

IMPROVING EFL PERFORMANCE VIA TEACHING LITERATURE

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ABSTRACT

The current Study aimed at finding a way to improve EFL learners' competence, help learners enhance their language performance, bring motivation in EFL classes and develop students' critical thinking abilities through literary texts. The study was to deal with difficulties

in communicating cultural insights among EFL learners. Some of them lack vocabulary to communicate their ideas, others are not able to interact for expressing their opinions about the topics or discussions. This study tries to improve learners language performance through reading literary texts the study is an attempt to test hypotheses that. Literary texts improve EFL learners' communicative competence, Literary texts enhances EFL learners' performance, Literary texts brings enjoyment and motivation in the classroom and using literary texts develops students' critical thinking. This study shows the importance of teaching literary texts in EFL classroom. It also advises the teachers to select materials that enhance learners' language performances and bring entertaining situations in EFL classes. Furthermore, the study intends to widen learners' knowledge about global themes when teaching literary texts. Following descriptive analytical approach, the researchers used a questionnaire according to the questions and hypotheses. The final adjusted version was administered to the target sample. Data was collected, organized, tabulated, analyzed and discussed. Finally results were listed and recommendations were set.

1. INTRODUCTION

According to Povey (1972:211) reading literature familiarizes students or learners with subtle vocabulary usage and new and complex syntax and through this contribute to the extension of language usage and linguistic knowledge. Another advantage of using literature in language classes is the promotion of language use or communication especially in EFL settings. McKay (1982:53) believes that in literary works settings, role relationships are predetermined and social context is taken into consideration, so it can be used for increasing the awareness of the students about language use.

The other contributions of literature to learning are the motivational or affective and experiential factors which are provided through literature and their influence on the reading proficiency of the learners. However, the reader should be willing and motivated to read and the literature can be considered as a tool for providing the motivation.

The improvement of reading proficiency leads to achievement in academic and occupational goals. Another benefit of the literature is the encouragement of tolerance for cultural differences and promotion of creativity in the students. Henning (1993:87) believes that culture and language cannot be separated, but should rather be integrated into the curriculum.

Teaching literary texts provides added value beyond the level of language acquisition. These literary texts help students to expand their linguistic and cognitive skills, cultural knowledge and sensitivity. In fact literary texts can be used as a valid and authentic source for increasing the amount of comprehensible input students receive. According to Krashen (1982:56) students should be provided with enough comprehensible input which is not only interesting but also reduces students' anxiety. Since literary texts are rarely used for pedagogical purposes they can be considered a good authentic source for language learners. However there are many good reasons for using literary texts in the classroom as they expose learners to the language varieties, encourage interaction. Such literary texts are often rich in multiple layers of meaning and can effectively develop students critical thinking abilities and sharing of feelings and opinions. Literary work expands language awareness. Lazar (1993:84) claims that, *literary texts educate the whole person*. By examining values in literary texts, teachers encourage learners to develop attitudes towards them. These values and attitudes relate to the world outside the classroom.

1.1 Research Questions

The study sets up the following questions

1. What are the techniques for improving EFL learners' competence ?
2. How do literary texts help learners enhance their language performance?.
3. How can literary texts entertain EFL learners
4. To what extent does literature develop students' critical thinking ?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Advantages for the use of literature in EFL/ESL classes

Ghosn, (2002:91) asserts that, literary work is considered as a promising tool for language learning purposes. According to Maley (1989:62) literary texts deal with non-trivial things which are personally relevant to them. Authenticity is a criterion considered highly essential in the current literature in EFL/ESL which is naturally existent in literary texts. Authenticity can especially be envisaged in drama and novel. Below are some merits:

2.1.1. Realizing Motivation to EFL Learners

Literary texts are very motivating due to its authenticity and the meaningful context it provides (Ghosn, 2000). Literary text deals with things which are interesting in nature and includes little if any uninteresting things. Experience shows that students are highly motivated when they are exposed to literary texts for language learning purposes.

2.1.2 Enhancing Learners' Cultural Awareness

Literary texts promote cultural and intercultural awareness. Since literary texts deal with universal concepts Maley, (1989:83), asserts that, *literary texts are source for flourishing language learners' competence*. However, literary texts deal with universal concepts such as love, hatred, death, nature, etc that are common to all languages and culture. The similarities and even differences between cultures and languages can further our understanding of the world.

