

The Effect of Including Literary Texts in English Language Instruction in Slovenia

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Abstract

This article provides an overview of the Slovenian syllabuses for English as a school subject over the past 80 years, focusing on literary texts as content. The findings are correlated with trends in ELT of the relevant periods, which are typically mirrored in the contents and structure of formally approved and widely used coursebooks in Slovenia. The results are compared with recent trends in ELT in Slovenia using two methods: a) an analysis of the extent of literary content featured in a selected corpus of formally approved contemporary English coursebooks used in Slovenian primary schools, and b) an analysis of Slovene primary school students' success in standardized testing. Finally, a synthesis of these analyses is provided to shed light on the effectiveness of including literary content in ELT, as reflected in the primary school students' standardized test scores.

Keywords: Slovenian syllabuses, literary texts, ELT trends, coursebooks, standardized testing

1. Introduction

According to Kramsh and Kramsh (2000), throughout the 20th century, literature played various roles within ELT: it was used for the aesthetic education of the few (1910s), for the literacy of the many (1920s), for moral and vocational uplift (1930s-1940s), for ideational content (1950s), for humanistic inspiration (1960s-1970s), and for providing an "authentic" experience of the target culture (1980s-1990s) (adapted from Skela, 2013). Consequently, its substance and purpose have significantly adapted, reflecting shifts in the primary focus and goals of ELT. While literary texts were once central to foreign language teaching during the grammar-translation method era, serving as models of good writing and illustrations of grammatical rules (Duff and Maley 1990; quoted in Skela, 2013), the increased demand for English shifted ELT's focus from producing scholarly elites to creating large numbers of communicatively competent users. As a result, literature came to be seen as irrelevant (Maley 2001; quoted in Skela, 2013).

Despite the longstanding tradition of integrating literature into English language teaching (ELT), there remains a significant gap in research regarding its effectiveness in enhancing language acquisition and proficiency. This article aims to identify the role literature has played in ELT in Slovenia over the last few decades. By examining past Slovene syllabuses, the article traces the transformation of literature from being the primary content carrier in language instruction to being replaced by cultural content in non-literary texts and its introduction in lower grades. In addition to examining past and present syllabuses, the research is based on coursebook analysis, and standardized test scores. It seeks to estimate the current place of literature in Slovenian primary school English instruction and assess its effectiveness against the results of standardized testing administered in the 6th and 9th grades over the past 15 years.

2. Historical Overview of Literature Featured in Slovene English Language Syllabuses

The emergence of English language teaching in Slovenia dates back to the year 1945, when first textbooks were published, accounting for an almost 80-year tradition of ELT instruction in Slovenia. Since then and up to the present, the English language instruction techniques and approaches have undergone a substantial development process in terms of 'the what and the how', which is usually reflected in the structure and content of English language coursebooks. A colourful range of the most prominent methods that developed in the 20th century, among them widely implemented Grammar-Translation, Direct Method, Audio-lingual, and Communicative

Approach, all featured the cultural component as an integral part of ELT, and as such it was tightly linked to using literature as content. McKay (2001) argues that literature is “an ideal resource for integrating the four skills, while also raising cross-cultural awareness” (quoted in Skela, 2013). This endorsement of literature in the context of fostering (cross-)cultural awareness consolidated its place as the primary carrier of cultural content and firmly promoted the idea that separating “literature from language [was] a false dualism since literature is language and language can indeed be literary” (Savvidou, 2004; quoted in Skela, 2013). Furthermore, Paran and Robinson (2018) highlight that the practice of using literature in ELT has a long tradition, emphasizing its role in engaging students and promoting language proficiency. Activities based on literary texts often require students to use multiple skills simultaneously, promoting a more holistic approach to language learning. Reading and analysing literary texts expand reading comprehension and fluency (Arabati, 2023), enhances students' writing skills (Perumal and Perumal, 2020), improves pronunciation, intonation, and listening skills (Ambubuyog et al., 2023). It provides insights into different cultures, historical contexts, and social issues, which fosters empathy and a deeper understanding of diverse perspectives (Arabati, 2023), in addition to boosting critical thinking and analytical skills, along with students' engagement and motivation.

2.1 Early Developments (1940s-1970s)

A review of the past English language syllabuses in Slovenia since the 1940s reveals that literature has been featured in all of them, with considerable differences in its extent and the intended level of education. In the earliest syllabus from 1948, literature occupied a prominent position in English language instruction at the secondary level. The objectives included developing the ability to independently read newspapers, literary and technical texts, and acquiring a higher level of understanding the culture and civilization of the English-speaking world (Umek, 1988).

