

Challenges to Teaching English Literature at the University of Hail: Instructors' Perspective

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Abstract

This descriptive-analytic study aimed at identifying the most significant impediments to teaching English literature from the perspective of male and female instructors at The University of Hail (UoH). The study was conducted during the first semester of the academic year 2015-16. A questionnaire was used to collect data from 10 female and 12 male instructors. Data analysis revealed that the instructors consider the students' level of language proficiency, the texts' linguistic and stylistic degree of difficulty as well as the degree of cultural (un)familiarity to be crucial issues which impact the productivity of the teaching -learning process. Narrowing the distance between students and the text by relating the themes and characters of the literary work to the students' personal experiences, on the one hand, and by making students read independently, on the other, were found to be the most important practices the participants followed in order to help students read, enjoy and comprehend literature.

Keywords: challenges, teaching literature, instructors, Saudi Arabia, University of Hail

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Introduction

Teaching and learning foreign literature could be a daunting task for both the instructors and learners. This statement is particularly true for those involved in the teaching and learning of English literature at the undergraduate level in most Arab institutions, but particularly in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) for various reasons.

First, the Saudi environment is often described as one of the most conservative among the Arab and Muslim countries. As the birthplace of Islam and the custodian of the two holiest Muslim shrines at Mecca and Medina, KSA perceives and presents itself as a unique country that has the responsibility of guarding and preserving the Islamic traditions and teachings by all possible means, including the imposition of certain restrictions which affect all domains of life. One such restriction is the segregation of foreign expats in housing compounds which are totally separated from the Saudi community. The compounds function as cultural enclaves and “follow the principle of spatial seclusion of social groups with different cultural and religious background” (Glasze & Alkhayyal, 2002, p.321).

Second, upon joining university, a typical undergraduate Saudi student would have been exposed only to a brief selection of literary texts. These texts are usually presented to students following the historical approach which focuses on the writer’s biography and milieu and the social, cultural, and intellectual context. Indeed, a number of scholars and critics have repeatedly expressed their dissatisfaction with the unrepresentative selections and the traditional and outdated approaches to teaching them (Alamir, 2006). Focusing on the Saudi Arabic textbooks for high school, Zaalah (2010), for example, criticizes the selection of Saudi literary works for focusing on a few and unrepresentative literary eras and themes, excluding some important genres, oversimplifying the discussion of these works, not including any work by the many Saudi female writers as well as excluding all forms of literary analysis. Zaalah calls the discussion of the Saudi prose in these textbooks “a cognitive catastrophe.”

Third, in the Arab world, particularly in KSA, foreign, especially Western, literature is often viewed as a threat to the national and Muslim identity and as a tool of cultural colonization which promotes anti-religious and anti-cultural values. Therefore, though Saudi students start taking English as a compulsory subject in grade four, English literature is totally absent from the curricula of public schools. Indeed, this exclusion of foreign literature is done with the purpose of averting at least some of the objectives which Cai (2002) believes to be the most important for incorporating and using multicultural literature in the curriculum: challenging the dominant ideologies, fostering acceptance and appreciation of cultural diversity, developing sensitivity to social inequalities, and encouraging transformation of the self and society, (p. 134). Therefore, the teaching of English as a foreign language in KSA has always focused on the communicative and linguistic rather than the cultural functions of the language (Ibrahim, 2015). This focus is reflected in the general objectives for teaching English listed by the Saudi Ministry of Education (www.mkgedu.sa). Seven of the nine listed objectives are concerned with developing students’ attitudes towards learning English, improving their language and linguistic skills for various purposes. Of the remaining two, one stresses the importance of developing the “student’s awareness about the cultural, economic, religious and social issues of his [i.e. Saudi] society and prepare him to participate in their solutions,” while the other explicitly refers to developing an “understanding and respect of cultural differences between nations.”