2.1.3 Improving EFL Learners' Reading Ability

Literary texts are good for extensive reading purposes. Collie and Slater (1987:53), argue that, *students can be given a weak just to go through a novel without extensive use of dictionary. Such a practice will double up their reading speed and also encourage meaning guessing in reading*. Subsequently learners learn how to read a lot in a short period of time. Intensive reading can lead the learners to extract deep meanings embedded in texts.

Regarding its positive impacts, using literary texts in the English language classroom has undeniable improvements for learners because literary texts enrich the learners' competence in the target language.

According to Collie and Slater (1987:6), literature provides valuable 'authentic material', develops personal involvement and enriches the cultural awareness of the students in ELT/EFL classes. The integration between language and literature results with the development of critical thinking, interpretation and communication abilities.

2.1.4 Developing Sociolinguistic Knowledge

According to McKay, (2001:84) reading literary texts develop sociolinguistic and pragmatic knowledge as manifested in communicative competence models. Hence, special attention is needed to be directed to this component. Literature due to its authenticity is equipped with sociolinguistic and pragmatic information. These two features are more related to 'appropriateness' in language which can be found only in contextualized language such as literary texts especially dramas and plays.

2.1.5 Grammar and Vocabulary Knowledge

Van, (2009) believes that, literary texts deal with a potpourri of language varieties from slang to formal and various subject matters. Literature involves a profound range of vocabulary, dialogues and prose. Literary texts are the major sources where complex structures such as dangling structure, inversion, subjunctives, etc occur.

On the other hand, vocabulary knowledge can be expanded through considerable exposure to literary texts which treat both formal and informal language. Reading short stories and novels is a good exercise for enlarging students' vocabulary domain of knowledge.

2.1.6 Enhancing Language Skills

According to Van, (2009), literary texts is rich with innumerable authentic tokens of language for the development of reading, writing, speaking and listening skills. For writing purposes, literature shows to set a good ground for writing practice. Having the learners complete a poem or short story in cloze form is very encouraging. Also we can have the students write the end of a story in their own words or narrate a story from the point of view of another character in a short story, novella, or novel. For speaking purposes, the events in a poem, novel, or short story can be associated with the learners' own experience in real life. Such a

practice paves the way for hot topics for discussion in language classes. Shang, (2006:72) states that:

“Having the students freely reflect on the events and having them critically comment is also facilitative for advancing speaking proficiency. For listening purposes, the learners can be exposed to the audio versions of the poems, short stories, or novels.”

2.1.7 Developing Oral Abilities

Through literary texts, students practice speech exchange (speakers/listeners) make use of conversational processes to construct and reinforce social identities, negotiate meaning. To reinforce the link between extra linguistic and linguistic elements in oral interaction, Consolo and Vani's study (2006) noticed that the amount of speech act by the students increases in the classroom context, for example, as a result of a pleasant and relaxed atmosphere provided by the teacher.

With regard to verbal interaction within the pedagogical context, theoretical tendencies on conversational analysis have received influence on the socio – interactionist perspective of discourse for the analysis and interpretation of verbal interaction (Tavares, 2006). Considering that all signs of language (gestures, words or any sign that contains meanings) are culture-determined, classroom research on verbal interaction between the participants involved in that pedagogic event reflects the social thus cultural beliefs implicit in the speech act and how these views can be interrelated in the negotiation of meaning. The analysis is, then, grounded on the way the participants interact and negotiate meanings in so far they can be adapted to the situation itself. Tavares (2006) recently investigated how teacher and his/her students interact to each other in the EFL classroom to keep an atmosphere of cooperation and motivation observing the way they negotiated their images.

2.1. 8 Helping control Anxiety

According to Ghosn, (2002) multiple intelligences did not cater for this aspect of human intelligence. Intelligence is specifically related to human ability to control and manage their emotions and feelings in difficult situations. An example for EFL context is how far EFL learners are able to control their anxiety when it comes to taking high-stake\tests. Hence; dealing with affection, feeling and emotion, Literature is a good source for nurturing control.