2.2 Shifts in Focus (1980s-1990s)

Following the developments in English Language Teaching (ELT) during the 1970s, the emphasis on literature began to diminish, giving way to a greater focus on (cross-)cultural skills, awareness-raising, and civilization. The 1975 syllabus in Slovenia highlighted the importance of understanding the culture and civilization of English-speaking countries, developing critical thinking skills, and fostering awareness of international cooperation (Syllabus for English, Ministry of Education; in Skela 2013).

The vehicles of cultural content shifted from literary texts to a broader range of materials, including texts about school, family, the learners' homeland, and the target-language countries. This change reflected a move towards more practical and relatable content for students, aiming to enhance their communicative competence and cultural understanding (Skela, 2013).

2.3 Modern Practices (2000s-Present)

From the 1990s onwards, communicative competence and the development of all four language macro skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) gained prominence in the national curricula for high schools in Slovenia. Following the 1996 curricular reform, the Slovenian national syllabuses for English introduced in 1998 and 2008 both strongly emphasized Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) as the standard approach for teaching foreign languages in Slovenia (Ministry of Education; in Skela, 2013).

The 1996 curricular reform was a significant milestone in Slovenian education, aligning the national education system with European standards and promoting a more student-centered approach (Svetlik & Barle Lakota, 2000). The reform aimed to enhance the quality of education by focusing on the development of key competencies, including communicative competence in foreign languages (Ministry of Education, 1996).

The Slovenian national syllabus for English introduced in 1998 marked a shift towards CLT, which prioritizes the practical use of language in real-life situations and the development of communicative competence over rote learning of grammatical rules (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). This approach was further reinforced in the 2008 syllabus, which continued to build on the principles of CLT and aimed to develop students' ability to use English effectively in various contexts (Skela and Sešek, 2012).

The literature component in the Slovenian English language syllabus of 2008 is designed to encourage students "to independently read literary texts in English" and to develop intercultural reading competence for creative reading and understanding of complete literary texts (Ministry of Education, in Skela 2013).

3. Emergence of the CLT

During the late 20th century, there was a significant shift in English Language Teaching (ELT) towards communicative approaches, primarily driven by the need to develop communicative competence among learners. This shift marked a departure from traditional methods like the Grammar-Translation and Audio-Lingual methods, which focused heavily on grammatical accuracy and rote memorization. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) emerged as a dominant approach during this period, emphasizing the ability to use language effectively and appropriately in real-life situations, rather than merely mastering grammatical rules.

This approach was influenced by several key theories and developments, such as Hymes' Concept of Communicative Competence, which introduced the idea that knowing a language involves the ability to use language appropriately in various social contexts (Hymes, 1972), Stephen Krashen's Input Hypothesis which proposed that language acquisition occurs when learners are exposed to comprehensible input slightly above their current proficiency level (Krashen, 1982), Michael Long's Interaction Hypothesis emphasizing the role of interaction in language learning and suggesting that negotiating meaning through communication helps learners acquire language more effectively (Long, 1983).

This shift led to a decline in the use of literature in language classrooms, as literature was often seen as less relevant to the immediate communicative needs of learners, which further fostered a reduced emphasis on literary texts. The latter were often replaced by more functional and authentic materials, such as newspapers, advertisements, and dialogues that reflected everyday language use (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). Cultural component was integrated, delivered through various non-literary texts that provided insights into the target culture and facilitated cross-cultural understanding (McKay, 2001), while literature was de-emphasized.

The primary goal of language teaching became enabling students to communicate effectively in real-world situations. This practical orientation often sidelined the use of literature, which was traditionally valued for its aesthetic and cultural richness rather than its immediate communicative utility (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011). Despite this decline, literature has not been entirely abandoned in ELT. In recent years, there has been a renewed interest in using literature to enhance language learning, particularly for its potential to develop critical thinking, cultural awareness, and advanced language skills (Paran & Robinson, 2018).

A recent study on modern ELT practices and the integration of literature by Oviedo-Gómez (2024) identifies and examines seven tensions in the relationship between Critical Interculturality and EFL textbooks. This review highlights the complexities and challenges of integrating cultural content in language instruction. Additionally, Oviedo Gómez and Álvarez Guayara (2019) explore the contribution of customized lessons with cultural content in the learning of EFL among undergraduates. Their findings underscore the positive impact of culturally relevant materials on language acquisition and student engagement.

