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Exploring How Literary Narratives Shape EFL Learners' Sense of Self and Belonging Inside and Outside the Classroom.

Case Study: Third year EFL Mila University

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Exploring How Literary Narratives Shape EFL Learners' Sense of Self and Belonging

Dedication 1

" وَمَا تَوْفِيقِي إِلَّا بِاللَّهِ ۚ عَلَيْهِ تَوَكَّلْتُ وَإِلَيْهِ أُنِيبُ "

"And my success is not but through Allah. Upon Him I have relied, and to Him I return"

(Surah Hud 88)

To my beloved father*, my guiding light, I dedicate this achievement to you, my first source of safety and strength. No matter how much I grow, I will always be your little daughter who looks up to you with love. Thank you for your silent sacrifices, your constant encouragement, and your belief in me. This success belongs to you as much as it belongs to me.*

To my mother*, my heart and soul, As I am your only daughter, I have always tried to be a source of joy and pride for you. I hope I have succeeded in bringing a smile to your face and in repaying even a small part of your sacrifices, tears. Everything I have achieved is because of your prayers, patience, and endless support. I will always strive to make you proud.*

Farid *my brother in particular, Words are not enough to express my gratitude. You have always stood by my side, supported me. You have been more than a brother; you have been a true pillar of strength in my life.*

To my extended family, thank you for your encouragement and kind support. Your prayers and belief in me have always meant a lot and gave me strength throughout this journey.

To my dear cousin ***Khadidja****, you are far more than just a cousin to me; you are a sister, a true friend, and a companion. Thank you for your sincerity and your presence in my life. You hold a special place in my heart that words cannot fully describe.*

I dedicate this work to my late grandfather ***Abd El Hamid*** *whose wisdom, kindness to guide and inspire me even after his passing. I wish he were here to witness this success and share in this moment with me. I pray that Allah, the Most Merciful, grants him* ***Jannat El Firdaous****.*

I dedicate this achievement to my beloved cousin ***Leila****. Although she is no longer with me in this moment, her presence will always remain alive and unforgotten.*

To my friend ***Aya*** *thank you for standing by my side through every challenge and every success I always cherish this journey with you. And to everyone who supported me with kind words, I sincerely thank you. Your support, no matter how small it seemed, made a real difference in this journey.*

Finally, I dedicate this work to all those who believed in me. This achievement would not have been possible, after the will of Allah, without your support, and faith in me

-Hadjer-

Dedication 2

Before every achievement and before every dream that became reality, I dedicate this work to Allah the Almighty, whose mercy guided me, whose blessings surrounded me, and whose wisdom carried me through every challenge. Alhamdulillah for this journey and for this moment.

To the apple of my eye ***my mother*** *my first home and my endless source of love and strength thank you for every sacrifice, every prayer, and every silent act of support. This achievement belongs to you before it belongs to me.*

To my hero ***my father*** *thank you for teaching me that perseverance creates success and that dignity is built through patience. Your sacrifices made this journey possible.*

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To my sister ***Kenza*** *my second mother thank you for your care, tenderness, and for always being a place of comfort.*

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Abstract

Learning English as a foreign language (EFL) transcends mere linguistic acquisition, deeply influencing how learners negotiate their identity and relate to others. Among third-year university students, the development of a positive sense of self and a strong sense of classroom belonging constitutes a critical factor in fostering meaningful academic engagement. This qualitative study explored the role of literary narratives in shaping EFL learners' identity construction and sense of belonging. Using a qualitative research design, purposive sampling, and semi structured interviews with eight participants at Abdelhafid Boussouf Mila University, the data were analyzed through inductive thematic analysis. The study explored four interconnected themes: (1) learners' identity construction through character relatability, (2) emotional engagement and oral participation, (3) classroom community building, and (4) intercultural bridging and global English identity. The findings indicate that literary narratives support learners' identity construction by encouraging them to reflect on their personal experiences, future aspirations, and evolving self-understanding through engagement with literary characters, reflecting on their current and ideal selves. Furthermore, emotional engagement with literary narratives strengthened learners' sense of belonging by encouraging meaningful interaction and shared experiences within the classroom. Discussions of literary narratives created an interactive interpretive space that strengthened learners' sense of belonging and mutual recognition that significantly strengthens classroom belonging and mutual recognition. Moreover, it explores how interacting with literary narratives encourages learners to see themselves as confident English users, more deeply with learning, and develop a stronger sense of belonging in EFL classroom. Finally, exposure to diverse narratives cultivates intercultural awareness, allowing learners to situate their identities within a broader global context. Overall, this study

demonstrates that literary narratives contribute to EFL learners' identity construction and enhance their sense of belonging in EFL classroom.

Key words: English as a Foreign Language (EFL), literary narratives, identity construction, sense of belonging, emotional engagement, qualitative study.

List of Abbreviations

EFL: English as a Foreign Language

ICC: Intercultural Communicative Competence

L2: Second Language

POV: Point of View

SLA: Second Language Acquisition

WTC: Willingness to Communicate

ZPD: Zone of Proximal Development

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General Introduction

1. Background of the study

In recent years, language education has moved beyond a purely linguistic focus to recognize the importance of learners' identities, emotions, and social experiences. Learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) is now understood as a process that involves not only acquiring language skills but also constructing a sense of self and developing feelings of belonging within learning communities. For many EFL learners, especially in contexts where English is not widely used outside the classroom, engaging meaningfully with the language can be challenging and may affect their confidence and sense of inclusion that affect students' English learning by increasing their confidence, motivation, and willingness to actively participate in classroom activities.

Literary narratives have gained increasing attention in EFL education as powerful pedagogical tools that go beyond language instruction. Through stories, novels, and personal narratives, learners are exposed to diverse voices, cultures, and life experiences. These narratives offer learners opportunities to reflect on their own identities, relate personal experiences to those of characters, and imagine new possibilities for self-expression in the target language. By engaging emotionally and cognitively with literary texts, learners may begin to see themselves as legitimate participants in the English-speaking world. Moreover, literary narratives create a space for dialogue, interpretation, and shared meaning-making in the classroom. Such interactions can foster a sense of belonging within the EFL classroom community by encouraging learners to express opinions, share personal responses, and feel heard within a supportive community. When learners recognize aspects of their own lives or struggles in literary characters, they may experience validation and emotional connection, which strengthens their sense of belonging and engagement.

Previous research has provided valuable insights into both language learning and learner identity. Studies by Norton (2013), Mercer (2011), Ushioda (2011), and Murray (2020) consistently show that learning a language involves more than acquiring linguistic knowledge; it also shapes how learners understand themselves, interact with others, and develop their identities. At the same time, research on literature in language education has highlighted its pedagogical value. Kramsch (1993), Lazar (1993), Hall (2005), and Paran (2008) argue that literary texts enrich language learning by promoting language development, critical thinking, intercultural awareness, and meaningful classroom engagement. Although these two areas of research have made significant contributions to the field, they have generally been explored separately. As a result, little attention has been paid to the ways in which literary narratives specifically influence EFL learners' sense of self and belonging. This gap suggests the need for further research that brings these two perspectives together by examining how learners' engagement with literary narratives shapes both their sense of self and their sense of belonging.

Despite these potential benefits, literary narratives are frequently used with a primay focus on language instruction, with less attention given to their role in identity construction and belonging.

This gap highlights the importance of examining how literary narratives influence EFL learners' sense of self and belonging. Understanding this relationship can contribute to more inclusive and meaningful pedagogical practices that support both language development and learners' personal growth.

2. Statement of the problem

In EFL classrooms, language instruction continues to prioritize linguistic accuracy and communicative competence, often overlooking the role of literature in fostering identity construction and classroom belonging. As result, EFL learners may experience feelings of

alienation from the classroom learning community, leading to low participation, and weak emotional engagement with the target language.

This thesis argues that literary narrative has the capacity to reflect human experiences, cultural diversity, and personal struggles that resonate with learners' own identities through characters, stories, and themes, narratives can provide learners with opportunities to explore who they are, negotiate cultural meanings, and develop a sense of belonging within the classroom community and the wider language-learning. Despite this potential, the role of literary narratives in shaping EFL learners' sense of self and belonging remains underexplored. In the context of this study, sense of self refers to learners' understanding of who they are, how they perceive themselves, and how they make meaning of their personal experiences through engagement with literary texts. As learners recognize their own emotions, values, or life experiences in literary characters, they may reflect on and strengthen their sense of self. This process can, in turn, foster a stronger sense of belonging within the EFL classroom. Despite the importance of these processes, they have received limited attention, particularly in EFL contexts where learners negotiate multiple linguistic and cultural influences. This study therefore seeks to address this gap by examining how engagement with literary narratives may contribute to feel more connected to the classroom community, motivating, and identity-affirming language learning experiences.

3. Aims of the Study

The study aims to explore how literary narratives influence EFL learners' sense of self and their feeling of belonging in the classroom. It focuses on understanding how interacting with stories helps learners see themselves as confident English users, connect emotionally with the learning process, and feel included within their learning community. Moreover, it aims to examine how engagement with diverse literary texts strengthens learners' sense of self and enhances their sense of belonging by helping them connect with the broader English

speaking community. Ultimately, the study seeks to highlight the potential of literary texts to strengthen learners' sense of self and foster their sense of belonging within the EFL classroom.

4. Research questions

The present study aims to answer the following questions:

1. How do literary narratives influence EFL learners' perceptions of their ideal and social selves?
2. How do learners emotional responses to characters and themes translate into active classroom participation?
3. In what ways does engaging with these narratives foster a sense of belonging within the classroom community?
4. How does exposure to diverse literary narratives help EFL learners negotiate their local identities within a broader English-speaking world?

5. Significance of the Study

This study is theoretically significant because it helps explain how sense of self, belonging affect EFL learners' language learning. It adds to existing theories by showing that language learning is not only cognitive but also social, emotional, and cultural. By linking identity, belonging. For the context of EFL learning, cultural negotiation or in other word this interactive process enables learners to interpret literary texts in relation to their own experiences and cultural backgrounds, fostering the development of their sense of self and belonging. In doing so, the study supports sociocultural views of language learning and broadens theoretical understanding in this field.

6. Research Methodology

Methodologically, the present study uses a qualitative research method. It was conducted at Abdelhafid Boussouf Mila University and involved eight third-year EFL students selected through purposive sampling. Third-year EFL students were selected because they had already completed several literature and language courses, providing them with sufficient exposure to literary narratives. This enabled them to reflect meaningfully on how these narratives influenced their sense of self and belonging. They also represented the target population of undergraduate EFL learners, making them more suitable for the purpose of this study than master students, whose responses might be shaped by their specialized academic knowledge rather than their general learning experiences. The participants were interviewed through semi-structured interviews, which allowed them to speak openly about their experiences with literary narratives and how these texts relate to their learning learning, identity, and cultural negotiation. The study is guided by the four core research questions listed above, which investigate the intersection of identity, emotion, classroom community, and intercultural positioning.

This qualitative approach was chosen because it helps to explore students' personal experiences in depth and focuses on meaning rather than numbers. The semi-structured interviews provided detailed information about how learners interact with literary narratives and how these experiences may influence their identity, emotions, intercultural perspectives, and sense of belonging in the EFL classroom. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis in order to identify common patterns and themes across participants' responses. Ethical considerations were respected throughout the study, and all participants' anonymity and confidentiality were ensured.

7. Structure of the dissertation

This dissertation is divided into two main chapters. The first chapter is the theoretical part it is composed of two sections. The first section deals with literary narratives, presenting their definition, main characteristics such as plot, setting, theme, point of view, conflict, characters, and style, as well the different types including short stories, novels, drama, myths, autobiographical and personal narratives. It also highlights the theoretical foundations of literary reading and explains the role of literature in language teaching as a linguistic, intercultural, and personal growth resource. The second section focuses on the sense of self and belonging. It discusses major theories of identity and belonging, explains the types of self (personal, social, and ideal L2 self), and the importance of identity in language learning. It also explores the concept of belonging, its types, and challenges in EFL contexts, while showing how literary narratives can provide spaces for identity construction and classroom interaction.

The second chapter is the practical part. It presents the data collection through students' interviews and analyzes their responses using thematic analysis. The findings are organized into themes such as identity and character relatability, emotional engagement and oral participation, building a classroom community, and cultural bridging and global English identity. The chapter also includes a discussion of results, limitations of the study, and recommendations for students and teachers.

Finally, the dissertation ends with a general conclusion that summarizes the main findings and emphasizes the significance of literary narratives in shaping EFL learners' sense of self, classroom belonging, and intercultural positioning.

Chapter One: Theoretical Framework

This chapter establishes the theoretical basis for the research by examining the connection between reading literary works and the formation of learners' identities and sense of belonging. For a clear academic understanding, the text is organized into two primary sections. The first section emphasizes literary narratives, detailing their essential components, various types, and how readers actively create meaning during their engagement with a text. The second section explores the psychological and social dimensions of language acquisition, paying particular attention to the facets of identity, the significance of belonging, and the unique difficulties encountered by EFL students in the educational setting. Together, these sections show that incorporating literature in the foreign language classroom transcends mere language learning and actively fosters students' personal development, identity negotiation, and social integration.

Section One: Literary Narratives

Introduction

Literary narratives share stories that highlight human experiences, emotions, and cultural contexts, making readers engaged with the text and relate it to their own lives.

This section provides an overview of literary narratives, including their definition, key features, their structure, and their different types. It also explores theories of literary reading that emphasize the active role of the reader in shaping meaning and identity from a text. Finally, it highlights the value of literary narratives in language teaching, where they support language skills, foster cultural awareness, and encourage personal growth.

1. Conceptualizing Literary Narratives

Conceptualizing literary narratives means understanding what stories are, how they work, and what makes them special. It involves looking at their definition, main features, and structure, which help shape the story and influence the way readers connect with it. Literary narratives do more than simply recount events; they allow writers to share experiences, emotions, and cultural ideas in ways that feel meaningful and engaging to readers. Recent research suggests that readers actively construct meaning by drawing on their prior knowledge, experiences, and cultural contexts as they engage with literary texts, making reading a dynamic and interpretive process (Colton et al., 2023, p. 220). In the realm of language pedagogy, this interactive process allows learners to move beyond literal comprehension to actively negotiate identity and meaning within target-language discourse.

1.1. Definition of Literary Narratives

To understand literary narratives well, it is important to analyze their general conceptual framework, starting with their foundational meaning. Prince (1982) defines narrative as "the representation of events, real or fictional, organized in a sequence and told by a narrator" (p. 1). This definition emphasizes that a narrative is a story that connects events meaningfully; regardless of whether these occurrences are real or imaginary, their significance lies in how they are arranged and told by a particular voice.

According to Ricoeur (1984), "Narrative is a synthesis of heterogeneous elements into a meaningful whole" (p.66). In this view, a narrative is basically about taking different pieces, events, characters, and situations, weaving them together into one coherent story. Although these pieces might initially seem separate or even unrelated, once they are put in order and connected, they form a complete and meaningful whole. This enables the reader to follow the story and comprehend it fully. Moreover, Narrative is defined elsewhere as "the representation of events, consisting of a story and the process of telling that story" (Abbott,

2008, p. 13). This implies that a literary narrative is not only about the events or actions that take place but also the way in which those events are conveyed (the "how").

Therefore, a literary narrative refers to an artful construction of real or fictional events and experiences, organized into a coherent sequence and articulated through a narrative voice that shapes both meaning and interpretation.

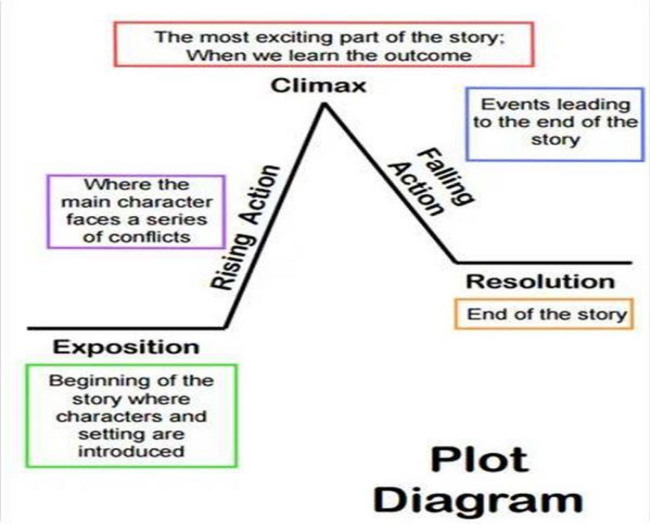
1.2. Characteristics of Literary Narratives

To create meaning and coherence in literary narratives, narratives depend on a number of key elements, such as plot, setting, theme, point of view, conflict, characters, and style, which work together to shape the overall story. “Narrative texts are characterized by the presence of narrator, characters, setting, and plot” (Bal, 2009, p. 5). Bal highlights the fundamental elements that distinguish literary narratives from other literary forms. A narrative is not limited to a collection of events; rather, it is a structured story shaped through different interconnected elements, including characters, setting, and plot.

