities. Many interviewees described how analyzing literary works forced them to question assumptions, consider

multiple perspectives, and evaluate characters' motivations. One graduate noted, "Literature made me look at life from multiple angles, questioning the why and how behind everything." This sentiment aligns with Ilyas and Afzal's (2021) assertion that literature fosters a deeper level of introspection and self-reflection, essential for critical thinking.

Problem-solving was another area where students recognized significant development. Many graduates described how literature helped them to think about challenges in more complex ways, particularly through the moral and ethical dilemmas presented in texts. One participant shared, "Literature gave me the tools to understand different ways of thinking, which helped me solve real-world problems in my professional life." This reflects the findings of Ouhiba (2022), who argues that literature provides a safe space for students to explore complex problems and think critically about potential solutions.

Cultural awareness was also a prominent theme in the interviews, with students acknowledging how literature introduced them to different cultural contexts, values, and perspectives. They highlighted specific texts that allowed them to explore issues like gender inequality, migration, and cultural conflict. For example, one graduate mentioned, "Reading literature from diverse cultures, such as *Oliver Twist*, helped me understand the challenges that people from other backgrounds face." This aligns with Kramsch's (1993) view that literature broadens students' cultural horizons, helping them develop empathy and understand global issues.

In conclusion, the interviews with literature graduates revealed that students perceived literature as a powerful tool for developing critical

thinking, problem-solving, and cultural awareness. These findings support the idea that literature provides students with essential cognitive tools that they can apply both academically and in their personal and professional lives.

5.4. Research Question 3: How Do Literature Instructors View and Incorporate 21st-Century Skills in Their Teaching Materials and Instruction?

Methodology: Interviews with Literature Professors

The third research question was addressed by interviewing literature professors to explore how they incorporate 21st-century skills, such as critical thinking, problem-solving, and cultural awareness, into their teaching materials and methods. The professors' insights provided valuable information about the practical application of these skills within the EFL classroom.

Professors expressed a strong belief in the importance of using literature to cultivate critical thinking and problem-solving skills. One professor explained, "I choose texts that challenge students to think critically about societal issues, to understand the perspectives of others, and to reflect on their own assumptions." This approach reflects Anaktototy's (2023) argument that literature can be a catalyst for cognitive engagement, pushing students to critically analyze characters' motivations and societal dynamics. Furthermore, this perspective aligns with the framework established by Paul and Elder (2001), who assert that critical thinking encompasses the analysis, evaluation, and synthesis of information in a structured manner. Together,

these insights underscore the significant role that literature plays in developing critical thinking as a foundational component of 21st-century skills.

In terms of cultural awareness, professors emphasized the significance of selecting diverse texts that expose students to a broad spectrum of cultural perspectives. One professor remarked, “Although I select stories relevant to students’ competencies, age, and preferences, I sometimes choose literature from cultures that may seem remote. This approach encourages students to reflect on how they would respond to similar situations in their own society, providing both Western and Eastern viewpoints.” This approach underlines the idea that literature not only serves to inform students about different cultures but also challenges them to consider their own responses to diverse societal issues. These insights resonate with the findings of Fikray and Habil (2022), who assert that literature is a powerful tool for enhancing cultural competence and fostering understanding in our increasingly interconnected world. By engaging with literature spanning different cultures, students are encouraged to develop empathy and a deeper appreciation of the complexities within various societal contexts.

Additionally, professors employed active learning techniques such as group discussions, critical essays, and reflective writing to help students engage with the texts on a deeper level. These methods were seen as essential for developing problem-solving skills, as they encouraged students to collaboratively explore and analyze the issues presented in the literature. These strategies resonate with Nguyen’s (2020) claim that literature promotes active engagement, which is necessary for fostering problem-solving and critical thinking.

In conclusion, literature professors demonstrated a clear commitment to integrating 21st-century skills into their teaching practices. By selecting diverse, challenging texts and using active learning methods, they successfully foster critical thinking, problem-solving, and cultural awareness among their students.

5.5. Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the findings of the study in relation to the three research questions. It has been established that literature plays a crucial role in the development of critical thinking, problem-solving, and cultural awareness skills in EFL students. Both the analysis of past assessments and the interviews with literature graduates and professors highlighted the significant impact that literature can have on students' cognitive and emotional growth. However, it is also clear that the effectiveness of literature in fostering these skills depends on careful selection of texts and the adoption of teaching methods that actively engage students. The findings suggest that literature should be viewed not only as a linguistic tool but also as a powerful medium for developing the 21st-century skills necessary for success in the modern world.

