

# L'ANALISI LINGUISTICA E LETTERARIA

FACOLTÀ DI SCIENZE LINGUISTICHE E LETTERATURE STRANIERE  
UNIVERSITÀ CATTOLICA DEL SACRO CUORE

2

ANNO XXIX 2021

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## TEACHERS' VIEWS ON THE USE OF LITERATURE AS A TOOL FOR LEARNING EFL

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Considering the lack of studies to support the theories regarding the advantages of integrating literature into language classes, our aim is to investigate the upsides of the use of literature in TEFL through empirical research. We try to find out whether secondary school language teachers' views towards the use of literature in FL classes change and which genre they perceive as the most beneficial for students. We collect teachers' opinions before and after showing them a set of lessons focused on three literary genres. As to quantitative research, we use a statistical survey through paired t-tests, effect size, and ANOVA, while for the qualitative research, we try to uncover what underpins teachers' viewpoints through semi-structured questions. After considering the potentiality of literature in a language class, most of the teachers realized that literary texts could represent models that students may follow in their future use of the language and foster motivation through interactive activities.

*Keywords:* teachers' perspective, literature in FL classes, literary genres, quantitative and qualitative analysis

### 1. Introduction

Language teachers struggle every day with the task of engaging and motivating students and of teaching language meaningfully. A way of achieving these two goals can be by teaching language through literature. Scholarly research has sustained the advantages of this mutually beneficial and productive interaction, emphasising how using literary texts can offer rich input for language acquisition, can be a source of motivation, and can develop cultural awareness.

Although the division between language and literature is still rigid in many contexts, several studies have been developed to promote this integration within the global context of FL education<sup>1</sup>. Nonetheless, even the supporters of the use of literature in language education acknowledge that more empirical research is necessary in order to validate the theoretical positions and to support the use of literature in the language classroom. Ed-

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<sup>1</sup> Cfr. J. Bloemert – A. Paran – E. Jansen – W. van de Grift, *Students' perspective on the benefits of EFL literature education*, "Language Learning Journal", 47, 2019, 3, pp. 371-384; R. Carter, *Literature and Language Learning in the EFL Classroom*, in *Literature and Language Learning in the EFL Classroom*, M. Teranishi – W. Saito – K. Wales ed., Palgrave Macmillan, London 2015, p. 316.

mondson, for instance, stated that the role FL literature can play in language teaching had not been “seriously investigated empirically”<sup>2</sup>. Likewise, in his survey, Paran complained about the lack of systematic enquiries which could analyse the way literature is taught, in terms of how it is perceived by teachers, received by students, and how successfully it is used in promoting language proficiency<sup>3</sup>.

This study follows our previous research dealing with students’ views about the advantages of using literary texts in ELT classes<sup>4</sup>. Our study tried to respond to the need for empirical studies which could validate the theoretical positions in this regard, analysing how three different literary genres could develop students’ linguistic competence and socio-cultural awareness while also increasing their motivation. Applying a sound methodology through pre-tests and post-tests, we compared students’ beliefs, opinions, and perceptions, before and after carrying out three lesson plans based on three literary genres. As a further step to this research, in the present study, we focus on teachers’ views to understand how, from their point of view, literary texts can be advantageous in learning a foreign language. Therefore, after examining the gaps in research on the issue, we investigated high school language teachers’ views on the possible benefits of using literature in a foreign language class, and in particular, how the use of literature in EFL classes can improve students’ linguistic and cultural competence, as well as motivate them. The quantitative and qualitative results are then presented and discussed together with relevant pedagogical implications. We end with a discussion of the implications of our findings from both a theoretical and practical viewpoint.

## 2. *A review of empirical studies*

A first attempt to empirically prove the benefits of literature in English language classes was realised by Gilroy, who, in 1995, explored university mother-tongue lecturers’ attitudes and practices<sup>5</sup>. In this study, the lecturers claimed that they regarded literature as a tool no different from any other EFL resource, but none of them used literature regularly in their lesson planning.

Another survey carried out in a university context was performed by Jones – Carter<sup>6</sup>. The authors found out that the professors surveyed believed that literature could have been a useful resource for developing English language and cultural awareness but had

<sup>2</sup> W. Edmondson, *The role of literature in foreign language learning and teaching: some valid assumptions and invalid arguments*, “AILA Review”, 6, 1997, 12, p. 44.

<sup>3</sup> A. Paran, *The Role of literature in Instructed foreign language learning and teaching: An evidence-based survey*, “Language Teaching”, 41, 2008, 4, p. 56.

<sup>4</sup> D. Sirico, *Students’ Perceptions and Attitudes on the Use of Literature as a Tool for Learning English as a Foreign Language*, “L’Analisi Linguistica e Letteraria”, 2, 2020.

<sup>5</sup> M. Gilroy, *An investigation into teachers’ attitudes to using literature in the language classroom*, “Edinburgh Working Papers in Applied Linguistics”, 6, 2005, pp. 1-17.

<sup>6</sup> C. Jones – R. Carter, *Literature and language awareness: using literature to achieve CEFR outcomes*, “Journal of Second Language Teaching and Research”, 1, 2012, pp. 69-82.

some doubts about how useful students would perceive it to be. Professors were also concerned about the preparation needed and the classroom time available.

As for the studies that investigated secondary school teachers' attitudes, we must mention Bloemert – Jansen – van de Grift, who examined how EFL teachers approached literature in a Dutch secondary school, and what kind of approach they tended to use more<sup>7</sup>. The authors administered a questionnaire asking about teachers' preferred methods and found out that their choices were linked to the "curricular heritage", i.e., teachers tended to accept the unsaid dynamics and the existing curriculum already adopted by the school.

In order to respond to the severe paucity of research in secondary school contexts, where very little is known about the various aspects of the use of literature in language classrooms and language teachers' involvement in it, Duncan – Paran tried to investigate the factors that teachers consider when choosing literary texts and how literary texts are used in foreign language courses<sup>8</sup>. In this study, teachers of different languages were firmly in favour of using literature in language teaching, stressing the general contribution of literature in education as well as the linguistic benefits. We must report, however, that, by the authors' admission, respondents represented a self-selected group of teachers who were particularly interested in teaching and using literature. Therefore, they could not be a particularly reliable sample of the entire population of teachers.

Following the examination of the theoretical and empirical studies aimed at demonstrating the advantages of using literature in teaching foreign languages, the following research gaps have emerged:

- A paucity of empirical research about the topic in general.
- A lack of research in Secondary School contexts.
- The absence of empirical studies dealing with plays.
- The absence of empirical studies comparing two or more literary genres.
- A drought of empirical studies applying a sound methodology.

Apart from the dearth of empirical research, in general, and in secondary school contexts, in particular, it is remarkably disheartening to notice that, notwithstanding the insistence of theorists about the importance of plays in developing oral skills and personal growth<sup>9</sup>, empirical studies about plays are essentially non-existent.

We have also to underline that no study has ever compared two or more genres. A genre-based orientation could have enabled the organisation of a holistic curriculum entrenched in texts intended to develop literacy<sup>10</sup>. Moreover, comparing different dimensions, such as the linguistic, motivational, and cultural aspects, could have been a useful tool to thorough-

<sup>7</sup> J. Bloemert – E. Jansen – W. van de Grift, *Exploring EFL literature approaches in Dutch secondary education*, "Language, Culture and Curriculum", 29, 2016, 2, pp. 169-188.

<sup>8</sup> S. Duncan – A. Paran, *The effectiveness of literature on acquisition of language skills and intercultural understanding in the high school context. A research report for The International Baccalaureate Organisation*, Institute of Education, University College London (IOE), London 2017.

<sup>9</sup> G. Lazar, *Literature and language teaching: a guide for teachers and trainers*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2009.

<sup>10</sup> K. Paesani, *Research in language-literature instruction: Meeting the call for change?*, "Annual Review of Applied Linguistics", 31, 2011, pp. 161-181.

ly investigate perspectives and perceived benefits. In reality, so far, empirical studies have usually only delved into a single dimension, asking students general questions<sup>11</sup>.

To grasp similarities and differences useful to delineate and understand the formative realities and to find and extrapolate pedagogical models that could transcend partiality and narrowness of perspective, data collection should not be separated from meanings, qualitative evaluation or historical development of events. It should also be emphasised that people are present in different research situations as active elements, with expectations, ideas, and emotions about the issues. These aspects are difficult to describe and control only with procedures that are generally provided by the quantitative, experimental method. Mixed research methods could increase the strengths of a study, leading to a better understanding of complex phenomena by combining numeric trends from quantitative data and specific details from qualitative data.

### 3. *Research questions*

Taking into account the above-mentioned research gaps, the present study has the main objective of analysing the opinions of high school language teachers regarding the use of poetry, novels, and drama for teaching EFL. This objective led to the following research questions:

RQ1: What are teachers' views regarding the use of poetry, novels, and drama in FL classes before and after observing lesson plans based on these three literary genres?

RQ2: Which genre and which dimension of advantages, whether linguistic, sociocultural or motivational, do teachers perceive to contribute most to students' learning?

RQ3: Are there any changes in comparison to the views expressed at the pre-test stage?

### 4. *Method*

#### 4.1 Lesson plans and participants

To carry out our study, we applied the advantages of the different literary genres, as specified in theoretical studies, into learning units based on literature. Therefore, three lesson plans, abridged in Appendix 1, according to three literary genres, were designed. Due to time limitations, we were not able to deal with all existing literary genres, and therefore, we opted to design learning units that dealt with poetry, prose (excerpts from a novel), and theatre (excerpts from a play).

The 30 teachers who took part in the survey had varied teaching experience. Among them, five (17%) had from one to ten years of teaching experience, twelve (40%) had from 10 to 20 years, ten (33%) from 20 to 30 and three (10%) had more than 30 years of teach-

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<sup>11</sup> Cfr. J. Bloemert – A. Paran – E. Jansen – W. van de Grift, *Students' perspective on the benefits of EFL literature education*.



ing experience. To ensure reliability, the sample was not chosen according to a self-selected group of teachers. Instead, all the foreign language teachers of the school were encouraged to take the tests.

#### 4.2 Procedure

The empirical study was carried out in a high school in the north of Italy. The researcher met with the teachers and administered the pre-tests. The researcher, then, taught three lesson plans to three classes of students attending the first year of a scientific high school. During the first phase of the project, three teachers, who were the classes' curricular English teachers, were present. During the teaching of the second and third parts of the project, which were the lessons based on the novel and the play, our lessons were conducted in the presence of other teachers who taught other subjects.

Before starting our project, the three teachers who were present in class were administered a pre-test about teaching a foreign language through poetry. After we taught our lessons about poetry, these teachers were administered a post-test and a semi-structured interview related to the items of the questionnaires.

Concerning the other 27 foreign language teachers who took part in the survey, they were administered the same pre-test too. Subsequently, they examined the lesson plans carried out in class to get a general idea of the work done with students and then were administered a post-test to compare their impressions after they had gone through the prepared lesson plans.

This part of the survey was also carried out with the three teachers who were present in class during the lessons about poetry. They joined the other school teachers because they had not observed the lessons about the other two genres, i.e., novel and drama.