4. Identified Research Gaps

A review of research on the use of literary content in primary school English instruction in Slovenia reveals a handful of studies, albeit with somewhat weak focus on the topic. Kerneža and Saksida (2024) investigated Slovenian language teachers' attitudes towards using comics and found (1) strong influence by certain stereotypes and (2) a need for more teacher training to effectively integrate comics as a literary-didactic method. Švajger (2022) explored differentiation in literacy lessons in the first and second grades of Slovenian primary schools. This study highlights how teachers adapt lessons to students' individual abilities and interests, which can include the use of various literary texts to cater to different learning needs. Emery (2012) provided a comprehensive overview of primary English teachers' qualifications, training, teaching experience, and career development in Slovenia. While not specifically focused on literary content, this study offers context on the overall teaching environment and practices, which can include the use of literature in instruction. Petek (2024) investigated views of Slovenian elementary school teachers on interpretive reading. This study assumed that interpretive reading by the teacher plays a central role in the recommended model of school interpretation of literary texts for developing student reading ability. It suggests that literary texts are used to enhance reading skills and comprehension.

These studies indicate that while there is some use of literary content in primary school English instruction, there is also a need for more focused research on this specific aspect. The integration of literature, including non-traditional forms like comics, is influenced by teachers' attitudes and the need for professional development.

5. Corpus, Scope, and Data Collection Methodology

The present research examines the literary content featured in the selected corpus of English language coursebooks, composed of the most widely used English coursebooks in primary education in Slovenia, more specifically in the last three grades of primary school. As at least an 8-year primary education is obligatory by law, the coursebooks used in public schools need to be approved by the National Education Institute Slovenia (Zavod Republike Slovenije za šolstvo, abbreviated to ZRSŠ).

5.1 Coursebook Corpus Selection Criteria

The analysed coursebooks were selected on the criteria of frequency of use and relevance to the research focus.

In reference to coursebook selection, the frequency of use in public elementary school programs is determined by several factors: formal approval, teachers' preference, and teachers' autonomy. The general principle applied in selecting the coursebooks for English language instruction in Slovenian public education is formal approval by the official body (ZRSŠ). However, the list of approved coursebooks is long (for the final three-year cycle of elementary school, 13 coursebook series are currently approved for English). Since teachers have the autonomy to select from the list, we have focused on examining those which are used most frequently. The top four selected coursebooks (Messages, Right on, Touchstone and Wider World) are estimated to cover approximately 90% of English language instruction in Slovenian public schools.

In terms of relevance to the research focus, the coursebooks for the final three years of elementary school were selected on the basis of inclusion of literary content. In comparison, the coursebooks used in lower grades of primary schools (1st through 6th) do not typically include (authentic) literary texts as the level of English is not yet conducive to reading and analysing literary writing. Therefore, the research focuses on the coursebooks for the final three-year cycle of primary education (7th, 8th and 9th grade).

The corpus thus consists of 10 different coursebook series (English Plus, Messages, New Challenges, Project Explore, Right on, Sprint, Think, Touchstone, Wider World, English in Mind; see Appendix for more detailed information), of which 2 are homegrown (Sprint and Touchstone; published in Slovenia by Eli Modrijan and Tangram, respectively). Five are foreign-produced and published in cooperation between UK and Slovene publishers (Messages, New Challenges, Right on, Think, and Wider World). The remaining three coursebooks are published by UK publishers, with potential global publishing and distribution interests (OUP and CUP).

5.2 Data Collection Methodology

The data collection criteria applied was strongly based on the scope and the type of literary texts included in coursebook content. The methodology employed was a page-by-page analysis of the coursebooks from the selected corpus (see Appendix). The collected data on literary content for each coursebook series was presented in a separate table, featuring information on the name of the coursebook series, the grade in which it was used, the names of segregated sections (often featuring literature and culture pages), the list of literary texts and the authors (where applicable). The presentation of data in this manner offered an insight into the scope of literary content according to the grade in individual coursebooks and whether literary content was subject to increase in scope in higher grades. It also allowed comparison between different coursebooks as it clearly showed how much or if any literary content was included in different coursebooks.

For further insight into the students' progress in English language proficiency, the data on the past 15 years of national standardized testing (in Slovene: NPZ – Nacionalno preverjanje znanja) scores for 6th and 9th grades of elementary school was obtained and presented in two separate tables, the first one structured by year of testing, the other one by year of birth. This way the scores could be observed within the same year of the national testing, as well as within the same generation of students in two different grades (6th and 9th).