The next chapter will restate key findings and provide recommendations for future research.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

Chapter Six

Conclusions

6.1. Overview

This chapter provides a comprehensive conclusion to the study by reiterating key findings. It also highlights practical recommendations for educators and policymakers on how to enhance EFL students' critical thinking, problem-solving, and cultural awareness skills through the integration of literary works into the curriculum.

6.2. Key Findings

This study thoroughly examined the impact of literature on the development of critical thinking, problem-solving, and cultural awareness skills in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students in Bahrain. The evidence gathered reveals that literature plays a crucial role in cultivating these essential skills, which are increasingly sought after in today's globalized labor market.

A significant finding of this study is that engagement with literature markedly enhances students' cultural awareness, critical thinking, and problem-solving abilities. Analysis of 120 student papers, comprising 60 from an introductory literature course and 60 from a 19th-century Victorian literature course, reveals that literature fosters emotional engagement and empathy, leading to a deeper understanding of complex social and ethical issues. The Victorian literature course, in particular, encourages students to confront moral dilemmas and societal complexities, effectively promoting critical thinking and empathetic responses. This progression highlights the

vital role literature plays in developing essential 21st-century skills, underscoring the need for its integration into the curriculum to cultivate reflective thought and cultural sensitivity among students.

Interviews with literature graduates reinforced these findings, as they detailed how their experiences with literary works profoundly shaped their cognitive skills. They reported that literature challenged their assumptions and facilitated reflective thinking, essential components of critical thinking. The graduates' insights confirmed that literature not only fosters introspection but also enhances their understanding of diverse cultural contexts, aligning with existing academic perspectives on literature's role in broadening cultural horizons. Furthermore, insights from literature instructors highlighted their recognition of literature as a powerful tool for integrating 21st-century skills into their teaching. Professors emphasized the importance of selecting texts that provoke discussions on complex social, ethical, and cultural issues, thus employing active learning strategies that encourage critical engagement. The consensus among educators is that utilizing a diverse range of literary works can significantly enhance students' cultural awareness and adaptability—skills essential for success in the modern labor market.

In summary, this study affirms that literature is not just a medium for enjoyment; it is a vital instrument for developing critical skills necessary for navigating the challenges of contemporary society. By embracing literature in EFL education, we empower students to think critically, solve problems effectively, and engage empathetically with diverse cultures—preparing them for success in both their personal and professional lives.

6.3. Recommendations

Based on the study's findings, several practical recommendations can be made to enhance the development of critical thinking, problem-solving, and cultural awareness in EFL students through literature.

1. **Curriculum Design:** Educators should integrate a diverse range of literary works into the curriculum that explore complex ethical, moral, and cultural issues. Works from different genres and historical periods can expose students to a variety of perspectives and challenge them to think critically about the world around them (Lin, 2019). Additionally, including works that portray moral dilemmas, such as dystopian fiction, can stimulate problem-solving and ethical reflection (Pardede, 2019).
2. **Active Learning:** It is essential that educators employ active learning strategies, such as group discussions, reflective writing, and role-playing, to ensure that students actively engage with the texts. This approach can foster deeper critical reflection and enhance problem-solving skills (Anaktototy, 2023). Professors should encourage students to question assumptions, evaluate arguments, and propose solutions based on their readings.
3. **Cultural Competence:** To promote cultural awareness, educators should select literary works that depict a wide range of cultural perspectives, social contexts, and global issues. This will help students develop empathy and a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by people from different backgrounds (Isariyawat et al., 2020). Literature can serve as a bridge to foster cross-cultural communication and understanding, which is crucial in today's globalized world.
4. **Teacher Development:** Professional development programs for literature instructors should emphasize the integration of 21st-century

skills into teaching practices. Educators should be trained in using literature to foster critical thinking, problem-solving, and cultural awareness in their students. Policymakers should ensure that teachers are equipped with the necessary tools to effectively teach literary works in a way that promotes these skills.