#### 4.3 Quantitative data analysis

Quantitative data were obtained through three questionnaires (included in Appendix 2), one per genre, designed on a 5-point Likert scale, which teachers completed before and after observing three lesson plans, one per each of the three genres under analysis. The three teaching units included, and the three questionnaires tested, the advantages of using poems, novels, and drama for EFL. For poetry and novels, the questionnaire included 18 advantages – 6, 2, and 10 within, respectively, the linguistic, the sociocultural, and the motivational dimensions. For drama, the questionnaire included 20 advantages – 6, 2, and 12 within, respectively, the linguistic, the sociocultural, and the motivational dimensions.

To analyse teachers' pre-test opinions on the advantages of the three literary genres under analysis for EFL, we used descriptive statistics calculating measures of central tendency, such as means and standard deviations. We also measured the internal consistency reliability of the different questionnaires through the Cronbach's coefficient, obtaining values of  $\alpha > .9$ , which revealed that their internal consistency was very high and that the scale was reliable.

In a second stage, pre-test and post-test results were compared through paired *t*-tests both for the linguistic, the sociocultural, and the motivational components and for the

specific items within each dimension. Pre-test and post-test results were also compared in relation to the three genres, along with the three different examined dimensions (linguistic, motivational, and sociocultural) and, in turn, the latter in relation to the two-time phases of the survey (pre-tests and post-tests). To perform these comparisons, we employed a repeated-measures ANOVA applied to three factors: genre, dimension, and time of the survey.

We carried out an in-depth statistical analysis with ordinal categorical data reporting the average effect size and any measure that could indicate the strength of our findings. These tools allowed us to endow stability to our research across samples, generalisations, and analyses, allowing evaluation of the practical relevance of the research outcomes, as claimed by Mackey – Gass<sup>12</sup>. The statistical analysis of ordinal categorical data is common in applied linguistics and has been carried out by many authors who published their inquiries in indexed journals<sup>13</sup>.

#### 4.4 Qualitative analysis

Qualitative data were obtained through semi-structured interviews and participants' written feedback. The semi-structured interviews took the form of narrative reports of the elements we considered meaningful. These reports of educational practice, which is itself a form of experience, and as such, can be narrated, became part of the empirical basis to be analysed and interpreted.

In order to obtain qualitative data, when the first part of the project was over, that is, after the lessons based on poetry were taught, we administered a semi-structured interview to the three teachers who were present in class during these first lessons. To uncover if, and mainly how, teachers had changed their views about the use of literature in the foreign language classes, after having observed our lesson plans, we conducted three interviews based on the single aspects they had answered in the pre-tests and post-tests. Through these in-depth interviews, we wanted to achieve both breadths of coverage across key issues and depth of content within each one of the tested elements.

Consequently, our analysis was built around two main sets of data:

- three interviews through which we could acquire information about teachers' views on the advantages of poetical texts introduced in the lesson plans;

<sup>12</sup> A. Mackey – S. Gass, *Second language research: Methodology and design*, Routledge, New York 2011, p. 283.

<sup>13</sup> Examples are: W. Yang – Y. Sun, *The use of cohesive devices in argumentative writing by Chinese EFL learners at different proficiency levels*, "Linguistics and Education", 23, 2012, pp. 31-48; J. Bloemert – E. Jansen – W. van de Grift, *Exploring EFL literature approaches in Dutch secondary education*; J. Bloemert – A. Paran – E. Jansen – W. van de Grift, *Students' perspective on the benefits of EFL literature education*; D. Hanauer, *Measuring voice in poetry written by second language learners*, "Written Communication", 32, 2015, pp. 66-86; M. Thenmozhi – S. Gupta, *Impact of literature in language learning classroom: An empirical study*, "Global English-Oriented Research Journal", 2, 2016, pp. 119-132; S. Duncan – A. Paran, *The effectiveness of literature on acquisition of language skills and intercultural understanding in the high school context*; R. Masbuhin – F. Liao, *English teachers' desire to teach poetry: The impact of educational backgrounds, belief toward poetry, and level of confidence*, "The Journal of Literature in Language Teaching", 6, 2017, pp. 21-36; D. Sirico, *Students' Perceptions and Attitudes on the Use of Literature as a Tool for Learning English as a Foreign Language*.

- teachers' answers to specific questions contained in the questionnaires. These questions were about:
  - the knowledge of students' literary preferences and habits;
  - the frequency with which teachers used/would like to use literary texts in class (before and after examining our lesson plans);
  - what they thought would be more pleasant/difficult for students (about the lesson plans), and why.

Teachers' feedback was indexed to sort answers so that material with similar content or properties could be viewed as a whole. This way, we could focus on each topic in turn, so that details and distinctions that lay within could be scrutinised. We tried to uncover what underpinned attitudes and motivations, distinguishing factors that could lead to different perspectives within the sample<sup>14</sup>. The open-ended questions and the interviews took the form of narrative reports of the elements we considered meaningful.

### 5. Quantitative results

Through our analytical comparison, we tried to explore how teachers' views changed regarding learning EFL through literary texts. We assumed that there would be a difference between teachers' scores after stimuli were introduced. This is apparent if we compare the data in the following tables, which provide the results by genre at the pre-test and post-test stages.

Table 1 - Comparison from pre-test to post-test for the dimensions related to poetry

DIMENSIONS AND ITEMS	Pre-test		Post-test		<i>t</i> stat (N=30)	<i>p</i> value
	M	SD	M	SD		
Using poems in the language classroom can contribute to the development of my students'						
LINGUISTIC COMPETENCE	3.13	.82	4.21	.62	-5.03	.00
listening skills	3.00	1.02	4.24	.83	-5.39	.00
speaking skills	2.97	1.00	4.03	.78	-4.44	.00
reading skills	3.41	1.13	4.38	.62	-3.52	.00
writing skills	2.86	.86	4.03	.73	-5.26	.00
vocabulary	3.66	1.35	4.62	.68	-3.76	.00
grammar	2.86	.82	3.97	.94	-4.00	.00
MOTIVATION TO LEARN EFL	3.14	.96	4.22	.57	-4.80	.00
because they can better understand their own personal emotions	3.28	1.20	4.24	.79	-3.65	.00
because they can better understand other people's emotions	3.24	1.04	4.34	.81	-4.42	.00

<sup>14</sup> Cfr. C. White – K. Woodfield – J. Ritchie – R. Ormston, *Writing up qualitative research*, in *Qualitative research practice*, J. Ritchie – J. Lewis – C. McNaughton Nicholls – R. Ormston ed., Sage Publications, London 2014, p. 380.

because they can develop their interpretative skills	3.31	1.34	4.31	.71	-3.88	.00
because they can become acquainted with figures of speech	3.62	1.35	4.48	.74	-3.24	.00
because poems can reveal a creative use of language	3.41	1.22	4.31	.60	-3.66	.00
because poems deal with important values	2.97	1.30	4.14	.99	-3.99	.00
because poems normally deal with non-trivial topics	3.00	1.05	3.97	.68	-3.78	.00
because poems are authentic material	3.00	1.11	4.28	.70	-4.78	.00
because using poems is an enjoyable experience	3.14	.97	4.34	.61	-5.5	.00
because poems are usually concise	2.45	1.16	3.83	1.07	-4.63	.00
SOCIOCULTURAL COMPETENCE	3.05	.87	3.62	.62	-4.92	.00
because students can better understand the Anglophone culture	3.17	.91	3.59	.82	-3.92	.00
because students can better understand their own culture	2.93	1.01	3.66	.72	-4.89	.00

Table 2 - Comparison from pre-test to post-test for the dimensions related to novel

DIMENSIONS AND ITEMS	Pre-test		Post-test		<i>t</i> stat (N=29)	<i>p</i> value
	M	SD	M	SD		
Using novels in the language classroom can contribute to the development of my students'						
LINGUISTIC COMPETENCE	3.45	.82	4.57	.45	-6.50	.00
listening skills	2.93	.92	4.41	.68	-6.74	.00
speaking skills	3.14	.99	4.52	.63	-6.86	.00
reading skills	3.86	.99	4.66	.55	-3.83	.00
writing skills	3.45	1.12	4.59	.63	-5.04	.00
vocabulary	3.93	1.13	4.72	.53	-4.37	.00
grammar	3.41	.98	4.52	.69	-5.34	.00
MOTIVATION TO LEARN EFL	3.23	.90	4.41	.68	-6.41	.00
because they can better understand their own personal emotions	3.10	1.05	4.38	.78	-6.25	.00
because they can better understand other people's emotions	3.24	.99	4.48	.78	-5.79	.00
because they can develop their interpretative skills	3.38	1.18	4.52	.78	-5.04	.00
because they can become acquainted with figures of speech	3.07	1.16	4.45	.83	-5.31	.00
because novels can reveal a creative use of language	3.28	1.10	4.31	.93	-4.30	.00

because novels deal with important values	3.24	1.18	4.31	1.04	-4.00	.00
because novels normally deal with non-trivial topics	3.14	.92	4.31	.81	-5.89	.00
because novels are authentic material	3.10	1.21	4.38	.82	-5.49	.00
because using novels is an enjoyable experience	3.31	.97	4.59	.57	-6.66	.00
because novels can help students understand different points of view	3.66	1.04	4.38	.78	-3.91	.00
SOCIOCULTURAL COMPETENCE	3.07	.94	4.14	.74	-5.99	.00
because students can better understand the Anglophone culture	3.24	1.02	4.28	.80	-4.61	.00
because students can better understand their own culture	2.90	1.01	4.00	.89	-6.09	.00

Table 3 - Comparison from pre-test to post-test for the dimensions related to drama

DIMENSIONS AND ITEMS	Pre-test		Post-test		<i>t stat</i> (N=29)	<i>p</i> value
	M	SD	M	SD		
Using plays in the language classroom can contribute to the development of my students						
LINGUISTIC COMPETENCE	2.99	.83	4.22	.66	0.35	.00
listening skills	2.93	1.00	4.14	.79	-5.52	.00
speaking skills	3.07	1.07	4.34	.77	-5.91	.00
reading skills	3.03	.98	4.21	.77	-5.72	.00
writing skills	2.55	.83	4.00	.96	-6.43	.00
vocabulary	3.59	1.15	4.66	.48	-5.23	.00
grammar	2.79	1.08	4.00	1.13	-5.39	.00
MOTIVATION TO LEARN EFL	3.12	.76	4.25	.54	-7.31	.00
because they can better understand their own personal emotions	3.24	1.18	4.48	.69	-6.32	.00
because they can better understand other people's emotions	3.28	1.03	4.52	.69	-5.64	.00
because they can develop their interpretative skills	3.34	1.01	4.31	.93	-4.30	.00
because they can become acquainted with figures of speech	3.21	1.24	4.34	1.08	-4.92	.00
because plays can reveal a creative use of language	3.1	1.28	4.28	1.07	-4.41	.00
because plays deal with important values	3.14	1.09	4.21	1.26	-3.87	.00
because plays normally deal with non-trivial topics	3.00	1.09	4.07	.92	-3.45	.00
because plays are authentic material	3.03	1.02	4.21	.90	-5.72	.00

because using plays is an enjoyable experience	2.80	.98	4.24	.87	-5.76	.00
because plays usually offer real lifelike settings	2.90	1.26	4.03	1.15	-5.98	.00
because plays can help students understand different points of view	3.24	1.02	4.17	.85	-7.70	.00
because they can find examples of colloquial and informal language	3.21	1.01	4.17	.93	-5.74	.00
SOCIOCULTURAL COMPETENCE	2.91	1.01	3.88	1.05	-6.49	.00
because students can better understand the Anglophone culture	2.93	1.07	4.03	1.12	-5.87	.00
because students can better understand their own culture	2.90	1.08	3.72	1.10	-5.87	.00

### 5.1 Poetry

The comparison between pre-tests and post-tests revealed that teachers valued poetry as a useful means to learn a foreign language. Graph 1 shows that, for all the items within the linguistic dimension, post-test values were higher than pre-test values. In fact, statistically significant differences were reported for all of them. As shown in Graph 1, after our intervention, teachers considered that the skills students could more effectively develop through poetry were vocabulary and reading, while grammar, writing, and speaking were considered the least valuable, even though significant differences were still reported.