By correlating the two sets of data, that is the scope of literary content in coursebooks and the national standardised testing success, we could see if the test scores reveal any significant increase in students' general English language performance. Namely, studies have shown that including literature in English language classroom instruction at beginner levels not only serves as a medium for personal enrichment, but also represents a notable contribution to increasing the students' academic performance. One such example is a longitudinal research study (Ghosn 2010), which compared proficiency in English vocabulary, grammar and reading comprehension of students in literature-based instruction (using reading anthologies) against those using international ESL course books. The research results confirmed that on the aspects of reading comprehension and vocabulary development students in the literature-based programs significantly outscored those using the communicative coursebooks.

6. Coursebook Research Results

The focus of the coursebook series analysis are the student's books, with specific attention on general literary content, referring to any English-speaking as well as non-English-speaking country, including legends, fairytales, and similar genres. In addition, data on segregated sections has been collected as it suggests the general structure of the coursebook and reveals the author's/-s' tendency to cluster similar content or separate the more pragmatic aspects of language teaching and learning, such as writing projects, research projects or CLIL, for instance. These segregated sections often include culture and literature, which in itself binds the two concepts, as well as gives them prominence, possibly as model examples of language use in their respective fields (CLIL as non-literary content and literature as an art form). On the flip side, relegating literary content to a segregated section might imply its reduced relevance in ELT as the assigned slot at the end of a coursebook often includes materials which are not addressed or processed due to lack of time or motivation.

6.1 *English Plus*

In the coursebook series English Plus, the 7th grade coursebook English Plus 1 features four segregated sections at the end of the coursebook (Extra Listening and Speaking, Curriculum Extra, Culture, and Vocabulary puzzles), whereas English Plus 2 and English Plus 3, used in the 8th and 9th grades, respectively, feature five segregated sections – Extra Listening and Speaking, Curriculum Extra, Culture, Project, and Song. This attests to the systematic scaling of the content according to the grade, with additional sections extending the syllabus as the student progresses. Culture, however, is featured in all grades. In reference to the literary content, it has been established that for each grade, one or two literary texts are typically included.

6.2 *Messages*

The coursebook series Messages features segregated sections on culture called Extra Reading – Life and culture, and CLIL sections called Curriculum studies. The actual literary content in this series is rather scarce (one per each grade), often supplemented by mentions of books (e.g. *The Curious Incident of the Dog In the Night-Time* by Mark Haddon), book reviews (e.g. *Fast Food Nation* by Eric Schlosser), songs (e.g. *Chapel of love*, *I can see clearly*), mentions of authors (e.g. Shakespeare), and a summary of *Romeo and Juliet*. An interesting feature of Messages 2 in this coursebook series, are two storylines *Wild flowers* and *Swim!*, both featured in 6 Chapters. This translates to a story which runs the length of the materials, with one episode per unit.

6.3 *New Challenges*

The coursebook series New Challenges features four segregated sections on culture called Across Cultures. In reference to literary content, it is interesting to note that none is included in the coursebook for the 7th grade, while the 8th and 9th grade coursebooks each contain several examples of literary texts. In most cases, for practical reasons (to make them more manageable in class as well as more accessible to or suitable for students in terms of difficulty), the texts included are abridged, adapted, summaries or simply excerpts.

6.4 *Right on*

The coursebook series Right on features the following segregated sections after each module: Across Cultures, CLIL, Projects, Values, and Presentation Skills. At the end of the coursebook, there are the following segregated sections: Songs, Festivities, World Tales, and Culture. Among the analysed coursebooks, this one is the only really glocalised coursebook, i.e. it has been specifically adapted for use in Slovenia, and consequently contains a lot of source language cultural content. It also accounts for the inclusion of a Slovene literary text, namely *Martin Krpan* by Fran Levstik. The final count shows several (at least two) literary texts included per each grade.

6.5 *Sprint*

The coursebook series Sprint features segregated sections on CLIL called Build your competences – CLIL (at the end of every unit), and culture sections called Culture (at the end of the coursebook). In terms of literary content, there is one entry per each grade.

6.6 *Think*

The coursebook series Think features segregated sections on culture called Culture (at the end of every second unit), on CLIL (at the end of the coursebook), and literature called Literature Extra (at the end of the coursebook). The literary content included in all three grades is abundant in this coursebook series.

6.7 Touchstone

In the Touchstone series, Touchstone 7 contains a segregated section on culture called Cultural Beachhead. Coursebooks Touchstone 8 and Touchstone 9 contain an additional segregated section on literature (called Literature: captivating, inspiring and entertaining). In the analysed corpus, Touchstone is the only locally produced coursebook series and contains also Slovene literary texts and references, as well as other examples of non-English-speaking authors, such as Serbian poet Desanka Maksimović, for instance. The coursebook also by far exceeds the number of included literary texts for all three grades, in addition to the segregated section on literature.