1.2.1. Plot

Plot is the narrative framework that organizes the events of a story into a coherent and logically connected sequence. It not only presents the events of the narrative but also shapes their development, contributing to the overall meaning, unity, and progression of the story. As Abrams and Harpham (2015) state, “plot is the arrangement of incidents in a narrative, the way in which the story is organized and presented” (p. 227). This idea shows that plot is not just what happens in a story, but how it is structured and presented to the reader; in other word, the events in a narrative are not random. The writer chooses the order of events carefully so the story makes sense. This means the plot is very important because it controls how the story develops and how suspense is created.

Figure 1 : ***Plot Diagram Structure***



Note. Adapted from Freytag's (1863) model of plot structure.

Figure 1 illustrates the the fundamental stages of a plot diagram. The sequence starts with the exposition, which establishes the setting and introduces the characters. It subsequently moves to the rising action, where the main conflict evolves and becomes more intense. This results in the climax, symbolizing the story's pivotal moment and peak of suspense. After the climax, the falling action illustrates the moments that guide the reader toward a conclusion, ultimately arriving at the resolution, where the main conflicts are settled and the narrative ends.

1.2.2. Setting

Setting refers to the time and place of the story; in other words, it dictates where and when the narrative events occur, helping to create a mood and an atmosphere for the text. Usually presented at the beginning of a story, these elements are employed in different genres, such as novels, short stories, and plays. More than just a background, the setting greatly affects character actions, establishes social limitations, and adds to the overall tone and thematic depth of the piece. Mieke Bal (2009) defines setting as "the environment in which a narrative takes place, including time, place, and social circumstances" (p.140).

Therefore, the setting can be understood as the foundational the world of the narrative. It is not limited to just a location on a map or a moment in time, but includes everything that builds the context of the story. For instance, the setting shows where and when events happen, as well as living conditions, such as poverty, wealth, and traditions, which influence how characters behave and shape the atmospheric qualities that affect the reader's emotions and expectations.

1.2.3. Theme

The theme is the core concept, main idea, or fundamental message that an author investigates throughout a story. Themes frequently explore universal ideas like love, ethics, or selfhood. For instance, literary analyses of John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* demonstrate how core themes often encompass the "brutality of capitalism, along with the importance and need for family and friendship" (LitCharts, n.d.). By engaging with these central messages, readers are invited to reflect critically on broader societal structures and human experiences.

1.2.4. Point of View

Point of view (POV) is the perspective from which a story is told; in other words, it refers to the angle of narration that shapes the reader's understanding of characters, actions, and events. As Moffett (1966) emphasizes that point of view is a fundamental structural choice in fiction that ultimately dictates how narrative information is filtered, controlling the conceptual distance between the narrator, the characters, and the reader. This underscore that POV is the most essential component in a literary text because it dictates the scope of narrative information, specifying who is narrating the story and the extent of information the audience obtains. POV is traditionally categorized into three distinct modes: first-person, second-person, and third-person.

In the first-person point of view, the story is told by a character who is directly involved in the events. The narrator speaks from a personal perspective using pronouns such as *I* and *we*, for example: “I did this” or “he said that to me.” This type of narration allows readers to access the character’s feelings, thoughts, and experiences more closely.

The second-person point of view speaks directly to the reader by using the pronoun *you*. For instance, the narrator may state, “You walked to the store.” This style makes the reader feel as if they are personally taking part in the events of the story.

Finally, in the third person point of view, the narrator tells the story from an external perspective and discusses the characters using pronouns such as *he*, *she,* or *they*. Examples include sentences such as “He opened the door” or “The father took her pen.” In this mode, the narrator is not part of the story but simply describes what happens to the characters.

1.2.5. Conflict

Conflict is the main struggle or the complication in a story, the problem for the protagoniste is trying to solve. On the other hand, it represents the tension between two opposing forces; for example, a characteragainst a society , a person against themselves,or a .character versus nature, such as a protagonist facing a natural disaster “Conflict is the central struggle between opposing forces in a story, which drives the plot and shapes character development” (Kennedy & Gioia, 2010, p. 11). In this view, conflict serves as the core narrative engine between opposing forces which may involve characters, society, or internal psychological states. This struggle is what creates the events of the plot and keeps the story developing. It is also essential because it reveals and shapes the characters, showing how they change, respond, and grow as they face different challenges.

There are two main types of conflict: internal and external. Internal conflict occurs when the problem is between the character and himself, involving deep psychological and

emotional struggles. Examples include Hamlet's indecision about avenging his father, or Harry Potter's struggle with the darkness within himself. Conversely, external conflict arises from forces outside the character. This dynamic can manifest as character versus character (a person against another), character versus society (struggles against societal norms or laws), or character versus nature, fate, or the supernatural. For example, this is evident in Santiago battling the marlin and the sea in *The Old Man and the Sea.*

1.2.6. Characters

A character can be defined as a person, an animal, or even a fictional creature within a story. Characters are generally categorized into two main types. The protagonist is typically the central figure around whom the story revolves, while the antagonist is the opposing force that creates conflict and challenges for the protagonist.

In literary studies, characters are built through their traits, motivations, thoughts, feelings, and relationships, all of which make them recognizable to readers and help shape the story's events and themes (StudySmarter, 2024; ProWritingAid, 2024). These sources emphasize that characters in literature are created through their personality, feelings, thoughts, goals, and relationships with others. These details help readers understand the characters and connect with them deeply. Besides, this perspective shows that characters are not passive in a story; instead, they play an active role in shaping its development. Their choices, actions, and emotional responses influence the progression of events and help express the main ideas or themes of the text.

1.2.7. Style

According to Nordquist (2019), "Style is a writer's distinctive manner of expression" (para.1). In literature, style is the way a writer chooses language to convey meaning and express the message they want to deliver through the narrator's voice. Therefore, Style refers

to how a text is expressed, including its tone and use of figurative language, which includes specific stylistic devices. A metaphor, for instance, compares two different things to highlight a similarity between them, even though they are not literally the same. Similarly, symbolism is a literary device where objects, characters, or ideas represent deeper meanings; for example, darkness may represent ignorance or evil, while a wolf in a story can symbolize loyalty.

2. Types of Literary Narratives

Literary narratives commonly take different forms, including short stories, novels, drama, myths, and autobiographical or personal narratives.

2.1. Short Stories

A short story is a fictional work that typically ranges between 1,000 and 7,500 words. It features a limited number of characters, a simple plot, and a central conflict that leads to a climax and ends with a rapid conclusion. Rohnberger and Woods (1971) state that the short story is a literary genre characterized by brevity, unity, and intensity. This definition highlights the main qualities that make short stories different from longer forms of fiction like novels.

2.2. Novels

Novels are a kind of long literary narratives. As defined by the *Encyclopædia Britannica* (2023), a novel is "an invented prose narrative of considerable length and a certain complexity that deals imaginatively with human experience, usually through a connected sequence of events involving a group of persons in a specific setting."

This definition clarifies that a novel is an invented prose narrative that represents human experience through a connected sequence of events involving characters in a specific setting. It emphasizes that a novel is a work of fiction, yet it is closely linked to real life because it

explores emotions, situations, and experiences that readers can relate to. Consequently, a novel is an extended work of narrative fiction, written in prose rather than verse. A novel typically consists of around 40,000 words or more, and in some cases, it may be published in the form of a series. Throughout the reading process, the length and complexity of the text keep readers engaged and curious to know the developing situations and the eventual resolution.

2.3. Drama and Myths

2.3.1. Drama

Drama is a literary form that is written to be performed later before an audience. It usually contains dialogue between two or more characters and is intended to be performed by actors. “Drama is the literary art of representing life through performance, where characters, dialogue, and action combine to express human emotions and social realities” (Aristotle, 1996, p. 10). Aristotle shows that drama mirrors human life through action and performance rather than through written text alone. He suggests that drama is meant to be seen and experienced by an audience, rather than just read. Through characters, dialogue, and unfolding events, drama brings emotions, conflicts, and social realities to life in a vivid and engaging way. It also helps readers and viewers better understand human behavior and feelings by observing how characters respond to different situations.

2.3.2. Myths

A myth is a traditional narrative that seeks to explain the origins of the world, natural events, or fundamental aspects of human existence. It typically involves supernatural beings and heroic figures, and it is deeply rooted in the beliefs and values of particular culture. According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary (n.d.), a myth is “ a usually traditional story of ostensibly historical events that serves to unfold part of the world view of a people or explain

a practice, belief, or natural phenomenon." This definition highlights that a myth operates as a traditional story that is often believed to be connected to historical events and is used by a community to explain its worldview, beliefs, customs, or natural phenomena. In simpler terms, myths are not just ordinary stories; rather, they are meaningful narratives that people have passed down over time to help make sense of the world around them. They often answer big questions, such as how the world began, why certain natural events happen, or why people follow specific traditions. In this way, myths reflect how a group of people understands life, nature, and their place in the world, while also preserving their cultural values and shared identity. Furthermore, beyond its surface narrative, a myth carries symbolic meaning and serves to express universal truths, cultural identity, and collective human experience.

2.4. Autobiographical and Personal Narratives

2.4.1. Autobiographical Narrative

An autobiographical narrative ranges from private writings, since it is defined as a self-authored account based on the narrator's recollections of significant events throughout their life. In literary studies, an autobiographical narrative is often defined as "a first-person story in which the writer recounts and reflects on their own lived experiences, combining factual events with personal interpretation and meaning" (K12 LibreTexts, 2020).

2.4.2. Personal Narrative

A personal narrative is a form of writing in which the narrator recounts their personal experiences and their own life. Generally, this kind of narrative usually includes dialogue or just follows a narrative form, sharing thoughts, feeling, and actions that happen to the narrator. According to academic frameworks, a personal narrative is "a first-person story that recounts and reflects on a single real-life experience, combining factual events with the

writer's feelings and insights" (EBSCO Research Starters, n.d.; Fiveable, 2023). This perspective suggests that a personal narrative is a real-life story narrated from the writer's own perspective. It goes beyond simply describing events by also presenting the writer's emotions, reflections, and personal insights related to the experience. As a result, the narrative becomes a meaningful expression of both lived reality and personal understanding.

3. Theoretical Foundation of Literary Reading

The theoretical foundation of literary reading is supported by theories such as Rosenblatt's Transactional Theory, and frameworks addressing reading as meaning-making and identity reflection. Besides these, other complementary perspectives further strengthen this understanding by showing that reading is not a fixed or mechanical process, but rather an active and thoughtful engagement with the text. These perspectives suggest that meaning is created as readers interact with what they read, bringing in their prior knowledge, emotions, and personal and cultural experiences. In this way, literary reading becomes something more dynamic and meaningful, where interpretation develops gradually through the connection between the reader, the text, and the context in which the reading happens.

3.1. Rosenblatt's Transactional Theory of Reading

Rosenblatt's Transactional Theory of Reading posits that literary meaning emerges from the dynamic interaction between the reader and the text, where the reader's prior knowledge, emotional responses, and contextual circumstances all shape the construction of meaning. Louise Rosenblatt highlights that the process of reading involves a deep interaction between the reader and the text itself:

> A reader makes meaning through a transaction with a text. The meaning does not reside ready-made 'in' the text or 'in' the reader but happens during the transaction between reader and text. The reader brings past experiences, emotions, and

knowledge to the reading situation, and these interact with the words on the page to produce meaning (Rosenblatt, 1978, p.16).

From Rosenblatt's point of view, each reader brings unique experiences, thoughts, and feelings to the text. In this process, meaning is constructed in a way that is unique to that particular moment. Therefore, Rosenblatt clarifies that reading is considered as a dialogue between the reader and the text.

Figure 2 ***The Transactional Theory Schema of Reading***

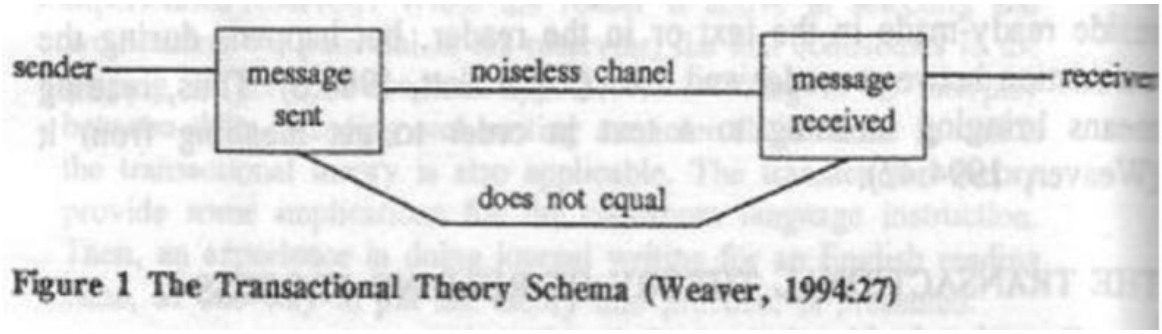


Figure 1 The Transactional Theory Schema (Weaver, 1994:27)

The illustration shown in Figure 2 depicts the connection between the sender (the writer) and the receiver (the reader). This diagram shows that although the author formulates a particular "message sent," the recipient interprets this message based on their individual experiences, emotions, and cultural background. Initially, the process seems to be a straightforward transmission where the information is sent and later acquired through a "noiseless channel," characterized as a transmission taking place without external interferences. Nonetheless, the key component of Weaver's (1994) diagram is the "does not equal" (≠) symbol placed between the transmitted and received messages. This suggests that the message meant by the author rarely matches the message formed by the reader, emphasizing the subjective aspects of literary interpretation.

3.2. Reading as Meaning-Making and Identity Reflection

Reading is an interactive and complex process that helps in understanding words to provide meaning for what is read. In addition, it contributes to shaping and exploring individuals' identities. Through the act of reading, readers engage with ideas, emotions, and experiences that encourage deeper thinking and interpretation. They often relate the text to their own lives, memories, and beliefs, which makes reading a personal and meaningful activity. Furthermore, exposure to different stories and viewpoints helps individuals understand themselves and others more effectively, while also supporting emotional growth and the development of personal awareness.

3.2.1. Reading as Meaning-Making

Reading is an active and personal process where readers do not simply extract meaning from a text, but instead construct it by linking the text to their own experiences, emotions, and prior knowledge. As a result, each reader may interpret the same text in a unique way based on their individual perspective.

From a psycholinguistic and meaning-making perspective, pioneered by theorists such as Goodman (1996), reading is conceptualized as an active, transactional process in which readers co-construct meaning with the text through inference, interpretation, and the systematic integration of prior experiences and cultural contexts. This perspective shows that within the meaning-making framework, reading is seen as an active and personal journey in which readers draw on their own memories and lived experiences to construct meaning, stories, and even cultural experiences. Meaning is not a fixed element that the reader merely derives from the text; instead, it is a construct that readers actively formulate by connecting the narrative with their own identity and experiences. It is also about constructing understanding by connecting it to one's experiences or context. At this point, readers interpret ideas and may even reshape their own thinking in response to what they have read.

3.2.2. Reading as Identity Reflection

Literature transforms human experiences and reflects them for readers, allowing them to connect these experiences with their own lives, emotions, and identities. According to Ezra Hyland (2014), “it’s not until we know the stories of each other that we embrace our humanity. When I know the stories of my people and my culture, that’s when I become human myself” (p.). From Hyland's perspective, individuals become more human when we know the stories of one another, which emphasizes that identity is shaped through narratives.

For language learners, interacting with texts that reflect their cultural identities, personal experiences, and family dynamics helps them to make sense of their world and reflect on who they are as a growing person. Reading about those who differ from them increases their capacity for empathy and compassion (Kucirkova, 2019). This process clarifies that EFL learners utilize literature to actively process personal experiences, which helps them comprehend their place in the world and build a stronger sense of second language (L2) identity. Thus, this enhances the ability to communicate, comprehend, and react to the emotions of others.

4. Literary Narratives in Language Teaching

Literary narratives play a major role in both general education and specialized language instruction. These narratives also help learners to develop their language performance and skills, understand cultural differences, and finally, serve on a personal level as a tool for personal growth. As Gillian Lazar explains, literature supports language learning by developing learners’ linguistic competence and cultural awareness (Lazar, 1993, p. 19).

4.1. Literature as a Linguistic Resource

Literature serves as an important linguistic resource in language teaching because the literature of every language is a rich treasure house of words; thus, it helps students build up

their vocabulary. It acts as the mirror of the century in which it was written, teaches manners and morals, and serves as a true guide to the art of living (Malhotra, 2023, p. 194). Malhotra clarifies that literature is considered a source for readers to enable them to construct vocabulary and even develop the four fundamental language skills: reading, speaking, writing, and listening.

4.2. Literature as Cultural Representation

Literature is a valuable way of introducing culture in language teaching, as it provides learners with rich, authentic representations of social practices, belief systems, and cultural values, while simultaneously fostering critical engagement with diverse perspectives and enhancing their ability to interpret language within its broader cultural and contextual frameworks.

Literature can be regarded as a reflective surface, a mirror through which cultural identities are both constructed and contested. This dual function of literary works is evident in how texts capture the nuances of societal change while simultaneously influencing perceptions of tradition and modernity. Scholars have explored this phenomenon extensively: Derma Putra (2011) illustrates how Balinese literature reflects modernity and identity, while Dyches (2018) argues that literary mirrors can shatter conventional understandings and offer prismatic experiences that reconfigure canonical narratives. Similarly, Hall (1997) argues that cultural identities are continuously produced and transformed through systems of representation. From this perspective, literature enables readers to reflect on themselves, others, and the societies in which they live.