6.4. Directions for Future Research

Future research should explore the long-term impact of literature on the development of critical thinking, problem-solving, and cultural awareness skills in EFL students. Longitudinal studies could provide more robust data on how engagement with literature influences these skills over time. Additionally, future studies could examine the role of other 21st-century skills, such as creativity and collaboration, in the context of literature. Comparative studies involving diverse student populations from various cultural and educational backgrounds could help generalize the findings and provide a more comprehensive understanding of the global applicability of literature in EFL education. Finally, exploring the relationship between student motivation, engagement, and the development of these skills would provide valuable insights for enhancing teaching strategies and curriculum design. In summary, continued exploration of these areas will deepen our understanding of literature's role in EFL education and inform more effective teaching practices to foster essential 21st-century skills in diverse learning contexts.

In conclusion, this study affirms that literature plays a vital role in developing critical thinking, problem-solving, and cultural awareness skills in EFL students. By engaging with literary works, students not only enhance their

cognitive abilities but also develop essential 21st-century skills that are increasingly demanded in today's globalized labor market. However, the integration of literature into the curriculum must be strategic and deliberate, with careful selection of texts and active teaching methods to maximize their impact on students' learning outcomes. As educators and policymakers continue to navigate the evolving educational landscape, it is imperative to recognize the transformative power of literature in shaping the next generation of critical thinkers, problem solvers, and culturally aware global citizens.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Problem-Solving Rubric

Level	Grade	Description
Expert	5	Demonstrates comprehensive understanding and insightful analysis of complex interpretative issues, generates innovative and well-supported interpretations, rigorously evaluates options, constructs coherent and persuasive arguments.
Proficient	4	Shows strong understanding and analysis of interpretative issues, generates multiple plausible interpretations, evaluates and selects options effectively, constructs well-supported arguments, and reflects on feedback to improve future analysis.
Intermediate	3	Understands and analyzes interpretative issues with some guidance, generates several potential interpretations, evaluates and selects options with support, constructs arguments with some assistance, and reflects on feedback to a limited extent.
Basic	2	Recognizes and understands interpretative issues with considerable guidance, generates a few potential interpretations, evaluates and selects options with significant support, constructs arguments with considerable assistance, and minimally reflects on feedback.
Novice	1	Struggles to recognize and understand interpretative issues, generates few if any interpretations, relies heavily on guidance for evaluation and selection, requires extensive support to construct arguments, and rarely reflects on feedback.

Appendix B: Rubric for Critical Thinking

Level	Grade	Description
Expert	5	Consistently demonstrates outstanding conceptualization, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation of literary texts. Provides clear, rational, and insightful interpretations and integrates various critical perspectives effectively. Actively reflects on and improves analytical processes.
Proficient	4	Shows strong conceptualization, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation skills. Provides clear and rational interpretations and effectively integrates critical perspectives. Regularly reflects on and improves analytical processes.
Intermediate	3	Understands and analyzes interpretative issues with some guidance, generates several potential interpretations, evaluates and selects options with support, constructs arguments with some assistance, and reflects on feedback to a limited extent.
Basic	2	Demonstrates competent conceptualization, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation skills. Provides generally clear interpretations and integrates some critical perspectives. Occasionally reflects on and improves analytical processes.
Novice	1	Struggles with conceptualization, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation skills. Provides unclear interpretations and lacks integration of critical perspectives. Rarely reflects on or improves analytical processes.

Appendix C: Rubric for Cultural Awareness

Level	Grade	Description
Expert	5	Exhibits comprehensive knowledge of cultural contexts, consistently demonstrates sensitivity and respect for cultural differences, adapts analytical approaches effectively, shows deep empathy, and actively engages in cultural discussions.
Proficient	4	Displays strong knowledge of cultural contexts, often demonstrates sensitivity and respect for cultural differences, adapts analytical approaches appropriately, shows empathy, and frequently engages in cultural discussions.
Intermediate	3	Displays some knowledge of cultural contexts, occasionally demonstrates sensitivity and respect for cultural differences, adapts analytical approaches with guidance, shows some empathy, and occasionally engages in cultural discussions.
Basic	2	Displays limited knowledge of cultural contexts, minimally demonstrates sensitivity and respect for cultural differences, struggles to adapt analytical approaches, shows limited empathy, and rarely engages in cultural discussions.
Novice	1	Lacks knowledge of cultural contexts, rarely demonstrates sensitivity or respect for cultural differences, struggles significantly to adapt analytical approaches, shows little to no empathy, and seldom engages in cultural discussions.

