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Agron Iljazi[1], Verona Husejini[2], and Jehona Rexhepi Iljazi[3]

[1]University of Tetova, Faculty of Pedagogy, Tetovo, North Macedonia, https://orcid.org/0009-0000-6608-6095

[2]University of Tetova, Faculty of Pedagogy, Tetovo, North Macedonia

[3]University of Tetova, Faculty of Philology, Tetovo, North Macedonia

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Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Agron Iljazi

Email: agron.iljazi@unite.edu.mk

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Teachers' Perceptions of Educational Applications in the Development of Critical and Creative Skills of Children in Primary Education (Grades I–III)

Agron Iljazi, Verona Husejini, and Jehona Rexhepi Iljazi

Abstract

Educational applications are increasingly used in primary education, yet their pedagogical value depends on how teachers select, integrate, and guide their use. This study examined teachers' perceptions of the relationship between educational applications and the development of critical and creative skills among children in Grades I–III. A quantitative correlational design was applied with a sample of 100 lower primary school teachers from different school contexts, including urban and rural environments. Data were collected through a structured teacher questionnaire and analyzed using descriptive statistics and Pearson's correlation coefficient. The findings show statistically significant positive associations between teachers' reported use of educational applications and their perceptions of students' critical thinking ($r = .475$, $p < .001$), creativity ($r = .738$, $p < .001$), classroom engagement ($r = .626$, $p < .001$), and performance in tasks requiring critical and creative thinking ($r = .514$, $p < .001$). Teacher professional preparation and institutional support were also positively associated with perceived effectiveness of application use ($r = .562$, $p < .001$), while teaching experience showed a moderate positive relationship with strategic integration of applications ($r = .461$, $p < .001$). The study concludes that educational applications are perceived by teachers as supportive tools for higher-order thinking when used intentionally; however, the findings should be interpreted as perceived associations rather than direct evidence of impact. Recommendations include continuous teacher training, careful selection of applications aligned with learning objectives, and stronger institutional support for meaningful digital learning.

Keywords: Educational applications, critical thinking, creativity, teachers, primary education

Introduction

The rapid expansion of digital technology has changed the conditions under which children encounter information, communicate, play, and learn. In primary education, this change is especially visible through educational applications that combine images, sound, feedback, tasks, games, and learning analytics in formats accessible through computers, tablets, and mobile devices. These applications are not valuable simply because they are digital; their educational value depends on whether they are connected to clear learning objectives, whether they promote active thinking, and whether teachers use them to support meaningful interaction rather than passive screen time.

The issue became more visible during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, when online resources and digital tools entered schools and homes with greater intensity. However, the growth of digital learning also raised important pedagogical questions. International reports warn that technology in education should be used on the basis of evidence, equity, and appropriateness rather than enthusiasm alone (Global Education Monitoring Report Team, 2023). For younger learners, the central question is not only whether technology should be present in classrooms, but how it can be used in ways that protect development, support social interaction, and strengthen higher-order thinking.

Critical and creative thinking are increasingly recognized as essential competencies for contemporary education. The OECD (2024) describes creative thinking as the capacity to generate, evaluate, and improve original and diverse ideas across different contexts. Critical thinking involves analysis, interpretation, evaluation, reasoning, and the ability to make informed judgments. In lower primary education, these skills appear in age-appropriate forms, such as asking questions, comparing ideas, explaining reasons, solving simple problems, producing alternative answers, and expressing ideas through language, drawing, play, or digital tasks.

Teachers have a central role in this process. Educational applications may provide interactive environments, but they do not replace pedagogical judgment. Teachers decide which application is appropriate, how it is introduced, how students are guided during its use, and how digital activities are connected with discussion, reflection, collaboration, and assessment. In this sense, teachers function as mediators between digital resources and children's cognitive development. The effectiveness of an application therefore depends not only on its design but also on the professional competence, experience, and instructional decisions of the teacher.

Although research on digital technology in education has expanded, several limitations remain. Much of the literature discusses educational technology in broad terms or focuses on older students, higher education, or emergency online learning. Fewer studies examine how lower primary teachers perceive the relationship between educational applications and the development of critical thinking, creativity, engagement, and performance in the early grades. In addition, the literature often emphasizes the benefits of digital tools without sufficiently distinguishing between direct measured effects and teachers' classroom-based perceptions. This gap is important because teachers' perceptions influence the way digital tools are selected and integrated in everyday practice.

The present study addresses this gap by examining teachers' perceptions of educational applications in Grades I–III. The main purpose is to determine whether teachers' reported use of educational applications is positively associated with their perceptions of students' critical thinking, creativity, engagement, and performance in tasks requiring higher-order thinking. The study also explores whether teacher preparation, institutional support, and teaching experience are related to more effective pedagogical use of educational applications in lower primary education.

Literature Review and Conceptual Background

Educational applications can be understood as digital software designed to support learning through instructional content, practice activities, feedback, assessment, communication, or classroom management. They may be used for language learning, reading, mathematics, science, formative assessment, collaborative activities, or interdisciplinary learning. Their common feature is the promise of making learning more interactive, individualized, and motivating. However, recent reviews emphasize that digital technologies should be understood as pedagogical tools whose value depends on purpose, design, and use rather than on technological novelty alone (Haleem et al., 2022; Global Education Monitoring Report Team, 2023).

Studies on engagement show that digital tools can increase behavioral, emotional, and cognitive participation when they provide feedback, interaction, and opportunities for active involvement. Bond et al. (2020) mapped research on student engagement and educational technology and showed that engagement is a multidimensional construct that cannot be reduced to attention or enjoyment. This distinction is important for primary education because young learners may appear

motivated by screen-based activities even when the cognitive demand is low. Therefore, teachers must distinguish between superficial engagement and meaningful engagement that involves reasoning, explanation, collaboration, and reflection.

The development of critical thinking requires learning situations in which students examine information, identify relationships, justify answers, and reflect on their choices. Digital applications can support these processes when they include open-ended tasks, simulations, problem-solving activities, and prompts requiring students to explain how they arrived at an answer. Jonassen (2008) emphasized that meaningful learning technologies should function as cognitive tools that help students represent ideas and solve problems, rather than as tools that merely deliver information. Similarly, Chusni et al. (2021) found that e-learning environments may support critical thinking when they are linked with discovery learning and active problem solving.

Creativity in primary education is expressed through originality, flexibility, imagination, and the production of new ideas within the child's developmental level. Digital applications may stimulate creativity when they allow students to draw, design, compose, build, tell stories, explore alternative solutions, or combine different forms of expression. The OECD (2023) stresses that creativity and critical thinking must be intentionally embedded into everyday classroom activities and supported by teacher professional learning. Amrina et al. (2024) also underline the close relationship between critical thinking, creative thinking, and problem solving among elementary school students, suggesting that these skills should be addressed together rather than as isolated outcomes.

The developmental relevance of teacher-guided application use can also be understood through classical theories of child development. Piaget's constructivist theory emphasizes that children actively construct knowledge through interaction with their environment, which suggests that digital tasks should encourage exploration, manipulation, and problem solving rather than passive reception of information (Piaget, 1952). Vygotsky's sociocultural theory further highlights the importance of guided interaction and the zone of proximal development, indicating that teachers play a crucial role in helping children move from what they can do independently to what they can achieve with support (Vygotsky, 1978). From this perspective, educational applications become more valuable when they are integrated into guided classroom activities rather than used as isolated digital exercises.

Teacher digital competence is another important factor. The European Framework for the Digital Competence of Educators explains that teachers need competences related to selecting digital resources, managing teaching and learning, assessing students, empowering learners, and supporting students' digital competence (Redecker, 2017). Falloon (2020) extends this idea by arguing that teacher digital competence is not merely technical; it includes pedagogical, ethical, and developmental dimensions. Therefore, a teacher may know how to operate an application but still need support in designing activities that promote thinking, collaboration, and creativity.

The role of teachers can also be explained through the technological pedagogical content knowledge framework. Mishra and Koehler (2006) argue that effective technology integration requires the interaction of technological knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and content knowledge. This framework is relevant to the present study because educational applications become pedagogically meaningful only when they are aligned with curriculum content and appropriate teaching strategies. Teachers must therefore decide not only which application to use, but how it supports the learning objective and how students will reflect on the activity.

Institutional support also affects implementation. Schools that provide devices, internet access, professional development, technical support, and a culture of collaboration create better conditions for meaningful integration of educational applications. Without such support, teachers may use applications only occasionally or superficially. Scherer et al. (2019) showed that teachers' adoption of digital technology is influenced by perceived usefulness, ease of use, and related contextual factors. These findings suggest that individual teacher motivation is important but insufficient without supportive school conditions.

The reviewed literature indicates both potential and caution. On one hand, educational applications may support engagement, critical thinking, creativity, and problem solving when they are interactive and pedagogically purposeful. On the other hand, the literature warns against assuming that technology automatically improves learning. The main gap addressed in this study is the need for evidence on teachers' perceptions in lower primary education, where students require particularly careful guidance and where digital applications are often used in different ways across school contexts. This study therefore examines perceived relationships rather than claiming direct causal impact, and it connects application use with teacher preparation, institutional support, and teaching experience.

Methods

Research Design

The study used a quantitative correlational research design. This design was appropriate because the purpose was to examine the strength and direction of relationships between variables rather than to test the effect of an experimental intervention. The study focused on teachers' perceptions of educational application use and its relationship with students' critical thinking, creativity, engagement, and performance in learning tasks.

The research was guided by five main hypotheses. The first hypothesis stated that teachers' use of educational applications is positively related to their perceptions of students' critical thinking skills. The second hypothesis stated that the diversity and creative features of applications are positively related to teachers' perceptions of students' creativity. The third hypothesis stated that application use is positively related to perceived student engagement in classroom learning activities. The fourth hypothesis stated that the frequency of application use is positively related to perceived performance in tasks requiring critical and creative thinking. The fifth hypothesis stated that teacher professional preparation and institutional support are positively related to perceived effectiveness of educational application use. An additional analysis examined the relationship between teaching experience and the effective use of applications for developing critical and creative thinking.

Participants

The final sample consisted of 100 teachers who worked with students in Grades I–III. The participants represented different levels of professional experience, educational backgrounds, and school environments. Including teachers from both urban and rural contexts made it possible to obtain a broader picture of how educational applications are used in different classroom conditions. The sample was selected through random sampling from the available population of lower primary teachers involved in the research context.

The focus on teachers was intentional. Teachers are the professionals who plan instruction, observe students' classroom engagement, evaluate learning progress, and decide how educational applications are integrated into learning activities. Their perceptions therefore provide useful evidence about the practical role of applications in everyday teaching, while also requiring cautious interpretation because they are not direct measurements of student outcomes.

Instrument and Procedure

Data were collected through a structured teacher questionnaire. The questionnaire included demographic items, such as teaching experience, educational level, and school area, as well as Likert-scale items related to the use of educational applications, student engagement, development of critical thinking, development of creativity, perceived improvement in performance, professional preparation, and school support for technology integration.

The questionnaire was designed to capture teachers' perceptions of the relationship between application use and student development. Items were formulated in a way that reflected classroom practice. For example, teachers were asked whether they use educational applications to support critical and creative thinking, whether students show greater engagement when such applications are used, whether applications stimulate creativity, and whether they notice improvements in tasks requiring reasoning, problem solving, and creative expression.

Participants completed the questionnaire voluntarily. The data were then prepared for statistical analysis. Responses were coded and reviewed for completeness and consistency before analysis. Since the study examined relationships among variables, the analysis focused on Pearson's correlation coefficient. The significance level was reported as $p < .001$ for the main results.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed quantitatively using descriptive statistics and Pearson's correlation coefficient. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize participant characteristics and general tendencies in responses. Pearson's correlation coefficient was used to examine whether statistically significant relationships existed between teachers' reported use of educational applications and their perceptions of students' critical thinking, creativity, engagement, performance, teacher preparation, institutional support, and teaching experience.

The analysis did not aim to compare groups through t-tests or analysis of variance. Instead, it aimed to determine whether stronger or more frequent use of educational applications was associated with higher teacher perceptions of student development in the targeted areas. This approach was consistent with the correlational nature of the research questions and prevents unsupported causal claims.

Results

The results showed positive and statistically significant relationships across all main hypotheses. Because the study was based on teachers' perceptions, the findings are presented as perceived associations between educational application use and student-related outcomes. The strongest relationship was found between the creative features of applications and students' creativity as perceived by teachers, while moderate positive relationships were found for critical thinking, performance, institutional support, and teaching experience.

Table 1 presents the main correlation results for the hypotheses tested in the study.

Table 1

Pearson Correlation Results for the Main Hypotheses

Hypothesis / Analysis	Relationship Examined	R	Significance
H1	Application use and perceived critical thinking	.475	$p < .001$
H2	Creative features and perceived student creativity	.738	$p < .001$
H3	Application use and perceived student engagement	.626	$p < .001$
H4	Frequency of use and perceived performance in critical/creative tasks	.514	$p < .001$
H5	Teacher preparation/institutional support and perceived effectiveness	.562	$p < .001$
Additional analysis	Teaching experience and effective application use	.461	$p < .001$

Note. All reported correlations were statistically significant at $p < .001$.

The first hypothesis was supported. The correlation between teachers' reported use of educational applications and perceived development of students' critical thinking was moderate and positive, $r = .475$, $p < .001$. This result suggests that teachers who reported more frequent or more purposeful use of applications also tended to perceive stronger development of students' critical thinking. In practical terms, applications may be perceived as helpful when students are asked to analyze information, make choices, explain answers, or solve tasks that require reasoning.

The second hypothesis was strongly supported. The relationship between the diversity and creative features of educational applications and teachers' perceptions of students' creativity was strong and positive, $r = .738$, $p < .001$. This was the strongest relationship in the study. It indicates that applications with creative content, flexible tasks, and opportunities for expression are associated with higher teacher perceptions of students' creative development. This result is important because it suggests that the type and quality of application matter, not only the frequency of use.

The third hypothesis was also supported. The correlation between application use and perceived student engagement was strong and positive, $r = .626$, $p < .001$. Teachers reported that students were more actively engaged in classroom activities when educational applications were used. This finding suggests that digital tools can make learning more interactive and motivating, especially when they include feedback, visual support, and opportunities for participation.

The fourth hypothesis was supported by a moderate positive relationship between frequency of application use and perceived performance in tasks involving critical and creative thinking, $r = .514$, $p < .001$. This means that students who are more frequently exposed to educational applications, according to teachers' perceptions, tend to perform better in tasks that require reasoning, problem solving, and creative expression. However, the moderate strength of the relationship also indicates that frequency alone is not enough. The quality of pedagogical integration remains essential.

The fifth hypothesis was supported by a moderate positive relationship between teacher preparation, institutional support, and perceived effectiveness of application use, $r = .562$, $p < .001$. Teachers working in schools that provide support, collaboration, and resources for technology integration reported stronger perceived value of educational applications for student performance. This finding confirms the importance of school-level conditions in enabling teachers to use digital tools meaningfully.

The additional correlational analysis showed a moderate positive relationship between teaching experience and the use of educational applications for developing critical and creative thinking, $r = .461$, $p < .001$. Experienced teachers may be better able to connect digital tools with pedagogical objectives, classroom management, and students' developmental needs. At the same time, this result should not be interpreted to mean that less experienced teachers cannot use applications effectively; rather, it highlights the need for professional support and mentoring.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine teachers' perceptions of the relationship between educational applications and the development of critical and creative skills among students in lower primary education. The findings indicate that educational applications are perceived by teachers as positively associated with several important dimensions of the learning process, including students' critical thinking, creativity, engagement, and performance in tasks requiring higher-order thinking. The results also suggest that teacher preparation, institutional support, and teaching experience are related to more effective integration of digital applications into classroom practice.

The moderate positive relationship between application use and perceived critical thinking suggests that educational applications may support students' ability to analyze information, make decisions, solve problems, and engage more actively with learning content. However, this relationship should not be interpreted as evidence that technology directly develops critical thinking. Rather, the findings indicate that teachers perceive such applications as supportive when they are used purposefully and when students are guided toward reflection, comparison, reasoning, and problem solving. This interpretation is consistent with Jonassen's (2008) view that technology has greater educational value when it functions as a cognitive tool rather than a simple delivery mechanism.

The strongest relationship in the study was between the creative features of applications and students' creativity as perceived by teachers. This result is particularly meaningful because creativity is not developed through repetition alone. Applications that include open-ended tasks, design activities, storytelling, drawing, construction, or problem-solving scenarios may allow children to produce original ideas and explore alternatives. The OECD (2024) emphasizes that creative thinking includes generating, evaluating, and improving ideas. Educational applications can support these processes when they provide students with opportunities to create rather than simply consume content.

The strong positive relationship between application use and student engagement confirms that digital tools can increase participation in learning activities. Younger students often respond positively to visual, interactive, and feedback-rich environments. However, engagement should be interpreted carefully. A student may be engaged with the device but not necessarily engaged in deep learning. Therefore, teacher guidance is necessary to transform attention into meaningful learning.

Teachers should ask students to verbalize their reasoning, compare solutions, work collaboratively, and connect digital tasks with classroom discussion.

The relationship between frequency of use and perceived performance in critical and creative tasks was moderate. This suggests that repeated exposure to applications may support learning outcomes as perceived by teachers, but it also shows that frequency is not the only factor. A high-quality application used with poor pedagogical planning may have limited value, while a simple application used with purposeful questioning may produce meaningful learning. This finding supports the argument that technology should be integrated as part of instructional design rather than added as a separate activity.

The findings also highlight the importance of teacher professional preparation and institutional support. The significant positive relationship between support and perceived effectiveness indicates that teachers need more than personal motivation. They need access to digital resources, reliable infrastructure, training, collaboration, and school policies that promote meaningful use. The DigCompEdu framework similarly emphasizes that digital competence involves professional engagement, digital resources, teaching and learning, assessment, learner empowerment, and the facilitation of students' digital competence (Redecker, 2017). Falloon (2020) also stresses that digital competence includes pedagogical and developmental judgment, not only technical skill.

These findings can be compared with previous research in two ways. First, they align with studies that connect educational technology with engagement and active learning (Bond et al., 2020; Kearsley & Shneiderman, 1998). Second, they add a lower primary perspective by showing how teachers perceive the relationship between applications and early development of critical and creative skills. Unlike studies that focus mainly on digital access or general technology adoption, this study connects application use with teacher mediation, school support, and the specific competencies of critical thinking and creativity.

The role of teachers is therefore not reduced by educational applications; it becomes more complex. Teachers must evaluate digital content, protect students from inappropriate use, connect applications with curriculum goals, support collaboration, and help students reflect on what they learn. In lower primary education, this guidance is especially important because children are still developing self-regulation, attention, social skills, and independent learning habits. Technology can enrich learning, but it cannot replace the relational and pedagogical role of the teacher.