6.8 Wider World

In the coursebook series Wider World, the 7th grade coursebook Wider World 2 features segregated sections on culture called Culture BBC (at the end of every unit). Wider World 3 and Wider World 4 also feature segregated sections on culture called Culture BBC (at the end of every unit), but they also include additional Culture pages at the back of the coursebook, and CLIL sections. Therefore, cultural content is abundantly covered, but not through any literary texts, according to the analysis results.

6.9 English in Mind

The coursebook series English in Mind features two segregated sections – Culture in Mind (in all coursebooks in the series) and Fiction in Mind (in coursebook 3) or Literature in Mind (coursebook 4). Culture is therefore favoured as the more appropriate content in the lower grades (in this case the 7th), which is then upgraded to more literary content of fiction and literature in the 8th and the 9th grades, respectively.

6.10 Project Explore

The coursebook series Project Explore doesn't include any segregated sections, nor does it include literary texts in the two lower grades (the 7th and the 8th), while in the 9th grade coursebook two literary entries by three authors are featured. The My Project section, though, encourages students to bring to class the short stories they expect their peers might enjoy, or write their own stories, which might constitute literary content as well.

7. Synthesis of Coursebook Analysis

The analysis of segregated sections reveals that culture pages are featured in all the analyzed coursebook series, except for Project Explore. Separate sections on literature are included in Right on, Sprint, Touchstone, and English in Mind. This observation suggests that culture has been widely accepted as the fifth language skill, while literature has taken a back seat to it. Once considered the chief carrier of culture, in the primary school curriculum in Slovenia, literature has secured its place in some, yet hardly the majority of coursebooks formally approved by the National Education Institute. While catering to students' language proficiency levels and conceptual aptitude by exposing them to suitably adjusted materials might seem like the sensible direction to take, it is not consistent with the findings of Ghosn's study, as cited above. The study results clearly point to multiple beneficial effects of using literature in English instruction, even with beginners, rather than relegating it to the role it has assumed in the segregated sections. These sections are often intended for use only if time permits, or meant for those more proficient students seeking to take on additional challenges, thus securing an even firmer advantage.

8. National Standardized Testing Scores

In the context of establishing the place of literature in Slovene English syllabuses, past and present, and sifting the coursebook content for extent of literary entries, we now look at the Slovene students' proficiency levels achieved in primary school national examinations. Students' scores and statistical data on national standardized testing is available online (RIC – Republiški izpitni center → National Examinations Centre) from the year 2008 onwards, except for the 2020 COVID-19 year when national testing was suspended. The year 2008 also coincides with the year of the last published primary school national syllabus for English.

8.1 Presentation of Data on Standardized Test Scores by Academic Year

- Table 1 presents the standardized test scores and the number of students that took the English test, arranged by individual academic year. This way we can gain insight into the levels achieved in the same year by two different generations of students. The standardized tests are administered at the end of the 6th and the 9th grades. The subjects tested are Slovene, Math and English for 6th-graders, while for 9th-graders it's Slovene and Math, while the third subject is selected by individual school regions on a yearly basis. Therefore, not all 9th-graders take English on these tests.

Table 1. List of NPZ scores for English by academic year

Academic year	No. of students	NPZ 6 th grade results in %	No. of students	NPZ 9 th grade results in %
2024	20,445	Not yet available	4,718	Not yet available
2023	20,292	68.7	4,785	58.9
2022	20,638	63.5	4,544	57.4
2021	19,357	66.8	4,170	63.7
2019	18,723	51.4	4,066	55.7
2018	17,925	51.1	3,882	59.8
2017	17,022	57.4	4,229	61.7
2016	16,857	49.6	4,120	61.6
2015	16,266	51.0	4,137	67.8
2014	16,617	48.3	3,991	61.4
2013	15,054	56.8	253	64.1
2012	15,652	50.3	X	X
2011	14,681	58.6	5,731	61.04
2010	14,723	72.51	X	X
2009	14,370	69.43	4,256	64.7
2008	7,651	63.6	X	X
AVERAGE	16,642	62.8	4,067	61.49

At a glance, we can notice that generally the results were better for the 9th-graders, with some exceptions in years 2009, 2010, 2021-23. Without looking into individual cases, it is difficult to draw a plausible conclusion as to why this occurs, but the drop over the past three consecutive years is nevertheless noticeable and possibly linked to the consequences of the COVID years, which were heavily marked by distant learning.