From this perspective, it is clear that literature is not just a vehicle for storytelling, it is also connected to culture and identity, meaning that literature reflects beliefs, values or even the changes that happen within society. In addition to the previous idea, when readers

engage with a certain literary narrative, it is not only to receive the meaning of the passage; rather, they engage with the text, and through this interaction, it becomes easier for readers to start rethinking their own identities and cultural perspectives. So that, literature becomes a point where different views and cultures meet, contributing to the understanding of the self and others as well.

Additionally, this negotiation of cultural identity via literature goes beyond a local comparison of traditions; it serves as an interactive access point to what academics refer to as Intercultural Communicative Competence (Byram, 2021). When EFL students interact with various narratives, the text transforms from a distant foreign artifact into a "cultural bridge" (Kramsch, 2022). Through this bridge, learners do not just passively absorb foreign values; instead, they actively situate their local identities in conversation with a global English-speaking context, fostering a sense of global belonging.

4.3. Literature as a Tool for Personal Growth

Literature can be a significant tool for personal growth in language teaching because it helps learners to reflect on emotions, experiences, and values through the lives of characters and the events of a story.

Literature functions as a powerful tool for personal growth by encouraging readers to reflect on their values, emotions, and identities through engagement with fictional characters and their experiences (Hansson, 2012; McHussain, 2023). According to Hansson and McHussain, literature works as an encouragement tool that aids learners to reflect on their emotions, values, and their own identities.

Conclusion

Ultimately, literary narratives serve as carefully structured forms of writing rather than simple accounts of events. This section has shown that their meaning is shaped through the interaction of essential elements such as plot, setting, and others, which give coherence to the narrative and guide the reader's interpretation. Literary narratives also appear in a variety of forms, each contributing in different ways to the representation of human experience. Moreover, the theoretical frameworks discussed, particularly Rosenblatt's Transactional Theory and the concept of meaning-making, emphasize that reading is an active and interpretive process. Meaning is not fixed within the text itself but is constructed through the relationship between the reader and the literary work. This process is shaped by the reader's prior knowledge, emotional engagement, and cultural background. In this sense, reading also plays a role in shaping identity, encouraging reflection on the self, and developing awareness of others and their perspectives. In the specific context of language teaching, literary narratives serve as effective pedagogical tools. They contribute to the development of language proficiency, enrich cultural understanding, and foster deeper engagement with texts. Overall, literary narratives hold an important place not only in language education but also in supporting learners' cognitive, emotional, and cultural development.

Extending the previous discussion on how literary narratives help readers construct meaning and understand themselves, the focus now shifts to a more personal dimension: the sense of self and belonging. In this part, attention is given to how reading experiences allow individuals to relate to characters, recognize shared human experiences, and gradually develop a feeling of connection to the self and the community.

Section two: Sense of Self and Belonging

Introduction

Sense of self and belonging are central to understanding how learners experience and relate to the world around them. Identity is not fixed; rather, it develops and changes through social interaction, personal experiences, and engagement with communities. In this context, this section explores the different dimensions of self, including personal, social, and ideal selves while also considering the role of learners' investment in shaping their identity. Furthermore, it examines why motivation, confidence, and the negotiation of identity are crucial in language learning. Finally, the discussion is framed through key theories, such as sociocultural theory and social identity theory, which help explain how learners construct a sense of belonging in educational contexts.

1. Sense of Self

1.1. Theoretical Perspective of Identity and Belonging

1.1.1. Sociocultural Theory(Vygotsky)

Lev Vygotsky, in his sociocultural theory, posits that cognitive development is inherently social, driven by interaction with more knowledgeable people, cultural tools, and language. According to Vygotsky's theory (1978), learning precedes development, with key components including the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and scaffolding.

The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). This is defined as the gap between what a learner can do alone and what they can achieve with guidance from more knowledgeable individuals, such as teachers, peers, or parents. To illustrate, a third-year university student reading a literary text might understand simple vocabulary independently; however, they may not understand the text's deeper nuances. Therefore, the guidance of a teacher is highly needed in this situation to simplify meanings, explaining cultural references, and ask

reflective questions. In this context, guided support not only helps learners understand the text but also reduces language anxiety by making them feel comfortable enough to participate. As a result, learners develop a sense of belonging within the classroom, especially when engaging with complex literary texts.

Scaffolding (1978). This refers to the temporary support a teacher or peer provides to help the learner accomplish a certain task, then gradually withdrawn as the learner becomes more capable. For example, in a literature class, a teacher may begin by asking guiding questions about characters or themes, offering vocabulary lists, or providing summaries of complex passages. As learners gain confidence, they are encouraged to participate in group discussions, eventually analyzing texts independently.

Scaffolding is not merely a cognitive aid; it also plays a crucial role in shaping the learner's emotional experience. In particular, it helps reduce language anxiety by creating an inclusive environment where students feel safe to contribute without fear of judgment. When teachers explain cultural references or simplify difficult sections, it strengthens learners' sense of belonging in the academic community, making them feel that their voices are valued. Moreover, as students transition from guided support to independent analysis, their identity begins to shift; they move from being positioned merely as language learners to becoming literary critics who actively construct meaning. This transformation illustrates how scaffolding contributes to identity negotiation, as learners are not just acquiring linguistic skills but are also reconciling their own cultural perspectives with those embedded in the English text. Consequently, scaffolding fosters both academic growth and a deeper sense of belonging, enabling learners to see themselves as legitimate participants in a wider academic discourse.

1.1.2. Social Identity Theory (Henri Tajfel & John Turner,1979)

Introduced by Henri Tajfel and further developed by John Turner (1979), this theory explains how individuals construct their identity based on group memberships and how this affects their attitudes, behavior, and sense of belonging. According to this theory, identity is shaped by more than a collection of internal factors; rather, it is shaped by interaction, categorization, and group affiliation. According to Tajfel and Turner (1979), individuals naturally classify themselves and others into various social groups, including cultural, linguistic, and national categories. This process, known as social categorization, not only simplifies the complexity of social life but also reinforces the distinction between the "in-group" and "out-group." Following this categorization stage, individuals identify with their group by adopting its values, norms, and behaviors, which gradually become a part of how they see themselves. In this way, their sense of self develops as they define who they are through their membership in certain groups. In addition, through social comparison, individuals tend to compare their group with others, often aiming to view their group more positively to maintain or strengthen their self-esteem (Tajfel &Turner1979; Tajfel, 1981).

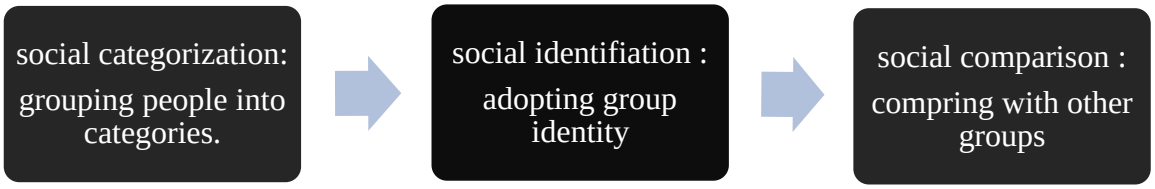
In the context of third-year university EFL students, social identity theory is particularly relevant because students may perceive themselves as members of a global English-speaking academic community or, conversely, feel excluded due to language limitations. This directly affects both their sense of self and their sense of belonging within the university classroom and the broader academic environment. As Bonny Norton (2013) emphasizes, language learning is closely tied to identity and investment; as result, students continuously reshape their identities through participation and interaction.

Stages of Social Identity Formation:

In the EFL context, students do not merely develop their language skills; they also construct their sense of self and belonging through continuous interaction within the classroom. By engaging with others and experiencing new cultural perspectives, they

gradually begin to understand their place within a social group. Social Identity Theory explains that this psychological development occurs through a series of three interconnected stages, as illustrated in Figure 3 below.

Figure 3: Stages of social identity formation (adopted from Tajfel & Turner, 1979)



Social Categorization. Learners naturally group people or characters in stories based on shared traits or roles which helps them understand social relationships and contexts. This process allows EFL learners to simplify and mentally organize the social world of the target language. By categorizing people, roles, and situations, learners automatically reduce the complexity of unfamiliar cultural contexts; this, in turn, makes it easier for them to understand and engage with the new environment.

Social Identification. Following categorization, learners begin to see themselves as part of a group and adopt the norms or perspectives from characters or groups they relate to, which gradually shapes their sense of self. At this stage, learners begin to internalize the values of the group with which they identify. For example, when a learner identifies with a character in a

literary text, they may adopt new perspectives and emotions. This allows them to explore new identities in a safe and imaginative space without fear of judgment.

Social Comparison. Finally, learners evaluate their own group or identity in relation to others, allowing them to recognize similarities and differences while influencing their sense of belonging and self-esteem. However, this comparison may negatively affect learners when they perceive themselves as less competent than their peers, leading to language anxiety and reduced participation. Nevertheless, literary discussions can reduce this negative effect by focusing on shared human experiences rather than strict linguistic accuracy, helping learners feel more included.

1.2. Definition of Sense of Self

According to Jerome Bruner (1990), “the self is not something that one is, but something that one does” (p. 116). This framework demonstrates that identity is not static; rather, it is actively constructed through experiences and narrative interactions. In this sense, the concept of a sense of self refers to the way individuals perceive, understand, and define who they are. It encompasses personal beliefs, values, and experiences, which continuously evolve over time, especially through social interaction and engagement with different literary contexts. Furthermore, in the field of language learning, this active construction of the self is closely linked to how learners navigate a new linguistic environment, as their perception of who they are may shift when they transition from their native language to English. Therefore, to fully grasp how this process functions in an educational setting, it is necessary to categorize the sense of self into its primary dimensions.

1.3. Types of Sense of Self

The sense of self is not a single entity; rather, it is a multidimensional phenomenon. As William James (1890) famously noted, the self is composed of various constituents that

reflect how an individual exists both privately and socially. In the context of language learning, these layers determine how students perceive their abilities and their future goals. Consequently, the sense of self can be categorized into three primary dimensions:

1.3.1. Personal Self

The personal self refers to the internal attributes, traits, and private feelings that make an individual unique. According to Rosenberg (1979), it involves a person's self-esteem and their own evaluation of their abilities in a private capacity. In literary contexts, the personal self is often developed through reading. Literary texts act as a mirror through which learners can reflect on their own emotions, beliefs, and experiences. This reflection subsequently helps to deepen their self-awareness.

1.3.2. Social Self

The social self is defined by an individual's perceived membership in social groups. Tajfel and Turner (1979) explain that people derive their identity from their relationships and how they are perceived by others in a group. Classroom discussions provide opportunities for learners to express their ideas and interact with their peers. Through this collaborative participation, they gradually establish their place within the group, which strengthens their sense of belonging.

1.3.3. Ideal L2 Self

This dimension represents the aspirations and the version of themselves that learners dream of becoming in the future. Dörnyei (2005) describes the "Ideal L2 Self" as a powerful motivator that drives students to invest more effort in learning English. Through literary narratives, learners can imagine their future selves more vividly; they can visualize themselves as successful fluent language users, which increases their motivation more effectively than traditional grammar-based learning.

1.4. Identity and Investment

In the field of second language acquisition (SLA), the relationship between who the learner is and how they learn has become a central focus. Bonny Norton (1997) captures this dynamic perfectly when she states that “when language learners speak, they are not only exchanging information with target language speakers; they are also constantly organizing and reorganizing a sense of who they are and how they relate to the social world” (p. 410). This means that learning English is inherently a social process in which the learner identity is always involved. Furthermore, Norton (1995) argues that students invest in a language when they believe it will improve their future social position. Therefore, the more students feel that the target language reflects their ideal selves, the greater the the investment and effort they will put into the learning process.

1.5. Importance of Sense of Self in Language Learning

Sense of self plays an important role in language learning because it influences learners’ motivation and participation. As Bonny Norton (2013) states that “Identity is the way a person understands their relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future” (p. 4). Building on this idea, Norton explains that learners’ engagement in a second language depends heavily on how they perceive themselves within the social world. Furthermore, a positive sense of self acts as a catalyst for successful learning by shaping three key dimensions: motivation, risk-taking, and identity negotiation.

Similarly, Zoltán Dörnyei (2009) shows that imagining an “Ideal L2 Self” significantly strengthens a learner’s psychological desire to learn. In addition, Ema Ushioda (2009) emphasizes that learner’s personal experiences and identities significantly influence their academic success. Therefore, the sense of self is deeply dynamic and plays an important role in language learning, especially through literary narratives that shape a learner’s identity,

agency, and sense of belonging. The following sub-sections will examine these key dimnsions to demonstrate how the sense of self plays a crucial role in language learning:

1.5.1. Motivation

Motivation is one of the most important factors in language learning because it drives learners to invest effort and stay committed over time. When learners have a clear image of their "Ideal L2 Self", the version they hope to become as successful language users, they are more likely to engage actively in learning and persist even when challenges arise. Zoltán Dörnyei (2009) explains that this vision of the future self gives learners a sense of purpose, guiding both their immediate actions in the classroom and their long-term goals in language acquisition. In this way, motivation is deeply connected to the learners' sense of self, shaping not only what they do but also how they see themselves as language users.

1.5.2. Confidence and Risk-Taking

Confidence and risk-taking involves learners being willing to participate, try out new language forms, and make mistakes without fear of negative judgment. According to Norton (2013), learners are more likely to take risks when they feel confident in their identity and supported by their environment. This willingness to take risks is essential for practicing and developing language skills, as making mistakes is a natural part of the learning process. In other words, a strong sense of self helps learners overcome language anxiety, try new expressions, and engage fully in communication, which subsequently accelerates their progress.

1.5.3. Identity Negotiation

Identity negotiation is the process through which learners shape and adjust who they are while interacting in social and cultural contexts. Norton (2013) demonstrates that learners' confidence and experiences influence how they take on new roles, while Ushioda

(2009) stresses that learners' agency helps them reflect and make choices about their evolving identities. Using literary narratives and authentic materials allows learners to experiment with new ways of being, connect with the target culture, and feel a stronger sense of belonging. Language learning, therefore, involves both skill development and the growth of the learner's self-concept.

2. Sense of Belonging

2.1. Definition of Belonging

Defining the concept of belonging is essential to understanding its role in shaping learners' educational experiences. Hagerty et al. (1992) describe a sense of belonging as the "experience of personal involvement in a system or environment so that persons feel themselves to be an integral part of that system" (p. 173). This quote suggests that a sense of belonging is more than just being part of a group; it fundamentally involves the feeling of being accepted, valued, and connected to others. In other words, individuals develop a sense of belonging when they feel that they are recognized and that their presence matters within a social context. This feeling is closely related to the sense of self, since learners understand who they are through their relationships and interactions with others.

2.2. Types of Belonging

Belonging is not a single or fixed experience; rather, it takes different forms depending on the context in which individuals interact. In educational settings, particularly in language learning, belonging can be understood through three interconnected dimensions: social, academic, and emotional belonging.

2.2.1. Social Belonging

Social belonging refers to the feeling of being accepted and connected to others within a specific group. It develops through interaction, communication, and shared experiences, as

individuals gradually feel that they are part of a community and are supported by their peers. This view is consistent with the framework of Roy Baumeister and Mark Leary (1995), who argue that the need to belong is a fundamental human motivation expressed through interpersonal attachments and group membership. For example, an EFL learner may develop a sense of social belonging when their classmates include them in group discussions, listen to their opinions, and encourage them to participate, even if their language level is still developing.

2.2.2. Academic Belonging

In contrast to social belonging, academic belonging is related to the learner's relationship with the learning environment itself. It involves feeling comfortable, included, and valued within the classroom, as well as believing that they have a legitimate place in the academic context. For instance, a learner may feel academically accepted when the teacher gives them positive and motivated feedback, adapts tasks to their level, and treats their contributions as meaningful. This reinforces their confidence as language learners.

2.2.3. Emotional and Psychological Belonging

Emotional and psychological belonging focuses on the learners' internal affective experiences. More specifically, it is associated with the feelings of safety, confidence, and psychological well-being. As a result, when learners feel emotionally secure, they are more likely to participate actively and engage in the learning process without anxiety or fear of being judged. For example, Maslow (1943) emphasized that psychological safety and belonging are fundamental needs that must be met before individuals can achieve higher levels of learning and self-actualization. Similarly, Osterman (2000) highlighted that students' sense of belonging within the school community is strongly linked to their motivation, persistence, and emotional well-being. In classroom contexts, students who are

not afraid of making mistakes, and who continue to persist even after facing difficulties, are more likely to speak freely and take risks in the target language when they feel respected by their peers and teachers.

2.3. Belonging as Community of Practice (Wenger)

Belonging develops through learners' participation and interaction within social groups. Supporting this idea, Etienne Wenger (1998) argues that learning does not occur in isolation but rather through active participation in social groups where members share common interests or goals. In such communities, learners gradually develop a sense of belonging, which is shaped not only by their engagement in activities but also by the recognition they receive through interaction with other members.