The practical contribution of the study is that it offers evidence for teachers, schools, and educational decision makers. Teachers should select applications that promote explanation, creativity, collaboration, and reflection rather than tools that only encourage repetition. Schools should support teachers through training, infrastructure, and shared planning. Policymakers should promote guidelines for age-appropriate and pedagogically meaningful use of applications in lower primary education. These recommendations are particularly important because the findings show that perceived benefits are stronger when applications are connected with professional preparation and institutional support.

Limitations and Future Research

This study has several limitations. First, the data are based on teacher perceptions rather than direct measurement of students' critical and creative thinking through standardized performance tasks. Teachers' perceptions are valuable because they reflect classroom experience, but they cannot replace direct evidence of student learning. Future studies should include direct assessments, classroom observations, student work samples, or performance-based tasks.

Second, the study used a correlational design, which means that the results indicate relationships between variables but do not prove causation. The positive relationships found in this study should therefore be interpreted as perceived associations. It cannot be concluded that educational applications alone caused improvement in students' critical thinking, creativity, engagement, or performance. Future research could use experimental or quasi-experimental designs to examine causal effects more directly.

Third, the sample included 100 teachers, which provides useful evidence but does not represent all school contexts. Future research could include larger samples, comparative analyses between urban and rural schools, and mixed-method designs involving teachers, students, and parents. Qualitative interviews and classroom observations would also help explain how teachers actually integrate educational applications and what challenges they face.

Finally, this study did not examine the effectiveness of specific applications separately. Different tools may have different pedagogical functions, such as practice, communication, collaboration, creativity, or assessment. Future studies should compare categories of educational applications and identify which types are most

useful for supporting critical thinking, creativity, engagement, and learning performance in lower primary education.

Conclusion

The study concludes that educational applications are positively associated with the development of critical and creative skills among students in Grades I–III as perceived by teachers. The findings show significant relationships with critical thinking, creativity, engagement, and performance in tasks requiring higher-order thinking. The strongest relationship was found between the creative features of applications and students' creativity, indicating that the design and pedagogical quality of digital tools are essential.

In response to the methodological nature of the study, the conclusion must be stated carefully: the research does not directly measure the impact of educational applications on students. Instead, it explores teachers' perceptions of how application use is associated with student development. This distinction is important because the correlational design and self-reported data do not allow causal claims. The findings should therefore be understood as evidence of perceived relationships that can guide future research and practice.

The study also confirms the central role of teachers. Educational applications do not automatically produce meaningful learning. Their value depends on how teachers select, explain, guide, and integrate them into the teaching process. Professional preparation, institutional support, and teaching experience all contribute to more effective use. For this reason, schools should invest in teacher training, digital infrastructure, and collaborative planning. Teachers should select applications that align with learning objectives, encourage problem solving, and give students opportunities to explain, create, and reflect.

In conclusion, technology should be viewed as a supportive pedagogical tool, not as a substitute for teachers. When used intentionally and responsibly, educational applications can enrich classroom learning and may contribute to the development of critical and creative competencies that children need for future learning and participation in society.

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Ana Koceva
Goce Delcev University, Stip, North Macedonia
https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1428-9362

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Ana Koceva,
Email: ana.koceva@ugd.edu.mk

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British English vs. American English: A Study of Learners' Perceptions, Vocabulary and Spelling Practices

Ana Koceva

Abstract

This research paper investigates the differences between British and American English by examining the learners' perception on the two standard varieties, their vocabulary acquisition, and specifically the spelling practices in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context. It represents a comparative study that includes two groups of EFL learners: secondary school students and university students. Data were collected through a mixed-format questionnaire and an in-class task. The questionnaire primarily explored learners' perception toward British and American English, as well as their beliefs on the manner of vocabulary acquisition in general. This was followed by a task designed to elicit participants' spelling preferences and usage patterns. The analysis of spelling is focused on common orthographic variations between the two English varieties. The paper aims to reveal differences in awareness, consistency and preference for vocabulary use and spelling conventions, as well as variations in the attitudes toward the two standard varieties. The findings contribute to better understanding of how EFL leaners engage with language variation and determine the role of educational context in shaping linguistic choices, offering implications for future teaching practices and teaching material design.

Keywords: EFL, spelling, British English, American English.

Introduction

Language acquisition is essentially equated with vocabulary acquisition. It is both the first phase of learning a new language and the crucial one, since it has a direct impact on the overall learner's ability to communicate effectively. Due to the high impact, the central position and the position of vocabulary as part of the teaching and the learning process of English as a Foreign language, the spelling of the words and the exposure to variation in spelling can create both opportunities and challenges for learners. Therefore, the textbook materials and teaching instructions are highly important in the presentation of new lexical items and their spelling during the EFL teaching process as part of formal education. Often, textbooks are considered as the guideline used by teachers and applied by learners, particularly for spelling conventions, since it follows one specific standard variation such as British English (BE) or American English (AE). However, more contemporary textbooks frequently include comparisons between these two variations by highlighting the key differences in specific words or the differences in the spelling of those words. Despite the relevance of the issue, research that focuses on British and American spelling conventions in North Macedonia is relatively limited. The focus is usually on proficiency and error analysis, or on the teaching strategies in relation to new vocabulary (Xhaferi, 2009; Nikolovska, 2019; Idrizi, 2020). Therefore, this study aims to analyse EFL learners' perception of vocabulary acquisition alongside the learnt spelling conventions of EFL learners in secondary and tertiary education. The primary focus of the paper is on vocabulary development with specific attention to spelling variation between British and American English. The paper seeks to raise awareness on the impact of spelling variation in EFL contexts and provide insights that will help improve future teaching practices.

Theoretical framework

The fact that English represents a global language and the most spoken foreign language around the world entails multiple variations within the language in vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation. Moreover, the long historical development of English together with the continuous borrowing from numerous other languages has further ensured that variability is inevitable part of the English language. All of these variations are especially important for learners of English as a foreign language, because they can cause confusion, ambiguities and negatively impact the learning process. Furthermore, as shown in the study by Ay and Uzun (2017),

ambiguity is present even for English teachers, whose perceptions and attitudes toward the two standard varieties and their practical use of the English language often do not correlate.

This paper focuses on the two main national varieties: British English and American English, which are often followed in educational foreign language programs. The two varieties share common grammar rules and overlap in most of the vocabulary, but there are significant differences in pronunciation and spelling. Although British and American English do not have major differences that can cause a significant miscommunication, and "speakers are generally able to comprehend one another despite the variations (Rushiti, 2024, p. 79); the orthographic conventions still create challenges for EFL learners especially in their early and intermediate stages of English instruction (Sammour-Shehadeh, et al., 2025). Moreover, even at university level students face difficulty in distinguishing American versus British English (Bylykbashi, 2025).

British English is often considered more conservative that follows older forms, while American is more contemporary and follows the latest spelling reforms and often incorporates more simplified forms. The key distinctions of spelling differences between British and American English vocabulary are detected in: word endings, vowel usage and consonant doubling.

First, word endings represent the most prominent differences between the two varieties. For example, British English retains the -our ending derived from French in words such as: *colour, honour* and *labour*, while American English uses a simplified -or ending or *color, honor, labor*. Another distinction is the -ce versus -se ending, where British English differentiates between noun and verb forms (*practice* vs *practise*), while American English has a single standardized form (*practice*). The -ise versus -ize variation further reflects this difference where -ise is the preferred variation in British English, while -ize is the accepted ending in American English. Another variety that occurs is the -re ending in British English in words such as *centre* or *metre* compared to *center* and *meter* in American English.

Secondly, there are divergences in vowel usage. British English often preserves the classical spelling using -ae or -oe diagraphs (*anaemia, manoeuvre*), whereas American English simplifies the forms and uses only one vowel such as *anemia* or *maneuver*. Also, American English frequently omits certain silent vowels or letters that are retained in British English; therefore, we have *program* vs *programme*, *catalog* vs *catalogue* etc. These changes reflect a broader tendency of American English toward orthographic economy and phonological transparency.

Thirdly, consonant related differences, especially consonant doubling, further highlight the differences in spelling rules. In British English often consonants are doubled in inflected forms such as *labelled* and *cancelled*, while in American English there is only one consonant or *labeled* and *canceled*. This notion, emphasizes the different conventions related to stress and suffixation. Additional consonant variations appear in lexical choices such as tyre or cheque in BE compared to tire and check AE.

Understanding these variations is essential for ensuring clarity, consistency and appropriateness in writing, particularly in international contexts where adherence to a specific standard is often required. Therefore, having awareness of standardized conventions will help achieve consistency in writing, specifically in international, professional and academic communication. Hence, the main aim of this study is to determine the tendencies of EFL students in Stip, North Macedonia and to check their awareness and ability to differentiate between the two above-mentioned varieties. This will contribute in future improvement of the teaching materials and the teaching process of EFL students that are part of the Goce Delcev University in Stip, North Macedonia.

Methodological framework

Research design

This study uses a quantitative comparative research method aimed at examining lexical preferences among learners of English as a foreign language with a special focus on the differences between British English and American English vocabulary. It is based on the assumption that instructional input plays a decisive role in shaping learner's lexical choices. In the analysed educational context, English teaching is based predominantly on British textbooks, which are officially prescribed by the Ministry of Education and are used in classroom practice. Accordingly, the main hypothesis is that British vocabulary is prevalent among learners of English due to the continuous exposure to British-oriented teaching materials in formal education. The main aim of the research is to empirically test this hypothesis by analysing learners' productive lexical choices and comparing them across two educational levels. More specifically, the research questions that are addressed are the following:

- Which lexical variety (British or American) is more prevalent in learners' vocabulary?
- How do learners report to learn new English vocabulary?
- Are learners able to distinguish between British and American English as two separate varieties?

These research questions are designed to examine the dominant lexical variety, and also to determine the relations among teaching instruction, informal input and learners' awareness of language variation.

Participants

The participants of the study are 120 learners of English as a foreign language with a similar proficiency level, but in different educational setting. The first group includes 60 fourth-year secondary school students in the age range between 17 and 19, enrolled at the Secondary Vocational School "Kole Nehtenin" in Stip, North Macedonia. The second group includes 60 first-year university students, aged between 19 and 21, and enrolled at the Faculty of Educational Sciences, Goce Delcev University in Stip, North Macedonia. All participants were assessed at a B1 proficiency level according to the CEFR reference for languages. The same proficiency level across the two groups served as a control variable of the linguistic competence. This allows the possible differences in lexical preference to be more reliably related to the instructional background and exposure, rather than to proficiency discrepancies. Moreover, the comparative structure of the sample enables the investigation of whether British vocabulary prevalence remains stable beyond secondary education or shifts with increased exposure to diverse input sources at the university level.

Instrument

Data was collected using a questionnaire that included two components (see appendix 1 and 2). The first part includes multiple choice and open-ended questions designed to elicit information about learners' exposure to English and their personal perception of the instructional variety. The participants responded to three multiple choice questions addressing the following:

- how do they learn new words (textbook, teacher, TV series, Internet or other);
- which variety are they currently learning and using at school/university;
- how frequently they engage with English-language content.

These questions helped determine the key factors relevant to the research, including primary input source, institutional orientation toward a specific variety and overall frequency of English exposure. Also, the participants were given the opportunity to fill out their own response for each question, if they do not agree with the listed options.

The second part was an individual written translation task that included 18 very simple sentences. Each sentence contains a target lexical item (see the full list in table 1) that represented a word with distinct forms in British and American English. The missing word was translated in brackets in Macedonian at the end of each sentence. Moreover, the words that were chosen are usually acquired in lower levels of English learning (A1 or A2) with the aim to avoid difficulties in completing the task due to proficiency level. This task was designed to measure the productive lexical knowledge and preference of the learners, rather than a passive recognition of the varieties. Responses were categorized in two groups and quantitatively measured. The initial categorization served as the primary indicator for determining which variety is prevalent in the learners' vocabulary.

Table 1

Target lexical items within the in-class task

Macedonian translation	British spelling	American spelling
боја	colour	color
чест	honour	honor
омилен	favour	favor
сосед	neighbour	neighbor
центар	centre	center
километар	kilometre	kilometer
литар	litre	liter
театар	theatre	theater
организира	organise	organize
анализира	analyse	analyze
критикува	criticise	criticize
дијалог	dialogue	dialog
каталог	catalogue	catalog
дозвола	licence	license
одбрана	defence	defense
вежба	practise	practice
програма	programme	program
сива	grey	gray

Note. Original compilation by the author based on lexical items selected from multiple English language textbooks.

Procedure

Data collection was conducted during regular lessons by the regular teachers, but with supervision of the researcher. Participants completed the questionnaire and the translation task individually and without an access to external materials or digital devices. The total completion time ranged between 20 to 30 minutes. Participation was voluntary and respondents were informed that the information will be used for academic research purposes. Also, anonymity was ensured and participants were informed that their responses will not have any influence on their academic evaluation. The complete procedure was implemented in accordance with established ethical standards for educational research.

The collected data was processed using descriptive statistics including frequencies and percentages. Then comparative analysis was applied to identify the differences between the two sample groups. Finally, relations between the different types of acquired data was analysed and determined. Overall, the questionnaire ensured uniform administration across participants, while the careful selection of the words helped strengthen content validity. Furthermore, the integration of controlled elicitation with self-reported data provided a good systematic basis for testing the main hypothesis.

Results & Analysis

This study investigated learner's perceptions of the type of English they are acquiring, focusing on two groups: fourth-year secondary school students and first-year university students. The analysis starts by focusing on the first part of the questionnaire, which includes the written answers by the participants in relation to vocabulary acquisition and the target English variation. Hence, the results show notable differences between the two groups. In the group of secondary school students, 23 responded that they believe they are learning American English, while 17 identified British English as the target variety. In addition, 17 students reported that they did not know which variety they were learning, and small number of students (3) indicated that they are learning both varieties. These findings suggest that although there is some awareness of both English varieties, perceptions remain divided with a slight tendency toward identifying American English as the dominant form. In contrast, the responses from the university students reveal a different pattern. Only 8 students identified American English as the variety they are learning, while a considerably higher number (23 students) selected British

English. However, uncertainty remains prominent since there are 23 students that do not know what variety they are learning and an additional 6 believe they are learning both. Herein, this distribution shows that although more university students recognize British English as the instructional model, a substantial proportion are still unsure about the variety they are exposed to.

Furthermore, the answers in the anonymous questionnaire reveal that the Internet is the primary source of vocabulary acquisition for both groups. A large number of participants reported learning new words through online platforms, social media and television, which provide frequent and varied exposure to English. Unfortunately, results indicate that teachers and textbooks have a minimal role in vocabulary learning, suggesting that formal instruction is perceived as less influential than informal exposure. In relation to the question regarding exposure to English content, most participants expressed that they engage with English often, very often or on a daily basis. The exact percentages per group are presented in table 2 below. This exposure occurs outside the classroom and is largely driven by digital media consumption. Hence, these findings suggest that students' vocabulary development is strongly shaped by informal learning environments rather than structured educational contexts.

Table 2

Frequency of English exposure outside school/faculty

	Never	rarely	sometimes	often	daily
Secondary school students	5%	15%	2%	34%	44%
University students	0	20%	4%	46%	30%

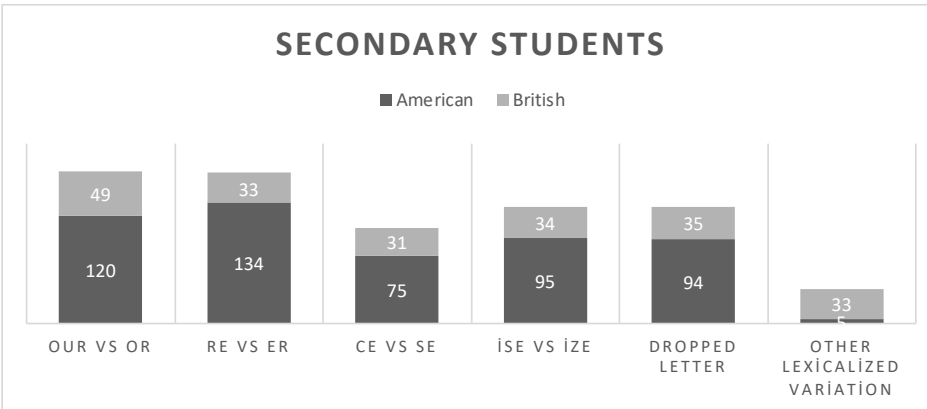
Note. Authors' own quantitative analysis based on the collected data.

The second part of the questionnaire includes a compilation of 18 sentences that students were required to complete by filling in a missing word, with its translation in Macedonian provided in brackets. The purpose of the task was to elicit specific lexical items representing the main spelling contrasts between American English and British English. The selected words cover all previously identified categories of variation. The design of the task ensured that students' responses would provide measurable evidence of their preference for either American or British spelling conventions. Hence, the results from secondary school students (see table 3) show a clear tendency toward American English forms across most categories. In -our vs – or distinction, students produced 120 American forms compared to 49 British

forms. A similar pattern is evident in -re vs -er category with 134 American forms and only 33 British forms, as well as in -ce vs -se, and -ise vs – ize. The dropped letter category again reflects the trend of American forms (94) compared to British forms (35). However, in the last category, which includes other variations (such as grey vs. gray, and program vs. programme), British forms (33) outnumber the American ones (5) suggesting that in less regular and more lexicalized cases, students may rely more heavily on forms encountered in formal instruction.

Table 3

Spelling tendencies of secondary school students

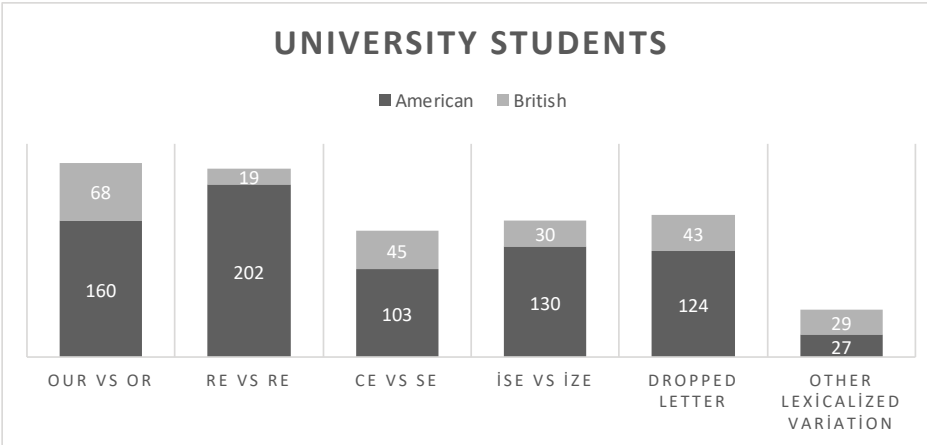


Note. Authors' own analysis based on the collected data.

