

First-year English majors' reading habits, reading skills and strategies from EFL and English literature tutors' perspective: An interview study

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ABSTRACT

Preparing English as a foreign language (EFL) students for final exams and language exams has become more and more significant in secondary education. However, those students who continue their studies as English majors have to live up to new expectations and rise to different challenges such as reading and discussing literary texts written in English. Thus, they would need help, nevertheless it is generally believed in many university courses that students have already reached the needed language proficiency level and they are able to read academic texts in English without having difficulties (Paran, 2008). Therefore, first-year English majors are often unprepared to cope with the demands made on them in literature courses. The main objective of this interview study, involving four EFL and four English literature tutors from a university in Hungary, is to explore the tutors' perceptions on first-year English majors' reading habits, what reading skills and strategies are required in literature courses. The findings provide an insight into some of the issues related to reading texts in English, what demands English majors have to meet when they enter tertiary education, and some possible solutions.

KEYWORDS

reading skills, reading strategies, tertiary education, reading problems, literature in the EFL classroom

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INTRODUCTION

The idea that language and literature should not be treated as separate areas in the foreign language classroom is certainly not novel. Literature has been present in foreign language education for over a century, however, its role has been constantly changing (Carter, 2007; Kramersch & Kramersch, 2000). Since the 1970s, when communicative language teaching emerged, literature has been considered as authentic material, thus an ideal source for teaching “real” language and the culture of the target countries for EFL students (Carter, 2007; Hall, 2005). More recently, the “re-emergence of literature as a valuable component in FL teaching” (Bloemert, Paran, Jansen, & van de Grift, 2017, p. 371) has promoted the exploration of possibilities that literary texts entail.

Despite its reconsidered place in the EFL classroom and its advocates, literature is still separated from language teaching – especially in tertiary education. In many university EFL courses literature is still regarded and treated as a form of art, thus literature is discussed without paying attention to language development, and “any focus on language is on its literary effects” (Paran, 2008, p. 467) since it is assumed and expected that university students have already obtained the necessary language proficiency in second language (L2) that is needed to discuss literary texts in a foreign language (Paran, 2008). However, numerous university students, especially first-year university students, seem to struggle with reading, processing and discussing literary texts in a foreign language as they “are rarely equipped for the demand made upon them by the literary departments of universities and colleges” (Short & Candlin, 1986, p. 92). First-year university students often lack proper reading skills and strategies, as in their earlier studies they have had “little exposure to the reading of complex, connected text” (Short & Candlin, 1986, p. 92).

This study aims to explore university tutors’ expectations towards English majors and their perceptions of the students’ reading skills and strategies. The research investigates first-year English major university students in an EFL setting – i.e., in a context where the mother tongue of the vast majority of the students and the tutors is not English – as this group of students has to meet new expectations and rise to unfamiliar challenges when they enter tertiary education. These challenges concern academic skills, such as reading, processing and discussing literary texts in a foreign language. The study aims to provide some insight into the requirements set by university EFL and literature tutors and their actual experience in their classes. It is firmly believed that understanding university tutors’ expectations may enable EFL teachers to prepare their students for tertiary education. It is also hoped that some solutions proposed and discussed by the tutors in the present study will lead to further discussions among EFL and literature tutors at universities on possibilities and potential changes that could benefit English major students in an EFL setting.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The purpose of the following section is to provide theoretical background to the interview study. First, the concept of reading is described by introducing some of the main definitions of the reading process, then the important differences between reading in first language (L1) and L2 are described. Next, reading skills and strategies applied in the academic context are introduced; and the importance of motivation is pointed out. Lastly, the rationale for the study is discussed.



Reading in L1 and L2

Reading has an active and constant role in our everyday lives. We encounter written texts everywhere, we read constantly: we read some texts consciously and some without a specific aim in mind (Grabe, 2009). Although reading is such an everyday activity, it is challenging to define what it means. The issue seems to be even more complicated when reading in L2.

We can define reading easily “as the ability to derive understanding from written text” (Grabe, 2010, p. 90). Nevertheless, this short definition does not cover all the aspects of the reading process. Reading can be regarded “as a complex combination of processes” (Grabe, 2009, p. 14) which could be described from at least five different angles (Grabe, 2009, 2010). First of all, reading is a rapid and automatic process. Secondly, reading is an interacting process as there is a constant interaction between “textual information and background knowledge” (Grabe, 2010, p. 91). Reading is also flexible and strategic “in that readers assess whether or not they are achieving their purposes for reading” (Grabe, 2010, p. 91). The fourth feature is that reading is purposeful as readers have to have an aim in mind while reading (Grabe, 2009, 2010). Finally, reading is a linguistic process since readers “derive understanding and new meaning (...) by means of linguistic processing” (Grabe, 2010, p. 91).