2.1.9 Raising Communicative Competence

Savvidou (2004:74) illustrates that, the necessities of teaching culture through language requires communicative competence as a major reason. In order for one to gain communicative competence, mastery of structure and form does not seem to be sufficient since comprehending the intended discourse requires social and cultural contexts, and this can be easily achieved by means of incorporating literary texts in EFL teaching. Erkaya (2005:157) claims that, *this potential is higher-order thinking skills*. Moreover, critical thinking is bare bone essential in interpreting texts and this advantage is most held by intermediate and advanced language learners A student can learn and use words effectively in different contexts through literary texts. Students also become more prolific and exploratory (critical evaluation) when they begin to identify the copiousness of the language they are trying to learn so as to make use of them with efficacy. This really improves communicative competence. Berardo et al (2006:39) state *“real-life texts, not written for pedagogic purposes.” Such text is not written to emphasize its form, but content.*

2.1.10 Developing Learners' Critical Thinking

Literary text is a good medium for critical thinking enhancement in EFL classes. Ghosn (2002:607) claims that *“literary texts can bring about changes in the attitudes of the learners and allow them to reflect on their lives, learning, and language”* However, literary texts can open "horizons of possibility, allowing students to question, interpret, connect, and explore. Literary text among other text types are fertile with ideas to critically look at. Facione, (1996:74) argues that, *“critical thinking informs critical discourse analysis in language studies and similar fields in philosophy, sociology, cultural studies, psychology, and laws .* Similarly, associated critical thinking with inferences drawn from factual statements, recognition of assumptions, interpreting whether conclusions are warranted or not, judging conclusions as relevant to given statements, and evaluating arguments. Peak (1997:62). States *“It assists students “examine the deep meanings, personal implications, and social consequences of any knowledge, theme, technique, text, or material. Critical thought about a subject reveals its internal structure and its connections to self and society”.*

2.1.11 Improving Speaking Skill through Authentic Materials

The communicative activities which are used in the CLT class should be based on authentic materials which have been written for the real world use. Such materials are claimed to give students opportunities to develop strategies for understanding language as it is actually used.

Furthermore, communicative activities are often carried out by the students in small groups. The nature of Speaking is so much part of daily life that we take it for granted. However, learning speaking, whether in a first or other language, involves developing subtle and detailed knowledge about why, how and when to communicate, and complex skills for producing and managing interaction, such as asking a question or obtaining a turn. Brown (2002:62), states “*walking and talking are species specific.. Speaking skills are often considered the most important part of an EFL course. With the growing need for international communication in the information age, many language learners attend language classes to improve their speaking ability*”

Moreover, some students are much more effective in their oral communication than others. And those who are more effective communicators experience more success in school and in other areas of their lives. According to Celce-Murcia, (2001:74). For most people, the ability to speak a language is synonymous with knowing that language since speech is the most basic means of human communication. Nevertheless, speaking in a second or foreign language has often been viewed as the most demanding of the four language skills.

3. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 The tool of the Study

The study used a questionnaire as a tool for data collection. The study used SPSS program for analyzing the data collected. The questionnaire is composed of twenty statements for teachers. Each statement has three options, they are: agree, to some extent and, disagree. For the presentation of the results the researcher used percentages, tables and figures for more explanation. This tool will be analyzed statistically with SPSS Program. The sample of the study has been randomly selected from EFL teachers in the area of Jazan, Saudia Arabia. . The questionnaire has been distributed to the fifty of them to fill. The study used the statistical package for social sciences to analysis the data collected. The researcher used Pearson's correlation and the results obtained as follows:

$$r_{xy} = \frac{N(\sum XY) - (\sum X \sum Y)}{\sqrt{[N(\sum X^2) - (\sum X)^2][N(\sum Y^2) - (\sum Y)^2]}}$$

Where

r = correlation

R: Reliability of the test

N: number of all items in the test

X: odd scores

Y: even scores

∑: Sum

$$R = \frac{2 \times r}{1 + r}$$

$$Val = \sqrt{\text{reliability}}$$

$$\text{Correlation} = 0.69$$

$$R = \frac{2 \times r}{1 + r} = \frac{2(0.69)}{1 + 0.69} = 0.82 \quad \text{Reliability} = 0.82$$

In this study the researcher used Pearson correlation through half-methods. According to the equation below it is found that the validity is:

$$Val = \sqrt{0.82} \quad \text{Validity} = 0.90$$

3.2 Analysis and Discussion

Statement (1) EFL learners need to develop their language performance.