Graph 1 - Means for the perceived usefulness of the linguistic dimension of poetry both in the pre-test and in the post-test

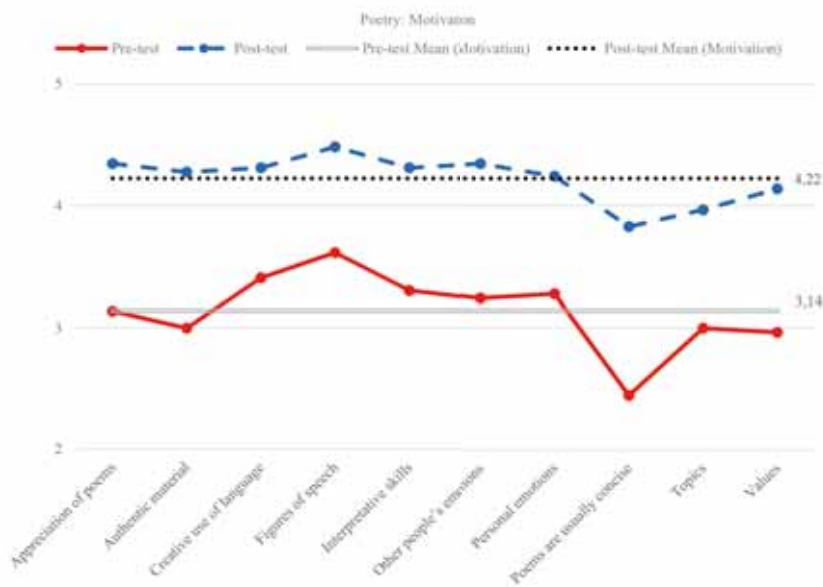


As for motivation, statistically significant differences were reported for almost all the items (Graph 2). The most considerable differences between values in pre-tests and post-tests

were found in the chance that the poems used in class could help students become better acquainted with figures of speech.

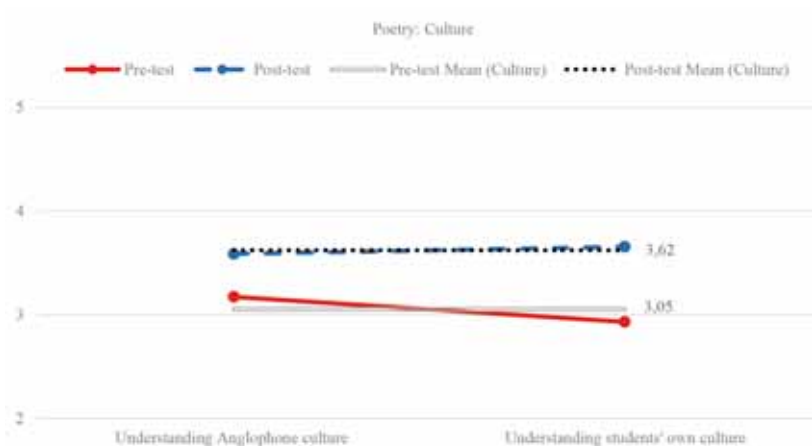
Teachers also thought that the poem used in class represented a source of motivation that students could consider engaging and enjoyable. This led to a higher score related to the general appreciation of poetry, as displayed in Graph 2. The creative activities carried out in class represented a source of motivation that they did not foresee, as well as the possibility of developing students' interpretative skills and the opportunity for students to recognise other people's emotions. Teachers also started to recognise the crucial importance of using authentic material in class as a source of motivation. In general, the means related to the motivation were substantially higher in the post-tests, and the differences were statistically significant.

Graph 2 - Means for the perceived usefulness of the motivational dimension of poetry, both in the pre-test and in the post-test



Regarding the possibility of expanding students' knowledge of the culture of Anglophone countries and students' own country, as also shown in Graph 3, teachers' attitudes underwent a statistically significant change in the post-tests. As a matter of fact, they acknowledged that poems could improve these dimensions.

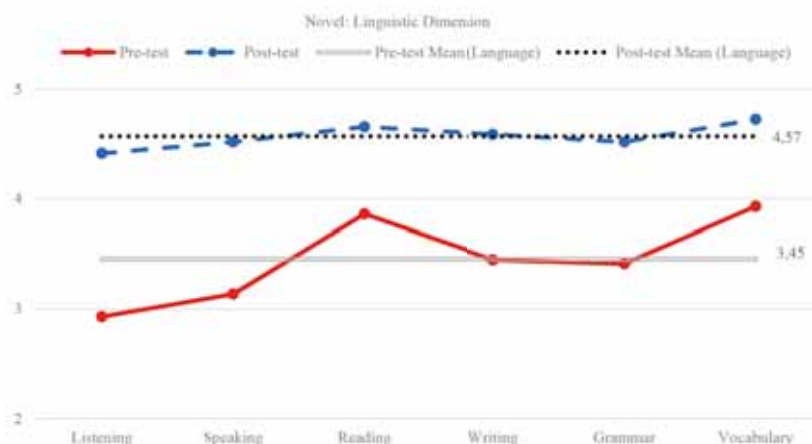
Graph 3 - Means for the perceived usefulness of the cultural dimension of poetry, both in the pre-test and in the post-test



### 5.2 Novels

The linguistic dimension of novels was the component that teachers considered the most useful in the teaching of a foreign language, giving this factor a very high score, as shown in Graph 4. Vocabulary and reading were the linguistic skills that teachers deemed students could best develop through novels, as well as listening and speaking, whose values markedly increased.

Graph 4 - Means for the perceived usefulness of the linguistic dimension of novel both in the pre-test and in the post-test

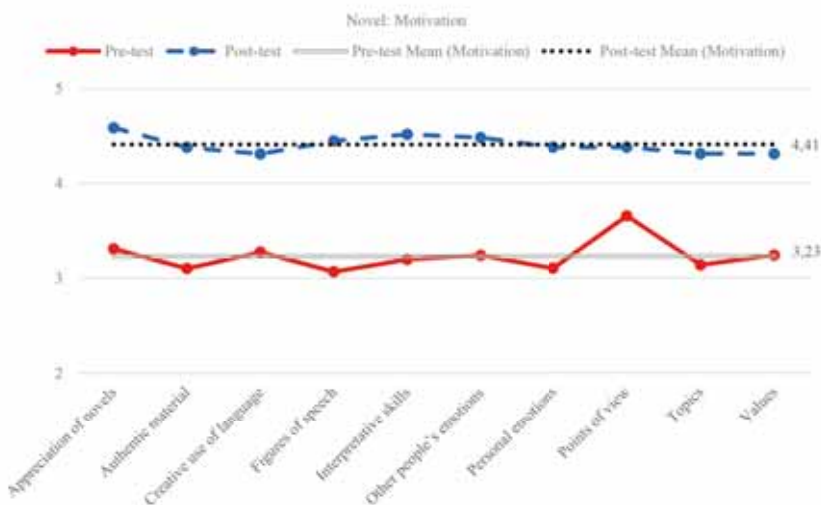




Regarding the increase in motivation through the use of novels, teachers stated that students could recognise that novels can be a source of motivation in learning the FL, confirming their inclination for this genre, as displayed in Graph 5.

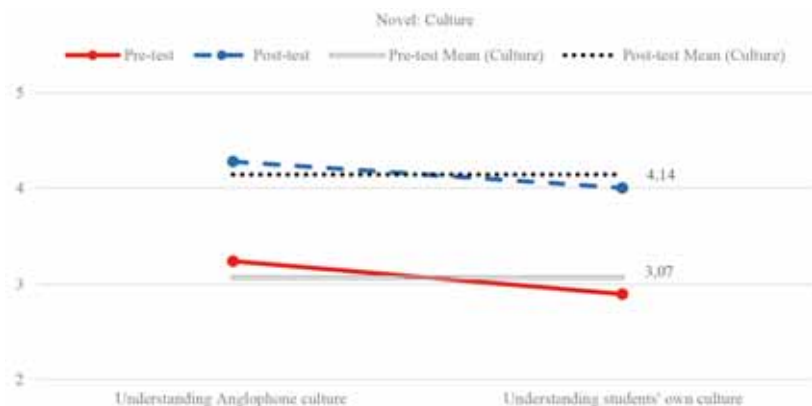
However, since all the values in the post-test were close to the overall mean, no significant differences could be found among the various elements linked to motivation. Notwithstanding, the values given by teachers were commonly higher in the post-test, as apparent in the perception of the power novels have to nourish positive values. The teachers seemed to appreciate the theme conceived for the lessons, which was the topic of disability. Their feedback proved that they appreciated the proposed activities and considered the possibility that students could start thinking critically about the topic and could better understand both their own emotions and other people's emotions.

Graph 5 - Means for the perceived usefulness of the motivational dimension of novel, both in the pre-test and in the post-test



Regarding the cultural dimension, values showed an increase in teachers' appreciation. In fact, both the item concerning the understanding of the culture of Anglophone countries, as well as the item concerning cultural awareness of students' own country, experienced an increase in the scores given by teachers. However, the general trend of the pre-test was reiterated in the post-test, as shown in Graph 6.