Another important factor is that reading is a sociocultural practice as well (Eskey, 2002). One reads for different aims and some of these goals are determined by one’s culture or the culture one would like to join (Eskey, 2002), so reading can be regarded as a “culturally learned behaviour” (Eskey, 2002, p. 7). Although our reading habits are affected by our cultures, it is important to note that reading is also an individual behaviour since each individual has different reading habits (Eskey, 2002).

When focusing on reading in L1 and L2, it must be noted that “L2 readers are almost always at some disadvantage (in comparison with L1 readers)” (Grabe, 2010, p. 96) since they have limited exposure to L2 texts. Apart from this obvious difference, three other differences must be highlighted: linguistic and processing, developmental and educational, sociocultural and institutional differences (Grabe, 2009). Linguistic differences (i.e., more limited language knowledge in L2 as compared to L1) may be related to the fact that students start reading in L2 later than in L1, in addition, they already speak their mother tongue when they learn to read in their L1 (Grabe, 2009, 2010). Hence, students lack the appropriate linguistic background and support in L2 that they have in L1 (Grabe, 2009). Developmental and educational differences refer to contextual factors like prior L1 reading experience, reading motivation and reading skills (Grabe, 2009). The wider context, i.e., “[t]he wider societal and cultural contexts in which a learner is socialized” (Grabe, 2009, p. 137) also plays a significant role in L2 reading. For example, readers may have different expectations about texts written in L1 and in L2 which can have an impact on their reading as well (Grabe, 2009). The third difference involves sociocultural and institutional differences. For instance, the way how a certain text is read is affected by the sociocultural context, which also determines reading patterns (Grabe, 2009). It must be added that socio-cultural and institutional differences seem to have a significant impact on Hungarian students’ achievements in reading comprehension, languages (English and German) and mathematics (Hegedus & Sebestyen, 2019). As their study shows, “if the family background index is higher in an area, then the pupils’ achievement is higher as well” (Hegedus & Sebestyen, 2019, p. 125). The authors also note that secondary grammar school students obtain better results in languages at the school-leaving exam.



L1 reading has a substantial impact on L2 reading even if no linguistic similarities can be identified between the two languages (Koda, 1994). The reader has some prior reading experience when learning to read in L2, moreover, L2 reading is cross-linguistic (Koda, 1994), the “cognitive interplay between the two languages” (Koda, 1994, p. 5) has an impact on L2 reading. Additionally, reading skills and strategies developed in L1 affect the use of reading skills and strategies in L2 (Watkins, 2017). As pointed out by Watkins (2017), L2 readers might rely on their L1 reading skills and strategies when they read in L2 on the condition that they have some proficiency in L2.

Probably it is not an exaggeration to state that being a good reader is essential in modern societies (Grabe, 2009). Despite this fact, many teachers focus solely on the product of reading excluding the process of reading (Eskey, 2002). These reading-related tasks (e.g., reading comprehension questions) focus on the final result of the reading process which does not necessarily benefit students’ reading development as “[t]hese activities test reading but do not teach it, and this contributes little to improving any student’s reading performance” (Eskey, 2002, p. 8). Therefore, it is important to understand how one learns to read in L2, what differences can be identified between L1 and L2, what factors have an impact on the reading process, thus facilitating students’ reading development.

Reading skills, reading strategies and motivation for reading

In many cases, the difference between skills and strategies is not easy to determine (Grabe, 2009). Numerous definitions highlight that skills are activated unconsciously while strategies are applied to a text consciously (Grabe, 2009; Paris, Wasik, & Turner, 1991). Skills are “informational processing techniques that are automatic”, they “are applied to a text unconsciously for many reasons including expertise, repeated practice, compliance with directions, luck and naive use” (Paris et al., 1991, p. 611). Strategies can be defined as “cognitive steps that learners can take to assist in acquiring, storing, and retrieving new information” (Anderson, 1991, p. 460). However, strategies are not always applied consciously or intentionally, therefore it may be added that strategies could develop into skills later on (Grabe, 2009).