Fourth, understanding and appreciating a literary text requires the use of critical and individual thinking. However, in most Arab educational institutions rote memorization is considered the chief learning method. In the Saudi context, students are expected to reproduce correct answers exactly as stated in the book or given by the teacher if they are to pass their exams (Matson, 2016). Therefore, students memorize answers and paragraphs sometimes without fully comprehending them (Alkubaidi, 2014). Consequently, the concept of critical and creative thinking is still foreign in the KSA curricula (Elyas, 2008). Instead, the traditional approach of teaching in which the teacher is the power and the student is the empty vessel and the disempowered, is still followed in the Kingdom. Undoubtedly, these pedagogically erroneous practices have detrimental influences on students' ability to critically and creatively analyze a literary text.

Fifth, despite the massive expenditure on education in the Kingdom, students' achievement is far from satisfactory. A strong indication of the great importance education receives in KSA is reflected in the fact that 10 percent of the Kingdom's GDP is allocated to this sector making it the highest in the world (the average spending of most advanced nations does not exceed 4-5 percent). Another ample indication is the dramatic increase in the budget dedicated to education over the past few years. According to the US-Saudi Arabian Business Council, the spending of KSA on education more than doubled in the period between 2008 and 2015 (from SR 105 billion to SR 217 billion). However, a report titled "Arab youth: Do they suffer from a lack of educational foundations that would guarantee them a productive life?" issued in 2014 by the Center for Universal Education at the Brookings Institution reveals that half male students and almost one-third of female primary students in Saudi Arabia do not meet basic learning levels. The report also shows that the situation is even more alarming for the secondary level with 57.4% of students categorized as out of school, in school but expected to drop out or in school but not learning.

Sixth, the course plans in the English departments in KSA and elsewhere in the Arab world do not take into consideration the linguistic, cultural and intellectual needs of the students in the region for they are replicas of their counterparts in Western universities especially in Britain and North America. Ironically, as Hamdi notes, while "English studies programs in England and North America are increasingly moving in the direction of cultural studies and are becoming progressively less exclusive with reference to the English literary canon" (102) universities in the Arab world "still thrive on their strictly exclusive English and American curricula in the same way the Leavisite tradition dominated [...] English literature departments in England in the mid-twentieth century" (102). An increasing number of new and culturally diverse courses such as world literature, African literature, Arab literature, women literature, Latin American literature and postcolonial literature are now found in the curricula of the English departments in Western universities but rarely in their Arab counterparts.

Literature Review

Despite the existence of a large and growing body of literature on the issue of teaching English as a foreign language in KSA, the number of studies that specifically focus on the teaching of English literature in the country is meager. However, since language is no longer viewed as merely a code or a number of words and expressions connected by grammatical rules but rather "a social practice of meaning-making and interpretation" (Scarino & Liddicoat, 2009, p.16); the problems and challenges that face foreign language teachers and learners are often

relevant to those involved with foreign literature. Furthermore, despite significant cultural and political differences between Arab countries, they share many common attributes in the field of education. Therefore, besides reviewing the limited number of studies on the teaching of English literature in the Saudi context, this section considers a number of studies on English language teaching and learning in KSA and the teaching of English language and literature in the Arab world in general.

A considerable number of studies which are concerned with the teaching of English in the Saudi context seem to agree on two points: The massive spending of the Saudi government on education in general and on the teaching of English as a foreign language in particular, on the one hand, and the dissatisfactory linguistic competence of students despite this generous spending (Al-Shumaimeri (2003); Hastings (2012); Khan (2011); Mahib ur Rahman & Alhaisoni (2013)), on the other.

Khan (2011) argues that, identifying the learning barriers to learning English in the Saudi context is particularly important in order to understand the reasons behind students' dissatisfactory level of achievement despite high government expenditure. According to Khan, the linguistic barrier and the lack of adequate motivation among both teachers and students are the most crucial at the tertiary level in KSA.

Similarly, Alhamdi (2014), Alharbi (2015), Al-Hazmi, (2003), Liton, (2012), Moskovsky & Alrabai, (2009), and Syed (2003) focus on the issue of motivation in Saudi learners of EFL. Liton (2012), considers the lack of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in order to teach English to Saudi students a principal hindrance to the learning of the language. Al-Hazimi (2003) argues that intrinsic motivation is more important than extrinsic motivation for if the desire to learn English arises from within the learners, they will actively seek strategies and techniques that will best suit their learning goals. Moskovsky and Alrabai (2009) point out that the number of studies on the role of motivation in Saudi EFL learners is inadequate and propose that EFL teachers employ the four main sources of intrinsic motivation (challenge, curiosity, control and fantasy) in order to enhance students' motivation.