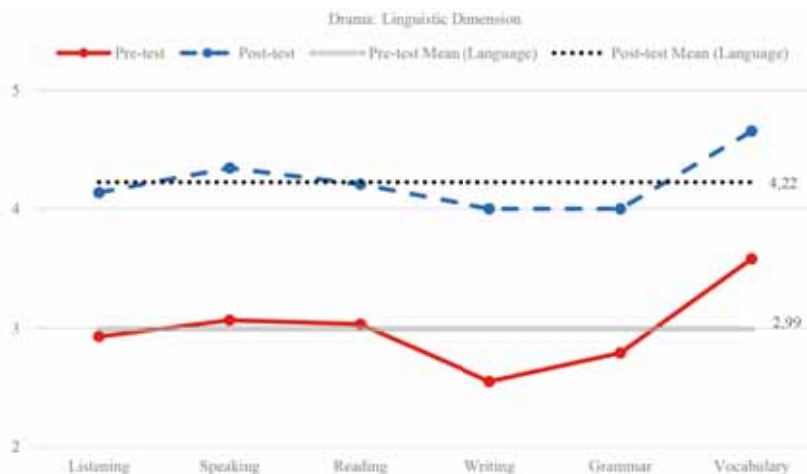
Graph 6 - Means for the perceived usefulness of the cultural dimension of novel, both in the pre-test and in the post-test



### 5.3 Plays

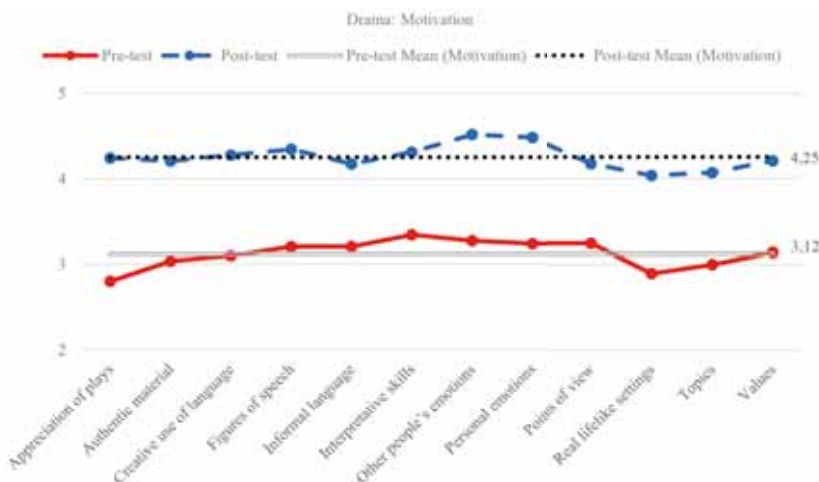
As shown in Graph 7, teachers did not expect that drama could help students develop their linguistic skills, while the post-test revealed statistically significant differences in this respect. Vocabulary was confirmed as the preferred component, while teachers appreciated the activities aimed at developing students' speaking skills. It is also interesting how, throughout the project, teachers started to consider the possibility of teaching grammar through literary texts.

Graph 7 - Means for the perceived usefulness of the linguistic dimension of drama both in the pre-test and in the post-test



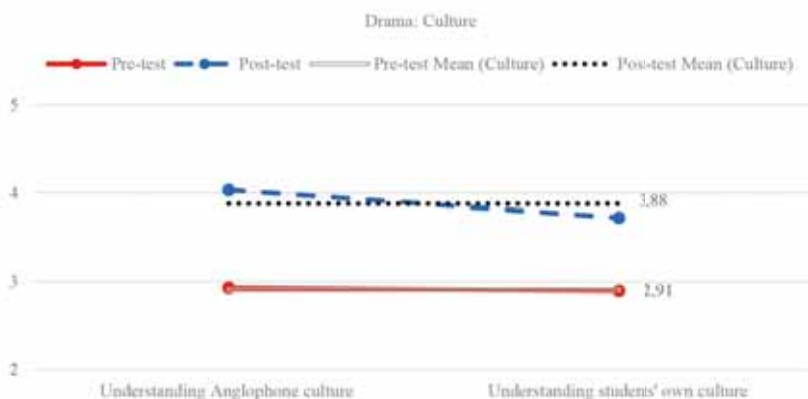
As for the motivational dimension, displayed in Graph 8, data showed that teachers started to consider that students would appreciate the use of plays as a tool in learning the foreign language. In fact, this aspect increased considerably. Almost all the elements linked to motivation in plays were considered useful by teachers, in particular, the ones related to the understanding of emotions, both one's own as well as other people's.

Graph 8 - Means for the perceived usefulness of the motivational dimension of drama, both in the pre-test and in the post-test



Regarding the cultural dimension, ratings were higher in the post-tests. This means that they started to consider the possibility of students learning the culture of Anglophone countries through plays, even though a less significant increase can be seen in the element linked to the knowledge of students' own culture, as displayed in Graph 9.

Graph 9 - Means for the perceived usefulness of the cultural dimension of drama, both in the pre-test and in the post-test



#### 5.4 Pre-tests and post-tests results compared to the three genres

To answer the second research question of which genre teachers found the most valuable and which competence they deemed could contribute most to developing their students' competences, the tests were compared in relation to the three genres, along with the three different examined aspects, and, in turn, the latter in relation to the two phases of the survey, i.e., pre- and post-tests. The results related to each group of questions referred to the three specific dimensions, i.e., language, motivation and culture, were collected together according to each genre in order to grasp the overall differences among the various dimensions. The results showed that the differences were statistically significant in all genres, with  $p$  values = .00 in all the paired questions and the analysed collective clusters. For this test, we employed a repeated-measures ANOVA applied to three factors: genre, dimension, and time. The factor "genre" consisted of the levels: poetry, prose, and drama; the factor "dimension" was comprised of the levels: language, motivation, and culture; the factor "time" included the levels pre-tests and post-tests.

To demonstrate the statistical significance of the comparison between the three dimensions and the three genres, we ran a Mauchly's test, and then applied a Greenhouse-Geisser correction (displayed in Table 4).

Table 4 - ANOVA test: *Within-Subjects Effects Test*

Source		Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	$p$ value	Partial Eta Squared	Observed Power
Genre	Greenhouse-Geisser	9.27	1.86	5.00	3.85	.03	.27	.78
Dimension	Sphericity Assumed	8.42	2.00	4.21	13.43	.00	.39	.95
Time	Sphericity Assumed	136.65	1.00	136.65	52.23	.00	.65	1.00
Genre *	Sphericity Assumed	1.47	4.00	.37	1.07	.38	.00	.65
Dimension *	Sphericity Assumed	.90	2.00	.45	1.29	.01	.07	.22
Time	Greenhouse-Geisser	.90	1.95	.46	1.29	.28	.07	.22
Genre *	Greenhouse-Geisser	.57	2.68	.21	1.10	.00	.17	.34
Dimension *	Greenhouse-Geisser							
Time	Greenhouse-Geisser							

This table shows different values regarding the assumed sphericity according to each factor and dimension. Every factor was compared to all the other factors in pairs and, in the end, a correlation was established among all the dimensions. We can see significant values for almost all dimensions and interactions. The values of the partial eta squared showed that dimension (.39) and time (.65) were the most effective factors in determining the differ-

ences in the means. Even though the interaction between genre and dimension violated the hypothesis of sphericity assumed ( $p = .38$ ), we proceeded with the analysis monitoring the results regarding the means in this interaction.

Apart from the correlation between genre and dimension, the  $p$  values, regarding the assumed sphericity, showed significant figures for all factors and interactions ( $p < .05$ ). The values in regard to the "observed power" reveal that there was a significant statistical change in almost all the surveys.

As for the pairwise comparison with respect to genre, as shown in Tables 5 and 6, significant differences were found. The poetry and the play had a lower mean than the novel (difference =  $-.28$ ). Considering a  $p$  value inferior to  $.05$ , it can be therefore statistically affirmed that the novel was the most appreciated genre.

Table 5 - ANOVA test: General means according to each genre

Genre	M (SD)	Dimension	M (SD)	Time	M (SD)	Std. Error
Poetry	3.64 (.59)	Language	3.67 (.77)	Pre-Test	3.13 (.82)	.15
				Post-Test	4.21 (.62)	.12
		Motivation	3.68 (.77)	Pre-Test	3.14 (.96)	.18
				Post-Test	4.22 (.57)	.11
		Culture	3.34 (.40)	Pre-Test	3.05 (.87)	.16
				Post-Test	3.62 (.62)	.12
Novel	3.87 (.62)	Language	4.01 (.79)	Pre-Test	3.45 (.77)	.15
				Post-Test	4.57 (.45)	.08
		Motivation	3.82 (.83)	Pre-Test	3.23 (.90)	.17
				Post-Test	4.41 (.68)	.13
		Culture	3.71 (.76)	Pre-Test	3.07 (.94)	.17
				Post-Test	4.14 (.74)	.14
Play	3.64 (.62)	Language	3.61 (.87)	Pre-Test	2.99 (.83)	.15
				Post-Test	4.22 (.66)	.12
		Motivation	3.69 (.80)	Pre-Test	3.12 (.76)	.13
				Post-Test	4.25 (.54)	.10
		Culture	3.40 (.68)	Pre-Test	2.91 (1.01)	.19
				Post-Test	3.88 (1.05)	.19

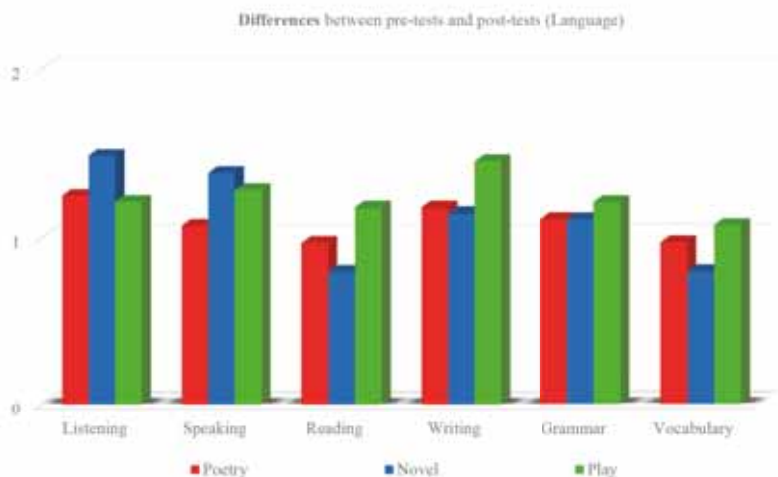
Table 6 - ANOVA test: Pairwise Comparisons according to genre

(I) Genre	(J) Genre	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	$p$ value
Poetry	Novel	-.28	.10	.03
Novel	Play	.28	.11	.05
Play	Poetry	.00	.13	.05

The analysis of the difference between the means in the pre-tests and the post-tests, as displayed in Graph 10, showed that means were decidedly higher in the post-tests for each

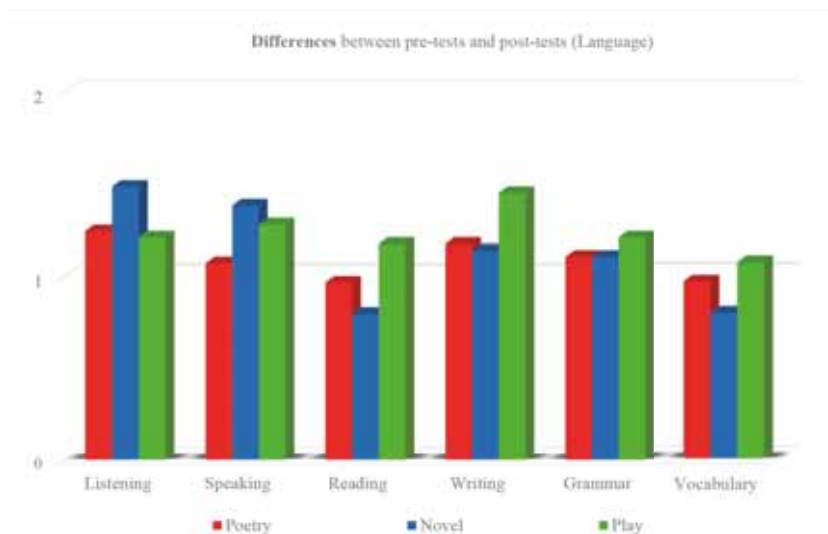
genre. Teachers thought that the most useful way of developing students' listening and speaking skills was through the use of the novel, while for all the other skills (reading, writing, grammar, and vocabulary), the highest difference was found in the play used in our learning plan.