Appendix D: Grading Scores of Level 1 Course

No .	Researcher			Assessor 1			Assessor 2			Mean			Mean Grade
	P S	C T	C A	P S	C T	C A	P S	C T	C A	PS	CT	CA	
1	2	3	2	2	3	2	2	3	1	2	3.00	1.67	Basic
2	1	3	2	2	1	1	2	2	1	1.67	2.00	1.33	Novice
3	1	1	2	2	2	1	2	1	2	1.67	1.33	1.67	Novice
4	1	2	1	1	2	3	1	1	2	1.00	1.67	2.00	Novice
5	1	2	1	1	1	2	2	2	2	1.33	1.67	1.67	Novice
6	1	1	2	1	2	2	2	2	2	1.33	1.67	2.00	Novice
7	1	2	3	2	1	2	2	2	2	1.67	1.67	2.33	Novice
8	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	1.33	1.67	1.33	Novice
9	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	1.00	1.33	1.33	Novice
10	1	1	1	1	2	2	2	1	2	1.33	1.33	1.67	Novice
11	1	1	2	2	1	1	1	2	1	1.33	1.33	1.33	Novice
12	1	2	2	2	1	2	1	1	2	1.33	1.33	2.00	Novice

13	1	2	1	2	1	1	2	1	1	1.67	1.33	1.00	Novice
14	2	2	1	1	1	1	2	2	2	1.67	1.67	1.33	Novice
15	2	2	1	2	1	2	2	2	1	2.00	1.67	1.33	Novice
16	2	2	1	1	2	2	1	2	2	1.33	2.00	1.67	Novice
17	2	2	2	2	3	2	3	2	2	2.33	2.33	2.00	Basic
18	2	1	2	1	2	2	2	2	2	1.67	1.67	2.00	Novice
19	1	2	2	2	1	2	2	2	1	1.67	1.67	1.67	Novice
20	2	1	2	2	2	2	2	1	1	2.00	1.33	1.67	Novice
21	2	2	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	1.67	1.33	1.33	Novice
22	2	2	1	1	2	2	1	2	2	1.33	2.00	1.67	Novice
23	2	1	2	2	2	1	2	2	1	2.00	1.67	1.33	Novice
24	2	1	2	2	2	1	2	2	2	2.00	1.67	1.67	Novice
25	1	2	2	2	1	2	2	2	1	1.67	1.67	1.67	Novice
26	2	1	2	2	2	2	2	1	2	2.00	1.33	2.00	Novice
27	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	2	2	1.67	2.00	2.00	Novice
28	2	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	2.00	1.67	1.67	Novice
29	2	2	2	2	2	3	1	2	2	1.67	2.00	2.33	Basic

30	2	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2.00	1.67	2.00	Novice
31	1	1	2	2	2	1	2	2	2	1.67	1.67	1.67	Novice
32	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	1.67	2.00	2.00	Novice
33	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	2.00	2.00	1.67	Novice
34	1	2	1	2	1	2	2	2	1	1.67	1.67	1.33	Novice
35	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	1.00	1.67	1.00	Novice
36	2	1	1	1	1	2	2	2	1	1.67	1.33	1.33	Novice
37	1	2	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	1.33	1.33	1.33	Novice
38	3	2	2	2	2	1	2	1	2	2.33	1.67	1.67	Novice
39	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2.00	2.00	2.00	Basic
40	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2.00	2.00	2.00	Basic
41	2	1	2	2	1	1	1	1	2	1.67	1.00	1.67	Novice
42	1	1	1	1	2	2	2	1	1	1.33	1.33	1.33	Novice
43	3	3	3	2	2	2	3	3	2	2.67	2.67	2.33	Basic
44	2	2	2	2	1	1	1	1	2	1.67	1.33	1.67	Novice
45	2	3	3	3	2	2	2	2	1	2.33	2.33	2.00	Basic
46	2	3	2	2	2	1	2	2	2	2.00	2.33	1.67	Basic

47	2	2	2	2	3	2	2	2	3	2.00	2.33	2.33	Basic
48	2	2	2	2	3	3	2	2	3	2.00	2.33	2.67	Basic
49	2	2	2	3	2	2	2	2	2	2.33	2.00	2.00	Basic
50	2	2	3	2	2	2	2	2	2	2.00	2.00	2.33	Basic
51	1	2	1	1	2	1	2	1	1	1.33	1.67	1.00	Novice
52	1	1	2	2	2	2	1	2	2	1.33	1.67	2.00	Novice
53	2	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	1	1.67	1.33	1.00	Novice
54	2	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2.00	1.67	2.00	Novice
55	2	2	1	1	1	2	2	2	1	1.67	1.67	1.33	Novice
56	2	2	2	2	2	1	2	2	1	2.00	2.00	1.33	Novice
57	1	2	1	1	2	2	2	2	2	1.33	2.00	1.67	Novice
58	2	2	3	2	2	2	3	2	1	2.33	2.00	2.00	Basic
59	2	3	2	2	3	3	3	2	2	2.33	2.67	2.33	Basic
60	2	2	1	1	1	2	2	2	1	1.67	1.67	1.33	Novice