The results from the group of university students (see table 4) show shared tendencies. In all major categories, American English forms are even more dominant than in the previous group of students. For instance, in -our vs -or category, university students produce 160 American and 68 British forms. Also, the difference is particularly striking in the -re vs -er category, where 202 American forms were recognized against only 19 British forms. Similar patterns and frequencies are observed with the other categories: -ce vs se, -ise vs -ize and the dropped letter forms. However, unlike the group of secondary students, university students show a balance in the 'other variation' category with 27 American and 29 British forms, indicating a more mixed usage in less systematic cases.

Table 4

Spelling tendencies of university students



Note. Authors' own analysis based on the collected data.

From an analytical perspective, the comparison between the two groups reveals a consistent dominance of American English spelling, despite both groups use textbooks following British norms. This suggests that factors beyond formal instruction play a significant role in shaping learners' written production. Exposure to global media, digital communication and online resources, where American English is highly prevalent probably contributes to this preference.

Furthermore, the data indicates a developmental trend: as students' progress from secondary school to faculty, their use of American forms not only persists, but becomes pronounced. This might be due to increased exposure to authentic American English input, as well as greater engagement with international and digital environments. Simultaneously, the persistence of the British forms in certain categories, suggests that classroom instruction still exerts some influence, especially in cases that rely more on memorization than on general spelling rules.

Discussion

The findings of the study reveal a complex interaction between learners' exposure to British and American English and their actual language use. Despite the fact that formal and institutional instruction as well as teaching materials are based on British rules and norms, both secondary school and university students show a strong preference for American English spelling rules. This discrepancy highlights

a gap between pedagogical input and learner output, which suggests that formal instruction is not the only, nor the primary source of influence on students' linguistic choices. This notion is also confirmed through the students' perception of teachers as playing a relatively minor role in their vocabulary development, despite regular English instruction in formal educational settings. Furthermore, the limited awareness of English varieties suggests a gap in EFL instruction, as students may use different lexical items from different varieties without understanding the contextual or cultural difference. One possible cause for the lack of clarity and the presence of ambiguity might be the comparative UK and USA examples that are included in the official textbooks. Although the main aim is to raise awareness of variation, which was highlighted in previous research (Bikelienė, 2015), the materials may also blur the distinctions between the two varieties if they are not accompanied by explicit instruction.

In contrast, the findings confirm the strong reliance on informal, media-based sources for vocabulary acquisition among both groups of EFL leaners, which correlates with previous studies (Nikolovska, 2011). Moreover, the dominance of Internet-based learning reflects broader changes in language exposure patterns and highlights the growth of learner autonomy. Research shows (Putri et al., 2026) that the use of online applications such as Duolingo contributes substantially to vocabulary development.

The prevalence of American spelling aligns with participants' media consumption habits and supports previous research that confirms significant influence of media exposure on lexical choices. Although both groups of EFL learners favour the American spelling, this tendency significantly stronger among university students, who have higher frequencies of AE in nearly all categories. This suggests a developmental trend in which increased exposure to English through academic materials, online content etc. reinforces the American norms over time. Therefore, learners do not align toward the prescribed British standards, but continuously move further away from it. However, British English is not entirely absent form learners' competence. For example, in the category of 'other variations', where spelling differences are less systematic and more dependent on individual lexical items, the British forms appear more frequently, especially for secondary school students. This indicates that formal instruction stills plays a role in shaping learners' language competence, and this role can be improved and reinforced through teaching material and curriculum changes. Moreover, the need for more explicit instruction and additional instruction is consistent with previous research (Koceva et al., 2023;

Koceva et al., 2024) focused on British vs. American variation in the language of EFL learners in North Macedonia.

These findings have several implications for EFL teaching. First, they emphasize the importance of explicitly addressing language varieties in the classroom. Regardless of what the intended mode is or what the target variety is, the distinctions between British and American forms should be clearly communicated and reinforced through instructional teaching materials. Secondly, educators need to recognize learners' extensive exposure to multiple varieties outside the classroom and adopt a flexible approach, which will encourage awareness and appropriateness rather than rigid adherence toward a single standard. Incorporating discussion about English as a global language and its variability during classes can only help learners and improve their learning process.

Despite its contributions, the study also has a few limitations. First, the sample size is relatively small and the focus on only two groups in specific educational context limits the generalizability of the findings. Therefore, future research is needed to expand the scope by including larger and more diverse sample, as well as additional methods for data collection. However, the present study will still greatly contribute as both quantitative and qualitative analysis on real language use by EFL learners in North Macedonia.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the paper demonstrates that learners' use of English as a foreign language is shaped by a complex interaction of formal instruction, informal exposure and individual linguistic awareness. Vocabulary is primarily acquired through informal exposure, particularly via the Internet and the digital media, rather than through teacher and classroom instruction. British English is the official teaching model and remains the formal teaching standard; however, American English clearly dominates in practise and learners have a significant tendency toward American English spelling conventions. Herein, the paper confirms the discrepancy between the intended instructional model and the actual student output. Since awareness of British and American differences remains limited, there is need for major changes in the teaching process and the teaching materials in North Macedonia. Teachers should put greater attention to raising learners' awareness of the British and the American English variety by increasing the number of activities and including more explicit instruction. Moreover, incorporating the students' learning preferences

into the teaching practise may help bridge the gap between formal education and informal language exposure.

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Aurelija Daukšaitė-Kolpakovienė

1Vytautas Magnus University, Kaunas, Lithuania

https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5710-6629

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Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Aurelija Daukšaitė-Kolpakovienė.

Email: aurelija.dauksaite-kolpakoviene@vdu.lt

BALKAN JOURNALS

Multimodal Resources for Learning English as a Foreign Language Outside the Classroom: Insights from Lithuanian University Students

Aurelija Daukšaitė-Kolpakovienė

Abstract

This study aimed to reveal Lithuanian university students' views on the use of multimodal resources for learning English as a foreign language. An anonymous online questionnaire, including open-ended and closed-ended questions, was administered to upper-intermediate and advanced-level students to collect data. The data were analysed using quantitative and qualitative methods and, at times, compared across the two student groups when views differed greatly. The findings suggest that the use of multimodal resources significantly helps English skill improvement, as close to half of all the participants emphasised that they improve vocabulary and reading skills, and moderately enhance grammar and writing skills this way. They see multimodal resources as motivating, engaging, and effective. In fact, videos are seen as effective by half of the study participants, but moderately effective are these: music, podcasts, interactive games, online platforms with interactive tasks, social media, and online dictionaries. It is also important to note that students' experience of using such resources has individual differences, and upper-intermediate students find the use of multimodal resources challenging and have accessibility-related issues. Although the findings should be viewed in light of some limitations, they can help EFL teachers to gain insight, improve their multimodal pedagogies and make students' learning more effective by using the multimodal resources they identify as the most useful.

Keywords: EFL, language skills and competences, multimodality, student preferences, university students

Introduction

Nowadays, foreign language learning is easier than ever before. This is a rather bold statement to make, but we have to agree that the development of technologies and the Internet connection in numerous devices that people own has made everything easier and more accessible. Language learning is not an exception. It is possible to study a language in a formal institution classroom or outside of a classroom (non-formally) using a variety of resources, most of which are available in digital formats. Even though "multimodality" involves the study of fonts, colours, pictures, and other features of texts, it also encompasses a variety of modes or resources, which is the focus of this paper. In particular, it dedicates attention to and aims to learn about university students' views on multimodal resources for learning English as a foreign language in the Lithuanian context. These include music, podcasts, social media, interactive games, online platforms of all sorts, online dictionaries, and other possible resources. Thus, the study of this paper is driven by the following research question: What are Lithuanian university students' views on the use of multimodal resources for learning English as a foreign language? However, first of all, the next two sections will discuss the concept of multimodality in more detail and prior studies on multimodality in the EFL context.

Concept of Multimodality

Multimodality, as a term, meaning five communicative modes, covering "linguistic, visual, spatial, aural, and gestural" to make and convey meaning, was introduced by the New London Group in the 1990s (Brosseuk & Downes, 2024, p. 318). At that time, printed paper formats (e.g. books) were the primary focus of descriptions of multimodality, but later, all sorts of digital formats came into play, since their popularity in various spheres of life started growing steadily. As a result, contemporary definitions of multimodality have been influenced by this transition from traditional to electronic formats and now often involve information and communication technologies as one of the main modes. Heberle (2010, p. 102) suggests the following definition of multimodality: "the knowledge and use of language concerning the visual, gestural, audio and spatial dimensions of communication, including computer-mediated communication." Lim et al. (2023) state that technologies have provided more ways of meaning-making, in addition to language, which has led to the so-called multimodal turn in multiple areas, including education in general and language teaching and learning in particular. At present, the

literature focusing on multimodal approaches in teaching emphasises that multimodality is the use of diverse modes and even semiotic signs (Masinde et al., 2023), which means that multimodality is not only about modes anymore, and teachers, as well as other specialists, "may resort to a variety of resources" (Denizci, 2022, p. 417) to reach particular aims. Jakobsen and Tønnessen (2018) explain that classroom practices are related to the world outside the classroom, which is indeed very multimodal. Since our world is surrounded by multimodality, our classrooms could and should reflect it, too, by making it an integral part. Thus, the use of multimodality can be seen as "an alternative to the traditional methods" (Masinde et al., 2023, p. 95) and a holistic approach to teaching a variety of skills and competences (D'Andrea, 2010). Educators can manipulate multiple modes for numerous pedagogical reasons (Denizci, 2022), for instance, to scaffold or in other ways support learning (Jakobsen & Tønnessen, 2018). In such a case, multimodality is also about communication, digital literacy and the development of necessary skills and competences by including authentic content related to the use of information and communication technologies (ICT) (Lim et al., 2022).

As far as the teaching of foreign languages is concerned, the use of multiple modes may be more or less common depending on the context and the language in question. For instance, English classrooms may use multimodal resources all the time to teach and engage students (Putri et al., 2024), while German classrooms may not see multimodality as an integral part of the courses taught (Ugagu-Dominic, 2021). In general, in contemporary classrooms, it is natural for teachers to use technologies just as they use PowerPoint presentations or audio recordings, but what is important is that "learning is more effective when information is presented in more than one mode" (Rodgers, 2019, p. 6).

Multimodality descriptions frequently mention technologies, which can rightly be seen as an important part of multimodal teaching practices in contemporary classrooms, no matter whether these are foreign language or other study subject classes. Just like in real life, students need to be able to "view, share, design, and produce multimodal texts" (Brosseuk & Downes 2024, p. 317) or other forms (e.g. videos), manipulate the forms, adjust them to make them more understandable, etc. (Guichon & McLornan, 2008). These online communication-related skills have become common in people's personal and professional lives (Rodgers, 2019; Ugagu-Dominic, 2021) and classrooms with students being taught face-to-face or online, especially during and after the pandemic.

Similarly, Jakobsen and Tønnessen (2018) suggest that students should not limit themselves to using multimodal resources provided by the teacher in the classroom but also create them (e.g. multimodal texts) or find and use them outside the classroom to continue improving or practising their skills and competences. Nevertheless, as Cárdenas-Claros et al. (2023) point out, current literature on multimodality in language teaching and learning has hardly investigated how teachers choose multimodal resources to integrate in their language classrooms and the factors that influence the use and combination of multiple modes. It does not focus on student preferences for and experiences related to the choice and use of multimodal resources in the EFL context either. This paper will focus on the latter gap in research, but will discuss some prior studies and their findings first.

Findings of Prior Studies

Multimodality has been found to have a positive effect on students' grades, since students have varied learning styles, and the utilisation of the same materials in different modes helps to choose the one that is the most effective and serves their needs (Masinde et al., 2023). Masinde et al. (2023) have also shown that, in primary education, multimodal approaches help with EFL students' listening and speaking skills and their active participation when compared to the use of only one mode, such as a textbook, for all students and classroom activities.

Similar conclusions were reached by Putri et al. (2024), who found that students benefit from the utilisation of more than one mode (e.g. films, pictures, interactive tasks, etc.) for meaning-making when they have differing learning styles, which, at the same time, makes their educational experience better. However, it may be difficult for teachers to find suitable materials in particular languages (e.g. French; Cousinard, 2022), and the materials the teachers can find may not be inclusive or appropriate in terms of culture, or financial aid may be necessary to obtain the necessary materials (Cárdenas-Claros et al., 2023). Masinde et al. (2023) discovered that even though EFL teachers see numerous advantages of multimodal approaches, they are not motivated to use them in their teaching due to the mentioned and other difficulties, such as technological ones, and time constraints that cause challenges in the implementation of multimodal teaching and learning (Putri et al., 2024).

Multimodality in vocabulary teaching has become very popular in recent years (Cárdenas-Claros et al., 2023). Some interesting results in this area can be found in Yu and Liu's (2022) study, which has revealed that multimodal input motivates and interests students in language learning contexts, but in terms of effectiveness in vocabulary learning, not all modes seem to work in the same way. For instance, when a picture is provided first rather than a translation while learning new vocabulary, it helps with vocabulary retention better (but not all words can be presented with pictures). This means that even the order in which different modes are introduced in a language classroom could be significant, although both of the mentioned modes have a positive effect on their own, too. In addition, Yu and Liu (2022) noted that the text-first approach was better for vocabulary review. Thus, it is a good idea for teachers (and students outside the classroom) to choose varying modes not only because of varying student learning styles but also because of the aims of particular activities that they do. A different study that interviewed second language teachers in a global context (half of the participants were teachers of English to whom English was a native language) noticed that the teachers chose particular modes in their teaching based on their students' needs and aims and their own experience while teaching and/ or learning (Cárdenas-Claros et al., 2023).

In the context of Ukrainian higher education (Fedorenko & Kravchenko, 2023), which would probably be geographically the closest to that of Lithuania, which the study to be reported later dealt with, it was revealed that the use of such multimodal resources as videos, websites and others to learn English for specific purposes (ESP) was mostly seen as entertaining (52%). Fewer students believed it was enlightening and thought-provoking, but the results were not much lower (42% and 49%, respectively). In general, multimodality in ESP courses was perceived as motivating and attracting student attention, but more as entertainment rather than serious learning. Thus, it is important to choose multimodal resources very carefully so that they are used strategically for learning purposes rather than for entertainment in the classroom.

Aryana et al. (2022) found that some multimodal resources are more favourable to EFL students (in Indonesia) than others. For instance, the EFL students were not in favour of music as a resource in higher education, while videos, texts and images were seen as preferable ones. In addition, a combination of different modes was seen as having a positive effect on active student participation (Aryana et al., 2022) and communication of knowledge of a second or foreign language (Morell & Pastor Cesteros, 2018). Moreover, Elmiana (2019) noted that the use of images engages

and motivates students while at the same time reducing their mental load, which makes learning easier. The upcoming parts of the paper will focus on Lithuanian students' preferences and experiences using multimodal resources for learning English.

Methodology

The study used an anonymous questionnaire as a *research tool* that was administered to EFL students at Vytautas Magnus University (VMU) in Lithuania. Based on the literature review, the questionnaire was created online on *Google Forms* and divided into two parts: the first one was on demographic information of the participants (3 closed-ended questions), and the second one involved eight closed-ended (multiple-choice and multiple-choice grid) and three open-ended questions on multimodality in the EFL context. The data were analysed using MS Excel, thematic analysis and at times a comparative approach (*methods*) to discuss very different findings among two groups of participants.

The *participants* were selected randomly through classes of English as a foreign language. Two EFL classes were approached: one of upper-intermediate level general English (B2) and one advanced level (C1/C2, EAP course) class. The former one had 24 students, while the second one was not full and had only 13 students at the time of the study (37 students in total). Both of these classes were taught by the same teacher. However, the students were asked to reflect on their overall experience, rather than the one related to these classes. The students participated voluntarily.

The following *procedure* was adopted: the students were introduced to the topic of the study and the questionnaire and invited to participate during one of their classes (with the permission of their teacher). They filled out the questionnaire using their mobile phones or laptop computers through a link posted on Moodle. It took them ten to fifteen minutes to complete the questionnaire. The analysed data were presented to the students during the last week of classes of that semester.

One of the main *limitations* of this small-scale study is the rather limited number of students and the unequal number of students in the two classes. As a result, the paper does not always employ the comparative approach with respect to the findings (only when the results differ between the two groups). It usually treats the participants as one group of students studying English as a foreign language, despite their differing levels of proficiency.

Results and Discussion

As indicated above, the first part of the questionnaire included three questions on the participants' demographic information, such as age, gender, and year of study, to learn about the context in which the study should be placed. An average study participant was 19 years old (60%). Others were slightly younger (11%) or older: 20 – 19%, 21 – 5% and 22 or older – 5%. The majority of study participants were female students of English as a foreign language (almost 76%). The proportions of genders differed in the classes of the two levels of English, but this was accidental, as VMU students register for their classes themselves by choosing a teacher, class time and location where the class takes place. The classes that were involved in the study were taught by the same teacher, at the same location, in the mornings, four times a week. The students could have studied (most probably did, although this information was not collected) lower levels of English with other EFL teachers. However, the study did not specifically focus on their experience studying English as a foreign language at the university level but rather on their overall general views, preferences and experiences related to learning English as a foreign language and the use of multimodal tools for this purpose.

The absolute majority of the students (94.6%) in both English classes were first-year students. As the study took place in spring, it means both groups of students were studying at the university for the second semester. Only 5.4% were second-year students. These must have started their English studies at university at either pre-intermediate (A2) or intermediate (B1) level, as VMU students study levels of English (as defined by the CEFR) based on their high school grades, the score of the state school-leaving examination and the placement test result received upon enrolment at university. As emphasised by the university study regulations, the students need to achieve an advanced level (C1 or C1/C2) proficiency within the first two years of their bachelor studies.

Table 1 presents the most frequently used multimodal tools to learn English as indicated by the study participants. The numbers show how many students chose the provided answers, but the percentage is not counted, since the numbers are rather small, and no clear standing-out tendencies can be revealed. On the other hand, some of the highest numbers have been highlighted for clarity.