Graph 10 - *Differences between the means in the pre-tests and post-tests related to the linguistic dimension in the three genres*



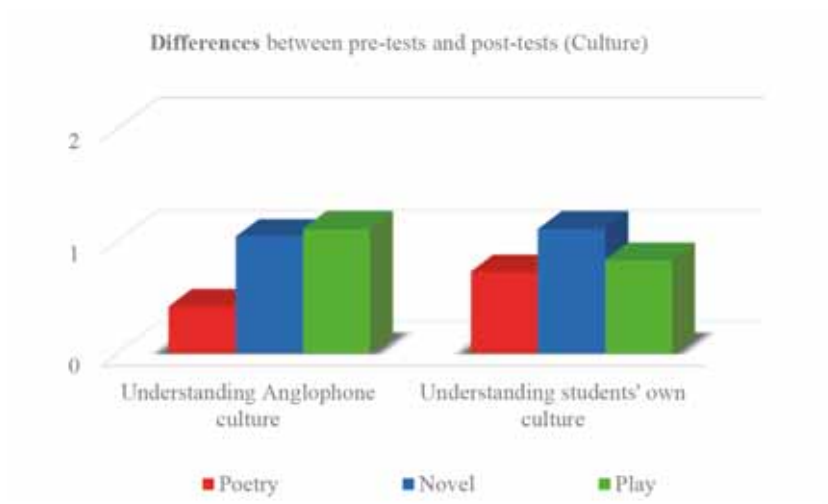
As for motivation, shown in Graph 11, the differences between the means in the pre- and post-tests were decidedly higher in the post-test for each genre, while the difference for the play was still remarkable, especially for the appreciation of the genre (difference=1.44) and for the chance to understand and share personal (difference=1.24) and other people's emotions (difference=1.24). Another noticeable difference was linked to the conciseness of poems (difference=1.38) and the possibility of learning figures of speech through novels (difference=1.38).

Graph 11 - Differences between the means in the pre-tests and post-tests related to the motivational dimension in the three genres



As we can infer from Graph 12, teachers deemed that the poem we used in class could help students understand the Anglophone culture better, even though the difference was rather small (.41). Their view changed alongside the other genres, and after we tried to establish a common ground to define what culture could represent.

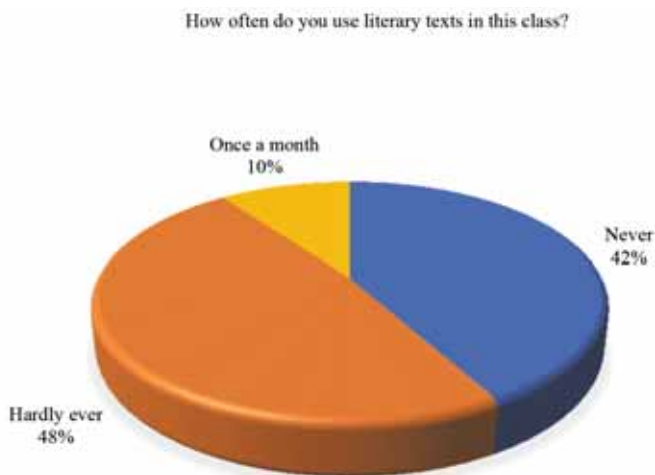
Graph 12 - Differences between the means in the pre-tests and post-tests related to the cultural dimension in the three genres



### 5.5 Frequency of use of literary texts in class

An important aspect to consider regarding the quantitative analysis is linked to the frequency with which teachers use literary texts in the two different moments of the survey. Before teachers could observe the lesson plans we designed, they were asked a simple, straightforward question: “How often do you use literary texts in this class?”<sup>15</sup>. As shown in Graph 13, only 10% of respondents claimed to use literature once a month in their foreign language classes.

Graph 13 - *Teachers' frequency of use of literature in the pre-test*



Regarding the genres that teachers stated to use more in class, a remarkable difference can be observed in their answers. As we can see in Table 7, the most used genre was the novel, with a meagre percentage of teachers using poems in their language classes. The most crucial factor was related to drama, which proved to be a genre thoroughly neglected by teachers.

Table 7 - *Teachers' frequency of use of literature in the pre-test*

	Poetry (Pre-test)	Novel (Pre-test)	Play (Pre-test)
Never	23%	17%	86%
Hardly ever	68%	63%	14%
Once a year	0%	0%	0%
Once a month	9%	20%	0%

*Note.* Percentage of answers in the pre-test related to the frequency with which teachers affirmed to use different literary genres during their foreign language lessons.

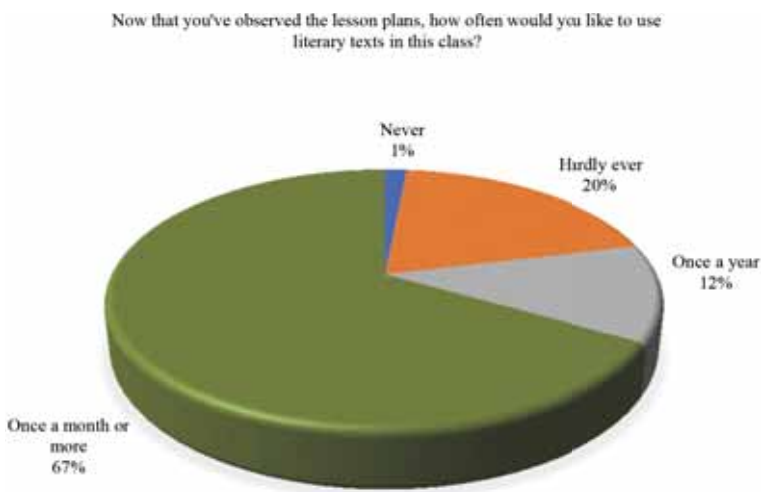
<sup>15</sup> The first class of a scientific high school, object of our research.



Following teachers' observation of our lesson plans based on literary texts, we asked the participants the same question: "Now that you've observed the lesson plans, how often would you like to use literary texts in this class?"

If we compare Graph 13 and Graph 14 along with the data in Table 8, we can infer that a noteworthy change occurred in teachers' opinions. The ratio regarding the possibility of not using literature in their lessons decreased from 90% (never = 42% + hardly ever = 48%) to 21% in the post-test, and the chances of using literary texts once a month or more increased from 10% to 67%.

Graph 14 - Teachers' frequency of use of literature in the post-test



The most impressive figure is related to the use of plays, which increased from total absence to 69%, which is the sum of the frequencies: once a year, once a month, twice a month, and once a week (shown in Table 8).

Table 8 - Teachers' frequency of use of literature in the pre- and post-tests

	Poetry (Pre-test)	Poetry (Post-test)	Novel (Pre-test)	Novel (Post-test)	Play (Pre-test)	Play (Post-test)
No answer	0%	9%	0%	9%	0%	9%
Never	23%	0%	17%	0%	86%	4%
Hardly ever	68%	27%	63%	14%	14%	18%
Once a year	0%	14%	0%	9%	0%	14%
Once a month	9%	32%	20%	45%	0%	45%
Twice a month	0%	18%	0%	9%	0%	5%
Once a week	0%	0%	0%	14%	0%	5%

*Note.* Percentage of answers in the pre-tests and post-tests related to the frequency with which teachers use or would use literary texts in a first class of a high school.

## 6. *Qualitative results*

### 6.1 Linguistic dimension

In their comments, some teachers reported the difficulty that students could have due to their lack of linguistic skills needed to understand sophisticated literary texts. Regarding listening skills, a teacher showed appreciation for the fact that the lessons were all taught in English and that this helped students with their listening ability.

Teachers did not agree with each other about the development of linguistic skills. In fact, a teacher complained that students did not listen to the poem enough because, in her opinion, it had to be read multiple times:

“We listened to the poem only once. And the listening skills were more concentrated on the conversations you had with students, not on poems in general.”<sup>16</sup>

When asked about the improvement of students’ speaking skills, teachers were willing to admit that students developed this skill during our lessons, even though they underlined that some shy pupils did not take part in the lessons actively enough:

“Not all of them spoke because of many different reasons. Most of them spoke and improved their abilities. Others didn’t. Not because of the plan of the lesson, but because of other kinds of reasons, that are related to their personality, or maybe time.”

Reading and writing skills were appreciated by teachers, too. They expected pupils to read a lot during literature-based lesson plans but, in their comments, they emphasised that they did not expect students to be asked to carry out so many written exercises:

“I didn’t expect that there were so many exercises. I read some of the students’ exercises, and they are very good. I didn’t expect them to be so good at writing.”

“They improved their writing. You made them write more than I expected.”

Teachers’ comments about vocabulary were discordant. Two teachers stated that pupils could learn a lot of new words, while another teacher criticised the sequence of the instructions we had designed in our lesson plan. She disagreed with placing reading comprehension activities and explaining the vocabulary after reading the poem. Moreover, the same teacher found the teaching of grammar through poems inappropriate:

“Teaching grammar is to be accurate when you speak. Poetry is something completely different and should be rid of burdens [*of grammatical rules*].”

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<sup>16</sup> Interviews were conducted in English. Some comments, provided by the teachers in Italian, were translated into English by the researcher.

As for grammar, similar concerns regarding the didactic choices of our lesson plans were also raised by a teacher who claimed that we did not deal with grammar during the first lesson plan based on poetry because, in her opinion, phrasal verbs cannot be considered grammar but rather vocabulary.

## 6.2 Motivational dimension

Some teachers claimed that acting could have been a hindrance for students, while others emphasised how this activity could be a source of motivation in the class. The most frequent adjectives used by participants to describe the project were: “funny”, “stimulating”, “not common”, “creative”, “more active”.

Concerning the understanding of other peoples' emotions and the empathy we tried to promote through the chosen topics, some teachers understood this as a genuine effort to make students empathise with victims and oppose the injustices that they had read about. However, other teachers thought that talking about emotions was not possible because pupils did not know the researcher well enough to speak openly.

The use of the poem as a source for understanding the evocative power of poetry and as a trigger for creativity was a conflicting point, too. Some teachers appreciated the activity proposed to students of creating a collective poem as a class. Other teachers believed that pupils were too young to create poems and understand the evocative power of poetry.

Some comments emphasised the authenticity of the adopted texts, and the real context pupils were called to deal with. However, two teachers affirmed that they did not like the chosen poem and that it should not have been used as authentic material. Some comments mentioned the difficulty that students could have acting in class, in front of their school-mates. One teacher revealed her personal point of view about plays and about her idea of what useful didactics means, denying the usefulness of literature-based lessons:

“Students at this age are usually shy, and theatre is not made for shy people... the risk is just wasting hours of ‘real’ work.”

## 6.3 Sociocultural dimension

The cultural aspect was a *vexata quaestio* we had to face with teachers. A striking point was provided by a teacher who, while commenting on the cultural implications linked to the poem we had chosen, claimed that racism had nothing to do with culture and stated that the culture we live in is not a consequence of the context of values we share in our society and does not depend on the stories, educational background or framework in which we grow up:

“Racism is not a matter of culture. It's really just a gut feeling.”

Finally, a teacher showed a low consideration of pupils' cognitive abilities and their possibility to understand and recognise the connotations related to culture:

“In their first year of high school, students are not aware of their own culture.”