PS = Problem-Solving; CT = Critical Thinking; CA = Cultural Awareness

Appendix E: Grading Scores of Level 4 Course

No.	Researcher			Assessor 1			Assessor 2			Mean			Mean Grade
	PS	CT	CA	PS	CT	CA	PS	CT	CA	PS	CT	CA	
1	3	4	4	4	5	5	5	3	4	4.0	4.0	4.33	Proficient
2	4	5	5	5	4	5	4	4	3	4.3	4.3	4.33	Proficient
3	5	4	5	4	4	5	3	5	5	4.0	4.3	5.0	Proficient
4	3	4	4	4	5	5	4	3	5	3.7	4.0	4.67	Proficient
5	5	5	5	5	5	5	4	5	5	4.7	5.0	5.0	Expert
6	4	5	5	5	4	5	5	5	5	4.7	4.7	5.0	Expert
7	5	5	4	5	5	5	4	4	5	4.7	4.7	4.67	Expert
8	5	4	5	5	5	4	4	4	5	4.7	4.3	4.67	Expert
9	4	5	5	5	5	4	5	5	5	4.7	5.0	4.67	Expert
10	5	4	3	3	3	5	4	4	3	4.0	3.7	3.67	Proficient
11	4	4	3	5	4	4	3	5	5	4.0	4.3	4.0	Proficient
12	4	4	4	5	4	5	4	5	5	4.3	4.3	4.67	Proficient
13	4	4	4	3	4	4	4	3	4	3.7	3.7	4.0	Proficient
14	5	4	4	4	3	4	5	4	5	4.7	3.7	4.33	Expert

15	4	5	5	5	4	5	3	4	4	4.0	4.3	4.67	Proficient
16	4	4	5	4	3	4	3	5	4	3.7	4.0	4.33	Proficient
17	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	4	5	5.0	4.7	5.0	Expert
18	3	4	4	4	3	4	3	3	4	3.3	3.3	4.0	Intermediate
19	3	3	4	4	3	4	4	4	3	3.7	3.3	3.67	Proficient
20	4	4	5	5	5	4	4	5	5	4.3	4.7	4.67	Proficient
21	4	5	4	5	5	4	4	4	5	4.3	4.7	4.33	Proficient
22	3	4	4	4	3	5	4	5	5	3.7	4.0	4.67	Proficient
23	3	4	4	3	3	4	4	4	3	3.3	3.7	3.67	Intermediate
24	5	5	5	5	5	5	4	5	5	4.7	5.0	5.0	Expert
25	4	5	5	5	4	5	4	4	5	4.3	4.3	5.0	Proficient
26	4	4	5	5	5	5	4	5	5	4.3	4.7	5.0	Proficient
27	4	5	5	4	4	5	5	4	4	4.3	4.3	4.67	Proficient
28	4	4	5	4	5	5	3	4	4	3.7	4.3	4.67	Proficient
29	5	5	5	4	5	5	5	5	5	4.7	5.0	5.0	Expert
30	4	3	4	3	4	4	4	4	4	3.7	3.7	4.0	Proficient
31	3	4	4	4	5	5	5	3	4	4.0	4.0	4.33	Proficient
32	4	5	5	5	4	5	5	5	5	4.7	4.7	5.0	Expert