Moreover, this feeling of belonging is closely linked to learners' identities, as it allows them to see themselves as valued participants within the group. Therefore, by participating in meaningful collaborative activities, learners can build up both their skills and their connection to the community, ultimately fostering a more integrated and confident sense of self (Wenger, 1998).

2.4. Importance of Belonging in Learning

This idea is further reinforced by Baumeister and Leary (1995), who argue that the deepest craving of human nature is the need to belong and be accepted; this concept describes the fundamental necessity for individuals to feel included and accepted in the environment around them. In educational contexts, this urge for belonging becomes a crucial factor that shapes students' motivation, engagement, and academic achievement. When learners feel accepted in their learning environment, they are more likely to participate actively, persist through challenges, and develop a stronger sense of identity as successful students.

According to Baumeister and Leary (1995), the need to belong drives human behavior, psychological well-being, and social integration, factors which directly affect learners'

willingness to interact, collaborate, and invest both effort and time in their learning. Wenger (1998) also emphasizes that communities of practice, including classroom communities, foster identity formation and a sense of belonging through shared experiences and mutual engagement. Therefore, cultivating belonging in learning environments is not only an emotional necessity but also a critical factor for academic success, social interaction, and personal development.

2.5. Challenges to Belonging in EFL Contexts

Despite the recognized importance of belonging in EFL classrooms, learners often encounter several challenges that hinder their sense of acceptance and integration. These challenges may arise from linguistic barriers, cultural differences, social dynamics within the classroom, and institutional practices. Addressing these obstacles is essential to foster an inclusive learning environment that supports both academic achievement and personal development. To better comprehend these obstacles, one must analyze the particular systemic and interpersonal factors that may hinder learners' sense of belonging in the EFL context:

Language Anxiety and Fear of Mistakes. Learners often feel nervous about speaking in English because they worry about making errors or being judged by their peers. This fear can prevent them from participating in class discussions or interacting with their classmates, which reduces their sense of inclusion and behavioral engagement (Norton, 2000). Consequently, this affective barrier may hold learners from speaking or participating even when they fully understand the content. Over time, this limits their opportunities to practice and reinforces their feelings of exclusion.

Cultural Differences and Unfamiliar Norms. Learners from distinct cultural backgrounds may struggle to relate to classroom norms or the sociolinguistic behaviors of their peers. Differences in communication styles, values, or expectations can make learners feel isolated and negatively affect their sense of belonging (Wenger, 1998). These differences may lead to

misunderstandings in communication and classroom behavior, making learners feel disconnected and less integrated into the target language environment.

Large Class Sizes and Limited Interaction Opportunities. Overcrowded classrooms are more likely to provide fewer opportunities for collaborative learning and peer-to-peer interactions, making it harder for learners to form social connections and feel included (Wenger, 1998). This means learners receive less individual attention from the instructor, which reduces interaction and makes it difficult to build relationships with both peers and teachers.

Lack of Confidence and Low Self-Esteem. Learners who question themselves and their linguistic abilities frequently may avoid participation, which reinforces their feeling of exclusion and negatively impacts both social engagement and academic performance (Norton, 2000). When learners doubt their competence, they tend to avoid participation, which slows their progress and negatively affects their sense of belonging.

Exclusion or Marginalization. Students who experience being ignored during group work, or being overlooked during interactive tasks, they are more likely to build a weak sense of belonging, resulting in a significant decrease in their level of motivation over time (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Even subtle forms of exclusion can have a strong emotional impact, leading to decreased motivation and engagement over time.

2.6. Literary Narratives as Spaces for Identity Construction

Literary narratives are not merely tools for learning a language; rather, they are transformative spaces where learners explore, negotiate, and construct their identities. Through engagement with stories, characters, and events, learners are exposed to different perspectives, experiences, and ways of thinking. As a result, they begin to reflect on their own lives, beliefs, values, and sense of self. In this process, learners are often exposed to certain characters or situations that allow them to relate the narrative to their personal

experiences. At the same time, they may also encounter unfamiliar contexts that encourage them to question and rethink their assumptions. In this sense, literary narratives provide a safe space where learners can explore different identities without fear of judgment.

Bruner (1990) supports this idea; arguing that individuals make sense of themselves and their lives through narratives. Similarly, Dan P. McAdams (1985) sees identity as a life story that is continuously constructed. In the context of language learning, Norton (2000) emphasizes that identity is shaped through interaction, communication, and experiences, all of which can be facilitated through engagement with literary texts. Therefore, literary narratives play an important role in helping learners develop both their sense of self and their sense of belonging, as they allow individuals to connect personal experiences with broader social and cultural meanings.

2.7. Literary Interaction and Social Identity Formation

Literary interaction refers to the process through which learners engage with literary texts not only by reading them but also by discussing, interpreting, and sharing their ideas with others. In this way, learners understand texts better when they share ideas and talk about them with others. This interactive exchange is crucial to shaping social identity. As learners share their viewpoints, engage with diverse interpretations, and participate in group discussions, they gradually establish their place within the classroom. Consequently, they begin to perceive themselves not only as readers but also as active participants in a community of learning.

Moreover, through these interactions, learners receive feedback, recognition, and support from their peers and teachers. As a result, they gradually develop a sense of confidence and belonging, which contributes significantly to shaping how they perceive themselves in relation to others. From this perspective, social identity is not fixed; instead, it is continuously constructed and negotiated through interaction. This view is supported by

Vygotsky (1978), who emphasizes the importance of social interaction in learning and development, and Wenger (1998), who argues that identity is formed through participation in social practices. In addition, Norton (2000) highlights that identity in language learning is shaped through interaction and social positioning.

2.8. Classroom Dialogue and Co-Construction of Meaning

According to Vygotsky (1978), learning is essentially a social activity that develops through interaction with others rather than in isolation. This idea means that understanding does not develop in isolation, but through interaction with others. Inside the classroom, dialogue plays a central role in shaping how learners interpret and make sense of texts. Instead of passively receiving meaning as something fixed without interpretation, learners actively build it through discussions, questioning, and exchanging ideas.

In this process, each learner presents their own perspective, which is fundamentally shaped by their unique background, personal experiences, and beliefs. As different viewpoints are shared, understanding becomes richer and more complex. In other words, meaning is not created by one individual in isolation; rather, it is co-constructed through the collective contributions of the group.

Moreover, classroom dialogue allows learners to express their opinions and participate in a collaborative space where all ideas and perspectives are heard and valued. As a result, learners not only develop a deeper understanding of the text but also become more aware of their own thinking. This interactive process also contributes significantly to the formation of social identity, as learners begin to see themselves as active participants whose voices matter within the learning community.

Therefore, classroom dialogue is essential not only for building meaning but also for fostering a sense of belonging, as learners feel recognized, valued, and connected to others through shared intellectual experiences.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this section has demonstrated that belonging is a multidimensional construct encompassing social, academic, and emotional dimensions, each of which plays a pivotal role in shaping learners' engagement and success in EFL contexts. Drawing on the perspectives of Vygotsky, Wenger, Baumeister and Leary, Maslow, Norton, and Bruner, it has been shown that learning and identity are socially negotiated through interaction, participation, and narrative. At the same time, challenges such as cultural differences, language anxiety, and limited classroom participation can hinder learners' sense of inclusion. Nevertheless, when classrooms foster dialogue, recognition, and supportive communities of practice, learners not only co-construct meaning but also develop stronger identities and deeper connections. Ultimately, belonging emerges as critical factor that underpins motivation, psychological well-being, and identity formation in language learning.

Overall, the discussion in sections one and two demonstrates that identity and belonging are deeply intertwined in the process of language learning. First, section one highlighted that the sense of self is not fixed but continuously shaped through social interaction, cultural positioning, and motivational aspirations, drawing on Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, Bourdieu's concepts of field and agency, Tajfel and Turner's social identity theory, as well as the frameworks of intercultural communicative competence and cultural bridging advanced by Byram and Kramsch, alongside contributions from Joseph, James, Rosenberg, Dörnyei, Norton, Mercer, and Ushioda.

Second, section two built on this foundation by examining belonging as a multidimensional construct (social, academic, and emotional) supported by perspectives from Baumeister and Leary, Maslow, Wenger, Norton, and Bruner. Moreover, it addressed the challenges faced by EFL learners, such as cultural differences, language anxiety, and limited

participation, while emphasizing the importance of dialogue, recognition, and narrative in fostering inclusion. Taken together, these sections reveal that identity and belonging are co-constructed through participation, reflection, and interaction, and that both are indispensable for enhancing learners' motivation, emotional well-being, and academic achievement.

Chapter Two: Data collection and Analysis

Introduction

This chapter examines the role of literary narratives in shaping EFL learners' sense of self and belonging at Abdelhafid Boussouf Mila University. It aims to explain how reading literary narratives encourages learners to discover and better understand themselves, and how this process leads to developing a stronger sense of belonging within a classroom, particularly in relation to their ideal and social selves, as well as how it fosters their sense of inclusion within the classroom environment. To investigate these experiences, a qualitative research design was adopted. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with eight third year EFL students to gain deeper understanding of their lived experiences, as the primary data collection tool, enabling participants to freely express their perceptions, reflections, and interpretations of the literary narratives they encountered throughout their studies. This method ensured both flexibility and focus, allowing for rich insights into issues related to identity formation, emotional engagement, and classroom belonging.

This chapter, therefore, focuses on the main themes that emerged from the data analysis, highlighting the ways in which literary narratives contribute to the development of learners' sense of self and belonging. It also discusses the facilitating factors that shaped these experiences, alongside participants' perspectives and suggestions. Overall, it aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the significance of literary narratives within the EFL context at Abdelhafid Boussouf Mila University. Braun and Clarke (2006) argued that thematic analysis is theoretically flexible for identifying, describing, and interpreting patterns (themes) within a data set in great detail. It fits well with any qualitative study which attempts

to explore complex research issues. Inductive thematic analysis is used to analyze the open-ended interview responses gathered from these EFL students.

2. Students' Interview

The present study employed a semi-structured interview consisting of fourteen open-ended questions divided into five sections designed to explore how literary narratives shape EFL learners' sense of self and belonging at Abdelhafid Boussouf Mila University. The interview was conducted with eight third-year EFL students who were recruited from the Mila University book club to provide valuable insights into the relationship between literature, identity, and classroom integration.

The interview was organized into five main sections. The first section focused on general information about the students' background and their engagement with literary narratives in English, as well as their perceptions of the role of literature in the EFL classroom. The second section examined the relationship between literary narratives and learners' sense of self, exploring how students relate to characters, identify with situations, and construct their ideal and social selves through reading. It also addressed whether literary engagement influences their confidence and identity as English language users. The third section investigated learners' emotional responses to literary texts and how these emotions affect their willingness to participate in classroom interaction and take communicative risks. The fourth section focused on the sense of belonging, particularly how discussions of literary narratives contribute to building a classroom community, fostering peer interaction, and creating a shared interpretive space among students. It also explored how literature may serve as a cultural bridge between learners' local identity and the wider English-speaking world.

Finally, the last section invited participants to reflect on the overall impact of literary narratives on their sense of belonging within the English department, as well as any

additional insights regarding their personal development and engagement with literature in the EFL context. This structure allowed for a comprehensive and in-depth exploration of the multiple dimensions through which literary narratives influence learners' identity formation and sense of belonging.

3.1. Administration of the Interview

The interview was conducted face-to-face with eight third-year EFL students at Abdelhafid Boussouf Mila University. These participants were selected because they had previous experience with literary narratives in their English studies and were that able to provide valuable insights into the research topic. The interviews took place in a quiet setting within the university, which helped create a comfortable atmosphere and allowed participants to express their thoughts freely. Each interview lasted between 20 and 35 minutes, giving students enough time to discuss their experiences and opinions in depth. The sessions were conducted entirely in English, as the participants demonstrated a high level of linguistic proficiency that allowed them to articulate their personal reflections and emotional experiences fluently.

With the participants' prior consent, all interviews were audio-recorded, and subsequently transcribed verbatim to prepare the data for inductive thematic analysis. This operational approach provided rich, authentic insights into the relationship between literary narratives, identity development, and classroom belonging. Throughout the administrative process, ethical principles, including confidentiality, anonymity, voluntary participation, and informed consent, were strictly observed.

3.2. Analysis of the Student's Interview

3.2.1. The Approach Used in the Research

In this study, inductive thematic analysis was used as the main method for analyzing the interview data. Thematic analysis is a highly effective qualitative approach that was chosen for this study because qualitative research design focuses on examining, organizing,

and interpreting recurring patterns of meaning within data sets (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The recorded interviews were first transcribed verbatim to ensure that all participants' responses were accurately captured. The transcripts were then carefully read several times to achieve familiarity with the data. After that, initial codes were generated by identifying meaningful segments related to the research questions.These codes were subsequently organized into potential themes based on recurring patterns across the data. The themes were then reviewed, refined, and clearly defined to ensure they accurately reflected the participants' experiences. Finally, the themes were named and used to present and discuss the findings following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phase thematic framework. In this research, this process was executed by thoroughly reading the transcripts to achieve data familiarity, systematically coding relevant phrases, and grouping those codes into the final themes. This method was chosen because it corresponds closely with the aim of the research, which is to understand how literary narratives influence EFL learners' sense of self and belonging. Since the data is based on students' personal accounts, thematic analysis offered an effective way to move from individual experiences to more general patterns while still maintaining the richness and authenticity of the participants` voices.

In applying this approach, the researcher was able to closely examine how participants described their interaction with literary narratives and how these experiences shaped different

aspects of their learning process, including their sense of identity, emotional involvement with texts, participation in classroom activities, and feelings of belonging within the EFL environment.

3.2.2. Themes Analysis

3.2.2.1. Identity and Character Relatability

Literature, particularly narratives that center on relatable characters, appears to play a significant role in shaping how students understand themselves and their experiences. The analysis of the gathered data suggests that students engage with literary texts in ways that are deeply personal, where characters are not simply followed as part of the plot but are experienced as meaningful reflections of the self. Across the dataset a clear pattern emerges: readers consistently relate to characters in order to better understand their own thoughts, emotions, and even identities. In addition, the findings suggest that relatability plays a central role in how meaning is constructed.

For many students, this connection develops gradually. At first, reading is approached as a form of enjoyment or escape from reality. However, as they become more involved in the narrative, they begin to notice similarities between themselves and the characters. This process often happens naturally, without deliberate effort. These moments of recognition indicate that personal identification forms an important part of students' engagement; literary narratives create opportunities for self-reflection and identity exploration. Through their interactions with characters, students are able to recognize familiar aspects of themselves, reflect on their personal values and characteristics, and in some cases, imagine qualities they admire or aspire to develop. Consequently, literary narratives appear to function not only as a source of entertainment but also as spaces where readers negotiate and make sense of their identities.

This broader pattern of identity and character relatability is reflected through three interconnected sub-themes: Seeing Oneself in Literary Characters, Identity Recognition through Character Similarities, and Literary Characters as Representations of Possible Selves.

3.2.2.1.1. Seeing Oneself in Literary Characters

A clear pattern across the data is the students' tendency to see themselves reflected in literary characters. This process is not usually planned; rather, it develops naturally as readers become engaged in the narrative. Characters are not only understood as fictional figures but also as reflections that connect with personal emotions, memories, or lived experiences.

For some participants, this recognition is important because it allows them to express feelings that were previously difficult to put into words. Participant A illustrated this experience while reading the novel *The Poppy War* by R. F. Kuang:

> "When I was reading The Poppy War, I found myself thinking I went through this. I had never thought that I could actually explain this feeling or express it clearly, but this character is going through it, and it feels like everything is being said for me."

The experience of participant A shows how the reader connects deeply with the character, not only by recognizing similar experiences but also by using the narrative to better understand personal emotions. In this case, the character becomes a way of giving meaning to feelings that were previously unclear. Moreover, this pattern can be understood through the concept of reading as meaning-making and identity reflection, which suggests that readers interpret texts in relation to their own identities and lived experiences. The data supports this perspective, as students consistently describe a tendency to seek personal connections within the narrative. For instance, Participant B stated:

> "It is I think a human instinct to try and find yourself in other characters, because as person who tries to write, you can't help but put yourself in other characters."

Here, relatability is represented as something natural and almost automatic. This suggests that readers do not passively receive the text, but actively search for connections that reflect their own identity.

3.2.2.1.2. Identity Recognition through Character Similarities

Another pattern emerged from the data is that students often relate to characters through similarities in personality, emotional tendencies, and ways of thinking, rather than shared life experiences. In this sense, identification is based more on internal traits rather than external events, showing that relatability can develop through subtle forms of resemblance. Participant C explained this experience: "The more I read, the more I find characteristics that are so close to me." This quote indicates that identification does not necessarily depend on shared life events but can also emerge through internal similarities such as feelings, attitudes, or ways of thinking.

In addition, Participant C also highlights how personal and social identities can shape this connection: "As someone who is a woman… I feel like it pulls me back from reaching my full potential." This indicates that reading is influenced by the readers' lived experiences. Students interpret characters through their own social and personal realities, which makes the reading experience more relevant and impactful.

This kind of engagement can be linked to Norton's (2013) idea of identity and investment, which highlights that learners are more likely to engage when learning materials resonate with their personal identities and experiences. Furthermore, by reflecting on gendered societal expectations, the participant actively negotiates her social self within the EFL learning framework.