### 7. Discussion about teachers' views

In general, the teachers who took part in our research showed a high interest in finding new ways to motivate students through literary texts. Their issues were mainly linked to the difficulties that students could have in understanding unabridged texts written for native speakers.

The respondents seemed to be enthusiastic about the possibility of using literature in language classes and showed a positive attitude towards the advantages that literary texts could bring to the development of students' linguistic skills. The areas in which teachers thought that literary texts could contribute to language development to the greatest extent were vocabulary and reading.

#### 7.1 Linguistic dimension

In the pre-tests, data showed that teachers had a somewhat neutral attitude toward the use of poetry used to teach the foreign language. The questionnaires revealed that teachers' expectations about the usefulness of literature were neutral. An in-depth analysis of the linguistic dimension showed that, before observing the lesson plans, teachers considered poetic texts a valuable source for learning vocabulary, but they did not consider them useful enough for learning other skills, such as listening, speaking, writing, and grammar. Teachers' neutral attitude in pre-tests was also observed with regards to the use of novels in learning a FL. Teachers believed that novels could only broaden students' vocabulary and improve their reading skills, while as for all the other linguistic skills and functions, they did not foresee a significant benefit. For drama, teachers did not expect that this genre would be beneficial in developing students' linguistic skills. Only the possibility of enriching students' vocabulary was seriously considered by teachers, while other elements like writing and grammar were not given sufficient consideration.

A negative attitude towards the use of poems in class was observed by Masbuhin – Liao, who found out that the more English teachers studied poetry, the more they were unwilling to teach the language through it because they deemed that poetry was too difficult for both teachers and students<sup>17</sup>. This attitude was also confirmed by Savvidou, who pointed out that teachers often consider literature inappropriate to the language classroom because, in poetry and prose, students can find deviations from the conventions and grammatical rules, common in the standard language. Moreover, according to the author, in poetry, grammar and vocabulary can be “manipulated to serve orthographic or phonological features of the language”<sup>18</sup>.

In the pre-test results, participants agreed that the essential characteristic of learning a language through literary texts was the expansion of vocabulary and the concept that novels could be an important tool to develop students' linguistic skills. Some authors high-

<sup>17</sup> R. Masbuhin – F. Liao, *English teachers' desire to teach poetry: The impact of educational backgrounds, belief toward poetry, and level of confidence*.

<sup>18</sup> C. Savvidou, *An integrated approach to the teaching of literature in the EFL classroom*, “The Internet TESL Journal”, 10, 2004, p. 2.

lighted the idea that novels can be more useful in learning a foreign language both for the linguistic accessibility related to syntax and vocabulary that do not hinder immediate understanding and for the literary accessibility linked to its narrative and descriptive features. Lazar, for instance, affirmed that a good novel can engage students intellectually and linguistically<sup>19</sup>. Moreover, Kellermann, in her study on foreign-language literacy, observed that the readability grade of a text written in a foreign language essentially depends on how it is devoid of “lexical and grammatical traps”<sup>20</sup>.

In the post-tests, teachers valued poetry as a useful means to learn a foreign language. For all the items within the linguistic dimension, post-test values were higher than pre-test values. In fact, statistically significant differences were reported for all of them.

After our intervention, teachers considered that the skills students could more effectively develop through poetry were vocabulary and reading, while grammar, writing, and speaking were considered the least valuable, even though significant differences were still reported. The linguistic dimension of novels was the aspect that teachers considered as the most useful in the teaching of a foreign language, giving this component a very high score. Vocabulary and reading were the linguistic skills that teachers deemed students could most develop through novels, as much as listening and speaking, whose values markedly increased. Concerning drama, in the post-test, teachers changed their minds, as confirmed by the statistically significant differences between pre- and post-tests. Vocabulary was confirmed as the preferred element, while teachers showed their appreciation for the activities aimed at developing students' speaking skills. Teachers also started to consider the possibility of teaching grammar through literary texts.

An interesting issue was then raised by a teacher who claimed that during our lesson plan based on poetry, we did not deal with grammar. Actually, in our learning units, we included the following structures:

- lesson plan based on poetry:
  - verb plus preposition forms (phrasal verbs),
  - future forms;
- lesson plan based on novel:
  - simple past (positive, question and negative forms of regular and irregular verbs);
- lesson plan based on drama:
  - conditionals.

Debating which category phrasal verbs should belong to could be exciting but pointless, also because these structures possess unique semantic, syntactic, and stylistic properties<sup>21</sup>. In our experience, phrasal verbs have always been included in leading grammar textbooks, such as the *Oxford Practice Grammar*. Moreover, the definitions given in dictionaries confirm our choice of categorising phrasal verbs as a grammatical topic<sup>22</sup>.

<sup>19</sup> G. Lazar, *Literature and language teaching: a guide for teachers and trainers*, p. 204.

<sup>20</sup> M. Kellermann, *The forgotten third skill: reading a foreign language*, Pergamon Press, NY 1981, p. 88.

<sup>21</sup> E. Kovács, *Spotlighting English phrasal verbs*, “Journal of Languages for Specific Purposes”, 1, 2014, p. 8.

<sup>22</sup> Cfr. <http://www.learnersdictionary.com/definition/phrasal%20verb>, <https://www.merriam-webster.com>, and <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/phrasal-verb> (last accessed 13 September, 2021).

Apart from these cases, in general, the analysis that was carried out showed that, after observing our lessons, teachers changed their minds and considered the possibility of teaching through literature to a greater extent. The difference between the means in the pre- and post-tests showed that, even though the item that received the highest values in almost all the genres was “reading”, the skills that changed the most, in teachers’ opinion, were: listening in novels, writing in plays, speaking in novels, speaking in plays, listening in poems, grammar in plays, listening in plays, and writing in poetry. Therefore, teachers mostly changed their minds about all the items related to drama and, for poems and novels, they changed their views about listening, speaking, writing, grammar.

Teachers’ views about the possibility of expanding students’ linguistic knowledge through literary texts have been discussed by other researchers. Baba, in her qualitative study, interviewed three teachers who stated that the application of literature in a FL context was beneficial because it offered valuable language input<sup>23</sup>. Baba claimed that literature facilitated and expanded students’ vocabulary acquisition through exposure to new vocabulary contained in the literary texts. This finding is in line with our analysis. In fact, our participants started considering that literary texts could be engaging material that can help them teach the foreign language more effectively.

One reason to explain why teachers appreciated the activities related to the speaking and listening tasks might come from the issue that teachers often neglect oral English. As underlined by Chen – Goh, oral activities are not a priority for teachers who cannot implement these skills effectively and cannot “balance students’ needs”<sup>24</sup>. According to the authors, teachers also have to disregard oral English activities because they cannot afford the time required to devote to these tasks.

## 7.2 Motivational dimension

As for motivation, in the pre-tests, teachers assumed that poems were not particularly appropriate for stimulating students’ interest. Poetry was considered by teachers as a useful tool to help pupils learn figures of speech and to develop creative use of language, which are distinctive traits of poetry. On the contrary, for them, the least useful elements that could generate the necessary motivation in students were those related to the conciseness of poems, to the values and topics. Moreover, the use of poems as authentic material was not considered by teachers in line with the goal of offering students samples of authentic communication and genuine experiences, which led them to give a neutral score to this element.

The negative nuance of meaning that conciseness could take on with its double-edged perception was underlined by F  rez – Coyle – Maurandi<sup>25</sup>. In this study, some participants

<sup>23</sup> W.K. Baba, *An investigation into teachers’ and students’ attitudes towards literature and its use in ESL classrooms: A case study at a matriculation centre in Malaysia*, Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Leicester, 2008.

<sup>24</sup> Z. Chen – C. Goh, *Teaching oral English in higher education: Challenges to EFL teachers*, “Teaching in Higher Education”, 16, 2011, p. 336.

<sup>25</sup> P. F  rez – Y. Coyle – A. Maurandi, *The use of poetry for EFL: Exploring the beliefs of primary school trainees*, “Revista Signos”, 53, 2020, pp. 56-79.

assigned a low value to the conciseness of poetic texts and considered it disadvantageous for practising reading because of its poetical shortness.

Concerning novels in pre-tests, teachers did not expect that this genre could be particularly motivating to teach the foreign language. The element that teachers thought that pupils could mainly learn from novels was the point of view. Furthermore, they did not deem novels useful enough to either learn figures of speech or to understand learners' own emotions better. The use of novels as authentic material, an element that was not considered important for poems, was not deemed crucial to novels either.

Motivation-related items for drama were within the average range, too. The most appreciated elements were the interpretative skills and the possibility to understand other people's emotions. Data showed that teachers did not expect plays to be a genre that could be appreciated by students.

A considerable difference between values between pre-tests and post-tests could be found, in our study, in the chance that the poems used in class could help students become acquainted with figures of speech. Teachers thought that the poem used in class represented a source of motivation that students could consider engaging and enjoyable. This led to a higher score related to the general appreciation of poetry. The creative activities carried out in class also represented a source of motivation that teachers did not foresee, as well as the possibility of developing students' interpretative skills and the opportunity for students to recognise other people's emotions. Teachers also started to recognise the crucial importance of using authentic material in class as a source of motivation. In general, for poetry, the means related to the motivation were substantially higher in the post-tests, and the differences were statistically significant.

Concerning novels, the values given by teachers in the post-test were commonly higher, as it is apparent from the perception of the power that novels have to nourish positive values. Teachers seemed to appreciate the theme conceived for the lessons, which was the topic of disability. Teachers' feedback proved that they appreciated the proposed activities and considered the possibility that students could start thinking critically about the topic, as also confirmed by students' recognition of their own emotions and other people's emotions.

As for the motivational dimension linked to drama, data showed that teachers started to consider that students would appreciate the use of plays as a tool to learn a foreign language. In fact, this aspect increased considerably. Almost all the elements linked to motivation in plays were considered beneficial by teachers, especially the ones related to the understanding of personal and other peoples' emotions.

The possibility of learning through drama proved to be a successful tool for teachers. In fact, the differences between the means in the pre-test and the post-test were substantial. Nevertheless, some teachers considered the request of acting in class a demanding activity, unsuitable for shy students, which could hinder pupils' perceptive skills and prevent them from taking part in the lesson. We did not actually perform a play in class; instead, we made use of an interactive form of didactics that emotionally engaged learners through drama techniques.

The educational effectiveness of drama was stressed by Winston, who stated that plays can help learners feel more confident and can “stimulate the visual, kinaesthetic and auditory aspects of learning”<sup>26</sup>. Moreover, tasks based on the drama “can bring the feeling of authenticity to the communication project because they provide contexts for language that are dynamic and that feel real”<sup>27</sup>. In class, we observed that even shyer learners managed to carry out the minimal acting they were involved in, and the activities were considered delightful by students. They also generated interesting discussions, originating from the fact that different groups produced different interpretations of the passages we read in class. As also stated by Collie – Slater, students can consider acting out brief scenes in class an extraordinarily engaging activity<sup>28</sup>.

As we have emphasised, teachers changed their minds about the possibility of using literary texts as authentic material; in fact, the difference between the means in the pre-test and post-test was remarkable. As it has been underlined, if the ultimate goal in language teaching is to enable students to deal with the authentic language of the real world, they should learn how to cope with it in the classroom.