q1					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	disagree	3	6.0	6.0	6.0
	neutral	5	10.0	10.0	16.0
	agree	42	84.0	84.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	

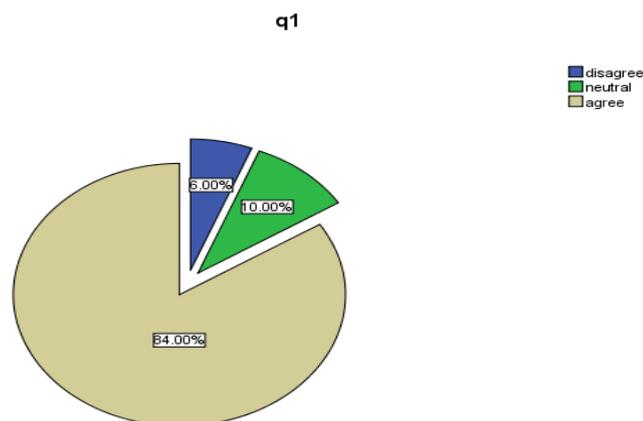


Table (4.1) shows that, (84 %) of the respondents agree with the statement. (20%) of the sample choose the answer neutral and (6%) disagree that, EFL learners need to develop their productive skills. Thus the statement is accepted.

Statement (2) Using Literary texts develops EFL learners' competence

Table (4.2): developing EFL learners' competence.

q2					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	disagree	2	4.0	4.0	4.0
	neutral	4	8.0	8.0	12.0
	agree	44	88.0	88.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	

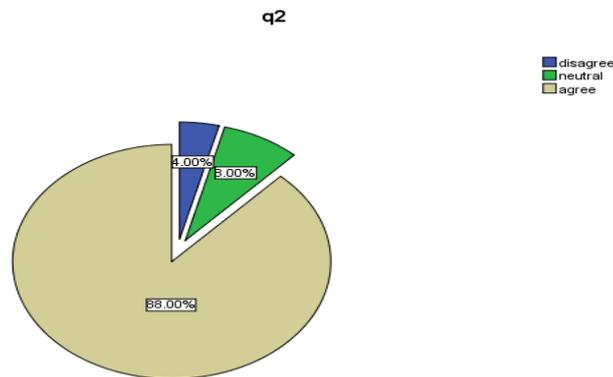


Table (4.2) shows that, (88%) of the respondents agree that, using Literary texts develops EFL learners' competence (8 %) of the sample neutral and (4%) disagree with the statement. Therefore the statement is accepted.

Statement (3) Teaching short stories develop EFL learner's language skills

Table (4.3): Developing language skills.

q3					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Disagree	4	8.0	8.0	8.0
	Neutral	2	4.0	4.0	12.0
	Agree	44	88.0	88.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	

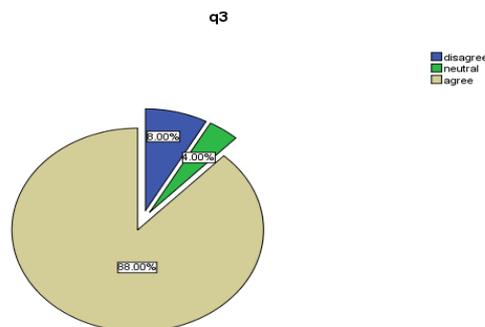


Table and diagram (4.3) show that,(88%) of the respondents agree with the statement, (4 %) of the sample answer neutral and (8%) sample disagree with the statement, therefore the statement is accepted

Statement (4) Speaking and writing can be taught through literary texts

Table (4.4): Teaching speaking through literary texts.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	disagree	2	4.0	4.0	4.0
	neutral	5	10.0	10.0	14.0
	agree	43	86.0	86.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	

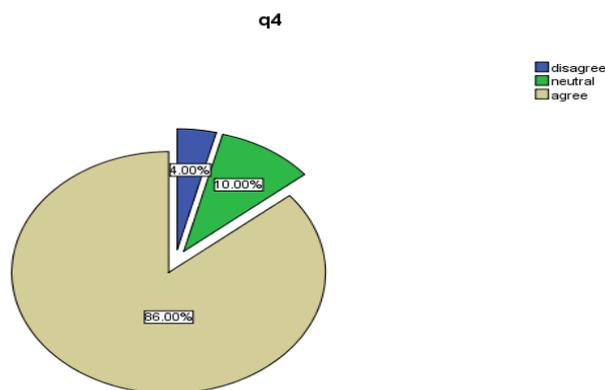


Table and diagram (4.4) show that,(86%) of the respondents agree with the statement, (10 %) of the sample choose the answer neutral and(4%) of the sample disagree.