Other studies such as Alhamdi (2014), Al-Asmari & Khan (2014), Alharbi (2015) and Sofi (2015) largely blame Saudi students' low proficiency in English on the curriculum and the teaching methods. Alhamdi (2014) blames the students' poor communication skills in English primarily on the fact that the Saudi textbooks and the applied teaching strategies give far more importance to reading and writing than to listening and speaking. To Alhamdi's list of factors that affect the educational process, Sayed (2003) adds reliance on rote learning and memorization and dependence on high-stakes testing. He concludes that coupled with outdated curricula and methodologies, insufficient support systems, and the rarity of qualified teachers, these impediments contribute to the unflattering picture of English teaching and learning in the region.

Al-Asmari & Khan (2014) argue for the need to go beyond the traditional teaching of English in KSA which exclusively focuses on the American and British varieties. The authors advocate the exposure of Saudi students to other varieties mainly because restricting students to one particular form of English or another negatively affects their ability to communicate effectively in the age of globalization. Moreover, the authors encourage the adoption of a unique

variety of English in KSA in a manner similar to Hinglish in India or Singlish in Singapore. Alharbi (2015) too attributes the low proficiency of Saudi students in English communication to ineffective teaching methods (for example, using Arabic when teaching English and keeping the classroom teacher-centered). To overcome these obstacles, Alharbi proposes a reform of specific policies of the Ministry of Education and Higher Education and the employment of contemporary approaches to teaching which emphasize skills in problem solving and critical thinking. Sofi (2015) maintains that learning by rote and lectures are methods still used in Saudi Arabia because English teachers are not well trained for the job. In order to enhance students' communicative competence and motivate them to think critically, Sofi proposes using model lesson plans which follow the communicative and student-centered approaches and incorporating multimedia.

On the matter of the impact of English on the local culture, Al-Haq and Smadi (1996) surveyed 1,176 undergraduate university students representing all universities in KSA in order to explore their opinion on whether the use of English increases their inclination towards becoming more westernized, on the one hand, and weakens their national and religious identity, on the other. The results of the study show that the vast majority of students did not believe the learning of English to push them away from their Arab/Muslim culture towards a more westernized lifestyle and belief system.

Mekheimer (2011) argues that attitudinal inhibitors to learning/teaching literature in the Saudi context are under-researched, and therefore he embarks on exploring the perceptions and attitudes of faculty and students towards English literature at King Khalid University. The researcher concludes that, in general, both instructors and students have positive attitudes towards teaching/learning English literature since they recognize the important role of literature in learning about other cultures. Among the factors that negatively impact the teaching/learning of English literature, Mekheimer lists the rigid socio-religious context, the, sometimes, inappropriate selection of literary texts and the inadequate employment of technology. Likewise, Adam and Babiker (2015) advocate the teaching of literature because it provides students with opportunities to improve their language skills and enhances their ability to write creatively.

Hastings (2012) points out that despite the large sum of money spent on English language education in KSA, the outcomes are not as good as desired. He partially blames these poor outcomes on the isolation of foreign EFL teachers from the rest of the community. According to Hastings, this separation could negatively impact teachers' attitudes and motivation as well as their "immediacy" which is defined as "communication styles that lessen the distance between teacher and students, which has been proven to directly correlate to student success in the language classroom" (Witt & Wheekess, qtd in Hastings, p18).

As for the teaching of literature in English Departments in the Arab world, which can be traced back to the 1920s, the following issues have been the focus of various studies and debates:

- The percentage literature courses should constitute in the course plans
- Whether literature courses are effective in improving students' language proficiency
- The benefits for teaching English literature
- The type of literary texts which students should be exposed to
- The impact of literature courses on the Muslim-Arab identity

- Effective teaching practices and methodologies to teach English literature
- The instructors' and students' attitudes towards the teaching/learning of literature courses and the challenges they face.