For many students, this sense of connection also changes how they read. When they recognize themselves in a character, they become more curious and engaged. This is clear in the statement by participant C: “If I feel like the characteristics look like me, I feel the need to analyze it more, so I keep reading.” This shows that relatability pushes students to go further; they do not just read, they reflect and question. In some cases, this connection can even point toward who they would like to become.

Moreover, recognition increases engagement, encouraging deeper reflection and continued reading. This links directly to the idea of the Ideal L2 Self, where learners are motivated by images of themselves that they relate to or aspire to. Through certain characters, students may not only see who they are, but also imagine who they could be in future.

3.2.2.1.3. Literary Characters as Representations of Possible Selves

In addition to the recognition of characters in themselves, students also describe how literary figures shape their imagination of who they might become in the future. In these cases, characters go beyond merely reflecting identity and begin to represent potential versions of the self. This is clear when participant C stated: “The character was put through a lot of hard things and she went through them without giving up.” Here, the focus is not only on the events of the story, but on how the character responds to them. This response becomes meaningful to the reader and represents qualities that they admire or aspire to develop.

Through such characters, students are exposed to different ways of thinking and behaving, which allows them to reflect on their own development and imagine alternative versions of themselves. Participants often highlight characters who show resilience and persistence in difficult situations. These qualities are not only observed but also valued and emotionally meaningful.

Overall, what emerges from the participants' responses shows how personal connection naturally shapes the way students read. Characters are not seen as separate from the reader, but as figures they can relate to, reflect on, and sometimes even recognize themselves in. In this way, reading becomes a space where students make sense of their own thoughts and feelings, where meaning grows through the interaction between the text and their personal experiences.

3.2.2.2. Emotional Engagement and Oral Participation

The data analysis revealed that emotional engagement played a significant role in shaping students' oral participation during literature classes. Participants did not describe literature as merely an academic requirement or a source of information to be analyzed. Rather, literary texts were experienced as emotionally meaningful encounters that invited reflection, challenged perspectives, and encouraged self-expression. The emotions evoked through reading influenced how participants interpreted texts, how they positioned themselves in relation to characters and themes, and how willing they were to contribute to classroom discussions.

Emotional engagement, however, did not emerge in a single or straightforward way. For some participants, it developed through recognizing aspects of themselves in fictional characters and situations. For others, it arose through empathy with experiences different from their own. These emotional responses often shaped the confidence with which they expressed their views and interacted with others during discussions. Three interconnected sub-themes captured these experiences: Connecting through Shared Experiences, Exploring Different Emotional Worlds, and Finding the Courage to Speak.

3.2.2.2.1. *Connecting through Shared Experiences*

Participants frequently described literature as becoming more meaningful when they recognized familiar emotions and experiences within the stories they read. These moments of

recognition transformed reading from a purely academic activity into a deeply personal encounter.

A noticeable pattern across the participants' accounts was the way reading gradually shifted from being an academic obligation to becoming a personally meaningful experience. Both Participant D and Participant E. Participant D reflected on this profound connection:

> I passed through this situation. Yes, for example, like when some characters go through something and they are speaking about it, I find myself thinking, I went through this and they are putting it into words in this way, but this character is going through it and the author had put it into words this exact way it's very jarring to see it on paper. And relieving, yes, it is to find yourself not alone in a lot of experiences.

The reflection of Participant D shows a clear shift in how reading is experienced, moving from an academic and detached activity to something personally meaningful. She explained, "I passed through this situation… I find myself thinking, I went through this and they are putting it into words in this way," which indicates that she begins to recognize her own life experiences within the character's story. This suggests that reading is no longer limited to the formal analysis of a text, but becomes a moment of personal connection and self-recognition. She further describes this experience as both "jarring" and "relieving," highlighting the emotional effect of seeing her own experiences represented in written form. While it feels striking to encounter such similarity, it also provides comfort and emotional relief. Her sense of being "not alone" shows how the text creates reassurance by validating her personal experiences.

Similarly, Participant E highlighted the distinct boundary that shifts when a text becomes personally relevant:

> It makes it so much a personal read because I believe that there is different kinds of reading. There is personal reading and there's analytical or academic reading. So even

> I am reading a book academically and I find a character I relate to, it will become something on a personal level. I will not just see this book as a bunch of characters and sentences that I need to analyze. I will see it as something that I want to relate to and understand.

The account of Participant E shows how identifying with a character transforms the reading experience. She explained, “There is different kinds of reading… but even if I am reading a book academically and I find a character I relate to, it will become something on a personal level.” This shows that once she identifies with the character, the reading shifts from an analytical process to a personal one. She further emphasizes that the text is no longer seen as “a bunch of characters and sentences,” but becomes something she wants to relate to and understand, reflecting a deeper engagement with the character’s perspective. This individual investment directly connects passive reading with active participation in the classroom, as the student develops a psychological interest in the narrative content.

Overall, both participants demonstrate the same concept of identifying with a character’s core values and standing up for them, where this identification leads them to emotionally connect with the text and stand closer to its meaning on a personal level. Participant F and Participant A both engage with this shared idea of moral alignment, identifying with a literary character’s core values and expressing a willingness to uphold them. For instance, Participant F described that identifying with a literary character whose choices reflected values she deeply admired, stating: “The woman has changed from eating meat to vegetarian. It was her decision…and her family and friends did not accept her. And I told myself I would do the same if I find it the right way to express myself.”

Participant A added a reinforcing perspective, noting, “As long it’s not going to harm me or the others, I am going to do it.” This shows that Participant A connects with the character’s way of thinking about making personal choices. When she says, “As long it’s not

going to harm me or the others, I am going to do it," she is expressing that she values acting according to her beliefs, but only when those actions remain safe and do not negatively affect others. This reflects a balanced way of thinking where personal freedom is important, but still guided by care and responsibility toward the people around her.

Correspondingly, Participant F aligns herself with the character's decision to adopt vegetarianism despite social disapproval from family and friends. She interprets this choice as an act of self-expression and personal belief, and indicates also that she would similarly act according to what she believes is right, even in the presence of external resistance. This reflects an internalization of the character's moral viewpoint and a recognition of individual integrity in value-driven decision-making. In comparison, Participant A emphasizes a principle-based ethical position, stating that she would act on her beliefs as long as they do not cause harm to herself or others. This response demonstrates a balanced moral framework that values personal agency while maintaining consideration for ethical responsibility toward others. Together, both participants demonstrate a common process of moral alignment, as they relate to the character's values and convert them into personal principles that shape their own perceptions of their ideal and social identities.

These findings strongly resonate with Transactional Theory of Rosenblatt's (1978), which argues that meaning is constructed through the dynamic interaction between readers and texts. Readers actively bring their past experiences, emotions, and beliefs into the reading process, shaping how they interpret literary narratives. The participants' accounts illustrate that emotional engagement emerged through this dynamic relationship, transforming literature from an objective item of analysis into an active source of self-reflection and personal growth. Overall, this demonstrates that when participants recognized themselves or their values in literary texts, they engaged with reading in more meaningful ways. Literature

became an interactive space where they could understand themselves more deeply and make sense of their emotional experiences.

3.2.2.2.2. Exploring Different Emotional Worlds

Participants also described emotional engagement as an opportunity to encounter experiences entirely different from their own. Rather than connecting only through familiarity, they became invested in understanding unfamiliar emotions and perspectives. Literature exposed them to diverse human experiences and encouraged them to move beyond their own viewpoints. Participant A reflected on this phenomenon:

These characters are basically humans in another world. So, every time you are reading about a character suffering from grief, especially if it's an emotion you experienced already… grief, injustice, freedom, especially us, as women, when we read feminist literature, and you see how woman is breaking through, and drawing her own journey to be free, I feel really engaged. I want to participate more and give my own opinion and my own interpretation about this character.

She further added: "Different characters in different books, in different narratives, make you see how people experience emotions differently." Through these encounters, the participant recognized that literature offers profound insight into the complexity of human emotions and the divers ways individuals respond to similar situations. Exposure to different narratives challenged simplistic understandings of grief, injustice, resilience and freedom, allowing her to appreciate that emotional experiences are heavily shaped by personal and social contexts.

Interestingly, encountering unfamiliar emotions did not diminish engagement. Instead, it encouraged participants to invest greater cognitive and empathetic effort in understanding others. Participant G stated:

> "If I find a character that is experiencing an emotion that I don't relate to, I try to put more effort to understand it more, to understand this emotion, to understand how someone goes through that, and what makes them go through that. So, if anything, it makes me more engaged and put more effort to understand this character."

This suggests that emotional engagement was not exclusively dependent upon direct identification. Rather, it could emerge directly from curiosity and deep empathy. Students appeared willing to suspend judgment and explore emotional realities far beyond their own lived experiences. Literature thus functioned simultaneously as a mirror reflecting the self and as a window opening onto the lives of others.

From the perspective of Rosenblatt's (1978) transactional theory, these interactions demonstrate that readers do not merely confirm what they already know through literature; they also expand their emotional and interpretive horizons. Through their encounters with diverse narratives, participants negotiated new meanings and reconsidered assumptions about how people experience and express emotions. Overall, these findings highlight the vital role of literature in fostering empathy and emotional openness. By engaging with unfamiliar experiences, participants developed a richer understanding of human complexity and approached classroom discussions with greater sensitivity and insight.

3.2.2.2.3. Finding the Courage to Speak

Participants' narratives further suggested that emotional engagement directly influenced their willingness to express themselves during oral classroom discussions. When literary themes resonated with them emotionally, they appeared more confident in voicing their opinions and defending their interpretations. Emotional investment transformed participation from a passive academic expectation into a meaningful act of self-expression. Participant B explained this position:

> I think I am a bit of an outlier because I will share my opinion about absolutely almost anything. So, it will make me enjoy it more. It won't motivate me because I am always communicating and participating in class, but it will make me more motivated and more likely to pursue a debate or an argument or conversation about this specific thing.

She further explained:

> Even if there is a book that I don't really connect with it emotionally, I will participate. But if I do have an emotional connection with a character or plot, I will be more likely to argue. If I am mentally doing this as an academic thing, I will debate. I will concede some people's ideas. But if I actually care, I will argue with you, and I will tell you when you are wrong and I am more likely to step out of the academic way to talk.

These extracts suggest that emotional engagement fundamentally changed what oral participation meant to the participant. Since she already considered herself someone who spoke regularly in class, emotional connection did not necessarily encourage her to participate more often, but rather made her contributions feel more personal and meaningful. Classroom discussions were no longer limited to exchanging ideas to meet academic requirements; they became opportunities to express opinions she genuinely cared about. Feeling emotionally invested in a text appeared to strengthen her confidence in her own interpretations and made her more willing to defend them when challenged.

A completely different experience emerged in another student's account. Participant H Reflecting on a scene from the film *Dead Poets Society,* explained:

> "The teacher was kicked out of the school, and that specific shy student stood on the table and started repeating a line the teacher said before… So that encouraged me to give my own opinion before the time is too late, like the student didn't give

> his opinion or participate until his teacher was kicked out. And I have chance to participate and give my own opinion, and I still have time."

Unlike the previous participant, this account was not about speaking with greater passion but about finding the confidence to speak in the first place. The scene encouraged her to reflect on how silence can sometimes lead to regret and how opportunities to express oneself should not be taken for granted. By identifying with the fictional student's delayed response, she became more aware of the importance of sharing her own thoughts while she still had the opportunity to do so. Literature, in this sense, acted as source of encouragement that helped her move beyond hesitation and trust that her perspective deserved to be heard.

Taken together, these accounts suggest that finding the courage to speak meant different things to different participants. For some, emotional engagement made student contributions more authentic and personally meaningful. For others, it provided the psychological reassurance needed to move beyond self-doubt and voice opinions that might otherwise have remained unspoken. Despite these individual differences, a clear common pattern emerged: feeling emotionally connected to literary texts appeared to strengthen students' confidence in their interpretations and encouraged them to contribute more openly to classroom discussions.

This finding can also be contextualized through Tajfel's (1979) social identity theory, which argues that people's sense of self is shaped through their membership in and interactions with social groups. Classroom discussions can be seen as more than opportunities to exchange ideas; they are also spaces where students negotiate how they see themselves and how they wish to be recognized by others. In addition, emotional engagement in literary experiences encouraged them to take a more active place in these social interactions. By voicing interpretations that reflected their feelings, beliefs, and values, they were not only

responding to the texts they had read but were also expressing important aspects of who they were. In doing so, they affirmed that their perspectives had value and deserved to be part of the collective classroom conversation. Overall, this highlights that the courage to speak is not simply about increasing the frequency of participation. Rather, it involves feeling secure enough to express ideas that matter, standing by one's interpretations and trusting that one's voice belongs in the discussion. Through emotionally meaningful encounters with literature, students appeared to move beyond speaking as a classroom obligation and towards using discussion as a way of expressing themselves more authentically.

3.2.2.3. Building a Classroom Community through Literary Discussions

One of the most salient themes that emerged from the participants' reflections is the role of literary discussions in transforming the classroom into a collaborative community of thinkers. Through exchanging interpretations, debating meanings, and sharing reflections, students move beyond the role of passive learners and begin to experience themselves as active members of a learning community. The findings suggest that literary discussions foster both intellectual engagement and strengthen the sense of belonging among students.

3.2.2.3.1. Literary Discussions Create a Collective Intellectual Space

Participants described literary discussions as opportunities to engage in the meaningful exchange of ideas, thoughts and interpretations. Instead of viewing the classroom as a traditional learning environment, they perceived it as a shared intellectual ground where knowledge is collectively constructed. Participant E reflected on this shift, stating: "I feel like honestly, I'm in a sort of book club maybe, I'm not in the classroom anymore. The atmosphere is different."

This insight suggests that literary discussions create a more informal and participatory learning environment, encouraging students to engage freely with texts and among each other. This experience reflects Wenger's (1998) notion that learning occurs through

participation in shared social practices as the participant perceives the classroom as a community engaged in collective meaning-making rather than a traditional instructional setting.

Similarly, Participant F noted that: “exploring different views makes the classroom feel like a collaborative intellectual space.” This perspective highlights the importance of multiple perspectives in enriching classroom interactions. The emphasis on exploring different viewpoints resonates with Wenger’s view that knowledge is co-constructed through interaction and engagement with other members of a community.

Participant C further explained how these dynamics manifest, sharing, “it encourages me to exchange ideas, debate meanings with others, which creates an intellectual connection.” This statement suggests that literary discussions encourage students to engage with one another through meaningful conversations about texts. For the participant, discussing literature is not limited to sharing answers alone; it involves exchanging viewpoints, questioning interpretations, and reflecting together on different meanings. Through this process, students develop what the participant describes as an “intellectual connection”, a bond that emerges from thinking and learning together.

Together, these accounts indicate that literary discussions facilitate dialogue, critical thinking, and intellectual collaboration among students. Through the exchange of diverse interpretations, learners actively participate in constructing knowledge and developing shared understanding of literary texts. This finding aligns perfectly with Wenger’s (1998) concept of communities of practice, which emphasizes learning as a social process in which individuals build knowledge and develop shared identities through participation in collective activities.

3.2.2.3.2. Belonging is Strengthened Through Recognition and Being Heard

Another important aspect that emerged from the data is the role of literary discussions in fostering the students' sense of belonging. Participants emphasized the value of having their opinions acknowledged and appreciated by their peers.

Participant A presented this link directly, asserting: "To debate is to share thoughts because someone's thoughts are their internal being. Debating in literary texts is one of the best ways to make friends and get to know people."

Participant A presents literary discussion as a deeply personal and social activity. By describing thoughts as part of a person's "internal being", the participant suggests that sharing interpretations involves revealing core aspects of one's identity, values, and experiences. This perspective indicates that literary discussions create opportunities for authentic self-expression, allowing students to understand one another beyond surface-level interactions. The participant's belief that debating literary texts helps people make friends and get to know each other illustrates how academic dialogue can serve as a foundation for interpersonal connection. Rather than functioning solely as a pedagogical activity, literary discussion becomes a means through which students develop trust, familiarity, and social cohesion within the classroom community.

Likewise, Participant B explained that "hearing that others share similar feeling or even appreciate my unique perspective definitely strengthens my sense of belonging." This assertion highlights the significance of both similarity and difference in fostering a sense of belonging. On the one hand, discovering that others share similar feelings provides reassurance and validates the participant's experiences. On the other hand, the appreciation of a "unique perspective" suggests that belonging is not achieved through conformity but through the recognition and acceptance of individuality. The participant's response demonstrates that literary discussions create a space where students can express personal

interpretations without fear of exclusion, contributing to a classroom environment in which diversity of thought is valued and respected. This reflection complements Wenger's (1998) framework by showing how knowledge is collaboratively negotiated through interaction with peers.