Table 1

The most frequently used multimodal tools for learning English

	Slides	Videos	Music	Podcasts	Interactive games	Online platforms with i nteractive exercises	Social media	Online dictionaries with audio/ visual features
Never	3	5	9	10	10	**13**	8	8
Rarely	8	4	5	8	**14**	8	4	**12**
Sometimes	**16**	9	4	10	7	8	3	6
Often	6	**11**	4	5	5	5	6	6
Very often	4	8	**15**	1	1	1	**16**	5

Note. The table was created by the author of this article

The students sometimes learn English from PowerPoint or other slides, probably provided and demonstrated in class by the teacher of English. These may include grammar rules, exercises and other materials gathered in one place. However, if the numbers of the two groups of participants are considered separately, which is not reflected in the table, there are quite a few differences in the frequency of use of certain multimodal resources. For instance, advanced students mostly learn through videos, while upper-intermediate ones learn through social media. In addition, advanced students rarely learn through music, which is not the case for upper-intermediate students, whose answers are well reflected in Table 1 (they learn through music very often). In general, both participant groups rarely or never learn English through interactive games, online platforms and online dictionaries. Moreover, podcasts are moderately frequently used. Some of these findings are in line with the study by Aryana et al. (2022) that revealed that EFL students in higher education are not in favour of using music as a multimodal resource, while videos are among the most preferred resources.

In terms of the effectiveness of multimodal resources for learning English, the responses are widely distributed as well (Table 2). Since the numbers are quite low in every category, the percentages are not counted, but the highest numbers are highlighted in bold for discussion purposes.

Table 2

The most effective multimodal resources for learning English

	Videos	Music	Podcasts	Interactive games	Online platforms with interactive exercises	Social media	Online dictionaries with audio/visual features
Not effective	1	4	6	6	1	3	1
Slightly effective	1	6	3	5	2	5	7
Moderately effective	9	10	**11**	**11**	**11**	**14**	**13**
Quite effective	9	8	7	10	**12**	6	6
Very effective	**17**	9	10	5	**11**	9	**11**

Note. The table was created by the author of this article

Videos seem to be very effective for close to half of all study participants. This is probably the reason why they are often chosen, as discussed above. However, all the other types of multimodal resources that were listed in the questionnaire, namely music, podcasts, interactive games, online platforms with interactive tasks, social media, and online dictionaries, are moderately effective. Table 1 earlier demonstrated that quite some students use music and social media very often to learn English, but as Table 2 shows, these multimodal resources are only moderately effective. Thus, it may be that these multimodal resources are used for other primary reasons, such as enjoyment, engaging content and others, rather than learning English, but some linguistic skills and competences may be acquired at the same time, too.

When the learners of English were specifically asked about their skill improvement with multimodal resources outside the classroom, the responses varied greatly, but some numbers that stand out in Table 3 are highlighted (the percentages were not counted).

Table 3

The use of multimodal resources and language skill improvement

	Vocabulary	**Grammar**	**Pronunciation**	**Listening**	**Speaking**	**Reading**	**Writing**
Not at all	1	3	1	2	1	2	3
Slightly	3	6	7	3	8	5	8
Moderately	11	**16**	7	9	11	6	**18**
Significantly	**16**	12	9	11	11	**17**	6
Greatly	6	0	13	12	6	7	2

Note. The table was created by the author of this article

Close to half of the respondents significantly improve their vocabulary and reading, while they moderately enhance their grammar and writing skills through multimodal resources. Fewer students significantly or greatly improve their grammar, listening and speaking skills. On the other hand, if the categories of "significantly" and "greatly" are put into one to narrow down the number of categories, vocabulary, pronunciation, listening, and reading skills would be those that are mostly improved with the use of multimodal resources. These are in line with the findings about videos being very effective for learning English. Videos often involve all of these linguistic skills and competences (reading can be practised if transcriptions are used). Prior studies revealed that listening, vocabulary and other skills and competences can successfully be improved (in- and out-of-class) with multimodal resources (Cárdenas-Claros et al., 2023; Masinde et al., 2023). Using videos is one way of doing that, but at the same time, learners can develop a great number of other skills (e.g., critical thinking) and 21st-century competences (Rodgers, 2019).

Similarly to the study by Fedorenko & Kravchenko (2023), Lithuanian university students agree or strongly agree that multimodal resources are more motivating for learning English compared to traditional methods. However, if the responses of the two participant groups are contrasted (not reflected in Figure 4), the proportions differ greatly: 53.8% of advanced students and 37.5% of upper intermediate agree with this idea, while 15.4% and 29.2% respectively strongly agree. Yu and Liu (2022) have revealed that multimodal input not only motivates but also interests students. In the present study, it is interesting to note that among upper-intermediate students, there was none who would disagree or strongly disagree, whereas

7.7% of advanced students disagreed that multimodal tools motivate more than traditional teaching and learning methods.

Interestingly, 46% see the learning of English with multimodal tools as quite engaging and 21% as very engaging. However, 3% noted that such tools and resources are not engaging at all, and 30% marked moderate engagement. If the findings in the two participant groups are compared, some differences can be observed. 41.7% of upper-intermediate students see such multimodal resources as quite engaging, compared to 53.8% among advanced students. This means that, in general, a higher number of advanced students identify multimodal resources as more engaging. On the other hand, 29.2% of upper-intermediate students believe such resources are very engaging, as compared to only 7.7% of advanced students. Thus, it appears that the students of lower proficiency (upper-intermediate level) are more engaged when multimodal resources are used (70.9%) than those of higher proficiency (61.5%). What is also important to emphasise is that some respondents in the latter group (advanced proficiency) noted that multimodality does not engage them at all, which was not observed in the data on lower proficiency students in the study.

Accessibility of multimodal resources is an important issue, as some students may not find them useful if they are difficult to work with. For 43%, such resources are very accessible, suggesting they have no access issues, while for 32%, they are quite accessible. Only 3% indicated they are slightly accessible, which may point to many problems, most probably related to the necessity of an Internet connection, which is often a must for such resources. If the data from the two participant groups are compared, it seems that lower proficiency students have more issues in relation to accessibility. 33.3% of them see such resources as very accessible, compared to 61.5% of advanced students. They are moderately accessible to 29.2% of upper-intermediate students, in contrast to only 7.7% of advanced students who think the same way. The only similarity in the data is related to the option of 'moderately accessible' (29.2% and 30.8% respectively). In general, 66.66% of upper-intermediate level students identified multimodal resources as (quite or very) accessible, as opposed to 92.3% of advanced students who marked the same options in the questionnaire. Yet, both groups agree (100%) that when their learning combines text, images, audio, and other modes, it is more effective than when only one mode, for instance, a textbook (although they can also be seen as multimodal), is used. This is in line with some previously discussed results with respect to the use of videos, music, podcasts, interactive games, online platforms with interactive exercises, social media, and online dictionaries with audio/visual features.

The responses on whether the use of multimodal resources is challenging do not differ greatly, as 54% indicated a positive, while 46% a negative answer. However, if the data of the two groups of participants are considered separately, the students' views on challenges concerning the use of multimodal tools turn out to be the opposite. 62.5% of upper-intermediate students indicated their experience as challenging, while almost the same amount – 61.5% – in the advanced students' group indicated that it was not challenging. A possible reason may be that while moving from lower to more advanced-level studies, the students do not see multimodality as a challenge anymore, since it may have become an integral part of the learning process. Another way to explain this could be related to the proficiency the students gain: the higher the proficiency, the easier to learn English through different modes, which future studies could explore. Yet one more possible explanation may not be linked to their language proficiency but to their digital skills, since many multimodal resources are now created with the help of information and communication technologies. On the one hand, as Sanchez (2023) notes, "Technology is part of students' lives, they are involved one way or another with iPhones, iPads, MacBooks, and iBlogs on the internet. The YouTube channel has become the main source of knowledge for multiple disciplines" (p. 553). On the other hand, the use of various tools and technologies as educational rather than recreational resources may turn out to be more complicated than it might seem at first sight.

When asked to provide specific examples of situations in which the use of multimodal tools or resources in general had helped them improve their English, some students were very explicit and detailed, while some others only attempted to indicate specific skills or competences that they believed they had become better at when they used such resources inside or outside the classroom. Having read the responses and grouped them by focusing on key words related to linguistic skills and competences, it became evident that upper-intermediate students often improved their vocabulary (8) and speaking skills (5) (the number in brackets means the number of times it was mentioned by the students). Others were indicated less frequently: reading (2), grammar (2), listening (2), pronunciation (2), and writing (1). The rest of the students could not remember or chose not to indicate. Here are some examples (the language here and elsewhere is not corrected):

Student 1 (subsequently S1). *It improved my vocabulary.*

S11. *Watching YouTube videos helped me understand more words.*

S10. *It really helped me to build a confidence while talking in English, also it helped me expand my vocabulary.*

It is important to note that while some students did not indicate any, some other students pointed out two or three skills or competences that they improved while using multimodal resources.

However, when advanced students of English were given the same question, their provided answers differed. Speaking and pronunciation were mentioned four times each. Then, in the order of frequency of mention, were vocabulary (3), listening (2), and reading 1. Here are some examples:

S1. *I feel more free to speak with foreign people.*

S6. *It helped to improve my listening and talking abilities.*

S11. *Improved my speaking.*

Just like upper-intermediate students, advanced-level students sometimes indicated several skills or competences, while some others indicated none. There was one comment that could hardly be classified under some specific linguistic skill or competence but is important: "Listening to people have conversations gives you a good understanding of how English works when used in a realistic setting" (S10). This only proves that it is useful to ask students open-ended questions, as their answers can help to see a bigger picture. In this case, the student refers to the use of the English language in real-life contexts. This is why languages are studied – they should be used in the real world outside the classroom.

In addition, the study intended to find out if the students' learning becomes more effective with regard to their preferred learning styles when multimodal resources are used. Only one upper-intermediate student did not know, and one student indicated that it is disturbing when various modes are used: "I really like the textbook, because other sources make me not to pay attention, so if not textbooks, then slides are okay" (S2). Other students agreed it is, in fact, useful to use such resources in the learning process. Thematic grouping of open-ended answers showed that only one student had the auditory learning style, while fourteen students preferred the visual learning style and highly approved of the use of videos for learning English. Here are some examples:

S4. *For someone it could be just boring, and much more interesting to watch videos […], something that is happening in the world now.*

S7. *I prefer visual learning style. I think it makes learning more appealing.*

S9. *I found textbook really boring and not that effective. I think that visual learning and some games, for example Kahoot, would be very beneficial for language learning.*

Advanced students, on the other hand, rarely focused on their own learning styles, as they pointed out that theirs would be a mixture of different ones. This is the reason why they agreed (with one exception, as the student did not have an opinion) that learning with multimodal resources, not only with their EFL or ESP textbook, makes their learning more engaging, less repetitive, and less limited, and provides learning opportunities that textbooks cannot. The following are some examples:

S8. *Using not only textbooks, gives variety of learning opportunities.*

S9. *I learn better when I listen to other people talk, so listening to podcasts and YouTube videos helps me learn the pronunciation l, which can't be done reading a textbook.*

Thus, in general, it is possible to claim that the research participants see multimodal resources as helpful and effective because of or in line with their learning styles.

At the end of the questionnaire, the students were asked to provide suggestions on how teachers could improve the use of multimodal resources for English language learning in the classroom. Only 11 (out of 24) upper-intermediate students provided suggestions, five of which were related to video watching (e.g. S4. Teachers need to pick videos that are engaging and interesting and also interactive; S5. In my opinion, it will be interesting to watch some videos/read articles about what is happening in the world now, and in the news). Others suggested the use of memes (S3), short movies (S14), free and accessible resources (S9), etc. The same question was posed to advanced students. Six (out of 13) students provided suggestions, two of which were also related to video watching (S2. Watch more videos, which cover topics. Videos shouldn't be long and have a lot of visual info which is actually related to the topic not only for aesthetic; S6. For me, it really helps learning by watching videos, so I can imagine more clearly what the teacher is talking about). Videos may be very much preferred because "they engage students effectively," as claimed by Elmiana (2019). In various questionnaire questions, the study participants referred to the use of videos, which only proves that they are an important part of contemporary foreign language learning. Other student suggestions on multimodality included gamification (S4), the use of various resources on a regular basis (S7), and movies (S9).

Conclusions

This small-scale case study included mostly 19-20-year-old first-year Lithuanian female university students studying English at either upper-intermediate or advanced level. As the findings indicate, these students most frequently choose either videos (advanced students) or social media (upper-intermediate students) while studying English outside the classroom with multimodal resources. However, they rarely or never choose interactive games, online platforms, online dictionaries, or podcasts for this purpose. Both student groups agree that the use of multimodal resources makes their learning more effective. In fact, videos are seen as effective by half of the study participants, but moderately effective are these: music, podcasts, interactive games, online platforms with interactive tasks, social media, and online dictionaries. This may suggest that even if the students use some of them and learn English through them, the learning itself is not their primary aim of use. On the other hand, multimodal resources do significantly help in terms of English skill improvement, as close to half of the participants emphasised that they improve vocabulary and reading skills, and moderately enhance grammar and writing skills this way. Fewer students significantly or greatly improve their grammar, listening, and speaking skills, but they agree or strongly agree that multimodal resources are more motivating for English learning compared to traditional methods. Both upper-intermediate and advanced students agree that when their learning combines text, images, audio, and other modes, it is more effective than when only one mode is used.

Multimodal resources are engaging, but more lower proficiency students (upper-intermediate) are strongly engaged by them. Nevertheless, it appears that these students have more accessibility issues with such resources, even though, in general, they are very or quite accessible. At the same time, it is interesting that two-thirds of upper-intermediate students see the use of multimodality as challenging, while almost two-thirds of advanced students do not hold this view. In general, it is possible to state that despite the possible challenges or accessibility problems, Lithuanian university students of English are not discouraged from using multimodal resources, but learning English may not always be the primary goal. Yet, when they do learn with multimodal resources, upper-intermediate students indicate their improvement mainly in vocabulary and speaking skills. Advanced students mention the same and add pronunciation, but their answers are more divided and less conclusive.

Although the findings should be viewed in light of some limitations in terms of sample sizes indicated in the paper, they lead to possible recommendations on how to improve EFL teachers' multimodal pedagogies and make students' learning more effective. Firstly, the use of a variety of resources helps students with mixed learning styles, which can result in more efficient and beneficial learning in terms of different linguistic skills and competences (vocabulary and speaking in particular). Secondly, videos are seen as the most favourable multimodal resource for English students, so their teachers could make use of them more often when teaching a great variety of topics (although Masinde et al. (2023) have noted that teachers are reluctant to use multimodal resources). Whether, to what extent and how successfully this could be applied in different contexts to teach students of various proficiency levels is an area for future investigation.

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Elena Spirovska

South East European University, Tetovo, North Macedonia

https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7860-9076

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Elena Spirovska Tevdovska.

Email: e.spirovska@seeu.edu.mk

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Bibliotherapy - The Healing Power of Literature in Our Classrooms

Elena Spirovska

Abstract

This article will attempt to examine the notion of bibliotherapy, history of bibliotherapy and the impact of bibliotherapy in an educational setting. Bibliotherapy is defined as usage of literary texts to enhance emotional, psychological, and social well-being. As such, bibliotherapy has recently emerged as a powerful tool to promote mindfulness and enhance stress free environment in a contemporary educational setting. This article will provide the theoretical background of the concept of bibliotherapy and will explore the potential of literature in supporting students' mental health, their personal development, and overall well-being. Furthermore, the article will provide insight and suggestions regarding relevant texts and strategies to implement bibliotherapy in classrooms and the potential to create opportunities for self-reflection, empathy, and effective strategies for dealing with various personal challenges. The paper highlights the benefits of bibliotherapy and examines the potential drawbacks, emphasizing its ability to improve emotional literacy and create a beneficial environment for students to explore difficult emotions and situations.

Keywords: bibliotherapy, well-being, personal challenges, strategies, literature.

Introduction

The purpose of this article is to examine the theory and practices which serve as foundations of bibliotherapy. The history of bibliotherapy and first notions related to it will be looked into more depth. In addition, different types of bibliotherapy will be examined, as well as their exploitability in classroom settings for the purpose of enhancing the well-being of our students. The recommendations will focus on texts and practices which are age suitable and relevant for the target population and the emotional challenges emerging from the described context, including peer pressure, bullying (cyber bullying included), substance abuse and issues arising from poor communication.

Bibliotherapy – History, Definition, Types

History of Bibliotherapy

The article will attempt to examine the origins of bibliotherapy and the definitions provided throughout the development of different strategies included in bibliotherapy. The ancient Egyptians inscribed the phrase *"Healing place for the soul"* above the entrance of the sacred library in the tomb complex of Ramses II at Thebes, signifying an early recognition of the therapeutic potential of books. Although bibliotherapy emerged relatively recently as tool in classroom management, Elsenman and Harper (2016) state the following regarding the history of bibliography "Historically, bibliotherapy dates back to the 1930s when librarians began compiling lists of written material that helped individuals modify their thoughts, feelings, or behaviors for therapeutic purposes." (p. 1).

On the other hand, Myracle, L. (1995), pinpoints the beginning of the 1920s as a decade when bibliotherapy was conceptualized, stating that "…the early twentieth century is a logical starting point for the study of bibliotherapy because it was at this time that a flurry of attention was directed toward adolescents as a rapidly growing reading public."

As a result, a number of literary texts from the literary canon, as well as other less "serious" texts – as seen by the society, stories and texts, emerged on the market targeting adolescents. At the time, the influence of the "less serious" literary works was a source of worry for parents and educators. In response, sets of guidelines and book lists were created, with the purpose of helping the parents select the content that their children can consume safely. As Myracle (1995) states: "Here is

how you can mold your child. These are the books that will change children's behavior and enable them to be productive members of society." This intentional use of reading for the promotion of mental and emotional health is commonly known as bibliography.

Definitions and Setting

There are several definitions of bibliography in past and current literature. According to Afolayan, J. A. (1992, p. 138-139), the notion of bibliotherapy can be defined as follows**:** "The term bibliotherapy, also referred to as bibliocounseling, is a method by which children and adolescents undergoing emotional stress, anxiety or maladjustment, may seek therapy through readings of selected books in which main characters are experiencing problems the same as or similar to those of the readers." However, in order to distinguish bibliotherapy from reading, Lin et al. (2024, p.735) state the following: "Bibliotherapy is different from reading in the traditional sense; it is the process of reading with a therapeutic purpose, rather than just reading and enjoying."

We can define the term bibliotherapy as the use of novels, poetry or stories, with the purpose of helping individuals to cope with their emotional issues and psychological and social challenges. By engaging with carefully selected literary works, individuals can identify their emotions and experiences and develop coping strategies. Although bibliotherapy can be used in various settings, including educational and rehabilitation settings, the classroom is one of the most obvious and beneficial.