Statement (5) Teaching authentic sources engage language discussions

Table (4.5): Teaching authentic sources.

q5					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	disagree	3	6.0	6.0	6.0
	neutral	3	6.0	6.0	12.0
	Agree	44	88.0	88.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	

q5

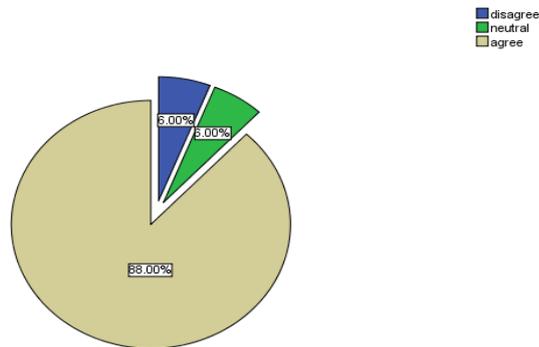


Table and diagram (4.5) show that, (88 %) of the respondents agree that , teaching authentic sources from the native speech community helps to engage language discussions (6 %) of the sample choose the answer neutral and (6%) disagree with the statement. The statement is accepted.

Statement (6) Literary texts motivate learners to read further

Table (4.6): Motivating learners.

q6					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	disagree	3	6.0	6.0	6.0
	neutral	5	10.0	10.0	16.0
	agree	42	84.0	84.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	

q6

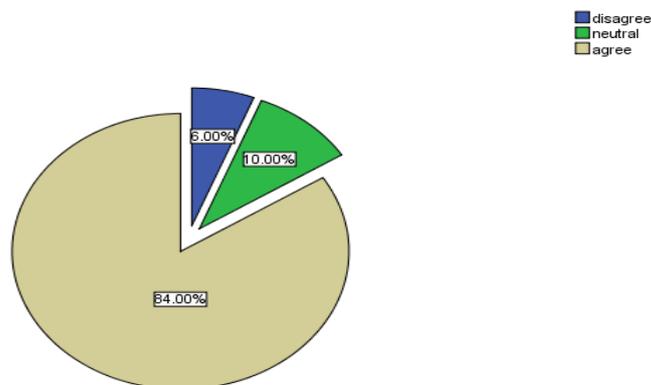
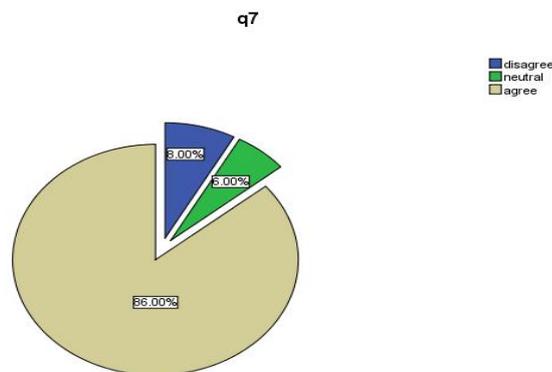


Table and diagram (4.6) show that, (84 %) of the respondents agree with the statement and (10%) of the sample neutral and (6%) disagree, therefore the statement is accepted.

Statement (7) Reading literary texts enables students to become familiar with others cultures

q7					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	disagree	4	8.0	8.0	8.0
	neutral	3	6.0	6.0	14.0
	agree	43	86.0	86.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	



(86 %) of the respondents agree with the statement, (6%) of the sample neutral and (8 %) disagree with the statement. Thus the statement is accepted

Statement (8) Lesson instructions should improves learners' productive skills.