One of the core issues considered by earlier studies, especially since the first conference on the problems of teaching English language and literature at Arab universities held in Jordan in 1983, is what component of the curriculum (literature, language or linguistics) is most beneficial to students. Bader (1992) and Zughoul (1983, 1986 & 1987), for example, argue for increasing the number of language and linguistics courses at the expense of literature courses for two reasons: 1. The moral, religious and social values embedded in foreign literature which often conflict with the students' Arab and Muslim culture and values (Asfour (1983); Dahiyat (1983) & Zughoul (1983), and 2. the belief that as taught in the Arab countries, some English literature courses do not significantly add to students' competence because they primarily focus on content rather than on mode of expression (Bader 1992). Similarly, Zughoul (1983, 1986 & 1987) largely blames the failure of English departments in the Arab world to respond to the needs of the communities they are supposed to serve on the fact that the literature component of the curriculum is overrepresented at the expense of language and linguistics.

At the other end of the spectrum, a study by Salih (1986) surveyed 118 Arab students majoring in English to investigate their views on whether literature helped them improve their language skills. The study concludes that, in general, students believe that studying literature allows them to practice all their language skills and hence positively impacts their language competency. Obeidat (1997) agrees with Salih arguing that the domination of the language and linguistic components of the English curriculum does little to improve students' language competence, while literature helps students acquire a native-like linguistic competence, express their ideas in sound English, learn the linguistic features of modern English, speak clearly and concisely, as well as become creative, critical, and analytical learners. Likewise, a study by Ben Zid (2015) conducted at Sultan Qaboos University in Oman reveals that students have positive views towards literature primarily because it enhances their language competence.

Interestingly, all the above studies base their argument in favor of one particular component of the curriculum over the other primarily in relation to the role literature plays in improving the linguistic competence of the students which would better prepare them for the job market. In the process, far less attention is given to some essential objectives for teaching foreign literature (such as increasing students' awareness of and tolerance for other cultures and improving their critical thinking and analytic skills). Hence, Haggan (1999) rightly asks whether the role of the English Department is to provide students with the needed vocational training or to intellectually develop their minds within an academic area congenial to the individual. To explore students' attitudes towards the courses they were studying, Haggan administered a questionnaire to 71 students at Kuwait University and arrived at the conclusion that forcing unwilling students to study linguistics or literature courses could be counter-productive. Therefore, she proposes allowing students to choose either linguistics or literature as their area of specialization within the Department of English.

Ten years later, a study similar to Haggan's was conducted at the Hashemite University in Jordan. Al-Kharabsheh, Al-Azzam, and Obeidat (2009) surveyed 75 English majors in their

fourth year by asking them to describe in an essay their attitudes towards the various components of the curriculum (the researchers added the translation to the list). Unsurprisingly, the respondents' answers revealed that some students prefer language/linguistics, others literature while a third group favors translation for reasons such as future expectations, market demands, and personal preferences.

In recent years, increasing attention has been given to the type of literary texts to be included in the curriculum. A number of academics, including Al Maleh (2005) and Hamdi (2003), point out to a major problem with teaching English literature in the Arab world: the fact that English departments in the Arab world religiously follow their counterparts in the West in the sense that they frequently stick to the canon (with occasional departures), follow more or less the same curricula and assign textbooks and reading selections not too different from those typically used in Western universities (Al Malah, 2005). According to Hamdi, text selection is crucial since the cultural, economic, and educational onslaught of western post-colonialism entails training students to think in universalistic terms and thus alienates Arab students from their own identities, cultures, and histories.

Al Maleh (2005) suggests that when dealing with a Western literary work in a non-Western context, teachers need to teach the foreign text amorally and to avoid all questions pertaining to the text's social or moral values as they could tamper with the students' appreciation of the literary work. In addition, Al Maleh proposes that "students should not be reading books for their ethical content or import alone. They should be encouraged to look at reading as primarily a cognitive process leading to some transnational awareness of comparative ethnicity."