The practice of bibliotherapy is underpinned by several psychological and educational theories. Erikson's (1968) psychosocial theory highlights literature's role in helping children navigate identity, belonging, and emotional conflicts. Bandura's (1977) theory of social learning emphasises the observation of fictional characters, which consequently encourages students to model and imitate constructive behaviours. Cognitive-behavioural frameworks emphasize that reading and discussing stories can improve and even reshape poorly adapted thinking and even facilitate the development of healthier coping strategies (Heath et al., 2005). The theoretical works listed provide arguments in favour of bibliotherapy's role in classrooms. It has to be emphasised that bibliotherapy is not as seen as a clinical intervention but as developmental bibliotherapy (Gladding & Gladding, 1991), which facilitates the coping mechanisms for everyday challenges including conflicts and dealing with conflicts, problems with self-esteem and cultural and societal adaptation.

Types and Varieties of Bibliotherapy

Different types of bibliotherapy can be classified, according to the goal or the setting of bibliotherapy which define the approaches. Martinec et al. (2022) defines the use of *cognitive and affective bibliotherapy*. According to Martinec et al. (2022), the goal of the cognitive bibliotherapy is learning. Thus, it can be used in various fields of education. This type of bibliotherapy can be performed through a selection of various literary texts, including non-fiction and self-help books. The contact with the therapist is not of primary importance. Instead, a selected literary text is used to help the individual solve an issue or cope with a specific challenge. On the other hand, affective bibliotherapy involves using texts in order to elicit or stimulate emotions or experiences, in the process of making connections with literary characters or situations. Martinec et al. (2022, p. 90), specifies that: "The assumption is that connection with the character(s) in the literary text can lead to comparison and then separation. In the separation phase, the focus is on one's own characteristics, insights, and possible courses of action.

Yontz-Orlando (2017) divides the area of bibliotherapy into three major fields. The first category is *self-help*. The implementation of this category involves non-fiction books (including self-help literature) given to the patients or learners. After reading the material, the patients and advisors usually have a feedback session. This approach doesn't involve a significant level of interpersonal interaction.

Creative bibliotherapy involves writing fiction. This approach encourages the patient or the learner to write a poem, a scene or a short story. The bibliotherapist reads the patient's work and provides feedback and observations

Informal bibliotherapy is a model of bibliotherapy which focuses on reading circles and groups. Library displays and involves an extensive and dynamic cooperation between the therapists and patients. Yontz-Orlando (2017) provides information regarding the success rate of the above listed models of bibliotherapy. According to the article, the models are successful, with the informal model yielding the best results.

Fanner & Urquhart (2008), suggest using bibliotherapy to treat an array of conditions. Those conditions include alcohol dependence, self-harm, panic disorder, sexual dysfunction, underdeveloped social skills and unipolar depression.

Bibliotherapy can be implemented by an array of professionals and in diverse settings. The settings include schools, libraries and medical institutions. The

professional who can carry out bibliotherapy include teachers, educators, psychologists, social workers and psychiatrists.

Bibliotherapy in a Classroom Setting

Bibliotherapy can be defined as an effective and powerful therapeutic approach which can enable adults, teenagers and younger population to cope more effectively with challenging situations and improve their psychological well-being.

Bibliotherapy and narratives are powerful tools in a classroom setting, having therapeutic values which can be used by educators, educational psychologists and teachers. What are the implications and contexts of implementation of bibliotherapy in classrooms? Sapra (2019, p. 818) analyses the therapeutic benefits of bibliotherapy and the use of bibliotherapy in a classroom, stating the following: "The narrative can be woven into a story for children, which gives a sense of identity and direction to the child."

There is a wide array of techniques to be used in bibliotherapy implementation. The initial step is to identify the problem to be solved and the text to be used, which is followed by reading and analysis of the text. It is important to select materials to ensure they are appropriate and not worsening the condition or trauma. The selected texts should align with students' interests, age and reading proficiency. The topics should be relatable and provide potential for discussions and debates. A discussion and a dialogue can be used to facilitate the processing of the material and identifying potential solutions, as well as relating to real life situation experienced. It is important to foster an open and free of prejudice discussion environment, which can facilitate the therapeutic benefits. Extension activities which build on bibliotherapy gains are essential, since they encourage students' creativity, personal growth and introspection. Journals and reflections, art projects including multimedia and multimodal expression (text, visual arts related to the text themes), as well as drama and role play activities, advance the benefits of bibliotherapy.

Classroom Applications: Case Studies

Development of Emotional Intelligence

Sullivan & Strang (2012) case study focuses on students with socio-emotional difficulties which are frequently associated with aggression. Bibliotherapy is used as a way to promote skills and cognitive strengths.

Dealing with Grief and Loss

Shechtman (2009) conducted a group bibliotherapy program in Israel with adolescents dealing with grief and aggression as consequence. By engaging with literary texts and stories about loss, students experienced liberation from these feelings and developed healthier coping mechanisms with grief. Teachers noted improvements in classroom climate and peer empathy.

Emotional Regulation in Early Childhood

Cook et al. (2006) explored the role of bibliotherapy in early elementary classrooms, where picture books about emotions were an integral part of literacy lessons. Follow-up activities, including role-playing or keeping journals helped children regulating emotions. The study found bibliotherapy improved both literacy and reading comprehension as well as emotional awareness and expression.

Anxiety and Stress

Heath et al. (2005) described a school program where bibliotherapy was used with anxious students in order to facilitate emotional development through children's literature. According to the study, stories provide opportunities for children to gain insight and learn healthier ways to cope with difficulties.

Reinforcing Social Skills

Bibliotherapy reinforces social skills including empathy, self-awareness, self-regulation and ability to communicate effectively. Elley (2014), analyzing the benefits of bibliotherapy implemented in a classroom, identifies several social skills which were improved after the use of bibliotherapy. The social skills addressed by bibliotherapy in this research include interrupting each other, working well in cooperative groups, determining how the participants get on well with each other and tolerance. The research shows that bibliotherapy proved to have a powerful effect in fostering the social skills mentioned.

Positive Emotions in a Classroom Context

Arslan et al. (2022) conducted a study on 53 high school students in Mediterranean Turkey, analyzing the pre and post story reading a bibliotherapy. The study focused on positive and negative mental health indicators including depression, mindfulness, happiness and positive emotion. Results from the study by Arslan et al. indicated that story reading and bibliotherapy had major effects on mindfulness

and optimism, but no significant effect on happiness and positive emotions in a classroom context. In other words, the study participants reported more positive self-assessment of the mental state and mental health.

Challenges in Classroom Use

Despite these successes, studies also identify limitations and challenges for classroom use. Some of them can be listed as follows:

Teacher preparedness: Many educators lack training in selecting appropriate texts or guiding discussions (McCulliss, 2012). Implementation of bibliotherapy requires a certain level of preparation and skill, in addition to sensitivity and awareness of students' emotional issues. The lack of cultural sensitivity can be reflected throughout classroom practices and in the process of text selection: inappropriate or non-representative texts risk alienating students rather than supporting them. In addition, time constraints can also pose significant problems, since integrating bibliotherapy within standardized curricula can be challenging (Shechtman, 2009). Finally, there is a significant risk of triggering negative emotions: without guidance, students may feel overwhelmed by difficult themes (Heath et al., 2005).

Conclusion and Recommendations

It can be concluded that bibliotherapy in the classroom can provide a number of strategies for educators for supporting students' emotional well-being, fostering empathy, and promoting self-awareness. If bibliotherapy is implemented attentively, it has a potential to create beneficial environment where literature fosters the personal growth and healing. A number of studies confirm the usefulness of bibliotherapy. A number of teaching practices enhance the success of bibliotherapy. Some will be listed here:

Text selection: a careful book selection and titles available for students is essential. Careful selection of novels or texts which include characters who successfully overcome personal and emotional issues is crucial when conducting bibliotherapy. The texts should include an array if experiences and issues relevant for the target population, which results in increased awareness of the issues and encourages engagement with the text.

Numerous teaching practices facilitate the implementation of bibliotherapy in a classroom setting. Group discussions which are based on the texts and include open ended and relevant questions promote empathy and personal responses. These activities offer opportunities for the students to observe an issue from a different point of view. Extended activities which include self-reflection and personal responses are important. Journals or reflection writing foster engagement with the text and promote awareness of challenges and issues – an individual can establish a personal connection and coping strategies. Individual or collaborative projects which include artistic expression and creativity: posters, drawings or comic books are examples of visual expression of the emotions and issues presented in the text. Role playing or creating plays involve acting out the scenes which illustrate the key moments of the text or encourage the students to present their response in similar or equal situation and their ways to cope with a specific problem.

It is important to emphasize the need for building a safe classroom environment and predictable routine with elements which will increase the learners' interest. This includes illustrative themes and possible pairing of issues, for instance working on the topics of grief and change, anxiety and perfectionism or similar pairings. In addition, it is important to remember that the teacher is not providing therapy. Instead, the teachers are teaching skills through literature and bibliotherapy.

We can conclude that bibliotherapy can be implemented in a variety of classroom contexts and activities, thus offering a significant potential for students' engagement in and outside the classroom setting The research supports the acceptability and potential effectiveness of bibliotherapy for a number of issues including depression, anxiety, grief, bullying, and adjustment challenges, especially when adults facilitate reflection and connect stories to concrete coping and help-seeking skills. Following the procedure of a thoughtful text selection, including safe routines and simple progress checks, any teacher can use stories and other literary genre to help students feel seen, gain language and awareness necessary for their inner lives and mental health and practice healthier ways of handling emotional challenges and difficulties.

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Folasade Esther Jimola, Olatunbosun James Aborisade

[1] Ekiti State University, Ado-Ekiti, Nigeria, https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0857-8355

[2] Ekiti State University, Ado-Ekiti, Nigeria, https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7361-2778

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Folasade Esther Jimola.

Email: folasade.jimola@eksu.edu.ng

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Pre-Service Teachers' Construction and Utilization of The Affective Domain Assessment Techniques

Folasade Esther Jimola, Olatunbosun James Aborisade

Abstract

The tripartite taxonomies of learning, without exemptions, contribute in no small measure to students' learning outcomes. However, existing literature has not identified ongoing gaps in the utilization of affective assessment among pre- service teachers. The paper assesses pre-service teachers' construction and utilization of the affective domain assessment techniques in classrooms. Descriptive research of a survey type was employed to approach the research problem. The study employed simple random sampling technique. Quantitative research data were collected by administering a well-structured-close-ended questionnaire on sixty pre-service teachers from two universities in Ekiti State, Nigeria who had undergone two teaching practicums. Findings revealed that pre-service teachers hardly utilize the affective domain assessment techniques during teaching practicum. The mostly utilized techniques are questioning, performance assessment and observation, leaving out other assessment techniques. In addition, a significant portion of the respondents could neither construct teacher-made affective assessment techniques nor knowledgeable of how to make use of standardized tests in classroom. Also, majority of respondents only pay attention to students' attitude, attention and participation in class activities leaving out other numerous affective domain components. The study concluded that pre-service teachers' knowledge and utilization of the affective domain assessment techniques is not encouraging. The study recommended that at the teacher training programme, pre-service teachers should be taught the significance of the affective domain, how to construct and utilize affective assessment techniques in classroom.

Keywords: Affective domain, affective assessment techniques, construction, pre-service teachers, utilization

Introduction

Comprehensive learning and assessment are requisites phases of educational programmes. Kasilingam et al. (2014) expound that the target of Bloom's taxonomy is to generate an integrated form of education through the three learning domains: cognitive, psychomotor and affective. The cognitive domain is about how knowledge and intellectual capabilities are acquired and processed. Psychomotor has to do with carrying out manual or physical skills to a defined level of precision, smoothness, swiftness, or potency. The affective domain centers "*on attitude, motivation, willingness to participate, valuing what is being learned and ultimately incorporating the discipline values into real life*" (Kasilingam et al., 2014, p.28). These domains serve interdependent and complementary roles, and none should be less treated. However, students' performance in and reaction to school subjects hinge on affective taxonomy because it is a receptive and an underlying factor.

In spite the importance of the three domains in teaching-learning process, research revealed that of all the three domains, cognitive domain has received much concentrated attention to the detriment of affective domain which is a less trodden part. Kuboja (2016) concurred that the affective domain is the least applied, less understood and much more difficult to assess in schools. Teachers are more particular about learners' dexterity at the levels of the cognitive domain (Nkomo & Ojating, 2018; Moroaswi et al., 2023). Some factors are considered responsible for the neglect of the affective domain such as its learning outcomes, pedagogy and assessment. These areas are considered inconsequential because of the inclusion of some intrinsic qualities like beliefs, perceptions, values, motivation, and interests (Olatunji, 2013). Affective domain, at times, fluctuates which could be influenced by a person's mood. With the inclusion of intrinsic traits, transparency and authenticity of intrinsic qualities might not be ensured due to absence of validated standards. Fear of victimization could lead to insincerity on the part of the learners to their teachers' questions. Shakeel (2019) affirmed that one of the banes of students' inability to achieve their learning goals has been attributed to learners' passivity, lack of interest and loss of concentration power in classrooms. Kuboja and Ngussa (2015, p.38) decried the state of moral decadence in the society and linked it to downplay of the teaching of the affective domain in classroom.

Teaching practice also known as teaching practicum (TP) is part of the teacher education program organized to expose students to authentic teaching and learning situations from where they can practice what they have been taught in the university or college in real life situations. The experience garnered at this stage avails

pre-service teachers the opportunity to get conversant with pedagogy, school milieus, student-teacher interaction, and professional qualities and development. It is important that pre-service teachers become aware that the neglect of affective domain in classroom activities could lead to lack of interest in daily classroom tasks, lack of concentration power, anxiety generated by social phenomena, timidity, guilt, and inferiority complex. Several studies (Boyd et al., 2006; Kasilingam et al., 2014; Kuboja, 2016; Nkomo & Ojating, 2018; Moroaswi et al., 2023) have reiterated the neglect of the affective domain in classroom by teachers which could be occasioned by different factors such as teachers' inability to construct and utilize affective assessment techniques.

The study investigates pre-service teachers' knowledge of the overview of the components and levels of the affective domain, without singling out any of the components of the affective domain as the major focus. Thus, the present study sought to investigate the knowledge of pre-service teachers to construct and use the affective assessment techniques in teaching practicum, and investigate the affective domain components that pre-service teachers attend to in classroom. These areas have not been investigated in the literature understudied in the present paper. To this end, research questions were raised for the study:

1. Which of the affective domain components do pre-service teachers give attention to in classroom?
2. Can pre-service teachers construct affective assessment techniques that assess the affective domain?
3. What affective assessment techniques do pre-service teachers utilize in classrooms?
4. What is the pre-service teachers' perceived ease of assessing the levels of the affective domain in classroom?
5. What behavioral verbs do pre-service teachers employ to specify learning outcomes of the levels of the affective domain?

Literature Review

An outward expression that is controlled by emotions is referred to as an affect (Brett et al., 2018). Moroaswi et al. (2023, p.230) explained that "affect' has two components: inside and the between. The "inside" refers to personality attributions such as character, self-esteem, anxiety, temperaments, attitudes, motivation,

and learner styles. "Between" refers to the social and interpersonal learning processes that take place in the classroom, among students, and among teachers and students". Affective domain is evident in behaviors indicating attitudes, interest, emotions, attention, prejudice, appreciations, concerns, taste, responsibility, values, sentiments, and various forms of physiological or mental trials (Okoli et al., 2022; Annenberg Foundation, 2024). The affective domain is the aspect that embodies how learners feel, how they respond to their feelings and how they manage their emotions. Emotional state of learners often serves as driving force of behavior which exert influence on what they learn, how they learn, the decisions they make and interaction with the society. Learning can be enhanced if teachers are aware of students' interest, attitudes, self-esteem, emotions, and feelings towards the lesson.

Krathwohl et al. (as cited in Bostwick, 2000) affirmed that the affective domain has its characteristics, instructional objectives and behavioral verbs for specifying learning outcomes:

Table 1

(*Levels of the Affective Domain: Characteristics, Instructional Objectives and Behavioral Verbs*)

Levels	**Characteristics**	**Instructional Objectives**	**Behavioral Verbs**
Receiving	*Phenomena related with getting students' attention in class*	• *Listening attentively* • *Attending diligently to classroom tasks*	*Ask, give, choose, describe, identify, locate, name, point to, select, differentiate*
Responding	*Active involvement and reaction of students to phenomenon in class.*	• *Active engagement in class tasks* • *Show interest in subject*	*Comply, discuss, approve, answer, applaud, volunteer, assist, label, perform, recite*
Valuing	*Concerned with the importance a student attaches to a particular phenomenon*	• *Expression of concern for other's welfare* • *Exhibit problem-solving demeanour*	*Assist, defend, complete, demonstrate, differentiate, initiate, justify, propose, share, support*

Levels	**Characteristics**	**Instructional Objectives**	**Behavioral Verbs**
Organization	*Concerned with the development of a value by arranging the value in order of priority.*	• Acknowledge systematic planning in solving issues • Appropriately timing to meet with diverse needs	Adhere, Accommodate, arrange, combine, compare,, formulate, integrate, modify, synthesize, discriminate
Characterization	Individual possesses a value system that dictates their behavior which is predictable and consistent.	• Work in groups, independently • Dispassionate approach in solving problem	Verify, revise, resolve, act, discriminate, display, influence, modify, perform, practice, qualify

Adapted from Krathwohl et al. (1964, as cited in Bostwick, 2000).

Neuman and Friedman (as cited in Allen and Friedman, 2010) observed some lapses in Krathwohl et al. (1964)'s taxonomy of the affective domain. They claim that Krathwohl et al. (1964)'s taxonomy is limited in its usefulness for designing instruction, specifically, its inability to make distinctions between the learner's attitudes about the learning experience and actual affective learning. Hence, they proposed taxonomy of affective learning. The taxonomy starts with identification, clarification, exploration, modification, and characterization. Learners are taught identification when they are able to differentiate peoples' thoughts, evidence, feelings, notions, and understand the peculiarity of their own personal views, assumptions, values, beliefs, and attitude when compared with others. Clarification of values means that learners ought to have liberty to select perceived values from available options, internalize the values, weigh and affirm the selected choice, express and act upon the preferred values, and act regularly with the preferred choice. Exploration, which is the third level, implies that learners examine the consequences and shortcomings of their choice and they compare and contrast them with other's viewpoints. Modification, the fourth level, occurs when learners adjust, assimilate certain values, attitudes, or beliefs, or alter to accommodate the available options in a receptive manner. The final level which is characterization means that learners have good understanding of their views, assumptions, values, beliefs, and attitude, and have imbibed and systemized them into an orderly structure which now defines and depicts learners. The degree of absorption of values is reflected in the consistency of learners' behavior and maturity (Allen & Friedman, 2010).