Participant C added an underlying emotional layer to this dynamic, noting, "Especially when I feel like I'm heard and understood." Although it is brief, this quote captures an essential aspect of belonging. Participant C emphasizes that feeling heard and understood is central to the experience of inclusion within literary discussions. The response suggests that belonging is not simply a matter of physical participation but depends heavily on the quality of interpersonal interactions, hence, when students perceive that their participation or contributions are genuinely listened to and acknowledged, they are more likely to view themselves as valued members of the learning community. Feeling heard and understood directly reflects a central aspect of psychological belongingness, as recognition and interpersonal validation contribute immensely to individuals' sense of inclusion within a community (Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

Collectively, these findings demonstrate that literary discussions provide students with opportunities to express themselves, receive recognition, and build meaningful social connections. As a result, students develop a stronger sense of belonging and inclusion within the classroom. This finding is highly consistent with Baumeister and Leary's (1995) Belongingness Theory, which argues that individuals have a fundamental psychological need to establish positive and lasting interpersonal relationships in which they feel accepted and valued.

3.2.2.4. Cultural Bridging and Global English Identity

Another prominent theme that emerged from the participants' responses is the role of literature as a cultural bridge that connects learners to different perspectives, values, and

ways of life. Participants repeatedly described literary texts as much more than objective academic materials used for language learning. Instead, they viewed literature as a medium through which they could explore unfamiliar cultures, compare them with their own realities, and develop a broader understanding of the world. Through engaging with literary narratives, students became more aware of cultural diversity, more open to alternative perspectives, and increasingly capable of positioning themselves within a wider English-speaking community. The findings suggest that literary discussions and reading experiences contribute not only to linguistic development but also to intercultural understanding and identity formation.

3.2.2.4.1. Literature as Bridge Between Cultures

Participants consistently described literature as a means of connecting their own cultural experiences with the cultures represented in English literary texts. Through sustained exposure to various narratives, traditions, and social realities, they develop a deeper understanding of both similarities and differences across cultures. Rather than perceiving literature as a distant representation of foreign societies, participants described it as a space where meaningful cultural encounters could occur. Participant E reflected on this phenomenon, noting that: “discovering universal themes like family devotion or personal honor in Western literature creates a beautiful middle ground that connects my local culture with the English-speaking world.” This perspective of cultural interconnectedness was heavily echoed across the dataset.

Participant B concisely stated that literature “always builds a connection between cultures.” While Participant C further explained that “reading is unique experience; it is a bridge between you and different cultures, different people, and different timelines.”

This active negotiation of cultural boundaries directly mirrors Kramsch’s (2022) concept of the "cultural bridge," where the foreign text ceases to be a distant artifact and instead becomes an interactive space for dialogue. Furthermore, by using these narratives to

compare values, traditions, and lifestyles, the students are not just reading; they are actively developing what Byram (2021) conceptualizes as Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC), learning to navigate and decipher language within its broader global and cultural frameworks. These quotes indicate that participants actively sought connections between their own lives and the experiences represented in literary texts. The recurring use of expressions such as “connection” and “bridge” suggests that students did not view cultures as isolated entities. Instead, they perceived literature as a shared space where common human experiences could be recognized despite geographical, historical, or spatial differences.

Furthermore, participants appeared to appreciate the universal dimensions of literary texts. Themes such as family relationships, personal values, sacrifice, honor, and belonging allowed them to identify common ground between their own cultural background and those portrayed in English literature. Through this process, literature reduced the sense of distance that often exists between learners and unfamiliar cultures. Rather than emphasizing separation, literary narratives highlighted similarities that fostered empathy and understanding.

In addition, participants’ responses suggest that literature encouraged them to reflect on their own cultural identities while engaging with other cultures. Facing alternative perspectives prompted them to compare values, traditions, and social norms across different contexts. As a result, cultural learning became a dialogic process involving both self-reflection and the exploration of others. Students were not merely acquiring information about foreign cultures they were actively interpreting cultural meanings and relating them to their own experiences.

This finding can be effectively interpreted through Vygotsky’s (1978) Social Constructivist Theory. From a social constructivist perspective, learning occurs through collaborative interaction and the co-construction of the meaning. The participants’

descriptions of literature as bridge suggest that cultural understanding was not acquired individually, but rather developed through engagement with literary texts and discussions with peers. Through these interactions, students negotiated meanings, compared cultural perspectives, and collectively constructed a broader understanding of the world around them.

3.2.2.4.2. Fascination with Cultural Differences

Another important aspect that emerged from the responses was the participants' fascination with the cultural differences they encounter through literature. While students frequently identified similarities across cultures, they also expressed curiosity about unfamiliar traditions, lifestyles, beliefs, and social practices. Literary texts appeared to provide a safe and engaging environment in which learners could explore aspects of human experience that are entirely different from their own. Participant C highlighted this sense of wonder, sharing that "when you never experienced something before and you hear about it or read about it in a book, you feel fascinated. Like, oh, other people in other parts of the world can participate in this and practice this." Participant B complemented this idea, explaining that "reading a book of a different culture is one the best ways to get exposed to the culture itself…it made me go out of my way to try and understand cultures better."

These quotes suggest that literary reading stimulated intellectual curiosity and helped participants to look beyond the boundaries of their immediate social environment. Instead of passively consuming information, students engaged actively with the cultural content of literary texts. Their responses reveal a desire to understand how people in different societies think, live, and interpret the world around them. Moreover, the fascination with cultural differences appeared to be accompanied by a positive attitude toward diversity. Instead of perceiving unfamiliar practices as strange or threatening, they viewed them as opportunities for learning and personal enrichment. This openness is paramount because it reflects a

willingness to engage respectfully with perspectives that differ from one's own attitudes that are considered fundamental components of intercultural competence.

The findings also suggest that literature encouraged learners to move beyond stereotypes and simplistic representations of other cultures. Through detailed narratives and complex characters, literary texts expose readers to the diversity that exists within cultures themselves. Consequently, this finding can be linked to Vygotsky's (1978) Social Constructivist theory and reinforced by Lave and Wenger's (1991) situated learning framework, which argues that learning develops through participation in communities. By discussing literary texts together, participants explored new cultural perspectives and developed greater curiosity about other cultures.

3.2.2.4.3. Negotiating identity through global English

Participants further highlighted the influence of literature on their personal, cultural, and linguistic identities. Their responses suggest that literary engagement contributed not only to language development but also to how they perceived themselves as English language users.

Participant A stated that: "literature transformed the English language from just a university subject into a comfortable space for self-expression." Similarly, participant C noted: "Literature has influenced not only my academic development but also my personality. It has made me more open to other cultures, ready to discuss different topics, and also express ideas and emotions in a very clear way."

These quotes indicate that participants no longer viewed English solely as an academic subject. Instead, literature helped them to use the language as a means of self-expression, communication, and personal growth. Through exposure to diverse perspectives and experiences, they became more open-minded and confident in expressing their ideas.

Moreover, literary discussions encouraged participants to share opinions, exchange interpretations, and engage in meaningful dialogue. As a result, they developed a stronger sense of belonging to the English speaking academic community and began to see themselves as active participants rather than passive learners.

This finding can be explained through Tajfel and Turner's (1979) Social Identity Theory, which suggests that individuals develop their identities through membership in social groups. By engaging in literary discussions, participants increasingly identified themselves as members of an English-speaking community. Similarly, Lave and Wenger's (1991) concept of Communities of Practice highlights how participation in shared activities contributes to both learning and identity development. Through discussing literary texts, students strengthened their language skills in addition to their sense of belonging and participation within their academic community.

3.3. Synthesis of the Findings

Overall, the findings across all themes highlight the multifaceted role of literature in the experiences of EFL learners at Abdelhafid Boussouf Mila University. Literature was not perceived merely as a pedagogical tool for improving language proficiency; instead, it emerged as a transformative medium that supports linguistic development, critical thinking, emotional engagement, intercultural awareness, and identity formation. Through literary reading and discussion, the participants enhanced their vocabulary and communication skills, while simultaneously being encouraged to engage with complex ideas, question assumptions, and connect academic learning with real life experiences.

At the same time, literary discussions fostered a sense of community among learners by encouraging collaboration, dialogue, and the exchange of perspectives. Participants described how sharing interpretations helped them build meaningful connections with their peers and develop a stronger sense of belonging within the English department. These

interactions not only supported learning but also contributed to the construction of cultural and linguistic identities. Overall, the findings suggest that literature plays a crucial role in shaping learners' academic, social, and personal development, making it a valuable component of EFL education.

3.4. Discussion of the Main Findings

The findings of this study demonstrate that literary narratives play an important role in shaping EFL learners' sense of self and belonging. Following the thematic analysis framework delineated by Braun and Clarke (2006), four interconnected themes emerged from the participants' accounts: identity and character relatability, emotional engagement and oral participation, building a classroom community, and cultural bridging and global English identity.

One of the most significant findings is that learners frequently took core elements from literary characters to make sense of their own lived experiences, emotions, and future aspirations. Participants did not approach literary texts as passive readers, instead, they actively interpreted characters through the lens of their personal identities. This finding strongly supports Norton's (2013) view of identity as a dynamic, and socially constructed phenomenon. Furthermore, it lends empirical support to Dornyei's (2009) concept of the Ideal L2 Self, which posits that learners are fundamentally motivated by imagining future ideal versions of themselves as language users. Through their engagement with literary narratives, participants were able not only to recognize aspects of their current identities but also to envision the transformative qualities they once hoped to cultivate.

Another critical insight concerns the intimate relationship between emotional engagement and oral classroom interaction. The analysis revealed that deep emotional connections with literary texts boosted students' confidence, making them much more willing to speak up, share their personal opinions, and participate in classroom discussions. These

findings support Rosenblatt's (1978) Transactional Theory, which emphasizes that literary meaning is not static but dynamically emerges through the fluid interaction between readers and texts. Participants' responses suggest that literature becomes pedagogical and personally transformative when readers connect it to their own emotional realities, which in turn increases their willingness to communicate (WTC) and engage with others within the academic environment.

The findings also highlight the pivotal role of literary discussions in fostering a sense of belonging. Participants described literary discussions as collaborative opportunities to exchange ideas, debate interpretations, and build meaningful relationships with classmates. Feeling heard, understood, and valued contributed to a stronger sense of inclusion within the classroom community. This finding aligns seamlessly with Wenger's (1998) concept of Communities of Practice and Baumeister and Leary's (1995) Belongingness Theory, both of which emphasize the importance of social interaction and mutual recognition in developing a sense of membership within a group.

Furthermore, the findings demonstrated that literature acts as a transformative bridge between learners and the wider English-speaking world. Through engaging with diverse stories, cultures, and alternative perspectives, participants develop a heightened awareness of cultural diversity, while simultaneously engaging in critical self-reflection regarding their own beliefs and identities. Reading literary narratives allowed them not only to learn about other ways of life but also to better understand their own place within a global community. These findings are consistent with Vygotsky's (1978) Social Constructivist Theory, which emphasizes that learning develops through interaction with others and the exposure to different perspectives. They also extend the empirical claims of Tajfel and Turner' (1979) Social Identity Theory, which suggests that individuals shape their identities through participation in social and cultural groups.

Taken together, the findings demonstrate that literary narratives play a role that extends far beyond instrumental language learning. For the participants, literature functions as multifaceted means of self-discovery, emotional expression, cultural exploration, and social connection. Through reading and discussing literary texts, learners were able to develop a stronger sense of who they are, build meaningful relationships with others, and engage with more confidence with various cultures and perspectives. These findings highlight the enduring value of literature in EFL education, not only as a tool for developing language skills but also as a powerful resource for learner's personal, social, and cultural development.

3.5. Limitations, Implications, and Recommendations

3.5.1. Limitations of the Study

Although this study provides meaningful insights into the ways literary narratives contribute to EFL learners' sense of self and belonging, several limitations must be considered and acknowledged.

First, the research involved a relatively small sample of participants, consisting of only eight third-year students at Abdelhafid Boussouf Mila University. While this small sample size was intentional and enabled an in-depth, qualitative understanding of the students' personal experiences, it may limit the generalizability of the findings to broader groups of EFL learners across different contexts.

Furthermore, the study relied primarily on semi-structured interviews, as the main data collection tool. While this method allowed participants to express their views and experiences in rich detail, the data inherently relied on the students' self-reported personal accounts. Consequently, their responses may have been influenced by individual interpretations, selective memories, or their level of personal comfort when discussing their sensitive emotional and identity-related experiences during the interview sessions.

Another limitation concerns the participants' prior engagement with literature. Because the participants were already actively interested in literary reading and involved in the university book club, their perspectives may naturally reflect a more positive relationship with literary narratives compared to the general population of learners who have had less exposure to literature. This means the findings represent book club members instead of the average EFL students who might find literature uninteresting or difficult.

Finally, the study was conducted within one specific university setting, which means that the findings represent the experiences of learners within a particular academic and cultural context. Therefore, future research could expand this scope by involving students from varied educational levels and diverse cultural background. This would help develop a broader, more comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted role that literature plays in shaping EFL learners' identities and sense of belonging.

3.5.2. Implications of the study

The outcomes of this research offer meaningful insights for the teaching and learning of EFL.

To begin with, they show that literary texts should not be viewed merely as instruments for language practice. Instead, literature opens a space for learners to reflect on themselves, engage emotionally, and shape their sense of identity. For this reason, EFL teachers may find it valuable to select narratives that resonate with students' personal experiences, allowing them to see parts of their own lives mirrored in the themes and characters.

Equally important, the findings reveal that literary discussions can transform the classroom into a more interactive and supportive community. When students are encouraged to share interpretations and personal reflections, the classroom shifts from a place of passive

learning to one of dialogue, collaboration, and belonging. This highlights the need to move beyond traditional text analysis and embrace learner-centered practices where the students' actively co-construct meaning.

The study also underscores literature's potential to nurture intercultural awareness. By engaging with diverse narratives, learners are exposed to different perspectives, cultural nuances, and worldviews. This not only broadens their understanding of others but also prompts them to reconsider their own identities within the global English-speaking sphere. In this way, literature becomes a bridge between linguistic competence and intercultural sensitivity.

Finally, the findings invite curriculum designers and practitioners to pay closer attention to the emotional and social dimensions of literary learning. While traditional EFL syllabi often prioritize strict text analysis, incorporating rich literary experiences into EFL programs can support students' academic progress, while also fostering personal growth and a deeper sense of connection to their learning community.

3.5.3. Recommendations

3.5.3.1. For the Students

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations can be made for EFL students.

To begin with, students should engage with literary texts beyond the strict boundaries of academic requirements. Literature is not simply an assignment to complete; rather, it offers a space for self-reflection, emotional exploration, and a deeper understanding of human experiences. In this way, learners can connect their personal lives with the ideas, characters, and themes they encounter in literary narratives.

Furthermore, students are encouraged to take an active role in classroom discussions. By sharing their interpretations and personal insights with their peers, they can not only strengthen their communication skills but also build confidence and develop a stronger sense of belonging within the classroom community. As a result, the learning environment becomes more collaborative and supportive.

In addition, exploring literary works from diverse cultural backgrounds can greatly broaden and expand students' perspectives. Exposure to different narratives enhances intercultural awareness, enabling learners to better understand the global English-speaking world while simultaneously reflecting on their own cultural identities.

Finally, learners should embrace literature as more than just a tool for language improvement. By engaging critically and personally with literary texts, students can refine their linguistic abilities while at the same time nurturing their identity, creativity, and personal growth as EFL learners.

3.5.3.2. For the Teachers

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations can be made for teachers. First, teachers are encouraged to create more opportunities for literary discussions that allow students to share interpretations and engage actively with texts.

Second, teachers should foster a supportive classroom environment where learners feel comfortable expressing their ideas and perspectives.

Finally, instructors are encouraged to select literary texts that connect with students' experiences and promote reflection, critical thinking, and meaningful interaction.

3.5.3.3. For the Syllabus Designers

In light of this study, several recommendations can be proposed for syllabus designers. First, literature courses should be designed in ways that move beyond traditional text interpretation and encourage opportunities for discussion, reflection, and student engagement.

Second, syllabus content should provide space for interactive and learner-centered activities that allow students to exchange perspectives and develop meaningful connections with literary texts.

Finally, syllabus designers are encouraged to select materials that support critical thinking, personal reflection, and active participation within the EFL classroom.

3.5.3.4. For Future Research

First, future research could examine how literary narratives shape EFL learners' sense of self and belonging in different universities and cultural contexts to determine whether learners' experiences vary across educational settings.

Second, researchers may investigate learners at different educational stages or English proficiency levels to gain a deeper understanding of how literary narratives influence the development of sense of self and belonging throughout the language learning process.

Finally, longitudinal and comparative studies could explore the long-term impact of literary narratives and examine how different literary genres, such as novels, short stories, poetry, and autobiographical narratives, contribute to EFL learners' sense of self and belonging.

Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated that literary narratives can play a significant role in shaping how EFL learners perceive themselves and relate to others. As students engaged with

literary texts, they often identified aspects of their own lives, emotions, and ambitions reflected in fictional characters. These moments of recognition encouraged them to think more deeply about their identity, their personal values, and the kind of future they aspire to build.

The findings also indicate that literature provides a space where learners can connect more closely with their emotions and express their thoughts with increasing confidence. When students felt emotionally involved in a story, they were more inclined to share their viewpoints, take part in classroom discussions, and actively contribute to learning activities. In this sense, literature helped turn the classroom into a supportive environment where learners could express themselves freely while also engaging with the ideas of others. In addition, discussions around literary works helped strengthen relationships among students by promoting dialogue, empathy, and the sharing of personal experiences. These exchanges fostered a sense of community in which learners felt acknowledged, respected, and included. At the same time, encountering diverse cultures and perspectives through literature expanded their worldview and reinforced their sense of connection to the broader English-speaking world.