Table 1 also provides calculations of the average values in the number of students that took the test (the sample is on average 16,642 in the 6th grade and 4,067 in the 9th grade) and the scores achieved. With averages of 62.8 and 61.49 for 6th and 9th grades, respectively, students seem to be very close in proficiency in both standardized examinations when compared across all the generations on which we have available data. Despite seeming fluctuations, though, there seems to be a steady trend in terms of proficiency levels within the context of the national examination results.

8.2 Statistical Analysis of Data by Academic Year

Table 2 summarizes the key statistical metrics for the NPZ results of 6th and 9th grades, highlighting the weak correlations and non-significant p-values. For 6th grade, the weak negative correlation and non-significant p-value suggest that the number of students does not significantly impact NPZ results. Similarly for 9th grade, the weak negative correlation and non-significant p-value indicate no significant relationship between the number of students and NPZ results.

Table 2. Statistical analysis of the NPZ scores for English by academic year

Statistic	6th Grade NPZ Results	9th Grade NPZ Results
Count	15	12
Mean	58.60%	61.49%
Standard Deviation	8.26%	3.33%
Minimum	48.3%	55.7%
25th Percentile	51.05%	59.58%
Median (50th Percentile)	57.4%	61.5%
75th Percentile	65.2%	63.8%
Maximum	72.51%	67.8%
Correlation (No. of students vs. NPZ results)	-0.08	-0.27
Linear Regression Slope	-0.00	-0.00
Linear Regression Intercept	62.18	64.33
R-value	-0.08	-0.27
P-value	0.77	0.39
Standard Error	0.00	0.00

These results suggest that other factors might be influencing NPZ scores more significantly than the number of students.

8.3 Presentation of Data on Standardized Test Scores by Generation

Table 3 presents the standardized test scores, arranged by the students' year of birth, and the calculation of the difference between their 6th- and 9th-grade test results within the same generation. For all values, averages have been calculated and are presented in the bottom line. Only the generations which were tested in both 6th and 9th grades are included.

Table 3. List of NPZ scores for English by generation

Gen. born in the year:	NPZ 6 th grade results in %	NPZ 9 th grade results in %	difference
2007	51.4	58.9	7.5
2006	51.1	57.4	6.3
2005	57.4	63.7	6.3
2004	49.6	55.7	6.1
2003	51.1	59.8	8.8
2002	48.3	61.7	13.4
2001	56.8	61.6	4.8
2000	50.3	67.8	17.5
1999	58.6	61.4	2.8
1998	72.51	64.1	-8.41
1996	63.6	61.04	-2.56
AVERAGE	55.51	61.1	5.68

The results arranged by generation reveal several interesting points of observation. The generation of 2000, for instance, which ranked the third lowest in the 6th grade (the lowest being 48.3- the generation of 2002), experienced the biggest increase, that of 17.5 percentage points in the 9th-grade scores. The generation of 1998, which scored the highest in the 6th-grade, marked the biggest dip in the 9th-grade with a -8.41-percentage point drop. Except for the generations of 1996 and 1998, all others scored better in the 9th grade compared to their 6th

grade scores, with an increase of 5.68 percentage points on average. The average 6th grade score is 55.51, while the average 9th grade score is 61.1. This is an intriguing observation as the averages on both grades by academic year suggest that there is very little difference in results on average between the 6th and the 9th grade students and that their performance has been overall steady over the past 15 years, while the averages of the 6th and the 9th grade tests within the same generation reveal that there is in fact a bigger gap in their performance, suggesting that the students' proficiency increased by 5.68 percentage points over the three-year period between the two tests.

8.4 Statistical Analysis of Data by Generation

Results presented in Tables 4 and 5 provide insights into the trends and relationships between NPZ scores across different generations. Figures in Table 5 show a weak positive correlation (0.33) between 6th and 9th grade NPZ results, indicating a slight relationship. There is a strong negative correlation (-0.89) between 6th grade NPZ results and the difference, suggesting that higher 6th grade scores are associated with smaller differences. The linear regression between 6th and 9th grade NPZ results shows (1) a slope of 0.15, indicating a slight increase in 9th grade scores with higher 6th grade scores, and (2) a slope of -0.85, indicating that higher 6th grade scores lead to smaller differences.