Studies on the Affective Domain and its Utilization

Different studies have been carried out on taxonomy of affective domain. Respondents in Griffith and Nguyen (2006) gave clues to the trends in public schools and entry knowledge of just recruited teacher. They noted that many teachers tailored teaching and learning tasks in the class towards acquisition of minimum levels of academic skills, to the extent that teachers did not allocate time to address the affective domain. The respondents, who were just recruited into the teaching profession, felt they possess the knowledge to teach the affective domain, yet most of them did not make the time to teach the affective skills. Aydın et al. (2009) investigated the views of English language teachers on the affective domain in language classroom. The participants acknowledged the significance of the affective aspect to language learning, but the study did not capture whether the participants apply the affective skills in the classroom. Adetayo (2014) worked on how affective behavior can be assessed in learners. The study concluded that assessment of learners' affective behaviors aid learners' acquisition of academic competencies and psychomotor domain.

Nkomo and Ojating (2018) examined the extent to which the three domains of learning are assessed by academics in continuous assessments. It was discovered that out of the three domains, cognitive and psychomotor were adequately covered and one of the reasons given was that the university was a University of Technology, where most learning activities revolve around cognitive and psychomotor behaviors. Results in Charismana et al. (2023) results indicated that teachers have accurate knowledge of the affective domain. Nevertheless, teachers' refusal to construct affective domain assessment strategies and time limitations pose as constraints. In addition, the assessment of affective domain is considered relevant to teachers of Guidance and Counseling, Religious Education and Pancasila and Civics Education. Coffman and Kittur (2024) examined undergraduate engineering students' understanding and perceptions of affective domain of learning. It was shown in the study that there was a reduction in learners' interest, engagement and feelings when teachers failed to apportion learning tasks evenly, prioritize participatory classroom and utilize effective communication delivery.

The literature reviewed in this study focused on different aspects of the affective domain. These studies attest that the affective domain in learning could significantly influence and predict learning outcomes. These studies have recorded divergent findings. Nonetheless, it was discovered that none of these studies specifically assessed pre-service teachers' construction and utilization of affective assessment

techniques during teaching practice. Also, from the reviewed studies, none has focused on pre-service teachers' engagement with the levels of the affective domain. The reviewed papers have not examined perceived ease of assessing the affective domain and use of behavioral verbs for measuring learning outcomes of the affective domain. To bridge the research gap, the present study understudied each of the uncovered areas.

Methodology

Descriptive research design of a survey type was employed for this study. This design was employed because it gives room for gathering information on the existing situation and describes the situation according to the information supplied by the respondents.

Participants

Through the use of simple random sampling technique, 60 pre-service teachers were selected, 30 pre-service teachers who were in 400 level, finalists, in each of the two universities in Ekiti State, Nigeria participated in the study. This level was purposely selected because the pre-service teachers had undergone two different teaching practicums, and it is believed that they must have gathered a considerable knowledge of teaching experience. The ages of the respondents ranged from 19 to 25. Fifty-five percent of the respondents were female, while forty-five percent were male. The researchers sought the consent of the respondents, and the purpose of the study was made known to them. Respondents with affirmative responses were selected as sample for the study. There was strict adherence to research ethics. The identities of the respondents were guaranteed, their confidentiality was assured, and their particulars were not disclosed under any pretext.

Instruments and Procedure

A checklist and a self-structured questionnaire titled "Pre-service Teachers and the Affective Domain in Classrooms" were used for data collection. The questionnaire had four sections. Section A elicited demographic information of the respondents: age and gender. Section B focused on pre-service teachers' ability to construct teacher-made affective assessment techniques and pre-service teachers' usage of affective assessment techniques in classrooms. In these parts, respondents ticked either 'yes or no' for the construction of teacher-made techniques, and chose 'never', 'sometimes' and 'always' as applicable to the types of affective teaching

techniques employed classrooms. Section C centered on perceived ease of teaching and assessing affective domain in classrooms. This part was measured using Very Easy, Easy, Not Easy, Not Very Easy format. Section D focused on behavioral verbs that pre-service teachers' use in specifying learning outcomes of the affective domain. Respondents ticked these behavioral verbs by choosing either 'yes' or 'no' as applicable. The checklist had one section. It focused on how pre-service teachers give attention to the dimensions of the affective domain in classrooms. This part was measured using Always, Sometimes, Seldom, and Never. The levels of the affective domain discussed in this paper are based on Krathwohl et al. (1964)'s taxonomy.

Validity and Reliability of the Instruments

The researchers defined the content being measured, developed a draft questionnaire then, sought experts' opinions for the assessment of the content. Experts in language education, guidance and counseling, and testing, measurement and evaluation (T.M.E) ascertained the face and content validity of the instrument. A pilot study was conducted 20 pre-service teachers who were not part of the study. Also, reliability of the instrument was conducted and ascertained. Through a test-retest method using Pearson's Product Moment Correlation, the reliability of the instrument was estimated and a reliability coefficient of 0.78 was obtained. The final draft of the instrument was adjudged valid and reliable for the study after thorough scrutiny of the instrument was carried out. The data obtained were analyzed using frequency counts and percentages.

Results and Discussion

The results of data analyses for pre-service teachers' use of affective assessment tools in classrooms, perceived ease of teaching and assessing the levels of the affective domain in classroom and pre-service teachers' use of behavioral verbs for specifying learning outcomes of the levels of the affective domain as follows:

Table 2.

Components of the affective domain

S/N	As a pre-service teacher, which of the following do you give attention to during classroom instruction:	Always	Occasionally	Rarely	Never
1	Attitudes	53 (88.3%)	4 (6.7%)	2 (3.3%)	1 (1.7%)
2	Values	10 (16.7%)	8 (13.3%)	16 (26.7%)	26 (43.3)
3	Morals and ethics	6 (10%)	3 (5%)	21 (35%)	30 (50%)
4	Interest	12 (20%)	18 (30%)	16 (26.7%)	14 (23.3%)
5	Attention	57 (95%)	2 (3.3%)	1 (1.7%)	0 (0%)
6	Motivation	8 (13.3%)	2 (3.3%)	13 (21.7%)	37 (61.7%)
7	Sense of responsibility	2 (3.3%)	7 (11.7%)	7 (11.7%)	44 (73.3%)
8	Participation in class activities	54(90%)	5(8.3%)	1(1.7%)	-
9	Emotions	9(15%)	9(15%)	17(28.3%)	25(41.7%)

Source: Field Survey, 2026

Findings from Table 2 reveal unsatisfactory practices of the pre-service teachers on the affective domain in classroom delivery. This is evident in their responses to various practices they carry out in classroom. Apart from attitude, attention and participation in classroom activities, pre-service teachers rarely paid attention to motivation, emotions, values, morals and ethics, and sense of responsibility during classroom instruction. It can be inferred that pre-service teachers probably attached importance to students' attitude, attention and involvement in classroom activities in the learning process because these indices often visibly influence classroom dynamics, effective learning and learning outcomes. They regarded them as sine qua non for meaningful engagement, interaction and comprehension in classroom delivery. However, half of the respondents recognized the importance of students' interest in classroom, while the other half did not. The reason for this could be that pre-service teachers might consider balancing the diverse interests of students equally as a challenge. On the other hand, pre-service teachers did not consider emotions, values, morals and ethics as important, or, probably, they might consider it a challenge in addressing them within limited instructional time. This suggests that pre-service teachers seemed to consider topics in the curriculum as priorities, and might hold the view that emotions, values, morals and ethics are not vividly captured in their disciplines, curriculum and would not be evaluated in

examinations. Pre-service teachers opined that they hardly ever give attention to how students are motivated to partake in classroom tasks, nor imbibe willingness in the learners to take up responsibilities in the course of instructional practices.

These findings are corroborated by Okoli et al (2022) that students receive less attention in the area of the affective domain from their teachers. Eshun (2013) investigated Social Studies teachers' questions emphasis in senior high schools in Ghana. Findings revealed that the examination questions set by teachers were skewed. 299 questions were set, all the questions assessed cognitive domain, while no question was set on affective and psychomotor domains. Rimland (2013) observed that respondents shy away from the affective domain because affective learning outcomes are not immediate but represent long-term internalized value. The study condemned teachers' insouciant attitude to the affective domain in schools, and affirmed that affective domain assists teachers to help students who have lost all hopes and have stopped believing in themselves to keep hope alive and be motivated to sustain their interest in teaching-learning process in classrooms. The findings of Olatunji (2013), Kasilingam et al. (2014) and Nande et al. (2013) support the findings of this present study that the peculiarity of the subjectivity of the affective domain in terms of teaching methods and assessment make it difficult for teachers to harness its potentialities. In addition, large class size constitutes problem to teaching and assessing of the affective domain in classroom. Furthermore, premium is on cognitive domain because it is emphasized in curricula and it is always assessed in examination with a focus on acquisition of knowledge and intellectual skills, and not intrinsic qualities (Shephard, 2008).

Table 3.

Pre-service teachers' construction and utilization of affective assessment techniques

S/N	Item	Yes	No
1	I plan my lesson to incorporate the affective domain learning objectives	12 (20%)	48 (80%)
2	It is important to construct affective assessment techniques	30(50%)	30(50%)
3	Can you construct assessment techniques that assess affective domain in classroom?	14 (23.3%)	46 (76.7%)
4	Can you make use of standardized test in measuring affective domain?	16 (26.7%)	44 (73.3%)
5	I find it simple to assess students' attitude.	22 (36.7%)	38 (63.3%)
6	I find it easy to assess students' interest.	15 (25%)	45 (75%)

7	On my own, I find it easy to assess students' emotions.		13 (21.7%)	47 (78.3%)
8	I am capable to assess values, morals and ethics in students.		8(13.3%)	52(86.7%)
9	I can assess students' attentiveness in classroom.		35 (58.3%)	25 (41.7%)
10	I can assess students' participation		57(95%)	3(5%)
11	Students' sense of responsibility is one the affective domain indices I can assess in classroom		22(36.7%)	38(63.3%)
12	I can easily assess students' level of motivation		15(25%)	45(75%)
13	It is important to assess students' affective domain in classroom		30(50%)	30(50%)
	Affective assessment techniques			
	How often do you utilize the following assessment techniques?	Never	Occasionally	Always
1	Questionnaires	55(91.7%)	5(8.3%)	-
2	Written reflections/journaling	51(85%)	9(15%)	-
3	Anecdotal records	53(88.3%)	7(11.7%)	-
4	Rating Scale	51(85%)	7(11.7%)	2(3.3%)
5	Checklists	43(71.7%)	12(20%)	5(8.3%)
6	Observation	2(3.3%)	3(5%)	55(91.7%)
7	Questioning	-	-	100(100%)
8	Interview Schedule	36(60%)	24(40%)	-
9	Performance Assessment	7(11.7%)	18(30%)	35(58.3%)
10	Portfolio Assessment	56(93.3%)	3(5%)	1(1.7%)

Source: Field Survey, 2026

Findings from Table 3 reveal that half of the respondents expressed certainty and the other half exuded uncertainty about the importance of constructing affective assessment techniques and assessing the domain in classroom. The study also shows that a considerable portion of the respondents never planned their lesson to integrate the affective domain learning objectives. Most of the pre-service teachers did not assess attitude, interests, emotions, sense of responsibility, motivation, and values, morals and ethics, except students' attentiveness and participation. The probable reasons for these shortcomings could be that re-service teachers are more familiar with cognitive learning objectives than affective objectives. The result likely occurred because affective traits like feelings, attitudes, and values are difficult to measure accurately. Participation and attentiveness were easier to assess because these behaviors are visible in the classroom, making them easier for teachers to observe and assess directly. Also, values, morals, emotions, and motivation were difficult to assess because these behaviors are personal and hidden, so teachers may not feel confident assessing them.

The findings of this study show that only a few number of pre-service teachers employed affective assessment techniques. The few techniques employed are questioning, performance assessment and observation, while majority of the respondents did not make use of questionnaires, interview schedule, anecdotal records, rating scale, checklists, written reflections/journaling, and portfolio assessment. The findings came this way because these are the easiest and most common classroom assessment methods teachers already know. Techniques like portfolios, journals, and questionnaires may require more time, skill, and training, which many pre-service teachers may not have. Findings in the study of Boyd et al. (2006) support the findings of the present study that the assessment of the affective domain is limited to the use of descriptive reflection, while Oakland (1997) explained that affective qualities cannot be measured directly because human attitude, emotions, feelings, value, and temperament are unstable qualities that are susceptible to change overtime and as circumstances lend itself. Many of the techniques employed in assessing affective qualities may not give either standardized conditions or direct observations because they are uncalibrated, they may lack standard, and may assess unverified constructs. Few of the assessment techniques employed in the study were checklist, questionnaire, survey, interview, naturalistic inquiry, sociometric methods, case study, and standardized and unstandardized self-report.

Also, the study of Jimola (2019) corroborates this finding that teachers seem not to be skilled on the various affective assessment techniques. Their knowledge of assessment tools for the affective domain is confined to the traditional assessment techniques of questioning and observation. Charismana et al. (2023) reported that teachers have correct knowledge of the affective domain, but they refused to construct affective domain assessment strategies due to time constraints. Contrarily, Okoli et al. (2022) affirmed that teachers are capable of constructing teacher-made test for measuring affective behavior, and also make use of standard test in measuring affective domain.

Table 4.

Pre-service teachers' perceived ease of assessing the levels of the affective domain

Levels of the affective domain:	**Very Easy**	**Easy**	**Not Easy**	**Not Very Easy**
I make students attend closely to classroom activities by listening attentively (receiving)	20 (33.3%)	30 (50%)	6 (10%)	4 (6.7%)
I make students develop interest in my subject by making sure they complete assigned homework (responding)	25 (41.7%)	15 (25%)	12 (20%)	8 (13.3%)
I make students show commitment in my class by allowing them to demonstrate problem solving attitude (valuing)	6 (10%)	10(16.7%)	26 (43.3%)	18 (30%)
I make students accept responsibility for their own actions in the course of solving problems (organization)	3 (5%)	6 (10%)	23 (38.3%)	28 (46.7%)
I teach team work by allowing students practice in group activities (characterization)	4 (6.7%)	12 (20%)	20 (33.3%)	24 (40%)

Behavioral verbs for specifying learning outcomes of the levels of the affective domain				
1	2	3	4	5
Receiving	**Responding**	**Valuing**	**Organization**	**Characterization**
Identify 55(91.7%)	Comply 2(3.33%)	Complete 13(21.7%)	Arrange 2(3.33%)	Solve 17(28.3%)
Locate 40(66.7%)	Discuss 42(70%)	Differentiate 25(41.7%)	Compare 27(45%)	Interpret 2(3.33%)
Select 20(33.3%)	Answer 35(58.3%)	Debate 12(20%)	Integrate 1(1.7%)	Act 3(5%)
Name 30(50%)	Perform 25(41.7%)	Justify 15(25%)	Demonstrate 32(53.3%)	Display 1(1.7%)
Listen 25(41.7%)	Practice 10(16.7%)	Support 1(1.7%)	Relate 5(8.3%)	Change 4(6.7%)
Choose 3(5%)	Volunteer 7(11.7%)	Initiate 1(1.7%)	Examine 9(15%)	Question 5(8.3%)

Source: Field Survey, 2026

Table 4 revealed that the majority of the respondents perceived that receiving and responding, which are the lower levels of affective domain, are assessable, but they considered valuing, organization and characterization as difficult levels. Besides, the results revealed that pre-service teachers made use of limited behavioral verbs for specifying learning outcomes in affective domain. Result showed that the respondents have the knowledge of the appropriate measurable behavioral verbs to assess the first and second levels of affective domain, but have limited knowledge of the appropriate measurable behavioral verbs for the third, fourth and fifth levels. Plausible reasons for the outcomes could be that receiving and responding were easier because they involve simple observable behaviors like listening and answering questions. Valuing, organization, and characterization involve deep personal behavior and long-term attitude change, which are difficult to observe and assess. Furthermore, pre-service teachers used few behavioral verbs because many pre-service teachers might have limited knowledge of affective-domain instructional terms and objectives. Also, words connected to simple classroom actions are more familiar to the pre-service teachers than verbs linked to advanced affective behaviors. In essence, schools and curricula often focus more on cognitive learning than affective learning, so pre-service teachers pay less attention to affective assessment.

Nande et al. (2013, p. 7) agreed with this finding and noted that both primary and secondary school curricula do not consider affective learning goals as paramount; they do not state affective instructional objectives in lesson plans. Consequently, textbook writers neglect affective objectives or components. More so, Muhammad et al. (2018) concurred that although teachers use diverse classroom assessment strategies in their classroom, yet they seem not to know its purposes. Findings of Appau et al. (2022) contravened the findings of the present study. Participants in the study carried out by Appau et al. (2022) had some degree of the knowledge of the principles of constructing affective test items and were knowledgeable of setting behavioral objectives of the affective domain.

The current discussion situates findings within existing literature but would benefit from more explicit articulation of how this study extends previous research contributions. While the study confirms patterns documented by scholars such as Eshun (2013) and Okoli et al. (2022) regarding neglect of affective assessment, it uniquely reveals the specific gap between pre-service teachers' recognition of certain affective components (attitude, attention, participation) and their systematic avoidance of others (emotions, values, morals). This distinction advances understanding beyond general observations of the affective domain neglect by identifying which

specific components receive attention and which remain marginalized, offering a more detailed picture of pre-service teacher preparation gaps. In addition, the finding that pre-service teachers possess knowledge of behavioral verbs for lower-level affective objectives but lack competence at higher levels extends the work of Nande et al. (2013) by pinpointing precisely where knowledge deficits exist along Krathwohl's taxonomy. The discussion would strengthen significantly by explicitly stating these unique contributions and clarifying how they build upon, rather than merely corroborate, existing scholarship.

Conclusion

The affective domain is pivotal to academic, social, moral, intellectual growth and development of students and by extension, the society in general. The study reveals the unsatisfactory practices of the pre-service teachers on the affective domain in classroom delivery. The study shows that there is a significant gap between pre-service teachers' knowledge of the affective domain and its application in classrooms. Hence, there is need for further training of pre-service teachers on the affective domain, especially the ones with abstract or long-term qualities such as attitude, interest, motivation, sense of responsibilities, and values, morals and ethics.

Limitations and Pedagogical Implications

The study is a descriptive study and the number of respondents (60) in the study was small hence, makes the study less representative and the findings cannot be generalized at the national level. Further studies can toe the line of quasi-experimental research with a sizeable number of respondents. The study investigated whether the respondents could construct affective assessment techniques and assess the domain. The study did not cover reasons why the respondents could not construct the affective assessment techniques and assess the domain. Further studies could be done along this line. Nonetheless, these constraints have not affected the results of this study rather this study has contributed to literature on pre-service teachers' and affective domain in classrooms. This study shows areas of strength and weaknesses of pre-service teachers' use of the assessment techniques of the affective domain.