Table (4.8): Improving learners' productive skills.

q8					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	disagree	4	8.0	8.0	8.0
	neutral	2	4.0	4.0	12.0
	agree	44	88.0	88.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	

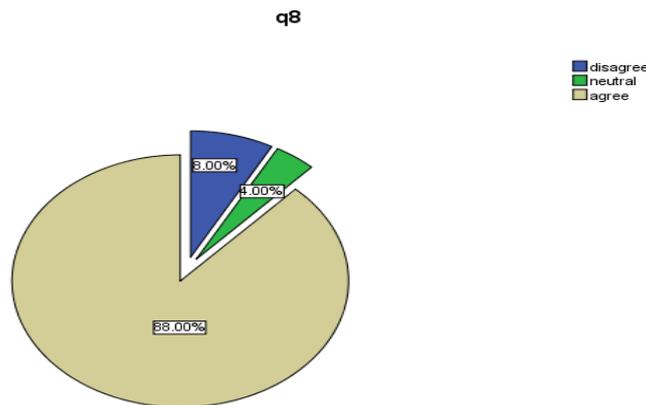


Table and diagram (4.8) show that, (88 %) of the respondents agree with the statement, (4 %) of the sample neutral and (8%) disagree. This confirmed that the statement is accepted

Statement (9) Language use must be associated with other culturally appropriate behavior

Table (4.9): Associating language appropriate behavior.

q9					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	disagree	3	6.0	6.0	6.0
	neutral	3	6.0	6.0	12.0
	agree	44	88.0	88.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	

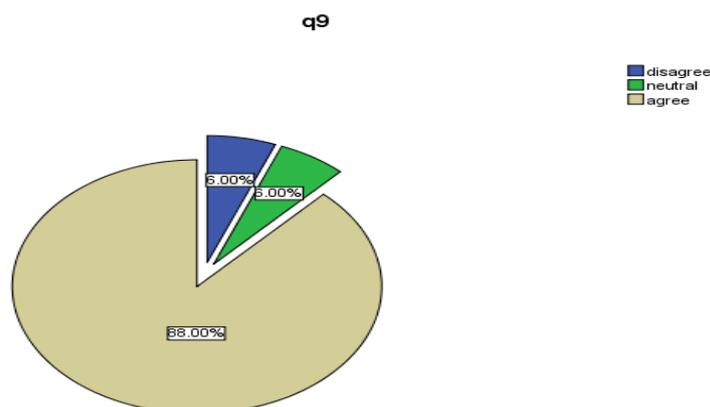


Table and diagram (4.9) show that,(88 %) of the respondents agree with the statement, (6 %) of the sample disagree and (6%) neutral. This statement is accepted.

Statement (10) Literary texts does not improve EFL learners ‘performance

Table (4.10): Improving EFL learners ‘performance.

q10					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	disagree	4	8.0	8.0	8.0
	neutral	3	6.0	6.0	14.0
	agree	43	86.0	86.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	

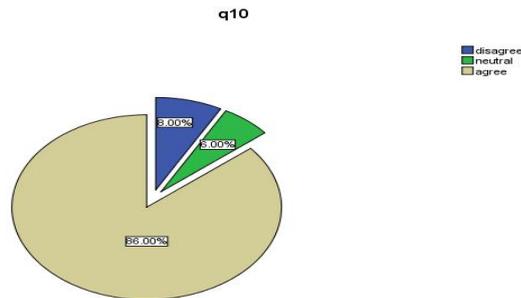


Table and diagram(4.10) show that,(86%) of the respondents agree that, literary texts can not improve EFL learners ‘critical thinking abilities (6 %) of the sample neutral and(8%)of the sample disagree with the statement. This statement is accepted.

Statement (11) Teacher talk should generate communicative interaction in the classroom

Table (4.11): Teacher talk.

q11					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	disagree	2	4.0	4.0	4.0
	neutral	4	8.0	8.0	12.0
	Agree	44	88.0	88.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	

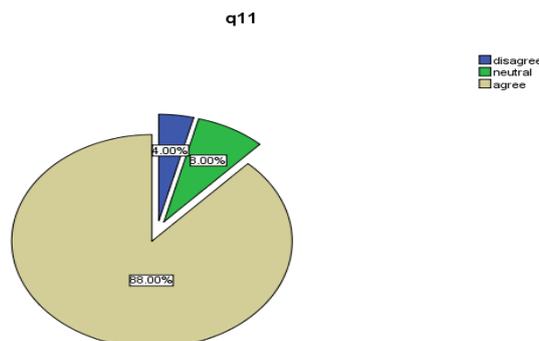


Table and diagram (4.11) show that, (88 %) of the respondents agree with the statement, (4 %) of the sample answers neutral and (8%)disagree with the statement .Thus the statement is accepted.