Overall, the results of this study suggest that literary narratives go beyond being simple academic texts. For many learners, they serve as meaningful spaces for reflection, interaction, and personal development. By supporting students in understanding themselves better, relating to others, and engaging with different cultural perspectives, literary narratives contribute meaningfully to the growth of both learners' identity and a profound sense of belonging.

General Conclusion

This study set out to explore how literary narratives shape EFL learners' sense of self and belonging within the classroom context. Moving beyond the traditional view of literature as merely a linguistic resource, the research aimed to understand how engaging with literary texts influences learners' identities, emotional experiences, classroom participation, and their sense of connection to others. More specifically, the study sought to examine how literary narratives contribute to learners' perception of themselves, encourage interaction and support the development of meaningful learning experiences. To achieve these objectives, this research adopted a qualitative approach and relied on semi-structured interviews conducted with third-year EFL students at Abdelhafid Boussouf Mila university. This methodological choice allowed for an in-depth exploration of students' personal reflections, emotions, and experiences with literary narratives. The collected data were analyzed thematically in order to identify recurring patterns and shared meanings across participants' responses.

The findings of this study revealed that literary narratives play a significant role in shaping learners' sense of self, their classroom belonging, and their intercultural positioning. First, participants demonstrated a strong identification with literary characters and themes, which encouraged self-reflection and helped them imagine possible future versions of themselves as English language users. Through this process, learners appeared to connect their personal experiences, aspirations, and emotions with the literary world. Second, emotional engagement emerged as an important factor in promoting classroom participation. Participants' responses suggested that connecting emotionally with stories increased their willingness to express opinions, communicate ideas, and participate more actively in oral interaction. Literary engagement therefore contributed not only to language use but also to learners' confidence and sense of agency. Third, literary discussions were shown to strengthen classroom relationships and create opportunities for interaction and shared

meaning-making. Through exchanging interpretations and discussing personal responses, students experienced the classroom as a more inclusive and supportive environment, which reinforced their sense of belonging. Finally, exposure to literary narratives from diverse cultural contexts expanded learners' awareness of different perspectives and encouraged reflection on identity in broader global contexts. Literary reading appeared to help students negotiate cultural meanings while developing a stronger connection with English as a language of communication and self-expression.

Overall, this study supports the view that literary narratives should not be treated solely as instructional tools for language acquisition. Instead, they should be recognized as meaningful spaces where learners reflect on identity, build relationships, and develop emotional and social connections within the EFL classroom. Despite these contributions, this study remains limited by its small sample size and its focus on a single educational context. Future research may involve larger populations, different educational levels, or mixed research methods to gain a broader understanding of how literary narratives shape learners' identities and experiences across various EFL environments.

In conclusion, this research highlights that literary narratives have the potential to enrich EFL learning beyond linguistic outcomes by supporting identity development, emotional engagement, and a stronger sense of belonging. Through literature, learners do not simply learn English; they also discover new ways to understand themselves and connect with others.

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Appendix

Dear Student,

We are conducting research on **Exploring how Literary Narratives in Shape EFL Learners' Sense of Self and Belonging**. Your participation in this interview is essential to our study and will provide valuable insights into how literature influences identity and social integration in the classroom. We sincerely invite you to take part and contribute to our research. Your personal reflections are vital, and all responses will remain confidential.

Section 1: General Information

1.Can you introduce yourself and briefly describe your experience and interest in reading literary narratives (short stories, novels, poems) in English?

2.In your opinion, what is the primary role of literature in an EFL university classroom?

Section 2: Literary Narratives and the Sense of Self

3.When you read a literary text, do you look for characters or situations that remind you of your own life? Please explain how this connection affects your reading experience.

4.Does seeing a character overcome obstacles in a story make you feel more motivated to achieve your own goals in the English language? Can you see a “future version” of yourself in their success?

5.Have you ever "adopted" a character’s way of thinking, a specific metaphor, or a way of speaking to help you feel more confident in your English identity?

6.How does engaging with these stories change the way you see yourself, not just as a student, but as an individual participating in a global English-speaking world?

Section 3: Emotional Response and Classroom Participation

7.When you feel a strong emotional connection to a theme in a story (such as injustice, freedom, or grief), does it make you more willing to participate in class discussions?

8.Can you describe a specific moment when a metaphor or a scene in a text made you feel "brave" enough to take a communicative risk and share your opinion in class?

9.If you don't connect with a story emotionally, do you find yourself putting less effort into the lesson? Why?

Section 4: Sense of Belonging and Community of Practice

10. When discussing different interpretations of a story, do you feel like you are part of a "community of thinkers" rather than just a student in a classroom? How does the text help create this bond with your peers?

11. Does sharing your personal reflections on a text with your classmates, or hearing theirs, make you feel a stronger sense of belonging to the group?

12. Have you ever felt that a literary narrative helped you bridge a gap between your local culture and the culture represented in the text, creating a "middle ground" where you feel you belong?

Section 5: Final Reflections

13.Overall, how has studying literary narratives influenced your feeling of being "at home" or belonging within the English department?

14.Is there anything else you would like to add regarding the influence of literature on your personality or your sense of belonging in the EFL context?

Thank you for your valuable contribution to this research

Student Answers of the Interview

1.Can you introduce yourself and briefly describe your experience and interest in reading literary narratives (short stories, novels, poems) in English?

A: I am a third year English student; I'm 24 years old (Y.O) and my interest interest in reading began when I was about 15 years old so I have been reading for more than half of my life and of course I'm member of book club. Reading in English only began when I was about 15 because there wasn't enough English literature growing up and when I began, I began with Agatha Christie novels because those are the most available novels in English. I'm mostly interested in novels, not very much so a poem person or short story person because I like when there's character development, I like when there is a big plot like series

B: I am third year English student and I enjoy reading literary texts, especially novels and short stories. I like different genres such gothic literature, psychology, history and crime

C: I am an English student in third year in university. I have been an avid reader and I have always been interested in reading English when I was about12 or 13 y.o I started with simple texts, when I started university especially with the literature module I started with poems and exploring more literary narratives.

D: I am third year student in English student in Abdelhafid Boussouf Mila University, I have been English for three years now. I enjoy reading literary narratives especially short stories and novels because they help me improve my language skills while allowing me to explore different emotions and cultures and perspective. I am particularly interested in stories that deals with personal struggles and social issues because they feel relate to me.

E: I am a third-year English student, and I have developed a growing interest in reading literary narratives in English. At first, I found short stories and novels difficult, but over time I started enjoying them because they helped me improve my vocabulary and understand different cultures. Now I see reading literature as both learning and pleasure.

F: I am currently studying English at Abdelhafid Boussouf Mila University, and my experience with literary narratives has been very positive. I enjoy reading novels more than before because they help me understand emotions and real-life situations. Literature also motivates me to participate more in class activities and discussions

G: I am an EFL student, and I have recently become more interested in reading English literature. Poems and short stories attract me because they are meaningful and creative. Even if I do not understand every word, I try to focus on the overall message, and this has improved my reading skills and confidence in English.

H: I am an English language student, and I am interested in literary texts, especially short stories and poems. I like how they express deep meanings in simple words. Reading in

English was challenging at the beginning, but it has become easier, and now I enjoy discussing stories in class and sharing my interpretations.

2.In your opinion, what is the primary role of literature in an EFL university classroom?

A: Literature is very important when you are learning English on a higher level. Me as a person who considered herself a very big reader was exposed to a lot of things that I have never read before like Shakespeare sonnets, Eliot's poems… Literature made me see a lot of the things that we were learning like literary devices, a lot of the romantic movements

B: I think literature can help students participate and analyze their ideas moreover, help them become more critical and share their opinions freely with allowing learners to express yourself and express thoughts.

C: I think the primary role of literature is learning critical thinking and analytical skills. Also, it helps learners for vocabulary and finally helps them analyze texts, not just read them briefly.

D: For me the primary role is to develop both language competence and critical thinking because literature helps students expand their vocabulary and improve their communication skills. And for sure encourages students to express their opinions, reflect on human experiences.

E: In my opinion, the primary role of literature in an EFL university classroom is to improve language skills in a meaningful context. It helps students learn vocabulary, grammar, and expressions through real usage rather than memorization. Literature also makes learning more interesting and less mechanical.

F: For me, the main role of literature is to develop critical thinking and interpretation skills. When we analyze texts, we don't just look for answers, we try to understand deeper meanings. This helps us become more reflective learners in the EFL classroom.

G: I believe literature's primary role in an EFL classroom is to encourage communication and discussion. It gives students topics to talk about and share opinions. This interaction helps us improve speaking skills and also builds confidence when using English in real conversations.

H: In my opinion, literature can connect language learning with culture and real-life experiences. Through stories and novels, we learn how people think, feel, and communicate in different situations. This makes English more than just a subject; it becomes a way of understanding the world.

3.When you read a literary text, do you look for characters or situations that remind you of your own life? Please explain how this connection affects your reading experience?

A: Yes, it is a human instinct to try and find yourself in other characters because when you try as a person who tries to write you can't help. So, in trying to find other characters that relate to me for example in the book the Poppy War by R.F Kuang the main character is a female but she is not like the pixie dream girl like they do in the most stories.

B: Yes, of course. I think everyone who reads, especially fiction is looking for character to reflect to relate to or an event to relate to. You always seek a character who is maybe studies the same major as you or thinks like you. Sometimes you feel misunderstood in your environment and you read something and realize that someone has gone through the same experience so it makes you feel less alone and more connected.

C: Actually, I look for the characters, not the situations, maybe because the situations are not the same, but I truly believe that the characteristics are going the same. The more I read, the more I find characteristics that are so close to me, so I can understand them.

D: I passed through this situation. Yes, for example, like when some characters go through something and they are speaking about it, I find myself thinking, I went through this and they are putting it into words in this way, but this character is going through it and the author had put it into words, this exact way it's very jarring to see it on paper, and relieving, yes it is to find yourself not alone in a lot of experiences.

E: yes, it makes it so much a personal read because I believe that there is different kind of reading: personal and analytical or academic reading. So even I am reading a book academically and I find a character I relate to, it will become something on a personal level. I will not just see this book as a bunch of characters and sentences that I need to analyze, I will see it as something that I want to relate to and understand.

F: Yes, when I read a literary text, I often look for a characters or situations. I usually connect with characters who struggle to achieve their goals, face social pressure. This connection makes the reading experience more personal for me and emotional.

G: Yes, I naturally look for moments in literary texts that feel close to my own life. When a character goes through something similar to what I have experienced, it feels like the story is speaking directly to me. This connection makes reading more engaging and memorable, and I find myself thinking about the text even after finishing it.

H: I often connect literary texts to my personal experiences without even realizing it. When a situation in a story reflects something, I have lived, I feel more emotionally involved in the

reading. This makes the text easier to understand and more enjoyable, because it turns reading into a kind of personal reflection rather than just an academic task.

4.**Does seeing a character overcome obstacles in a story make you feel more motivated to achieve your own goals in the English language? Can you see a "future version" of yourself in their success?**

A: For example, the book of a Thousand Splendid Suns, it goes through a lot of suffering and when I read it, I felt so hopeless. The character passed through a lot of obstacles but still be positive. So, it is very empowering. Yes, I see also referring to the book that I mentioned before the character one day decided to go back to her home in which she suffered from so, I realized this is her home so I need to be more like her because I need to be more accepting my home even through the bad things.

B: Yeah, some characteristics push me to achieve some of my goals. There was a book I read before called Caraval. So, as I read girls' characteristics and analyzed them, I felt like I had to do the same. I have to find my own adventures and achieve them. And I can't see a future version of myself in their success because, as I said I try not to melt into the characters so much.

C: Yes, it does. It motivates me because you see that the character was put through a lot of hard things and went through them without giving up. You feel this character developed with the passage of time and I am growing with the passage of time so I can be like them too.

D: I passed through this situation.

E: Yes, it does, because when I see a character overcoming difficulties, it really motivates me in my English learning journey. It reminds me that success takes time and effort. I can

sometimes imagine a future version of myself speaking English more confidently, just like the character who never gave up.

F: Definitely. Seeing characters overcome obstacles makes me believe that improvement is possible for me too. It creates a kind of mental image of my future self using English without fear. This motivates me to keep going even when I face challenges in class.

G: Yes, these kinds of stories encourage me a lot. When a character struggles but finally succeeds, I feel that my own difficulties in learning English are normal. I can see a future version of myself becoming more fluent and confident if I continue working hard.

H: I feel inspired when I read about characters who face challenges and still succeed. It gives me hope that I can also improve my English if I keep practicing. In a way, I start to picture myself in their place, achieving progress step by step.

5.Have you ever "adopted" a character's way of thinking, a specific metaphor, or a way of speaking to help you feel more confident in your English identity?

A: Yes, I have it happens to me in different ways the first is more humorous in which if I read a book about pirates or Victorian time I will more likely use their actions or the way of speaking and even jargon and language in a funny way, so when I read about a character that is more positive I would like to be more like them, I need not to be so negative I need to think about the solutions, what is the silver lining? so that is the way that the characters impact me.

B: Maybe a metaphor yes, I read a novel about criticizing people and politics in general. The character was fighting against his government. I adopted way of thinking to some extent, but as I said, characteristics may help me understand the world outside and myself too, but it depends on myself to understand my feelings and my own ideas. I select what I need from others.

C: yes, I have, in the book Daddy-Long-Legs. The protagonist is an orphan girl who writes letters to a man who is financially helping her to finish her studies. Her journey and the way she developed made me adopt the way she thinks. Her philosophy in life made my philosophy change. It made me more optimistic.

D: Yes, I once adopted the way a character in a novel stayed calm and positive even in difficult situations. I started telling myself similar ideas when I was afraid to speak in English class. This helped me feel more relaxed and confident, as if I was “borrowing” the character’s mindset to support my own learning.

E: I remember reading a story where the character used simple but powerful metaphors about “building step by step.” I liked this idea and started using it to describe my own learning process. Thinking this way made me feel more patient with myself and more confident in my English progress.

F: Yes, I have adopted a character’s way of speaking from a novel we studied in class. The character expressed ideas in a very clear and calm way, so I tried to imitate that structure when speaking English. It made me feel more organized and less afraid of making mistakes.

G: In one literary text, a character used encouraging phrases like “I can try again” and “mistakes help me grow.” I adopted this way of thinking in my English learning. Whenever I feel nervous, I remind myself of these ideas, and it makes me feel stronger and more confident when speaking.

H: Yes, I was inspired by a character who spoke very directly and honestly. I tried to imitate this style in my speaking activities by keeping my sentences simple and clear. This made me feel more natural and less stressed when using English in class.

6.How does engaging with these stories change the way you see yourself, not just as a student, but as an individual participating in a global English-speaking world?

A: I try to deep my finger in every single pot, because if you read and you just don't do anything with it, that does nothing because when we speak, you are thinking you just come across opposition.

B: Some situations make me think or act like the characters I used to read. I realized that I am not fully relying only on my own ideas as I thought before.

C: Engaging with literary texts made me develop this inner monologue in English. I feel like I am not only a reader. I'm participating in this journey. I use similar terms and adjectives to describe my own experiences and surroundings.

D: Yes, when we discuss texts together, I feel more emotionally connected to my classmates. Everyone brings personal experiences into the interpretation, and this makes the classroom feel like a supportive space where I belong.

E: Yes, sharing my ideas about a text makes me feel more included in the group. When I express my opinion and my classmates respond, I feel that I am part of the discussion, not just listening passively. This interaction strengthens my sense of belonging in the classroom

F: Engaging with these stories has changed how I see myself beyond just being a student. I started to feel that English is not only something I learn in class, but also a way to connect with people from different parts of the world. When I read these narratives, I notice that my thoughts and experiences can relate to wider human experiences, even if my background is different. This makes me feel more confident in expressing my ideas and less limited by my local context. In a way, I now see myself as someone who can take part in a bigger, global conversation, not just a classroom learner.

G: Hearing my classmates' interpretations helps me feel connected to them. Even if we understand the story differently, I realize that we are all thinking deeply about the same text. This makes me feel accepted and part of a learning community.

H: Sharing reflections makes the classroom feel more collaborative. I don't feel alone in my understanding because others also contribute ideas. This exchange of thoughts gives me confidence and a stronger sense of belonging to the group.

7. When you feel a strong emotional connection to a theme in a story (such as injustice, freedom, or grief), does it make you more willing to participate in class discussions?

A: These characters are basically humans in other word. So, every time you are reading about a character suffering from grief, especially if it's an emotion you already experienced already like grief, injustice, freedom, especially us as women, when we read feminist literature, and you see how woman is breaking through, and drawing her own journey to be free, I feel really engaged. I want to participate more and give my own opinion and my own interpretation about this character. So, I see that different characters in different books, in different narratives. Make you see how people experience emotions differently.

Yes, for sure. Because even if there is a book that I don't really connect with emotionally, I will participate and debate, I will concede some people's ideas.

B: of course, I had a strong emotional connection with that story, I would definitely punish the man. During participation of the next session in our book club, I would express that opinion, I felt empathy toward that woman.