The above review of studies on the teaching of English language and literature in the Arab world reveal the general sense of dissatisfaction among both learners and educators. Therefore, some serious studies that investigate all aspects of the teaching and learning process as well as a radical revision of the curricula of the departments of English in the Arab world are still needed.

The Study

This study sheds light on the difficulties and challenges that face instructors who teach literature courses at the Department of English (DoE) at The University of Hail (UoH). For this purpose, a questionnaire was distributed during the second semester of the academic year 2014/2015 to all instructors who teach literature courses at both the male and female campuses.

Setting/Context

This study was conducted at UoH during the first semester of the academic year 2015-6. UoH is one of 25 government universities in the KSA located in Hail, a city in the northwest of the country. Established in the year 2005, the university currently hosts more than 30 thousand students. Due to cultural and religious considerations, male and female students are taught in totally separate campuses by male and female staff members respectively. Instructors on both campuses are expected to adhere strictly to the course descriptions approved by the university and to use the textbooks and educational material specified in these descriptions.

Literature courses constitute approximately 33% of the total number of the courses students have to complete in order to obtain the BA degree. All students take the exact same courses as there are no electives. The overwhelming majority of instructors teaching at the DoE are Arab expatriates, and the rest are Saudis.

As stated above, the list of required readings, teaching methods as well as the objectives for teaching the various courses are typical of what is found in most other Arab universities. Examples of the required readings include Oedipus Rex, Robinson Crusoe, The Merchant of Venice, Hamlet, A Passage to India and Heart of Darkness in addition to the poetry of William Wordsworth, Lord Alfred Tennyson, Robert Browning, T.S. Eliot, and W.B. Yeats. Though text selection is usually done vigilantly in Arab institutions particularly in the Gulf (Al Maleh 2005), some of the works which are considered politically, religiously or morally controversial not only in the Arab world but worldwide have also made it to the list of required readings at UoH. These include Major Barbara, Waiting for Godot and Women in Love. (Al Maleh, for example, uses Waiting for Godot as an example of a literary work which is normally quickly excluded from the reading list in Arab universities because it runs against the dominant value system of the Arab/Muslim world).

Methodology

Research Objectives

This study attempts to answer the following question:

What challenges and impediments do instructors face while teaching English literature at UoH?

This question has been investigated from three different, though interrelated, angles: student-related challenges, text-related challenges, and instructor and pedagogy-related challenges.

Research Instrument

To gather the data needed for this research, the researchers developed a questionnaire for instructors who teach literature at the DoE at UoH on both the male and female campuses.

The questionnaire consisted of two parts. The first Part one was concerned with the demographic information of the instructors. Part two addressed the research question from three different angles. Instructors were asked to evaluate the various statements in this part using a 5-point Likert-scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

In order to judge the validity of the research instrument, the questionnaire was given to a jury of English language instructors. The members of the jury were asked to carefully read the questionnaire and to record their comments and suggestions. All relevant comments and suggestions were taken into consideration when writing the final draft.

Data Analysis

Data gathered from questionnaire items were analyzed using Minitab 17 and Item Analysis method. In order to increase the readability of the mean scores, the following score category breakdown was adopted:

Means Corresponding level

1.0-1.80 Very low

1.81-2.60 Low

2.61-3.40 Moderate

3.41-4.20 High

4.21-5.0 Very High

Findings and Interpretations

Part One

Demographic information

The questionnaire was distributed to 12 male and 10 female instructors. These represent all instructors who were teaching literature courses at the DoE at UoH during the period of the study. Table 1 shows the area of specialization, academic rank, number of years of teaching literature prior to joining UoH and number of years the instructor has been teaching literature at UoH.