Statement (12) Brainstorming activities develops learners’ language skills.

Table (4.12): Developing Learners’ Productive Skills.

q12					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	disagree	3	6.0	6.0	6.0
	neutral	4	8.0	8.0	14.0
	agree	43	86.0	86.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	

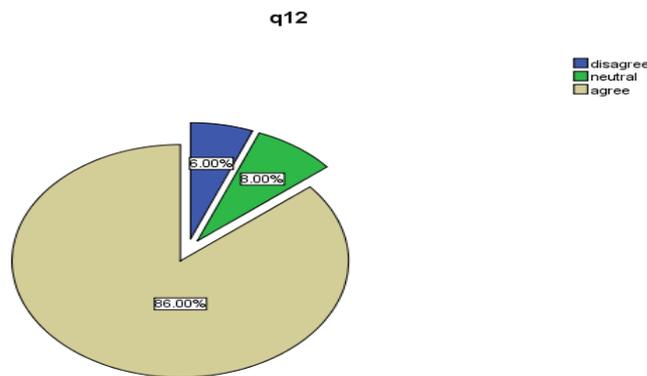


Table and diagram(4.12)show that, (86 %) of the respondents agree and (8 %) neutral and 6% disagree agree. This statement is accepted.

Statement (13) creating oral activities in EFL classes, improve learners’ communicative competence

Table (4.13): Creating oral activities.

q13					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	disagree	5	10.0	10.0	10.0
	neutral	3	6.0	6.0	16.0
	agree	42	84.0	84.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	

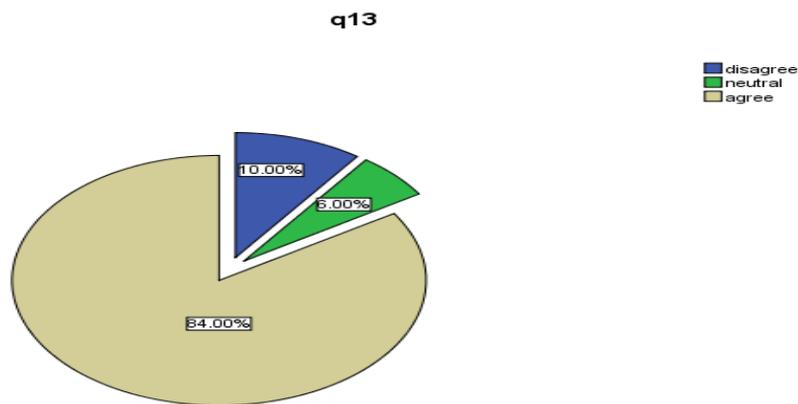


Table and diagram (4.13) show that, (84 %) of the respondents agree that, creating oral activities in EFL classes, improve learners’ communicative competence (6 %) neutral and (10%) disagree. Therefore, the statement is accepted.

Statement (14) Teaching authentic sources link EFL classroom language learning with language use outside the classroom

Table (4.14): Teaching authentic sources.

q14					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	disagree	4	8.0	8.0	8.0
	neutral	3	6.0	6.0	14.0
	agree	43	86.0	86.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	

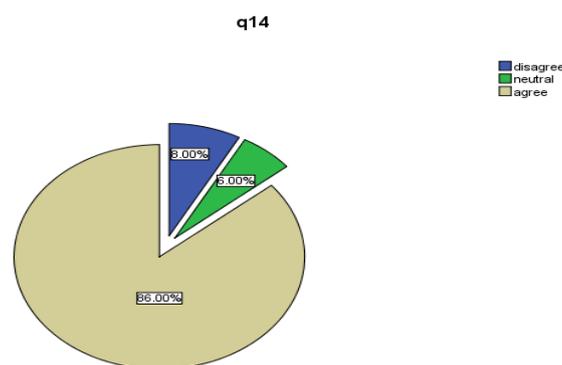
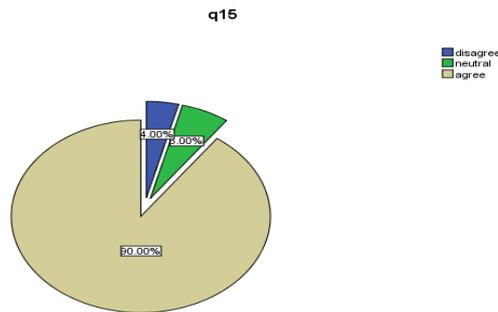


Table and diagram (4.14) show that,(86%) of the respondents agree that, teaching authentic sources link EFL classroom language learning with language use outside the classroom (6 %) of the sample neutral and 8% disagree with the statement . Therefore, the statement is accepted.