The importance of using authentic material was confirmed by participants in the research carried out by Duncan – Paran<sup>29</sup>. In their study, teachers considered authenticity one of the most engaging properties of literary texts. This element represents an essential aspect, considering that the communicative approach is focused on authentic contexts. Therefore, literature can represent an ideal resource in language education through activities that are based on real-life communication set in an authentic context to promote learning.

Other researchers, such as Hanauer<sup>30</sup> and Mattix<sup>31</sup>, maintained that poetry is an authentic and relevant teaching tool that provides language enrichment and personal involvement for students. Moreover, as it has been pointed out by Amer, the authenticity of literary texts can provide a “motivating medium for language learning”<sup>32</sup>.

Another relevant change in teachers’ views is related to the creative use of language. The interviewed teachers, who followed part of the project in class, admitted that one of the activities that students appreciated the most was the one related to the oral and written exercises in which students were asked to work creatively.

As for the chance that literary texts can reveal a creative use of language, some participants disagreed and expressed concern regarding this item. In fact, some teachers asserted that pupils were too young to write poems and understand the evocative power of poetry. Doing so, they denied students the possibility of appreciating the unique features of po-

<sup>26</sup> J. Winston, *Second language learning through drama*, Routledge, NY 2012, p. 7.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>28</sup> J. Collie – S. Slater, *Literature in the language classroom: A resource book of ideas and activities*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2011, p. 66.

<sup>29</sup> S. Duncan – A. Paran, *The effectiveness of literature on acquisition of language skills and intercultural understanding in the high school context*, p. 63.

<sup>30</sup> D. Hanauer, *The task of poetry reading and second language learning*, “Applied Linguistics”, 22, 2001, p. 300.

<sup>31</sup> M. Mattix, *The pleasure of poetry reading and second language learning: A response to David Hanauer*, “Applied Linguistics”, 4, 2002, p. 517.

<sup>32</sup> A. Amer, *Teaching EFL/ESL literature*, “The Reading Matrix”, 3, 2003, p. 63.



etry, its imagery, and its appeal to feelings and personal experience, which make it exciting and enjoyable to readers. Assuming that students are not able to appreciate poems and that they are too immature to create poetic forms implies that students' motivation can only stem from forms and styles imposed by the teachers, i.e., forms of colonised imagination that do not help students to think individually. Instead, in our lessons, students were confronted with tasks that required each one to complete in their own ways processes which produced linguistic inventions.

The necessity to foster creative writing was stressed by Xerri, who affirmed that the devaluation of students' creative and personal responses to literary texts originates from teachers' inclination to indoctrinate learners into a pattern of response. According to the researcher, the effect of not adequately encouraging students' creativity is that "it may fail to be nurtured"<sup>33</sup>.

Another essential element that underwent a change, compared to the pre-test, was the pleasurable involvement students could experience by emotionally engaging with the texts. This aspect was confirmed by Baba<sup>34</sup>. The participants in her survey affirmed that they became personally involved with the events they saw portrayed in the texts they read. They also stated that the events described in the texts represented everyday events, human conflicts, and relationships that they could easily identify with. Therefore, they were inherently impelled to be emotionally engaged in their reading, and this provoked further motivation to read literary texts.

This point has been emphasised by Zyngier – Fialho, who analysed how the emotional involvement of the reader could impact upon reading skills<sup>35</sup>. For them, teaching language through literature can become a space for questioning how texts can become meaningful and how reading them can be relevant to the individual student to become emotional, critical, and culturally independent.

The emotional appeal of literature and the importance of enjoying literature and enjoying reading have also been stressed by Duncan – Paran. In their study, they reported that a significant number of teachers stressed the "importance of emotions in the use of literature and in teaching generally"<sup>36</sup>. The authors also underlined how this element could be a source of motivation and interest for students.

Some of the teachers who answered our questionnaires revealed that they were against the idea of using literature simply because there is a lack of time allocated for teaching, so precious lessons could not be wasted on materials that require too much time to read them, like novels or plays. Accordingly, literature becomes a luxury that teachers cannot invest time on, as they have to adhere to a tight work schedule.

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<sup>33</sup> D. Xerri, *Creative and personal responses to literary texts in ELT*, "The Teacher", 141, 2016, p. 25.

<sup>34</sup> W.K. Baba, *An investigation into teachers' and students' attitudes towards literature and its use in ESL classrooms: A case study at a matriculation centre in Malaysia*, p. 186

<sup>35</sup> S. Zyngier – O. Fialho, *Pedagogical stylistics, literary awareness and empowerment: a critical perspective*, "Language and Literature", 19, 2010, p. 29.

<sup>36</sup> S. Duncan – A. Paran, *The effectiveness of literature on acquisition of language skills and intercultural understanding in the high school context*, p. 48.

Notwithstanding, as Hanauer stated, learning a language is an experience that involves the whole human being, beyond purely intellectual faculties<sup>37</sup>. Experiences and emotions intrinsic in the process of learning a language cannot be removed during language classes by considering only the communicative and purely intellectual aims of language usage. The recent trend in language teaching, also influenced by the stress given to pre-set level tests, seems to be to avoid any emphasis on the human being to accentuate the learning and assessing phases in a decontextualised backdrop. We tried to convey the idea that including exciting topics and themes through literary texts could be a way to humanise English classes.

### 7.3 Sociocultural dimension

In the pre-test, the cultural dimension in poetry received a neutral consideration. Teachers did not expect that, through English poems, students could better learn either the Anglophone culture or pupils' own culture. The same trend was repeated for novels, where teachers predicted that students would not improve the knowledge of their own culture through novels and showed a neutral view concerning the usefulness of using the novels written by Anglophone authors to enhance students' knowledge of Anglophone countries. As for drama, teachers considered this genre not very useful to learn either the Anglophone culture or students' own culture.

However, in the post-test, attitudes underwent a statistically significant change regarding the possibility of expanding students' knowledge of the culture of Anglophone countries and students' own country through poems and novels. In fact, values showed a positive attitude regarding teachers' views for both the aspect regarding the understanding of Anglophone countries and the one regarding the understanding of students' own country. Teachers started to also consider the possibility of students learning the culture of Anglophone countries through plays, even though a less significant increase could be seen in regard to the element linked to the knowledge of students' own culture.

In our previous study, we found out that students had a biased concept of "culture", and we had to discuss the connotation they attached to this term<sup>38</sup>. The same happened with a teacher who claimed that using a poem that dealt with racism could develop neither students' cultural awareness nor their critical thinking because, in her opinion, racism was not linked to culture but to basic and primitive instincts. This meant that talking about racist behaviours, analysing different points of view, especially the victims' ones, could not promote a "different culture" based on reception and welcome, on empathy and understanding, rather than on hatred and contempt for the "other" and the "unknown neighbour". As we can read in the document issued by the European Commission, *We are Europe*, in schools, students should learn values to develop effective strategies to combat racism and

<sup>37</sup> D. Hanauer, *Meaningful literacy: Writing poetry in the language classroom*, "Language Teaching", 45, 2012, p. 106.

<sup>38</sup> In our study, D. Sirico, *Students' Perceptions and Attitudes on the Use of Literature as a Tool for Learning English as a Foreign Language*, it came to light that students had a biased perception of culture, linking it to conventional subjects like famous monuments, traditional food, picturesque places and tourist attractions. In their opinion, talking about racism was not dealing with 'culture'.

xenophobia<sup>39</sup>. However, sometimes teachers do not regard establishing “civic education” as an easy task, nor are they aware that teaching civics to students is part of the schools’ goals and responsibility<sup>40</sup>. Notwithstanding, the European Guidelines have often insisted on the development of personal and social life skills and the importance of the enhancement of empathic values in educational contexts.

Some authors, such as Crozet – Liddicoat, have stated that relating to otherness “is the essence of intercultural competence”<sup>41</sup>, which is one of the crucial benefits linked to the use of poetry in language classes. Similarly, Hanauer also asserted that poetry is a genre with deep historical and cultural roots. Moreover, poetry has the “function of enhancing discourse and cultural awareness and creating personal motivation”<sup>42</sup>.

Cultural awareness, which is essential in developing critical thinking, can be a source of motivation in learning a foreign language. As underlined by Zyngier – Fialho, through literature, students can “challenge authoritative interpretations and think for themselves”<sup>43</sup>. Our own culture and values are forged through stories and narratives that we read and listen to every day since our childhood. We are significantly influenced by literary texts, by mass media, and by social agents<sup>44</sup>, because narrative texts have the potential to encourage empathy with marginalised others or to spread hatred. Literary texts can change attitudes and lead to the acquisition of our knowledge of the world<sup>45</sup>.

## 8. Conclusion

It was statistically demonstrated that teachers favourably changed their minds about the use of literature as a tool for learning a foreign language. They considered that novels could broaden students’ vocabulary and improve their reading skills. We also have to mention the considerable difference between pre-tests and post-tests regarding the use of plays to develop students’ linguistic skills. The change in teachers’ views was due to the bias that teachers sometimes have about the possibility of learning a foreign language through literary texts because they deem them too difficult for students. Teachers often consider literature inappropriate in the language classroom because, in literary texts, students can find deviations from the conventions and from grammatical rules that are common in the standard language. Especially through the pre-tests, we found out that teachers were strictly tradi-

<sup>39</sup> *We are Europe – Framework for the Key Citizenship Competences (March 2016)* is a project funded with support from the European Commission. Retrieved from [http://www.wreurope.eu/uploads/1/6/2/1/16214540/framework\\_for\\_key\\_citizenship\\_competences.pdf](http://www.wreurope.eu/uploads/1/6/2/1/16214540/framework_for_key_citizenship_competences.pdf), p. 20 (last accessed 13 September, 2021).

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

<sup>41</sup> C. Crozet – A.J. Liddicoat, *Teaching culture as an integrated part of language teaching*, “Australian Review of Applied Linguistics”, Series S, 14, 1997, p. 3.

<sup>42</sup> D. Hanauer, *Multicultural moments in poetry: The importance of the unique*, “The Canadian Modern Language Review”, 60, 2003, 1, p. 71.

<sup>43</sup> S. Zyngier – O. Fialho, *Pedagogical stylistics, literary awareness and empowerment: a critical perspective*, p. 14.

<sup>44</sup> Cfr. R. Mar – K. Oatley, *The function of fiction is the abstraction and simulation of social experience*, “Perspectives on Psychological Science”, 3, 2008, p. 184.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 182.

tion-bound and considered literature only in relation to the canon of great works of the past. The 'literature' we used, instead, was extended beyond the traditional canon of 'great works'<sup>46</sup> and was presented, somewhat controversially, as a resource to be exploited, rather than as a dogmatic text to be analysed in its own right and for its own sake. Therefore, we tried to remove the intimidating mysticism that surrounds literature, considering literary texts with a small 'l', thus taking them down from their pedestal<sup>47</sup>.

After considering the potentiality of literature in a language class, most of the teachers realised that literary texts can foster motivation through interactive activities and can represent models that students may follow in their future use of the language. We can state with confidence that, after observing our lesson plans, teachers saw a way to develop students' linguistic competences through literary texts by promoting interest, critical thinking, and expertise at the same time, which are ingredients for a promising future for responsible citizens.