C: A Gothic stories in class made us emotionally engaged and very interested. we all had different reactions to them, and that encouraged participation and discussion.

D: Yes, when I feel a strong emotional connection to a theme like injustice or freedom, I become much more willing to participate in class discussions. It gives me something real to say, not just ideas from the textbook. I feel more confident because I am speaking from my own feelings and understanding.

E: When I relate emotionally to a theme, I feel more engaged and interested in participating. I don't just answer questions for marks; I actually want to discuss the meaning behind the story. This makes me more involved in classroom interaction.

F: I notice that emotional connection makes a big difference in my participation. If the story moves me, I feel more comfortable sharing my ideas with classmates. It creates a natural motivation to speak and be part of the discussion.

G: I think emotional themes in stories really push me to speak in class. When a topic touches me, I naturally want to share my opinion and hear what others think. It makes the discussion feel more personal and less like a formal academic task.

H: Yes, I become more active in discussions when I connect emotionally with a story. For example, if a character experiences grief or unfairness, I feel the need to express my thoughts. It also helps me overcome my fear of making mistakes in English.

8.Can you describe a specific moment when a metaphor or a scene in a text made you feel "brave" enough to take a communicative risk and share your opinion in class?

A: Yes, I remember a moment when we studied a story that used the metaphor of "being trapped in a cage" to describe lack of freedom. It really touched me because I related it to how the character felt limited in their life. Even though I was not very confident in English, I decided to speak in class and explain my interpretation. That moment made me feel brave because I realized my personal understanding was valuable.

B: I read a novel called The vegetarian, the woman changed from eating meat to becoming vegetarian. It was her decision, but her family and friends did not accept her. I told myself that I would do the same if I found it the right way to express myself.

C: I think I am a bit outlier because I will share my opinion about absolutely almost anything. So, it will make me enjoy it more. It won't motivate me because I am always communicating and participating in class, but it will make motivated and more likely to pursue a debate or an argument or conversation about this specific thing. Even if there is a book I don't really connect with it emotionally. I will participate. But if I do have an emotional connection with character or plot, I will be more likely to argue, if I am mentally doing this as an academic thing, I will debate, I will concede some people's ideas. But if I really care, I will argue with you, and I will tell you when you are wrong and I am more likely to step out of the academic way to talk.

D: Yes, I remember reading The Old Man and the Sea by Ernest Hemingway. There was a powerful moment when the old man continues to fight the marlin alone at sea, even after many days of struggle. This scene made me feel that persistence is more important than fear of failure. It gave me the courage to share my opinion in class, even though I was not fully confident in my English. I felt that if the old man could keep going despite difficulty, I could also try to speak and express my ideas.

E: When I read Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone by J.K. Rowling, I was inspired by the moment Harry chooses to face challenges instead of running away from them. This made me reflect on my own fear of speaking English in class. I decided to take a risk and express my idea during discussion. That moment helped me feel more confident and less afraid of making mistakes because I realized that courage is about trying, not being perfect.

F: In one of the texts, there was a metaphor describing fear as “a heavy chain around the voice.” This image stayed in my mind because I often feel nervous when speaking English. It made me realize that fear is something that can be broken. After understanding this metaphor, I felt more brave to participate in class discussion and express my ideas without overthinking my mistakes.

G: There was a scene in a movie where the character was standing alone in the rain, which symbolized sadness and isolation. I connected it to times when I felt left out in group activities. This emotional link encouraged me to share my opinion in class, even though I was afraid of making mistakes. I felt that my idea added something meaningful to the discussion.

H: The teacher was kicked out of the school, and that specific shy student stood on the table and started repeating a line the teacher said before… So that this encouraged me to give my own opinion before the time is too late, like the student didn’t give his opinion or participate until his teacher was kicked out. And I have chance to participate and give my own opinion, and I still have time. Don’t let my shyness become an obstacle.

9.If you don’t connect with a story emotionally, do you find yourself putting less effort into the lesson? Why?

A: No, because I do read like I said, try to read a lot of things I will disagree and continue reading why would you write this and why would you do this and I put more effort into the lesson because then I am more likely.

B: No, as I told you I would never stop reading a book unless I finish it.

C: No, to be honest every narrative introduces a new emotion and a new experience and understand how someone can feel that way and what made them experience those emotions.

D: When I don't feel connected to a narrative, I tend to put less effort into understanding it deeply. I still try to follow the lesson, but I am less active in discussions because I cannot relate to the content.

E: I think emotional connection influences my level of engagement. If the story does not touch me, I become more passive. However, I still try to do my work because it is part of the course requirements.

F: Sometimes lack of emotional connection reduces my participation. I focus only on the basic understanding instead of analyzing deeply. However, when the teacher explains the context, I sometimes regain interest and try to engage more.

G: If I find a character that is experiencing an emotion that I don't relate to. I try to put more effort to understand it more, to understand this emotion, to understand how someone goes through that, and what makes them go through that. So, if anything it makes me more engaged and put more effort to understand this character.

H: Yes, if I don't connect emotionally with a story, I usually lose motivation. I find it harder to focus or participate because the text does not interest me personally. Emotional engagement is important for my effort in class.

10.When discussing different interpretations of a story, do you feel like you are part of a "community of thinkers" rather than just a student in a classroom? How does the text help create this bond with your peers?

A: Yes, I do because when we started reading literature in a more analytical way this year, it made me feel as though I have an importance in English community because it made feel as though my thoughts are being heard are criticized because to be criticized is to be heard in the

first place. This help when we disagree or agree about certain book it make me feel a certain way about the people depending on the way they think.

B: Yeah, most of the time, whenever we discuss a book, I feel like I am a member of the community, I feel like I am an understandable person. My opinions and thoughts are not going to be judge because I belong to this community where people are thinkers.

C: yes, I do because reading itself creates a community, when you meet people who read like you, you immediately form connections so you automatically feel connected.

D: Yes, I feel like I am part of a "community of thinkers" during literature discussions. We are not just answering questions, but exploring meanings together. The text acts as a bridge that connects our ideas and creates intellectual bonding.

E: Yes, I do because I feel like honestly, I'm in a sort of book club maybe, I'm not in the classroom anymore. The atmosphere in a different

F: For me, I think that exploring different views makes the classroom feel like a collaborative intellectual space

G: When we analyze different interpretations, I feel that the classroom becomes a space of shared thinking. The story gives us a common focus, and this helps build a strong connection between students as we compare ideas and learn from each other.

H: The text plays an important role in creating this bond because it gives us something to interpret collectively. Even if our opinions differ, we are still engaged in the same thinking process, which makes me feel part of an academic community.

11.Does sharing your personal reflections on a text with your classmates, or hearing theirs, make you feel a stronger sense of belonging to the group?

A: For sure, it does it's a debate. To debate is to share thoughts because someone's thoughts are their internal being and it is a better way to get to know someone that just sitting and talking.

B: Hearing that others share similar feeling or even appreciate my unique perspective definitely strengthens my sense of belonging to that group of people

C: Yes, it does, listening to other people's interpretations and sharing your own reflections make you feel connected even if people think differently, you still feel part of the same group. Especially when I feel heard and understood

D: I may express my feelings and opinions and understand theirs, but I do not feel I really belong. And having a chance to share doesn't necessarily make me feel that I belong there. Although sometimes I do.

E: Yes, sharing my personal reflections on a text makes me feel more connected to my classmates. When I express my ideas and see that others listen or respond, I feel included in the group. Hearing different opinions also shows me that everyone thinks differently, which makes the classroom feel more open and welcoming.

F: I feel a stronger sense of belonging when we exchange interpretations in class. Sometimes my classmates notice things I didn't see in the text, and I find that interesting. This sharing process makes me feel that I am part of a group where everyone contributes something valuable.

G: Sharing opinions about a text makes the classroom feel more like a community than just a lesson. I feel that my voice matters when I speak, and I also learn from others' perspectives. This exchange strengthens my feeling of belonging to the group.

H: Yes, it does I feel like I am in my home.

12.Have you ever felt that a literary narrative helped you bridge gap between your local culture and the culture represented in the text, creating a "middle ground" where you feel you belong?

A: For sure it is the best ways to get know cultures, for instance in the book o Thousand Splendid Suns it goes through Iran this is a strange culture for me, so they keep mentioning food I don't know it and words are now for me. Reading a book of a different culture is one of the best ways to get exposed to the culture.

B: absolutely yes, because I think that always discovering new cultures always builds a connection between cultures. And exchange ideas thoughts or even traditions that make you more knowledgeable about it.

C: Yes, of course. Reading a unique experience and a book isn't just a book it's a bridge between different cultures, people and timelines. When you never experienced something before and you hear about it or read about it in a book, you feel fascinated. Like oh, other people in other parts of the world can participate in this and practice this easily.

D: Yes, I have experienced that kind of connection while reading literary narratives. Sometimes the culture in the text feels very different from mine, but as I go deeper into the story, I start noticing familiar values and emotions. This creates a kind of "middle ground" where I don't feel like an outsider anymore, but someone who can understand both perspectives and relate them to my own life.

E: Discovering universal themes like family devotion or personal honor in Western literature creates a beautiful middle ground that connects my local culture with the English-speaking world.

F: It happened when I read Chinese novel, I never really felt like I belonged to our local culture. and Our culture sometimes makes me feel restricted while, other cultures make me feel that I deserve to adopt some ideas

G: For me, literature often acts like a bridge between my local culture and the culture represented in the text. Even if the setting is foreign, I can still find shared human experiences such as struggle, family bonds, or personal growth. This makes me feel included in both worlds, as if I belong to a wider human experience beyond cultural differences.

H: I think that when you dive into a book, you understand and relate to people from another era or culture. So, definitely creates that middle ground

13.Overall, how has studying literary narratives influenced your feeling of being "at home" or belonging within the English department?

A: In joining the book club, it has become one of the main ways that I feel as though I actually do belong to the département and I'm a student not just someone who comes and takes classes and leaves, it makes me connect with students that I don't usually sit with.

B: It made the English department my second home, especially Suring book club sessions, I don't feel like I'm just with classmates or teachers, I feel like I'm with my people that I relate to and understand.

C: At first, it was difficult but it helped me to had the chance to share, even my ideas were not acceptable or my emotions were not acceptable.

D: Literary narratives influenced my sense of belonging by encouraging me to speak more in class. When I realized that there is no single correct interpretation, I became more confident. This shift made me feel accepted in the English department, as my ideas are heard and discussed.

E: Literary narratives influenced my sense of belonging by making the English department feel more meaningful to me. Instead of just learning grammar rules, I engage with stories that reflect real human experiences. This made me feel that I am part of something bigger, and it strengthened my attachment to the department and my motivation to continue studying English.

F: I think literary narratives created a supportive learning atmosphere for me. Through group discussions and sharing opinions, I developed friendships and academic connections. This social interaction made me feel that I am truly part of the English department community.

G: Studying literary narratives has made me feel more “at home” in the English department because it gave me a space where I can express my ideas freely. At the beginning, I felt like an outsider, but through literature discussions, I started to recognize my own voice. Now I feel that I belong to a community where my opinions are valued and respected.

H: I feel that literary narratives helped me emotionally connect with the English department. Reading stories in English made me feel understood and represented in some way. This emotional engagement made the classroom feel less formal and more like a shared space where I belong and can express myself without fear.

14.Is there anything else you would like to add regarding the influence of literature on your personality or your sense of belonging in the EFL context?

A: Yes, I would like to say that my personality was influenced by literature in which transformed the English language from just a university subject into a comfortable space for self-expression.

B: I would say if they gave us more opportunities and efforts like the book club to build cultural community to criticize.

C: For me, literature has influenced not only my academic development but also my personality in a good way.

D: One thing I would like to allude to is political reading because reading is political, you can't read something and not be political. So, I would like you to maybe consider the politics of reading.

E: Literature definitely affected my personality and my own journey in learning English. It made learning English much easier because I often come across words and expressions that I had already encountered in books. It made learning more exciting and motivated me to continue reading and learning

F: For me, literature mainly strengthened my confidence in using English. At first, I was afraid of speaking, but after reading stories and analyzing characters, I had more ideas to share in class discussions. This made me feel that I belong in the EFL classroom because I can contribute something meaningful, not just grammar answers but personal interpretations.

G: Yes, I would add that literature has really helped shape my personality in a positive way. Through reading different stories in English, I became more open-minded and confident in expressing my opinions. It also made me feel that I am part of a wider English-speaking community, even if I am learning it as a foreign language. I no longer see English only as a school subject, but as a way to connect with others and understand different perspectives.

H: From my point of view, literature changed both my personality and my feeling of belonging. Before, I was shy and afraid to speak English, but reading literary texts encouraged me to take risks and participate more in class. I also started to feel like I belong to the EFL classroom community because literature gave me topics to discuss and share with my classmates, which made communication easier and more natural.

Résumé

L'apprentissage de l'anglais comme langue étrangère dépasse la simple acquisition de la langue et influence profondément la manière dont les apprenants construisent et négocient leur identité ainsi que leurs relations avec les autres. Chez les étudiants de troisième année universitaire, le sentiment de soi et le sentiment d'appartenance à la classe jouent un rôle déterminant dans leur engagement. Cette étude qualitative s'appuie sur un échantillonnage raisonné et sur des entretiens semi-directifs menés auprès de huit participants de l'Université Abdelhafid Boussouf de Mila. Les données ont été analysées à l'aide d'une analyse thématique inductive. La recherche a exploré quatre questions principales portant sur l'influence des récits littéraires sur : la reconstruction identitaire des apprenants et leur capacité à s'identifier aux personnages, l'engagement émotionnel et la participation orale, la construction d'une communauté de classe, et le rapprochement interculturel ainsi que le développement d'une identité anglophone globale. Les résultats montrent que les apprenants projettent leurs expériences personnelles et leurs aspirations futures sur les personnages, ce qui les amène à réfléchir à leur identité actuelle et à leur identité idéale. De plus, l'investissement émotionnel dans les textes renforce la confiance communicative, favorisant ainsi directement une participation orale plus active. Les discussions collaboratives autour des œuvres littéraires créent également un espace interprétatif interactif qui renforce considérablement le sentiment d'appartenance à la classe et la reconnaissance mutuelle entre les apprenants. Enfin, l'exposition à des récits variés favorise le développement de la conscience interculturelle, permettant aux apprenants de situer leur identité dans un contexte mondial plus large. Dans l'ensemble, cette étude démontre que les récits littéraires constituent des outils pédagogiques transformateurs qui soutiennent simultanément l'apprentissage de la langue, le développement identitaire et l'intégration sociale.

Mots-clés : anglais langue étrangère (EFL), récits littéraires, construction de l'identité, sentiment d'appartenance, engagement émotionnel, étude qualitative.

الملخص

ان تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية يتجاوز مجرد اكتساب المهارات اللغوية، إذ يؤثر بعمق في كيفية تفاوض المتعلمين حول هويتهم وبناء علاقاتهم مع الآخرين. وبالنسبة لطلبة السنة الثالثة الجامعية، فإن الإحساس بالذات والشعور بالانتماء داخل القسم الدراسي يُعدّان عاملين أساسيين يوجهان مستوى انخراطهم في عملية التعلم. اعتمدت هذه الدراسة النوعية على العينة القصدية واستخدمت المقابلات شبه الموجهة مع ثمانية مشاركين من جامعة عبد الحفيظ بوالصوف بميلة، كما تم تحليل البيانات من خلال التحليل الموضوعاتي الاستقرائي. وقد بحثت الدراسة في أربعة أسئلة رئيسية تتعلق بكيفية تأثير السرديات الأدبية في: (1) إعادة بناء هوية المتعلمين ومدى قدرتهم على التماهي مع الشخصيات، (2) التفاعل العاطفي والمشاركة الشفوية، (3) بناء مجتمع التعلم داخل القسم، و(4) تعزيز التواصل بين الثقافات وتشكيل هوية إنجليزية ذات بعد عالمي.

وأظهرت النتائج أن المتعلمين يسقطون تجاربهم الشخصية وطموحاتهم المستقبلية على الشخصيات الأدبية، مما يدفعهم إلى التأمل في ذواتهم الحالية والذوات التي يطمحون إلى أن يصبحوا عليها. كما بينت النتائج أن الاستثمار العاطفي في النصوص يعزز الثقة التواصلية لدى المتعلمين، الأمر الذي يشجع بصورة مباشرة على المشاركة الشفوية الفعالة. إضافة إلى ذلك، تسهم المناقشات التعاونية حول النصوص الأدبية في خلق فضاء تفسيري تفاعلي يعزز بشكل ملحوظ الشعور بالانتماء داخل القسم والاعتراف المتبادل بين أفراده. وأخيرًا، فإن التعرض لسرديات متنوعة ينمّي الوعي بين الثقافات، مما يتيح للمتعلمين تموضع هوياتهم ضمن سياق عالمي أوسع.

وبصفة عامة، تُظهر هذه الدراسة أن السرديات الأدبية تمثل أدوات بيداغوجية تحويلية تسهم في الوقت نفسه في دعم تعلم اللغة، وتنمية الهوية، وتعزيز الاندماج الاجتماعي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، السرديات الأدبية، بناء الهوية، الشعور بالانتماء، التفاعل العاطفي، دراسة نوعية.