Table 1: *Demographics of the participants*

		Female	%	Male	%	Total
		N		N		
		10	45.45%	12	54.55%	22
Area of specialization	Literature	6	60.00%	11	91.67%	17
	Linguistics	1	10.00%	1	8.33%	2
	Teaching Methods	2	20.00%	0	0.00%	2
	Translation	1	10.00%	0	0.00%	1
Academic Rank	Full Professor	0	0.00%	1	8.33%	1
	Associate Professor	0	0.00%	2	16.67%	2
	Assistant Professor	4	40.00%	5	41.67%	9
Years of experience teaching literature at university level prior to joining UoH	MA holder	6	60.00%	4	33.33%	10
	More Than 6 Years	2	20.00%	4	33.33%	6
	3-6 Years	1	10.00%	4	33.33%	5
Years of experience teaching literature at UoH	1-2 Years	0	0.00%	3	25.00%	3
	None	7	70.00%	1	8.33%	8
	More Than 6 Years	0	0.00%	2	16.67%	2

Table 1 clearly shows that there are some significant differences between female and male staff members to the advantage of the latter: male instructors who teach literature outnumber female instructors (12 males to 10 females); the vast majority of male staff members who teach literature courses (91.67 %) are actually specialized in literature, while the percentage falls to (60 %) when considering female members; males hold higher academic ranks than females (none of the females is full or associate professor while (8.33%) and (16.67%) of the males are full and associate professors respectively. (40%) of the females are assistant professors and the majority (60%) are MA holders. On the other hand, only (33.33) of the males are MA holders; and while (30%) of female instructors had experience in teaching literature prior to joining UoH, the figure goes up to (91.66%) when considering male participants. Of course, the items in this part of the

questionnaire are interrelated. For example, since the number of female PhD holders who are specialized in the field of literature is inadequate, there was a need to allow instructors with degrees in methodology or linguistics to teach literature courses. Similarly, the high percentage of MA holders on the female side could be attributed to the same reason.

Part Two

Table 2: *Student-related challenges*

	5		4		3		2		1		Mean	STDE V
	SA		A		N		D		SD			
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%		
1 (Cultural barrier) Students are not sufficiently familiar with the culture and social background of the literary text.	11	50.00	8	36.36	1	4.55	2	9.09	0	0	4.27	0.94
2 (Language barrier) Students' low level of language proficiency makes it difficult to understand and appreciate the literary text.	12	54.55	9	40.91	0	0	1	4.55	0	0	4.46	0.74
3 (Historical distance) Students' unfamiliarity with the historical context of English literature makes it alien and less understandable.	4	18.18	14	63.64	3	13.64	1	4.55	0	0	3.96	0.72
4 (Emotional and social distance) It is difficult for students to relate to the literary text because it is irrelevant to their reality.	4	18.18	9	40.91	6	27.27	3	13.64	0	0	3.64	0.95
5 (Motivational problems) Students lack the motivation and the interest to engage actively with the literary text.	5	22.73	9	40.91	6	27.27	2	9.09	0	0	3.77	0.92

Table 2 shows that far more instructors believe students' low language proficiency and unfamiliarity with the cultural and social background of the text, (M=4.46) and (M=4.27) respectively, to be the most serious student-related challenges. These results are not surprising in light of the previous discussion about the dissatisfactory linguistic competence of the Saudi students and their cultural distance from the texts they are studying.

In light of the many studies which focus on the issue of the poor motivation of Saudi students as a major hindrance to their learning, the researchers had expected the mean for the motivational problems to be very high. However, the mean was (3.77) lower than the historical-distance problems (M=3.96) but higher than problems related to emotional and social distance (M= 3.64).

Table 3: *Text-related challenges*

	SA		A		N		D		SD		Mean	STD EV
	SA		A		N		D		SD			
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%		
1 Choice of texts plays a crucial role in hindering or enhancing the processes of teaching literature.	6	27.27	8	36.36	0	0	6	27.27	2	9.09	3.46	1.41

2	A text which is extremely difficult on either linguistic or cultural level will have few benefits.	6	27.27	8	36.36	4	18.18	4	18.18	0	0	3.73	1.08
3	A text which is in harmony with students' age and interests will help them better understand literary work.	6	27.27	11	50.00	2	9.09	1	4.55	2	9.09	3.82	1.18
4	A text from an alien culture written beyond students' understanding.	6	27.27	8	36.36	3	13.64	5	22.73	0	0	3.68	1.13
5	A text which involves many unfamiliar vocabulary and grammatical structures discourage the students from reading and reacting to literature.	4	18.18	13	59.09	2	9.09	3	13.64	0	0	3.82	0.91
6	A text with too many figures of speech will hinder students' understanding.	5	22.73	8	36.36	4	18.18	4	18.18	1	4.55	3.52	1.21