### *Appendix 1*

#### Lesson plans

School: Upper Secondary School (scientific high school).

Class: Year 1

Approach: Integrated approach

Pre-Requisites: Present, future, and past tenses.

#### 1. Linguistic competences:

- students can:
  - develop the basic four linguistic skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing);
  - interpret the unsaid of the text;
  - read, enjoy and analyse a contemporary piece of literature;
  - explore the way that literature can work at different levels;
  - develop an aesthetic sense;
  - develop linguistic metacognitive awareness;
  - recognise essential structures of narrative, poetic and dramatic texts.

#### 2. Competences related to intrinsic motivation:

- students can:
  - recognise their own feelings and reactions in different situations and compare them with those of a character they have portrayed;
  - develop their empathetic and creative thinking;
  - develop their critical thinking and problem-solving attitudes;
  - take different points of view;
  - practice role-playing in order to better understand the thoughts, feelings, and motivations of others.

<sup>46</sup> Cfr. D. Hanauer, *The task of poetry reading and second language learning*, p. 297.

<sup>47</sup> Cfr. A. Rezanejad – Z. Lari – Z. Mosalli, *Down from the pedestal: Revisiting the exploit of literature in EFL language classes*, "International Journal of Applied Linguistics & English Literature", 4, 2014, pp. 158-168.

- negotiate and cooperate with others in the creation of oral and written texts;
  - sustain a role with increasing confidence;
  - interact by listening to others' opinion, being willing to change their own;
  - learn by doing.
3. Intercultural and social competences:
- students can:
    - see their own culture, stereotypes, and prejudices from an external point of view;
    - identify the founding elements of a civil partnership;
    - understand the motivations behind bullying behaviour;
    - prepare those who are being victimised by bullies to better deal with their situations.

In particular, the main themes dealt with in each teaching unit were:

Lesson plan 1. Prejudice vs hospitality policies – poem: *Mort aux chats*, by Peter Porter.

Lesson plan 2. Disability vs 'ordinariness' – novel: *Wonder*, by R.J. Palacio.

Lesson plan 3. Bullying and cyber-bullying – drama: *The Shape of a Girl*, by Joan Macleod.

The framework of the lesson plans consisted of:

1. Presentation
  - a. Warm-up (the teacher uses, as a trigger, something that is relevant to the lives of students and is linked into the texts).
  - b. The presentation phase starts with a bridge, i.e., a sentence that can connect the trigger of the warm-up phase to the text to be read.
  - c. Listening and reading of the texts.
  - d. Reading comprehension questionnaires.
  - e. Semantic field: in order to explain new words and expand students' vocabulary, the teacher proposes exercises to brainstorm words and expressions according to their semantic area.
2. Practice
  - a. The teacher provides exercises aiming at developing a more in-depth insight into the texts. Moreover, students can understand how texts are built from a formal and rhetorical point of view and how their eloquence is developed. In particular, the teacher tries to elicit the provocative intent or the hidden meaning contained in the texts proposing different options.
  - b. Analysis of the structure of the poem/novel/play
  - c. Analysis of some expressions: through the denotative and connotative point of view, students are required to discuss together to find a literal, symbolic or emotional meaning in the texts.
  - d. Grammar corner
    - i. Some grammatical rules are inferred from the texts and discussed in class (verbs plus preposition forms, simple past, conditionals).
    - ii. Written and oral exercises are presented to allow learners to practice the grammatical forms.

- iii. Some questions related to the literary texts, containing the grammatical forms being focused on, are provided. Students are asked to share their answers in an open class debate.
  - e. Figures of sound and speech. This activity aims at introducing some poetical devices. Students are asked to find and create some poetic effects.
3. Production
- a. Learners are asked to develop some written tasks related to the texts.
  - b. Role plays: in groups, learners are asked to create and act out a dialogue related to the topics dealt with in the texts, using the grammar structures learnt in class.
  - c. Class writing activity: Emotional words through Group poetry: students are required to write a collective poem.

### *Appendix 2*

Pre-test and post-test for teachers about poetry

*This questionnaire aims to explore your views about the use of literature in teaching the FL. Please read the following items carefully and answer considering that the students this questionnaire refers to are those attending the first year of high school. Please, indicate your degree of agreement by checking one of five response categories:*

<i>Strongly disagree</i>	1	2	3	4	5	<i>Strongly agree</i>
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*There are no right and wrong answers. Please be honest in your answers. Responses and information will be collected anonymously and treated as confidential.*

- 1 – Employing poems in class as a means of teaching the FL can be an enjoyable experience for students.
- 2 – Employing poems in class as a means of teaching the FL can improve students' listening skills.
- 3 – Employing poems in class as a means of teaching the FL can enhance students' speaking skills.
- 4 – Employing poems in class as a means of teaching the FL can develop students' reading skills.
- 5 – Employing poems as a means of learning the FL can strengthen students' writing skills.
- 6 – Employing poems as a means of learning the FL can enrich students' vocabulary.
- 7 – Looking over some structures employed in poems can ameliorate students' understanding of grammar.

8 – Employing poems as a means of learning the FL motivates students because they can help them understand and share their personal emotions and feelings.

9 – Employing poems as a means of learning the FL motivates students because they can help them understand and share other people's emotions and feelings.

10 – Employing poems as a means of learning the FL can develop students' interpretative skills (grasp symbolic, hidden meanings, make their own interpretations).

11 – Employing poems as a means of learning the FL can make students familiar with figures of speech and sound (metaphor, simile, alliteration, etc.).

12 – Employing poems as a means of learning the FL can disclose to students a creative, unexpected and evocative use of language.

13 – Employing poems as a means of learning the FL motivates students because poems normally deal with values like love, respect, empathy, social justice, etc.

14 – Employing poems as a means of learning the FL motivates students because poems deal with non-trivial (interesting) topics.

15 – Employing poems as a means of learning the FL can motivate students because poems are authentic material.

16 – Employing poems as a means of learning the FL can make students aware of the culture of Anglophone countries.

17 – Employing poems as a means of learning the FL can make students more aware of their own culture.

18 – Employing poems as a means of learning the FL motivates students because poems are usually concise.

*The following questions were contained only in the pre-test:*

19 – How often do you use literary texts in this class?

Hardly ever	Once a year	Once a month	Once a week	Twice a month
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20 – My students like reading poems

No	Very few of them	Some	Most of them	Yes	I don't know
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### Pre-test and post-test for teachers about novels

*This questionnaire aims to explore your views about the use of literature in teaching the FL. Please read the following items carefully and answer considering that the students this questionnaire refers to are those attending the first year of high school. Please, indicate your degree of agreement by checking one of five response categories:*

<i>Strongly disagree</i>	1	2	3	4	5	<i>Strongly agree</i>
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*There are no right and wrong answers. Please be honest in your answers. Responses and information will be collected anonymously and treated as confidential.*

- 1 – Employing novels in class as a means of teaching the FL can be an enjoyable experience for students.
- 2 – Employing novels in class as a means of teaching the FL can improve students' listening skills.
- 3 – Employing novels in class as a means of teaching the FL can enhance students' speaking skills.
- 4 – Employing novels in class as a means of teaching the FL can develop students' reading skills.
- 5 – Employing novels as a means of learning the FL can strengthen students' writing skills.
- 6 – Employing novels as a means of learning the FL can enrich students' vocabulary.
- 7 – Looking over some structures employed in novels can ameliorate students' understanding of grammar.
- 8 – Employing novels as a means of learning the FL motivates students because they can help them understand and share their personal emotions and feelings.
- 9 – Employing novels as a means of learning the FL motivates students because they can help them understand and share other people's emotions and feelings.
- 10 – Employing novels as a means of learning the FL can develop students' interpretative skills (grasp symbolic, hidden meanings, make their own interpretation of texts).
- 11 – Employing novels as a means of learning the FL can make students familiar with figures of speech (metaphor, simile, etc.).
- 12 – Employing novels as a means of learning the FL can disclose to students a creative, unexpected and evocative use of language.
- 13 – Employing novels as a means of learning the FL motivates students because novels normally include values like love, respect, empathy, social justice, etc.



14 – Employing novels as a means of learning the FL motivates students because novels deal with non-trivial (interesting) topics.

15 – Employing novels as a means of learning the FL can motivate students because novels are authentic material.

16 – Employing novels as a means of learning the FL can make students aware of the culture of Anglophone countries.

17 – Employing novels as a means of learning the FL can make students more aware of their own culture.

18 – Employing novels as a means of learning the FL can help students understand different points of view because in novels reality is often seen from several perspectives (those of the various characters).

*The following question was contained only in the pre-test:*

19 – My students like reading novels

No	Very few of them	Some	Most of them	Yes	I don't know
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Pre-test and post-test for teachers about drama

*This questionnaire aims to explore your views about the use of literature in teaching the FL. Please read the following items carefully and answer considering that the students this questionnaire refers to are those attending the first year of high school. Please, indicate your degree of agreement by checking one of five response categories:*

<i>Strongly disagree</i>	1	2	3	4	5	<i>Strongly agree</i>
--------------------------	---	---	---	---	---	-----------------------

*There are no right and wrong answers. Please be honest in your answers. Responses and information will be collected anonymously and treated as confidential.*

1 – Employing plays in class as a means of teaching the FL can be an enjoyable experience for students.

2 – Employing plays in class as a means of teaching the FL can improve students' listening skills.

3 – Employing plays in class as a means of teaching the FL can enhance students' speaking skills.

4 – Employing plays in class as a means of teaching the FL can develop students' reading skills.

- 5 – Employing plays as a means of learning the FL can strengthen students' writing skills.
- 6 – Employing plays as a means of learning the FL can enrich students' vocabulary.
- 7 – Looking over some structures employed in plays can ameliorate students' understanding of grammar.
- 8 – Employing plays motivates students because they help them understand and share their personal emotions and feelings.
- 9 – Employing plays motivates students because they help them understand and share other people's emotions and feelings.
- 10 – Employing plays as a means of learning the FL can develop students' interpretative skills.
- 11 – Employing plays as a means of learning the FL can make students familiar with figures of speech (metaphor, simile, etc.).
- 12 – Employing plays as a means of learning the FL can disclose to students a creative, unexpected and evocative use of language.
- 13 – Employing plays as a means of learning the FL motivates students because plays normally include values like love, respect, empathy, social justice, etc.
- 14 – Employing plays as a means of learning the FL motivates students because plays deal with non-trivial (interesting) topics.
- 15 – Employing plays as a means of learning the FL can motivate students because plays are authentic material.
- 16 – Employing plays as a means of learning the FL can make students aware of the culture of Anglophone countries.
- 17 – Employing plays as a means of learning the FL can make students more aware of their own culture.
- 18 – Employing plays as a means of learning the FL motivates students because plays usually offer real lifelike settings.
- 19 – Employing plays as a means of learning the FL can help students understand different points of view.
- 20 – Reading plays in class can motivate students because they can find examples of colloquial and informal language.

*The following question was contained only in the pre-test:*

21 – My students like reading plays

No	Very few of them	Some	Most of them	Yes	I don't know
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*The following question was contained only in the post-test:*

21 – Now that you've observed the lesson plans, how often would you like to use literary texts in this class?

Hardly ever	Once a year	Once a month	Once a week	Twice a month
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