Students, teachers and schools could benefit from the research findings. Students might get motivated because they will realize that emotions are important factors in classroom lessons. Teachers would be informed of the various indices of the affective assessment and assessment tools that can assess emotional needs of

students. Schools would have insight into various assessment tools that teachers can use for the affective domain, and could be properly monitored. The study would help researchers who wish to work on the affective domain.

The implication of the study requires substantial development to translate findings into actionable recommendations for educational practice and systemic change. Teacher education programs should integrate explicit training modules on constructing and implementing diverse affective assessment techniques beyond observation and questioning, including structured approaches to rating scales, reflective journaling protocols, and portfolio assessment frameworks that accommodate large class sizes. Curriculum developers must embed affective learning objectives explicitly within disciplinary content and examination frameworks to signal their legitimacy and importance, while assessment policies should mandate inclusion of affective domain evaluation in teacher performance reviews to institutionalize accountability. These findings carry broader implications for educational equity and social development, as systematic neglect of values, ethics, emotions, and responsibility perpetuates an education system that privileges cognitive knowledge transmission over character formation and civic development. Addressing these gaps through comprehensive teacher preparation reform and policy mandates could foster more holistic education that prepares learners not merely as knowledge repositories but as ethically grounded, emotionally intelligent, and socially responsible citizens capable of contributing meaningfully to democratic society and sustainable development.

Recommendations

The study recommended that:

- at the teacher training programme, pre-service teachers should be taught how to construct affective assessment techniques.
- during practicum, periodic check on pre-service teachers' utilization of affective assessment techniques should be carried out by pre-service teachers' supervisors and class teachers.
- pre-service teachers themselves should cultivate positive disposition to the construction and utilization of affective assessment techniques.
- holistic education through the integration of strategies that address affective domain should be emphasized during teacher training programs.

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Exploring the Relationship Between Big Five Personality Traits and Work Engagement Among Workers at International Balkan University

Hatidje Muchi-Ameti, Zumera Demiri

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Hatidje Muchi-Ameti, Zumera Demiri

[1]International Balkan University, Skopje, North Macedonia, https://orcid.org/0009-0007-3713-5215

[2]International Balkan University, Skopje, North Macedonia, https://orcid.org/0009-0008-3234-1068

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Hatidje Muchi-Ameti. Email: muci.hatice@ibu.edu.mk

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Abstract

The purpose of the study was to explore the relationship between Big Five Personality traits and work engagement among employees of International Balkan University in Skopje. The sample of the research consisted of 76 participants, both academic and administrative staff of the University. Participants completed an online survey, which included the Big Five Inventory and the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale. Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between traits and work engagement. The results revealed a significant positive correlation between Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, and work engagement. Neuroticism showed a significant negative correlation, while Openness to Experience showed a positive but nonsignificant correlation with work engagement. These results indicate that individual differences have an important role in shaping employees' engagement in their work settings. The findings support the inclusion of personality evaluations in workplaces to foster productivity and work engagement.

Keywords: Big Five personality traits, work engagement, Big Five Inventory, Utrecht Work Engagement Scale

Introduction

In recent years, work engagement has become one of the important concepts of organizational psychology. It is a concept strongly associated with employee well-being, job performance, job satisfaction, and other positive work concepts. Especially, in the developing industries and sectors, work engagement or a dedicated, energized and absorbed workers are prerequisite for hiring, considering that these workers will have higher level of motivation and psychological involvement with less reliance on extrinsic force (motivation).

Among various factors, individual differences are one significant element that has a direct effect on work engagement. One of the individual differences, personality traits, represent relatively stable characteristics that shape how individuals perceive, interpret, and respond to their work environment. One of the most accepted measurement of personality traits is known as Big Five that can also be applied in organizational research. Considering that work engagement is one of the psychological connections to work, examining the relationship between personality traits and work engagement allows for a deeper understanding of why some workers are more engaged than others in similar organizational contexts.

Although previous study emphasized Big Five and work engagement as separated and independent concepts, there are several studies that analyzed their association. Empirical evidence is still limited is some sectors especially such as higher education institutions. Also, the evidence is very limited in the Balkan region where there are no sufficient studies show the relationship between these two concepts among Balkan cultures.

In response to these gaps, the present study aims to explore the relationship between the Big Five personality traits and work engagement among employees of International Balkan University in Skopje, North Macedonia. By including both academic and administrative staff of the university, the study provides a more comprehensive view of work engagement. Consistent with the main argument that personality traits play a decisive role in shaping work engagement, the findings of this study are expected to contribute both theoretically and practically by supporting the integration of personality traits and its relationship to work engagement into the organizational settings.

Big Five Personality Traits

One of the most influential models over the past 10 years in personality psychology has been the five-factor model of personality. Much research has contributed to verifying its validity and nowadays it stands as an orientation among models of personality. This model encompasses five dimensions: Extraversion, Openness to Experiences, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, and Neuroticism (McCrae & Allik, 2002).

John and Srivastava (1999) provide information that in 1980, Costa and McCrae were working on developing the NEO Personality Inventory, which was later published in 1985. The inventory was just focused on three dimensions, more precisely on extraversion, neuroticism, and openness to experiences. Their work began as an analysis of Catell's work on the 16 Personality Factors. In 1983, their work included three dimensions, not including agreeableness and conscientiousness. To extend their work and complete it, they united these two other factors. Costa and McCrae (1992) launched the NEO Personality Inventory, revised (NEO PI-R), which consisted of 240 items that help to assess in a more detailed way the Big Five dimensions, for each factor, six facets. NEO PI-R was developed through the use of factor analysis and many other methods and procedures for its validity. It was first tested with samples of middle-aged and older adults. All the scales have presented strong reliability and validity in measuring Big Five dimensions.

Extraversion tends to describe individual differences in social situations, how we interact with others, how confident we are, and our levels of energy in social involvement. Highly extraverted people like to interact with others and enjoy socialization, they don't mind sharing their feelings and thoughts when they are in a group setting, and not only that, they often go through positive emotions such as passion, excitement, joy (Soto, 2016).

Agreeableness incorporates individual differences in acceptance and respect towards others, differences in respect and compassion. Highly agreeable people are concerned about other people's welfare, respect, and accept others' rights and choices. They always hold a positive mindset for other individuals. On the contrary, disagreeable people have less respect and acceptance for people and the social standards of humanity (Soto, 2016).

Conscientiousness is related to high order, neatness, responsibility, and productivity. Highly conscientious people love and take pleasure in maintaining organization;

they tend to keep everything ordered and well-structured. They are persistent and put in great effort to pursue and accomplish their ideals. They are very devoted to fulfilling their obligations and responsibilities. While conscientious individuals feel uncomfortable when things are not ordered, unconscientious people feel at ease or comfortable with chaos and messiness and are less inspired to accomplish their responsibilities or any other task (Soto, 2016).

Neuroticism tends to describe the individual difference in the degree and intensity of negative feelings. Those who appear to be highly neurotic are more prone to experience depression and anxiety, changes in mood, whereas emotionally stable people are characterized by calmness and resilience, even if they are faced with difficult or challenging situations (Soto, 2016).

Openness to experience, additionally referred to as Intellect, includes curiosity about things, aesthetic sensitivity, creativity, and imaginative thinking. Highly open people appreciate the process of learning and thinking; they are interested in art and beauty, providing authentic and unique ideas. Close-minded individuals are characterized by limited creative and intellectual preferences (Soto, 2016).

Work Engagement

In the 21. century, in order for companies to maintain their presence in the economy, they were compelled to hire workers who are creative, energetic, active, and those who use their full capacity which also shows positivity. All these characteristics could be collected under one concept which is known as "engagement" or "engaged workers" (Leiter & Bakker, 2010).

One of the pioneering researchers who explained work engagement was an ethnographic researcher, Kahn (1990), who claimed that it is "harnessing of organization members' selves to their work roles, in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, emotionally, and mentally during role performances" (p. 694). Stated differently, it means that workers work hard and put significant effort into their work since they identify with it (Kahn, 1990).

Another explanation of work engagement is that it is recognized as the positive opposite of burnout. Employees engaged in their work are often characterized by positive energy and active relations with their work, compared to employees who experience burnout, which relates to their work in a stressful and tough manner. According to this, engagement can be characterized with these three adjectives: vigor, enthusiastic

participation, and effectiveness, which are exact antitheses of the three burnout qualities: fatigue, skepticism, and decreased completion of work (Schaufeli, 2012).

Engaged workers use their full of skills, not only for productivity but also for problem-solving, developing creativity, interpersonal communication, and other strategies. One of the characteristics of engaged workers is their ability to deal with the challenging environment; however, they maintain their positivity with the influence of the management board. Thus, it is believed that managerial and human resources support play a significant role in engaging the workers because it is believed that engagement is highly correlated with social support, supervisor support, sufficient feedback which in return allows workers to become more productive (Leither & Bakker, 2010; Tomovska Misoska & Muchi, 2022).

Dimensions of Work Engagement

Engagement is not a state in a particular moment, but it is a long-lasting cognitive and emotional state that is not limited to a certain person, object, or behavior.

A high level of energy and emotional strength while the person is performing the job, the wish to put in effort and perseverance even in tough and challenging situations that one can be faced with in work, represent the dimension of vigor. This dimension is also known as the opposite of emotional exhaustion (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003) and it is highly correlated with motivation, cognitive well-being, organizational effectiveness, and other positive concepts (Shirom, 2010).

The other dimension or the concept of work engagement is known as dedication and it is commonly seen as a profound commitment to work, which is marked by feelings of significance, passion, encouragement, dignity, enthusiasm, and challenge (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008). The dimension dedication is the opposite of cynicism (detachment, emotional coldness) and it is positively related to commitment, inspiration, feeling of being valued, and other related outcomes (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003).

The last dimension of work engagement, absorption, signifies being totally engaged and attentive, enthusiastically involved in one's job, allowing time to pass away swiftly unnoticed and effortlessly making it difficult to disconnect from work, where workers are fully concentrated and happily engrossed (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003; Bakker et al., 2014). Absorption is the opposite dimension of burnout's detachment dimension, and it allows workers to be feel more creative and valuable (Robinson, 2017).

Big Five Personality Traits and Work Engagement

Previous empirical research has increasingly examined the relationship between Big Five personality traits and work engagement, suggesting that personality characteristics play an important role in shaping workers' psychological involvement in their work. Theoretical perspectives indicate that personality traits have a significant role on shaping an individual's motivation, regulating emotions, interpersonal relationships, coping strategies which are all components of work engagement.

There are several empirical evidences that support this argument. For example, according to Zaidi et al. (2012), extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness to experience tend to be positively related to work engagement, while neuroticism is consistently negatively correlated to work engagement among university teachers. Moreover, a similar research conducted in organizational and banking contexts showed that conscientious and agreeable employees are more likely to experience higher levels of vigor, dedication and absorption, whereas workers higher in neuroticism tend to be less associated with work engagement because of emotional instability and increased stress levels (Bansal et al., 2020). Comparable findings were also reported in studies conducted among university staff, where higher levels of conscientiousness, extraversion, and openness to experience were positive predictors of work engagement, while neuroticism was a negative predictor of it (Karimi, 2019).

Research Hypothesis

In accordance with relevant research, the following hypotheses are proposed

H1: There is a positive correlation between Extraversion and work engagement.

H2: There is a positive correlation between Conscientiousness and work engagement.

H3: There is a positive correlation between Openness to Experience and work engagement.

H4: There is a positive correlation between Agreeableness and work engagement.

H5: There is a negative correlation between Neuroticism and work engagement.

Methodology

The study applied a quantitative, correlational study design since statistical correlation between levels of work engagement among staff in the university and Big Five personality traits was explored. A correlational study design was adopted since it is well-suited for determining and measuring the strength and direction of relationships between variables. The study was carried out in the natural setting, and it aimed to involve academic and administrative staff of International Balkan University. We were therefore able to collect naturalistic data in a working context.

Sample

The participants were collected by snowball method. The sample of this research involved 76 employees at International Balkan University in Skopje, both academic (67.1%) (lecturers, assistants, professors) and administrative (32.9%) (office, support, technical) personnel.

The age of participants ranged between 21 and 56 years, and the sample included both male (32.9%) and female (67.1%) employees. 24 (31.6%) of the participants have less than a year of work experience, while 21 (27.6%) of them have 1-3 years. Also, 13 (17.1%) participants have been working in this institution for 4 to 6 years, while 6 of them have been working in the same institution for 7-10 years. Finally, there were 12 (15.8%) participants with more than 10 years of working experience.

There were no specific inclusion or exclusion criteria, except that they must be currently working at the university. Everyone was kindly asked to participate, and responses were promised to remain anonymous and confidential. It was explained to them that the information would be utilized solely for academic purposes and that they could withdraw at any time without any consequence. The data was collected by using an online format survey via Google Forms, allowing increased participation and facilitating easier data collection.

Table 1

Demographic data

Gender	Male	25 (32.9%)
	Female	51 (67.1%)
Age	21-30	42 (55.3%)
	31-40	20 (26.3%)
	41-50	11 (14.5%)
	Over 50	3 (3.9%)
Current occupation	Academic staff	51 (67.1%)
	Administrative staff	25 (32.9%)
Work experience	Less than 1 year	24 (31.6%)
	1-3 years	21 (27.6%)
	4-6 years	13 (17.1%)
	7-10 years	6 (7.9%)
	More than 10 years	12 (15.8%)

Source: Prepared by authors.

Instruments

There were two standardized psychometric instruments that were used to measure variables of interest in this study: the Big Five Inventory (BFI) and the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES). Both were included in the online Google Form and designed in separate sections for ease and to reduce participant fatigue.

Big Five Inventory (BFI)

The Big Five Inventory is a self-report questionnaire that taps into five broad personality dimensions: Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Neuroticism, and Openness to Experience. The 44-item version was used in this study, with items scored on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

It has 8 reverse-scored items, which are interspersed to reduce the threat of response bias and improve measurement accuracy. In several studies, the Big Five

Inventory has been shown to have high internal consistency, construct validity, and test-retest reliability and is thus suitable for both academic and organizational applications.

Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES)

Work engagement was assessed using the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES), developed by Schaufeli and Bakker (2004). The UWES contains 17 items, divided into three subscales: Vigor (6 items), which measures energy and resilience at work. Dedication (5 items), assesses involvement, enthusiasm, and pride in work. Absorption (6 items) assesses complete concentration and immersion in work tasks.

It is scored on a seven-point Likert scale, ranging from 0 (Never) to 6 (Always), portraying how frequently the respondent experiences each state. The UWES is internationally validated and broadly used in organizational psychology research for its outstanding psychometric properties and ease of use with heterogeneous professional groups.

Procedure

Data collection employed a structured and ethically sound approach to ensure the validity and reliability of research findings. The study was done online using Google Forms, which offered a user-friendly and accessible platform for respondents to participate in the survey anonymously and voluntarily.

The survey was reasonably separated into four sections for improving comprehension and logical organization. The first section of the survey included informed consent. First, participants were presented with a detailed explanation of the research purpose, procedures, confidentiality, and voluntary involvement. They had to click "I've read the information above and want to continue" only to access the next part of the survey. Two of the respondents chose the option "I do not want to continue"; for this reason, we did not include their responses in the processing of the results. The second part asked for little demographic data, like gender, age, work role (academic or administrative), and years of work experience. The third section added 44 items measuring five dimensions of personality, the Big Five Inventory. The Likert scale ranged from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree), and the section included direct items and reverse-scored items. The final section consisted of 17 statements that assessed the participants' vigor, dedication, and absorption in their workplaces. Every statement was scored on a 7-point scale from 0 (Never) to 6 (Always).

The Google Form link was shared using institutional email and other communication channels, and the questionnaire was open for two weeks. The questionnaire was simple to access at any time, and respondents had the freedom to fill it out at whatever time they wanted. After data collection through Google Forms, we exported data to Microsoft Excel to clean the data that didn't want to continue with the questionnaires. After this, the data was imported into the PSPP statistical analysis software to operate and analyze the results. To test the research hypothesis, we used Pearson correlation analysis to explore the relationship between five personality traits and work engagement.

Results

Table 2

Correlation between Extraversion and Work Engagement

	Extraversion	Work Engagement
Extraversion	-	.27*
Work engagement	.27*	-

Note. N=76. * $p < .05$.

Source: Prepared by authors.

According to Table 2, there is a significant positive correlation between Extraversion and Work Engagement, r (74) = .27, p = .019.

Table 3

Correlation between Agreeableness and Work Engagement

	Agreeableness	Work Engagement
Agreeableness	-	.49***
Work engagement	.49***	-

Note. N=76. *** $p < .001$.

Source: Prepared by authors.

As illustrated in Table 3, there is a significant positive correlation between Agreeableness and Work Engagement, r (74) = .49, $p < .001$.

Table 4

Correlation between Conscientiousness and Work Engagement

	Conscientiousness	Work Engagement
Conscientiousness	-	.41***
Work engagement	.41***	-

Note. *N*=76. *** $p < .001$.

Source: Prepared by authors.

As is shown in Table 4, there is a significant positive correlation between Conscientiousness and Work Engagement, r (74) = .41, $p < .001$.

Table 5

Correlation between Neuroticism and Work Engagement

	Neuroticism	Work Engagement
Neuroticism	-	-.37**
Work engagement	-.37**	-

Note. *N*=76. ** $p < .01$.

Source: Prepared by authors.

According to Table 5, there is a significant negative correlation between Neuroticism and Work Engagement, r (74) =. -37, p = .001.

Table 6

Correlation between Openness to Experience and Work Engagement

	Openness to Experience	Work Engagement
Openness to experience	-	.21
Work engagement	.21	-

Note. *N*=76. p =.067.

Source: Prepared by authors.

Finally, as is illustrated in Table 6, there is positive but nonsignificant correlation between Openness to Experience and Work Engagement, r (74) = .21, p = .071.

Discussion

The main purpose of this project is to explore whether there is a correlation between Big Five personality traits, such as Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Neuroticism, Openness to Experience, and work engagement. According to the results, most of the proposed hypotheses were supported, with the exception of the hypothesis regarding openness to experience. The results showed a significant positive correlation between Extraversion and work engagement ($r = .27$, $p < .05$). These results are in line and support the hypothesis that extraverted individuals who are enthusiastic, outgoing, adventurous, and sociable are more prone to higher engagement at work. Because extraverted individuals enjoy connecting and communicating with other people, this can contribute to higher connections with other employees in company, which leads to better engagement and enjoyment of work. The results also correspond with the relevant study by Karimi (2019) and Bansal at al. (2020), who found extraversion to be a good predictor of engagement in work. Based on the findings presented, the first hypothesis, "There is a positive correlation between Extraversion and work engagement," is accepted.