Table 4. Statistical analysis for NPZ results by generation

Statistic	NPZ 6th Grade Results	NPZ 9th Grade Results	Grade Difference
Count	11	11	11
Mean	55.52%	61.19%	5.68
Standard Deviation	7.34%	3.33%	6.99
Minimum	48.3%	55.7%	-8.41
25th Percentile	50.7%	59.35%	3.8
Median (50th Percentile)	51.4%	61.4%	6.3
75th Percentile	58.0%	62.7%	5.24
Maximum	72.51%	67.8%	17.5

Table 5. Correlation and Linear Regression Analysis

Analysis	Correlation	Slope	Intercept	R-value	P-value	Standard Error
6th vs. 9th Grade NPZ Results	0.33	0.15	52.88	0.33	0.32	0.14
6th Grade NPZ vs. Difference	-0.89	-0.85	52.93	-0.89	0.00	0.14

8.5 Synthesis of NPZ Scores Data Analysis

As the figures suggest, the trends in NPZ results for both 6th- and 9th-grades show a significant decline in 6th-graders' scores from around 72.5% in 2010 to approximately 48.3% in 2014. For the 9th-graders, the trend shows a gradual decline from 61.04% in 2011 to 58.9% in 2023. Notable changes include a peak around 2015 (67.8%), with both grades overall experiencing fluctuations.

These trends in NPZ results for both 6th- and 9th-grades could be influenced by several factors, such as educational policies and curriculum changes (for instance, shifts in testing formats, grading systems, or subject emphasis), student demographics (socioeconomic status, language proficiency, learning disabilities), school resources and infrastructure (adequate resources e.g., textbooks, technology, facilities, funding, class sizes), student motivation and engagement (peer relationships, school culture, extracurricular activities), standardized testing pressure, external factors (economic, social, health).

9. Discussion

The manifold benefits of reading literary texts are unquestionable, and it is therefore not surprising that they would find their way from mother tongue acquisition to foreign language learning. The investigation into the past approaches to foreign language teaching, such as the grammar-translation method, supports this claim and shows that literature was prominently featured as a model of language use and culture carrier, which was often reflected in the Slovenian national syllabuses.

These findings correlate with the coursebook analysis results, where it has been revealed that literature was prominently featured in the English coursebooks used in Slovenia from the 1940s onwards. Despite its evident advantage in the past, literature has come to be replaced by other culture-rich content in contemporary English coursebooks, due to its status as the global lingua franca. Given that literature is often regarded as ‘difficult’, its replacement by other types of content, less demanding yet still rich in cultural information, was warranted. This way, English language instruction was not only catering to the elites, while gaining its grasp became more accessible to wider audiences. Recently published coursebooks, approved for use in Slovene primary schools, reveal this trend, with relatively scarce literary content overall, while culture is featured abundantly, also in segregated sections at the end of individual modules and/or on the back pages of the coursebook. These features attest to the fact that the status of literature in ELT has been transformed.

Nevertheless, even if literature was in the past regarded as suitable only for secondary level education, it has over the years percolated down to the 7th grade of Slovene primary schools. Correlation of the observed syllabus and coursebook features with the standardized test scores reveals that English language instruction in Slovenian primary schools has been relatively successful, as the results show a steady improvement in students’ 9th grade scores compared to their 6th grade test results. The averages for both grades over the past 15-year period also show a solid over 60% score in both years tested, hinting at the possibility that the approaches to teaching English and the corresponding coursebook content positively affect the students’ achievement levels. However, the reasons for this are probably multilayered, among them overall accessibility of literary texts and English language input in contemporary technologically driven society, and therefore cannot be ascribed to the use of literary content alone.

10. Research Limitations

There seems to be a significant research gap in exploring the use of literary texts in developing English language skills at primary level of education in Slovenia. While this study provides valuable insights into the role of literature in English language teaching (ELT) in Slovenia, several limitations should be acknowledged:

10.1 Definition of Literary Content

The study uses a broad definition of literary content, including various genres and text types. However, the specific characteristics and quality of the literary texts were not analysed in detail. The impact of different types of literary content on language learning outcomes may vary.

10.2 Integration of Literature

The study focuses on the presence of literary content in coursebooks but does not examine how literature is integrated into classroom instruction. The effectiveness of literature-based teaching methods depends on how teachers use and adapt literary texts to meet their students’ needs.

10.3 Correlation vs. Causation

The study identifies correlations between literary content in coursebooks and student performance but does not establish causation. Other factors, such as teaching methods, teacher expertise, and student motivation, could also influence the observed outcomes.

10.4 Limited Sample Size

The study is based on a specific sample of coursebooks and standardized test scores from Slovenian primary schools. While the sample size is substantial, it may not fully represent the diversity of teaching practices and student experiences across different regions and schools.

10.5 Generalizability

The findings are specific to the Slovenian context and may not be directly applicable to other countries or educational systems. Differences in curricula, cultural contexts, and educational policies can influence the effectiveness of integrating literature into ELT.