Statement (15) Literary texts develops learners’ critical thinking abilities

Table (4.15): Developing Learners’ Critical Thinking Abilities.

q15					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	disagree	2	4.0	4.0	4.0
	Neutral	3	6.0	6.0	10.0
	Agree	45	90.0	90.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	



The investigator requests the sample their responses to the idea that, literary texts develops learners’ critical thinking abilities. Table and diagram (4.15) show that,(90%) of the respondents agree with the statement (6 %) of the sample neutral and(4%)of the sample disagree with the statement . Therefore, the statement is accepted

Statement (16) Texts chosen should match learners’ age and cultural background

Table (4.16): Choosing Literary Texts.

q16					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Disagree	4	8.0	8.0	8.0
	Neutral	3	6.0	6.0	14.0
	Agree	43	86.0	86.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	

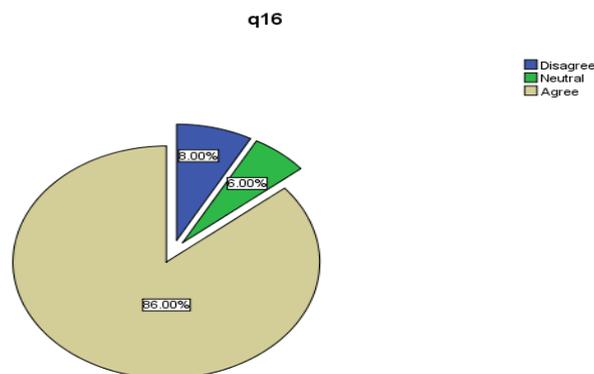


Table and diagram (4.16) show that, (86%) of the respondents disagree with the statement (6 %) of the sample neutral and(8%)of the sample agree with the statement. Therefore, the statement is not accepted

3.3 Findings

The study has received the following

1. EFL learners need to develop their language performance through literary texts
2. Using Literary texts develops EFL learners' competence
3. Teaching short stories develop learner's language skills in English as foreign language
4. Speaking and writing can be taught through literary texts
5. Teaching authentic sources helps to engage language discussions and negotiation
6. Language use must be associated with other culturally appropriate behavior
7. Teacher talk should generate communicative interaction in the classroom
8. Brainstorming activities develop learners' productive skills
9. Creating oral activities in EFL classes, improve learners' communicative competence
10. Literary texts develops learners' critical thinking abilities
11. Texts chosen should fit learners' age and cultural background

3.4 Recommendations

1. Teachers should motivate learners through literature
2. Learners should be exposed language varieties through reading literary texts
3. Teacher talk should facilitate learning and promote communicative interaction in the classroom
4. Uthentic materials should be used in EFL classroom
5. Discussions should be practiced in the classroom
6. Language used should be selected to improve learners' performance

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Appendix: Questionnaire

Dear colleague, This questionnaire is designed to elicit information about Improving EFL Learners' Competence and Performance through Literary Texts. You are invited to indicate your views about this topic by ticking the most appropriate box.

No	Statements	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
1	EFL learners need to develop their language performance			
2	Using Literary texts develops EFL learners' competence			
3	Teaching short stories develop learner's language skills in English as foreign language.			
4	Speaking and writing can be taught through literary texts			
5	Teaching authentic sources helps to engage language discussions and negotiation			
6	Literary texts motivate learners to read further			
7	Reading literary texts enables students to become familiar with others cultures			
8	Lesson instructions should improves learners' productive skills.			
9	Language use must be associated with other culturally appropriate behavior.			
10	Literary texts does not improve EFL learners 'performance			
11	Teacher talk should generate communicative interaction in the classroom.			
12	Brainstorming activities develop learners' productive skills			
13	Creating oral activities in EFL classes, improve learners' communicative competence			
14	Teaching authentic sources link EFL classroom language learning with language use outside the classroom			
15	Literary texts develops learners' critical thinking abilities			
16	Texts chosen should match learners' age and cultural background			