Agreeableness showed the most significant positive correlation among other personality traits, based on results ($r = .49$, $p < .001$). According to these results, people who score high in agreeableness tend to be more emotionally and positively connected to their work. Agreeable people can increase positive energy in their job since they are characterized by a forgiving, altruistic, and modest nature. These attributes can increase the readiness to go beyond minimum work requirements. The results support the hypothesis "There is a positive correlation between Agreeableness and work engagement".

Conscientiousness also demonstrated a significant positive correlation with work engagement ($r = .41$, $p < .001$). Because conscientious people tend to be organized and hard-working, are responsible for their duties, and have great self-discipline, these characteristics are associated with high levels of work engagement. When faced with challenges and difficulties at work, they tend to stay until their work is finished, which is very important for an employee. The results also support the research done at Lahore University that resulted in a significant positive correlation between Conscientiousness and work engagement (Zaidi et al., 2012). Based on these findings, the third hypothesis, "There is a positive correlation between Conscientiousness and work engagement," is also accepted.

Neuroticism (as expected) showed a significant negative correlation with work engagement ($r = -.37$, $p < .001$). Individuals who score high in Neuroticism tend to be tense or anxious in most cases, which can influence their performance at work. These results are in line with other psychological research, which suggests that negative emotions can undermine engagement in work. Thus, the results support the fifth hypothesis, "There is a negative correlation between Neuroticism and work engagement".

Openness to Experience showed a positive but non-significant correlation with work engagement ($r = .21$, $p > .05$). People who score high in Openness to Experience are characterized by curiosity, fantasy, and excitement. These characteristics can influence individuals' performance and engagement in work. However, based on results, the hypothesis "There is a positive correlation between Openness to Experience and work engagement" is rejected.

Overall, the results support the idea that work engagement has a relationship with personality traits. The significant positive correlation between four personality traits and work engagement demonstrates that personality psychology is very important for understanding workers' attitudes. The results also show the importance and positive side of including personality evaluation tools in organizational practices, whether in the hiring process or to improve the work program to increase work engagement.

Practical Implications

The findings of this study provide several important practical implications, especially within higher education institutions. Since a significant positive relationship was found between work engagement and conscientiousness, agreeableness and extraversion and a significant negative relationship between work engagement and neuroticism, it is important to treat Big Five as a relevant factor in employee development, work design/redesign and organizational planning.

First of all, the results suggest that the Big Five Inventory can be used as an assessment tool during recruitment and selection processes. Identifying candidates who score higher on conscientiousness and agreeableness may increase the likelihood of hiring workers especially for the job positions that are more dynamic, persistent, collaborative, so workers can keep their engagement level higher. Even though it is not suggested this assessment to be a selection criterion, it might help to gain perspective in decision-making process.

Moreover, the negative correlation between work engagement and neuroticism shows that some workers might need more training on emotion regulation and stress management to be more engaged. Institutions might implement psychological support systems, and/or resilience training to help workers especially for those who are more anxious (in nature) and emotionally unstable.

Overall, the results indicate that work engagement is not only determined by organizational conditions, but it is highly influenced by individual differences. Therefore, effective strategies for enhancing engagement should be considered in the organizational as well as individual level.

Research Weaknesses and Suggestions for Further Research

One of the weaknesses that can be considered is the definition of the sample at 76 participants, a small number to generalize the idea of the influence of personality on work engagement. Also, the goal was to carry out this research within a university, but the suggestion is to include perhaps other universities or other larger organizations, which will automatically lead to a larger sample size.

Another suggestion would be to consider gender balance because in this research, most of the participants are women, and future research could show how gender, in interaction with personality, influences work engagement.

Conclusion

This research explored the relationship between Big Five personality traits and work engagement among employees of International Balkan University, from the results of which it became clear that there is a significant positive correlation between Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness and work engagement; on the other hand, Neuroticism showed a negative correlation with work engagement.

Although Openness to Experience from the results showed a positive but not significant relationship with work engagement, we should emphasize that its role is important. This research adds support that personality traits, or rather personality differences between individuals, influence the way they are engaged at work.

In addition, to fulfill the academic requirement, the topic was chosen with sincerity to contribute to the university community. By conducting this research within the International Balkan University, the aim was to provide insights into the

psychological factors that may influence the workspace of its staff as well as the setting of the organization.

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Learning English in Higher Education: Students' Preferences, Experiences, and Challenges

Laureta Kadrijaj Qerimi, Besa Krasniqi

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Laureta Kadrijaj Qerimi[1], Besa Krasniqi[2]

[1]Alma Mater Europaea Campus College "Rezonanca"- Republic of Kosovo, https://orcid.org/0009-0009-6294-6890

[2]Alma Mater Europaea Campus College "Rezonanca"- Republic of Kosovo, https://orcid.org/0009-0008-7823-2879

Besa Krasniqi Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Laureta Kadrijaj Qerimi.

Email: laureta.kadrijaj@rezonanca-rks.com

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Abstract

The English language serves as lingua franca worldwide, and in most educational systems it is taught as a separate subject. This study examines students' experiences and challenges in learning English at the tertiary level, with a particular focus on English Language and Literature programs, where students are expected to acquire advanced knowledge to become specialized and competent in the English language. However, many students continue to face difficulties in developing English language skills, which may affect their academic performance and overall learning outcomes. To collect comprehensive data on students' learning experiences, a quantitative questionnaire, which also included several open-ended questions, was used. This study explores specific factors such as students' preferences, experiences, and challenges, highlighting how these factors influence learning outcomes and how they can be effectively addressed by English language teachers. This study aims to enrich knowledge that leads to improved teaching and learning practices, with the aim of increasing students' engagement, motivation and overall success in acquiring English language skills in higher education institutions.

Keywords: English, higher education, learning preferences, experiences, challenges

Introduction

With the rapid trends and developments happening worldwide, English has become a global medium of communication in all fields, including education, law, economics, medicine, and information technology. Consequently, learning English is essential at all levels of education, including higher education. Mastering English at the tertiary level is crucial for preparing future professionals to meet academic demands such as research and scholarly communication, as well as for enhancing their global employability and professional interaction in an increasingly interconnected world.

In the Western Balkans, as in other European regions, English has become an inevitable component of the educational process at all levels and fields of education, either as an ESP (English for Specific Purposes) subject within various study programs or as a full degree program in English Language and Literature. The latter is typically chosen by students who aim to pursue careers in English teaching, translation, or other language-related professions.

At the university level, English language proficiency becomes even more important, especially for students enrolled in English Language and Literature study programs. These students are expected to achieve advanced competence in all components of the English language, so that in the future they can effectively deliver it, translate different types of texts or engage in academic studies. For this reason, it is particularly important to consider students' perspectives regarding their preferences, experiences and challenges in learning English. A better understanding of these perspectives can help teachers identify potential barriers and adapt their teaching approaches to better support students in acquiring the required skills.

Literature Review

Learning English at the university level of study is a challenging process, as it requires students to acquire specific language skills, related to particular subjects, that will later enable them to perform effectively in their professional careers. Language learning goes beyond simple memorization of vocabulary, it requires the integration of new lexical items within the student's existing linguistic knowledge, thus facilitating their transformation into meaningful and functional knowledge (Brown, 2000).

In this context, it is of particular importance to initially recognize students' learning styles, their prior experiences, and the challenges they face during learning process. Understanding these individual characteristics, helps teacher to better support students' language development and adapt instructions based on their needs. The learning styles model classifies students according to the way they receive and process information (Felder, 1988). Understanding this model enables teachers to adapt teaching to the different needs of students. Identifying students' individual preferences in the learning process represents a crucial step in equipping them with the necessary language skills and enables teachers to effectively individualize, organize and manage relevant activities (Boström, 2011). As mentioned, students have different learning style preferences, and recognizing these differences helps to increase students' awareness of their preferred ways of learning, while also promoting an understanding of alternative learning approaches (Mkonto, 2015). However, learning styles are not fixed or absolute; students can adopt different learning styles depending on the context and learning task. Therefore, teachers are encouraged to use a variety of approaches and create different learning conditions that enable students to engage and develop different learning styles. Such flexibility in teaching can increase learning effectiveness and create an environment where students are able to achieve maximum success (Xudoyberdiyeva, 2024).

Even in English language learning, different students have different learning styles. Some are kinesthetic learners, while others prefer auditory or visual styles (Norhasanah et al., 2022). Therefore, it is important to use a teaching method that incorporates all three styles in order to meet the different needs of students.

The literature suggests a strong connection between students' learning experiences, their preferences, and the challenges they face. Positive experiences with interactive activities tend to increase students' preference and motivation for learning the language. On the other hand, negative experiences, such as frequent corrections by the teacher, can negatively affect students' internal language development (Loewen & Reinders, 2011). Limited opportunities to speak without being judged can also reduce motivation and increase anxiety, which can further hinder language learning (Liu, 2023). These learning experiences play a crucial role in shaping students' attitudes towards the English language. During the process of learning English, students can develop positive or negative attitudes, which significantly affect their learning outcomes. Students who develop positive attitudes towards language tend to achieve greater success, which in turn strengthens their motivation and engagement. Conversely, students who develop negative attitudes may

encounter difficulties in language learning, leading to poor results and negative experiences that further hinder the learning process (Elyıldırım & Ashton-Hay, 2006).

When students' learning styles and preferences are not considered, they are likely to face challenges in learning English, which can affect their classroom experiences, attitudes and overall development in relation to the language. Research shows that, despite the fact that higher education students already possess prior knowledge of English, as it is taught as a subject at previous educational levels, they continue to face difficulties due to previous learning experiences and failure to take teaching styles into account.

University-level students face a number of challenges, including language difficulties such as limited vocabulary and low speaking skills, mainly because many language teachers still prefer traditional teacher-centered teaching methods (Ismeti, 2022). This approach not only limits students' opportunities for language improvement, but also reduces their motivation. Other affective barriers, such as anxiety and lack of self-confidence, are additional challenges that students face (Zrekat & Al-Sohbani, 2022). Furthermore, contextual factors, including large class sizes and limited opportunities to use English outside the classroom, may further hinder language development.

The literature shows that students' preferences, experiences and challenges in the English language learning process are closely interrelated and should be carefully considered and addressed by teachers, in order to provide students with appropriate learning styles for effective language acquisition.

Research Methodology

This study employed a quantitative research approach to investigate students' preferences, experiences, and challenges in learning English in higher education. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire.

Population

The participants in the study were 20 undergraduate students enrolled in the English Language and Literature program at a public university in Skopje. The sample comprised of first- and second-year students who voluntarily agreed to participate in the study. Their responses provided valuable insights regarding their preferences, experiences, and challenges in learning English at the tertiary level.

Instruments

A paper-based questionnaire was employed to carry out this study; as described in the sections below. Questionnaire was designed to collect data on students' perceptions of English language learning, preferred learning styles, teaching methods, instructional materials, and the use of literature in English language courses. The questionnaire consisted of eight questions, including both closed-ended and open-ended items. The closed-ended questions used multiple-choice response options, allowing participants to select one or more answers, while the open-ended questions provided opportunities for students to express their opinions and suggestions in their own words. The questionnaire was administered anonymously to encourage honest responses, and the collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and thematic analysis of the open-ended responses.

Results

The questionnaire consisted of eight questions designed to explore students' preferences, experiences, and challenges related to English language learning in higher education. The first three questions focused on students' preferred learning styles, the teaching methods they found the most effective, and the types of materials they considered most helpful in their English courses. Two open-ended questions asked students to describe the qualities they believe make teaching materials more effective and to recommend ways in which literature-based learning could be improved. Other questions observed perceived benefits of studying literature for language development as well as the challenges that the students face when learning English through literary texts. The final open-ended question asked students to describe what their ideal English course would include in terms of methods, activities, and materials.

The results are presented below in the order of the questionnaire items.

Table 1

Students' Preferred Ways of Learning English

Method	Frequency	Percentage
Discussion/communication	8	40%
Reading/analysis	3	15%
Writing/creative tasks	2	10%
Lectures and note-taking	1	5%
Digital/multimedia	6	30%
Other	0	0%
Total	20	100%

Note. Based on authors' own research

As specified in the table, discussion and communication was the most preferred learning method, selected by 8 students (40%). This was followed by digital and multimedia-based learning, preferred by 6 students (30%). Reading and analysis was chosen by 3 students (15%), while writing and creative tasks were preferred by 2 students (10%). The least preferred method was lectures and note-taking, selected by 1 student (5%). No student selected the "Other" category.

Table 2

Most Effective Teaching Methods as Perceived by Students

Method	Frequency	Percentage
Communicative Language Teaching	19	95%
Task-Based Learning	2	10%
Literature-Based Approach	0	0%
Project-Based Learning	4	20%
Grammar-Translation	6	30%
Blended Learning	4	20%
Other	0	0%

Note. Based on authors' own research. Percentages may sum to more than 100%

Participants were asked to select all options that applied to their preferences.

As shown in Table 2, the majority of students (95%) chose Communicative Language Teaching as the most effective method for learning English. Other methods such as Grammar-Translation (30%) and Project-Based or Blended Learning (20% each) were moderately preferred, while Task-Based Learning (10%) and Literature-Based Approaches (0%) were less preferred.

Table 3

Materials Students Find Most Helpful in English Courses

Method	Frequency	Percentage
Course textbooks	8	40%
Original literary works	4	20%
Short stories or excerpts	0	0%
Films, adaptations, or videos	16	80%
Online platforms and digital resources	2	10%
Teacher-prepared handouts or slides	8	40%
Podcasts or audio materials	2	10%
Other	0	0%

Note. Based on authors' own research

Participants were asked to select all options that applied to their preferences.

Table 3 shows students' observations regarding materials they find the most helpful in English courses. Films, adaptations, or videos were selected by the majority of students (80%), followed by course textbooks and teacher-prepared handouts or slides (40% each). Original literary works were considered helpful by 20% of students, while online platforms and podcasts were selected less (10% each). Short stories, excerpts, and other materials were not selected by any student.

The fourth question was open-ended asking about the qualities that make teaching materials effective and engaging. Twelve out of twenty students responded, and their answers highlighted several key qualities: clarity and understandability (e.g., "It should be clear and understandable"), interesting and visually appealing content, interactive exercises and group activities that encourage creative thinking (e.g., "It should contain exercises that engage creative thinking and writing"), opportunities to develop language skills, especially speaking, and the use of digital resources such as videos or podcasts. Overall speaking, students preferred materials that are clear, engaging, interactive, and skill-oriented.

Table 5

Aspects of Literature Study That Improve Students' English Skills

Method	Frequency	Percentage
Expanding vocabulary	4	20%
Understanding grammar and structure	12	60%
Learning about culture and context	3	15%
Developing critical thinking and interpretation	6	30%

Method	Frequency	Percentage
Improving writing or speaking skills	2	10%
Other	0	0%

Note. Based on authors' own research

Participants were asked to select all options that applied to their preferences.

Participants were asked to select aspects of literature study that improve students' English skills. As indicated in Table 5, understanding grammar and structure was selected by the majority of students (60%), followed by developing critical thinking and interpretation (30%) and expanding vocabulary (20%). Learning about culture and context (15%) and improving writing or speaking skills (10%) were selected less frequently. No student selected other aspects.

Table 6

Challenges of Learning English Through Literature

Method	Frequency	Percentage
Complex language and vocabulary	6	30%
Cultural differences	4	20%
Difficulty understanding literary themes	6	30%
Lack of background knowledge	8	40%
Uninteresting or outdated materials	3	15%
Other	0	0%

Note. Based on authors' own research

Participants were asked to select all options that applied to their preferences.

Table 6 presents the challenges that students reported in learning English through literature. The most frequently chosen challenge was a lack of background knowledge, reported by 8 students (40%). Complex language and vocabulary and difficulty understanding literary themes were each selected by 6 students (30%). Cultural differences were noted by 4 students (20%), and uninteresting or outdated materials were mentioned by 3 students (15%). No other challenges were reported.

The seventh open-ended question invited students to suggest ways teachers could enhance literature-based learning. Ten students responded to the open-ended question about how teachers can make literature-based learning more engaging and effective. Their answers emphasized several strategies to make literature-based learning more effective and engaging. Students noted the use of interactive and visually attractive activities (e.g., "Include more interactive and funny activities";

"Use material that attracts our attention visually"), providing clear explanations of the topics (e.g. "Give clear explanation related to the topic"), and allowing students to express themselves freely. They also suggested using multimedia resources, assigning tasks related to literature, and connecting the material to the real-life contexts (e.g. "Relate the material with real life examples"). In general, students preferred literature-based learning that is interactive, clear, participatory, and relevant to real-life experiences.

The eighth open-ended question asked students to design their ideal English course and suggest the methods, activities, or materials they would include. Nine out of twenty students answered the open-ended question about the methods, activities and materials that they would include in their ideal English course. They highlighted several key preferences: the use of technology and multimedia resources to make lessons more engaging (e.g. "I would use technology, in order to make exercises related to the lesson more interesting"; "include more music, movies etc."), interactive activities such as group work, projects and discussions (e.g. "Group works, projects, digital activities and essays"; "I would include interactive activities such as group work") , and game-based learning including quizzes, word games and board games (e.g. "Games, quizzes and questions at the end of the class to test our understanding"). Students also suggested inclusion reading assignments, grammar-focused activities (e.g. "Grammar slides exploring how and when to use grammar units by giving examples, word games or board games, short films/podcasts"), and real-life examples to make learning more meaningful.

Discussion

The findings of this study show that students in higher education strongly prefer interactive and communicative ways of learning English, with discussion-based activities and multimedia resources being the most popular. This suggests that learners value active participation and engaging materials that make learning more interesting and motivating. Although literature-based approaches are part of the curriculum, students did not find them highly effective, potentially because literary texts can be complex and difficult to understand. They also noted challenges such as limited background knowledge and difficulty in interpreting themes, emphasizing the need for teaching material that is clear, interactive, and associated to real-life situations. These results support earlier studies showing that communicative methods and multimedia tools improve language learning.

Conclusion

This study investigated students' preferences, experiences, and challenges in learning English in higher education. The results show that students prefer interactive and communicative learning methods, such as discussion-based activities and multimedia resources, while literature-based approaches are seen less effective due to complex texts and limited background knowledge. Students also pointed out the importance of materials that are clear, engaging, and connected to real-life situations. These results suggest that English courses should combine interactive activities, multimedia, and carefully designed literature materials to increase students' engagement and support development language skills. Based on these findings, the author suggests that combining interactive activities, multimedia, and carefully designed literature materials could increase students' engagement, support the development of language skills, and improve their confidence in understanding and using English.

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