33	5	4	5	4	4	5	3	5	5	4.0	4.3	5.0	Proficient
34	5	4	5	5	5	4	4	4	5	4.7	4.3	4.67	Expert
35	4	4	3	5	4	4	3	5	5	4.0	4.3	4.0	Proficient
36	4	5	5	5	4	5	3	4	4	4.0	4.3	4.67	Proficient
37	3	4	4	4	5	5	4	3	5	3.7	4.0	4.67	Proficient
38	3	4	4	4	3	4	3	3	4	3.3	3.3	4.0	Intermediate
39	4	4	5	5	5	4	4	5	5	4.3	4.7	4.67	Proficient
40	3	4	4	4	3	5	4	5	5	3.7	4.0	4.67	Proficient
41	4	5	5	4	4	5	5	4	4	4.3	4.3	4.67	Proficient
42	4	5	5	5	4	5	4	4	3	4.3	4.3	4.33	Proficient
43	5	5	5	5	5	5	4	5	5	4.7	5.0	5.0	Expert
44	5	5	5	4	5	5	5	5	5	4.7	5.0	5.0	Expert
45	5	5	5	5	5	5	4	5	5	4.7	5.0	5.0	Expert
46	5	5	4	5	5	5	4	4	5	4.7	4.7	4.67	Expert
47	4	4	4	3	4	4	4	3	4	3.7	3.7	4.0	Proficient
48	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	4	5	5.0	4.7	5.0	Expert
49	4	4	5	5	5	5	4	5	5	4.3	4.7	5.0	Proficient
50	4	4	5	4	5	5	3	4	4	3.7	4.3	4.67	Proficient

51	4	4	5	4	3	4	3	5	4	3.7	4.0	4.33	Proficient
52	4	5	4	5	5	4	4	4	5	4.3	4.7	4.33	Proficient
53	4	5	5	5	4	5	4	4	5	4.3	4.3	5.0	Proficient
54	4	3	4	3	4	4	4	4	4	3.7	3.7	4.0	Proficient
55	4	5	5	5	5	4	5	5	5	4.7	5.0	4.67	Expert
56	5	4	3	3	3	5	4	4	3	4.0	3.7	3.67	Proficient
57	4	4	4	5	4	5	4	5	5	4.3	4.3	4.67	Proficient
58	5	4	4	4	3	4	5	4	5	4.7	3.7	4.33	Expert
59	3	3	4	4	3	4	4	4	3	3.7	3.3	3.67	Proficient
60	3	4	4	3	3	4	4	4	3	3.3	3.7	3.67	Intermediate
PS = Problem-Solving; CT = Critical Thinking; CA = Cultural Awareness													

الملخص

تتناول هذه الدراسة تأثير الأدب على تطوير المهارات الأساسية للقرن الواحد والعشرين—لا سيما حل المشكلات، والتفكير النقدي، والوعي الثقافي—بين طلاب اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في البحرين. تم استخدام منهج مختلط، حيث تم توظيف ثلاث منهجيات من أجل تحليل شامل. أظهر التقييم الكمي لـ 120 ورقة أدبية سابقة من دورات المستوى الأول والمستوى الرابع في إحدى الجامعات البحرينية تطور المهارات الخاصة بالقرن الواحد والعشرين لدى الطلاب. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، قدمت المقابلات مع أساتذة الأدب رؤى حول تصميم الدورات الذي يهدف إلى تعزيز هذه المهارات، بينما قننت المقابلات مع خريجي الأدب تصورات حول تأثير الأدب على تطورهم. تشير النتائج إلى أن الانخراط مع الأدب يعزز بشكل كبير الوعي الثقافي، والتفكير النقدي، وقدرات حل المشكلات لدى الطلاب، مما يعزز الانخراط العاطفي والحوار النقدي. يتم التأكيد على أهمية دمج المناهج لمجموعة متنوعة من الأعمال الأدبية التي تعالج قضايا أخلاقية وثقافية معقدة من خلال استراتيجيات التعلم النشط. تسلط هذه البحث الضوء على الدور الأساسي للأدب في تجهيز طلاب اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية لتجاوز تعقيدات العالم الحديث. ومع ذلك، فإن النطاق المحدود للدراسة يشير إلى الحاجة إلى مزيد من البحث لاستكشاف التداعيات الأوسع للأدب في التعليم. ستساهم دراسات إضافية ذات أحجام عينات أكبر في تعزيز تعميم النتائج والمساهمة في فهم تأثير الأدب على تطوير المهارات في سياقات تعليمية متنوعة.



جامعة البحرين

كلية الآداب

قسم اللغة الإنجليزية وآدابها

تأثير الأدب على تعزيز مهارات القرن الحادي والعشرين: حالة طلاب

الجامعات متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية

أطروحة مقدمة كجزء من متطلبات الحصول على درجة الماجستير في الدراسات التطبيقية في اللغة
الإنجليزية

إعداد

محمد جاسم قمبر

20125894

إشراف

الدكتور عبد العزيز محمد بوليلة

أستاذ مشارك

جامعة البحرين

مملكة البحرين

فبراير 2025