10.6 Changes Over Time

The study spans a period of 15 years, during which educational policies, teaching practices, and societal attitudes towards English language learning may have evolved. These changes could impact the relevance and applicability of the findings to current and future educational contexts.

10.7 Impact of COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted education systems worldwide, including Slovenia. The shift to remote learning and the suspension of national testing in 2020 may have affected student performance and the implementation of literature-based instruction.

Acknowledging these limitations is crucial for interpreting the study's findings and for guiding future research. Despite these constraints, the study provides a valuable contribution to understanding the role of literature in ELT and highlights the need for further empirical research to explore the complex interactions between literary content, teaching practices, and language learning outcomes.

11. Relevance to International Audience

Although this study is based on data from Slovenia, the findings have broader implications for English language teaching worldwide. The evolving role of literature in ELT in Slovenia highlights the importance of adapting teaching methods to meet changing educational needs and cultural contexts. This case study can offer valuable insights for other countries and educational systems, emphasizing the need for flexibility and innovation in language instruction. By (re-)integrating literature into English language curricula, educators can enhance cultural awareness, critical thinking, and language proficiency, benefiting students globally.

12. Implications for Including Literature-based Components into Coursebook Design

Developing literature-based components in coursebooks can enhance language learning by integrating rich, authentic texts that engage students and foster various language skills. To effectively incorporate literature-based components, educators should select texts that are culturally and contextually relevant to the learners (Al-Mousawi, 2020), addressing themes that resonate with students' interests and experiences. Some authors propose an integrated skills approach (Howard & Major, 2012), with tasks that encourage students to analyse and interpret the text and connecting it to broader social and cultural contexts (Patel & Vyas, 2018).

Offering a variety of texts and activities to cater to different proficiency levels and learning styles ensures that all students can participate meaningfully and benefit from the literature-based approach (Patel & Vyas, 2018). Developing assessment tools that evaluate students' comprehension, analytical skills, and creative responses, and providing constructive feedback to help them improve their literary analysis and language skills, is also important (Howard & Major, 2012).

13. Future Insights

Looking ahead, technological advancements and global trends are poised to significantly influence the role of literature in English language teaching. The integration of digital tools and platforms can make literature more accessible and interactive. For instance, e-books and online literary resources can provide students with instant access to a wide range of texts, while multimedia elements such as audio and video adaptations can enhance comprehension and engagement (Chong, 2024).

Moreover, global trends emphasize the importance of developing critical thinking and intercultural competencies. Literature, with its rich cultural and thematic content, is an ideal medium for fostering these skills. By incorporating global issues and diverse perspectives into literature-based activities, educators can help students become more globally aware and empathetic (Chong, 2021).

In addition, the rise of artificial intelligence and adaptive learning technologies offers new possibilities for personalized learning experiences. AI-driven platforms can tailor literary content to individual students' interests and proficiency levels, providing customized feedback and support to enhance their learning outcomes (Vaishnav, 2024).

By thoughtfully integrating these components and leveraging technological advancements, coursebooks can make literature a central part of language learning, enriching students' educational experience and fostering a deeper appreciation for the language and its cultural contexts.

14. Conclusion

Reading literary texts can significantly enhance foreign language proficiency. It contributes to language development in many ways, such as enhanced language awareness (Fogal and Pinner, 2019:202-228), improved listening and speaking skills (Hamane & Guetalia 2022), natural input and authentic grammar (Paiker 2021). Since English is so widely present and readily available in the environment, it has assumed the position of a second rather than foreign language in many countries around the world. Consequently, the proficiency levels reach higher in most learners and introducing literary texts, which are considered more demanding, especially in their authentic form, is more feasible than with other foreign languages. It would be interesting to compare the results with those referring to foreign language instruction other than English to see if similar trends and benefits are observed.

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Online Resources

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Appendix

List of Coursebook Series Selected for Analysis

No.	INFO Coursebook	Name of publisher	Country of publication	Intended grade		
				7 th	8 th	9 th
1	English Plus	OUP	UK	1	2	3
2	Messages	CUP, ROKUS KLETT	UK, SLO	2	3	4
3	New Challenges	PEARSON	UK	1	2	3
4	Project Explore	OUP	UK	2	3	4
5	Right on	EXPRESS PUBLISHING, DZS	UK, SLO	2	3	4
6	Sprint	Eli, MODRIJAN	Italy, SLO	2	3	4
7	Think	CUP, ROKUS KLETT	UK, SLO	2	3	4
8	Touchstone	ZALOŽBA TANGRAM	SLO	7	8	9
9	Wider World	PEARSON	UK	2	3	4
10	English in Mind	CUP	UK	2	3	4

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