As Table 3 shows, all of the text-related problems were rated high with means ranging from 3.46. and 3.82. The relatively small difference between the highest and lowest means shows that instructors consider all the text-related issues to be almost of the same importance.

Instructor and Pedagogy-related challenges

The results for the final part of the questionnaire which is concerned with issues pertaining to instructors and pedagogy are shown in Table 4.

Table 4: *Issues pertaining to instructors and pedagogy*

	SA		A		N		D		SD		Mean	STD EV	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%			
1	When teaching a course on literature, my primary goal is to help my students pass their exams.	0	0	2	9.09	4	18.18	12	54.55	4	18.18	2.18	0.85
2	I encourage my students to relate the topics and themes of the literary texts to their personal experience, feelings, and opinions.	9	40.91	11	50.00	1	4.55	1	4.55	0	0	4.27	0.77
3	I spend a substantial time of my classes on creating awareness about the western culture and history.	3	13.64	11	50.00	6	27.27	2	9.09	0	0	3.68	0.84
4	I improve my students' level of language proficiency.	8	36.36	10	45.45	3	13.64	0	0	1	4.55	4.09	0.97
5	I encourage my students to read literary texts by themselves in their free time.	10	45.45	9	40.91	0	0	2	9.09	1	4.55	4.24	1.04
6	I pre-teach all new words of the assigned literary texts.	4	18.18	11	50.00	3	13.64	3	13.64	1	4.55	3.57	1.08
7	I typically focus on analyzing the main elements of the literary text (plot, theme, setting, characterization, etc.)	8	36.36	10	45.45	2	9.09	0	0	2	9.09	4.10	0.94
8	I encourage students to enjoy the literary texts as a whole and not to focus on details.	10	45.45	5	22.73	2	9.09	4	18.18	1	4.55	3.86	1.32

Two of the items listed in this part of the questionnaire have very high means. The first concerns narrowing down the distance between the students and the text by relating the themes of the text to the personal experiences and feelings of the students (M=4.27), and the second concerns

encouraging students to read literary texts independently (M=4.24). Only one of the remaining items in this part (about teaching with the idea of preparing students to pass their exams as a primary goal for instructors) had a very low mean (M=2.18). All other items had high means ranging from 3.57 and 4.10.

Conclusion

This study was designed to investigate the difficulties and challenges that face English instructors while teaching literature courses at UoH. Data analysis reveals that the instructors believe students' low language proficiency and unfamiliarity with the cultural and social background of the text to be the most serious student-related challenges. In addition, the respondents considered issues pertaining to the text such as the level of linguistic and stylistic difficulty as well as the degree of cultural (un)familiarity to be crucial issues which impact the productivity of the teaching -learning process. The participants considered narrowing the distance between students and the text by relating the themes and characters of the literary work to students' personal experiences, on the one hand, by making students read independently, on the other, among the most important practices they follow in order to help students read, enjoy and comprehend literature.

This study sheds light on some of the challenges that hinder the teaching -learning process of English literature at one of the Saudi public universities from the instructors' perspective. To have a more comprehensive understanding of this issue, further studies need to be conducted in other Saudi universities not only to investigate the instructors' perspectives and compare them to results obtained from this study but also to explore this issue from the students' perspective.

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Dr. Elham T. Hussein earned her PhD in Modern British and American Drama from Purdue University. She taught literature at The Hashemite University in Jordan for five years and then moved to Hail University in KSA, where she is currently teaching. Dr. Hussein teaches a wide spectrum of literature courses but mainly courses on modern drama, fiction and poetry. In addition, she offers training courses in creative thinking and writing. Her research interests include political memoirs and Palestinian literature.

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