Reading in L2 regardless of its context requires three basic groups of reading skills: decoding skills, higher level cognitive skills and interactional skills (Hudson, 1998). However, reading for various purposes results in different types of reading which require various reading skills, particularly in academic contexts. Focusing on the academic context, six major reading purposes can be distinguished (Grabe, 2009) which necessitate different reading skills. *Reading in order to find information* is a common purpose in any L1 or L2 classroom (Grabe, 2009). The required skills include skimming and scanning which enable one to search for the necessary information on the surface or in depth. Another reading goal is *to read for quick understanding* which activates skimming (Grabe, 2009). The third purpose is *to read in order to learn* (Grabe, 2009). Reading to learn in an academic context involves various complex processes such as organizing and recalling information, or connecting text content with prior knowledge (Grabe, 2009). *Reading to integrate information* is another reading purpose (Grabe, 2009). This purpose is more challenging for students as the information they read has to be synthesized and learnt so that it can be integrated (Grabe, 2009). Particularly in academic settings, students also *read to evaluate, critique and use information* (Grabe, 2009). This complex reading purpose necessitates numerous skills from the readers like connecting new information to prior knowledge and



readings, making decisions while reading, reflecting on text information or reinterpreting the text for the reader's purposes (Grabe, 2009). Lastly, probably the most common reading purpose starting from very low levels is *reading for general comprehension* (Grabe, 2009). This kind of reading takes place both in the L2 classroom and outside the classroom when one reads a text for pleasure. Although reading for general comprehension is part of our daily activities, it is important to note that “it is both fundamental to reading and most often misunderstood as easy reading – but it is not easy” (Grabe, 2009, p. 10). It requires several complex reading processes from the reader which become automatic, thus “become seemingly effortless” (Grabe, 2009, p. 10) and form a solid basis for the remaining reading purposes and reading types.

Apart from reading skills, reading strategies such as paraphrasing, or predicting are also vital to assist text comprehension. These cognitive strategies are essential for fluent readers not only to remove reading obstacles but also to facilitate deep comprehension instead of being content with the “shallow levels of analysis” (Graesser, 2007, p. 4). Therefore, these strategies enable not only beginner but skilled readers as well when they encounter unfamiliar or challenging texts. These strategies focus on several areas that support text comprehension: grammatical knowledge, processing skills and background knowledge (Grabe, 2004). Another categorization distinguishes between strategies used before reading (e.g., examining the title), during reading (e.g., connecting chains of events) and after reading (e.g., summarising) (Paris et al., 1991). However, it must be noted that these strategies can be applied at different times as reading is a recursive process (Paris et al., 1991).

Apart from various reading skills and strategies, another component is necessary when the focus is on reading in academic contexts: motivation. There have been innumerable attempts to define motivation without reaching a consensus (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011); however, the following broad definition, which is applicable regardless of situation, can be proposed: motivation determines the “*direction and magnitude* of human behaviour” (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011, p. 4). In terms of reading, all the factors that motivate one to start reading and to continue it can be regarded as motivation for reading (Józsa & Józsa, 2014). Since reading has such a vital role in humanities, motivation for reading is indispensable for those students who continue their studies in these study fields – such as English majors.

Rationale for the current study

Regarding the Hungarian context, although students' reading habits and reading comprehension skills have been researched before, there is a dearth of educational research focusing on university students. The few examples include the study conducted by Szűcs (2017) who explored first-year English major BA students' reading strategy awareness. The findings show that first-year English majors face difficulties with using reading strategies and their reading comprehension skills have to be improved. Focusing on reading in Hungarian, Hódi and Tóth (2019) researched Hungarian first-year university students' reading comprehension skills. The results imply that there is a correlation between good reading comprehension skills and positive attitude towards reading. The researchers also found that the majority of students seem to have the necessary comprehension skills – at least when reading texts in Hungarian – which are expected at universities.

In spite of the fact that reading skills have been investigated in Hungary before, not much attention has been given to EFL students in tertiary education. Another research gap should be



noted: the use of literature in the EFL classroom is a subject which still needs to be explored in Hungary. Hence, the aim of this paper is to fill in the void and lead to further investigations focusing on the reading habits and skills of EFL students in Hungarian tertiary education. English majors – as they are in an EFL context – take part in courses where the language of instruction is English. For instance, they are expected to read literary and academic texts, and discuss these texts in English in their literature courses. Preparing students to read literature is not the focus of these courses, thus those students who do not have the necessary knowledge and skills struggle with reading. University EFL and literature courses could complement each other, however, EFL courses focus on language skills development and not on preparing students to read literature in English. Learning about EFL and English literature tutors' views and experience may bring the two fields closer to each other and prepare their cooperation. Although the main focus of this research is to explore EFL and English literature tutors' views on English majors' reading habits, reading skills and strategies, a small section is dedicated to the use of literature in the EFL classroom as a possibility and solution to the reading problems perceived by the tutors.

METHODS

Research questions

Based on the literature, the following research questions are addressed in the present study:

1. According to university EFL and English literature tutors, what reading skills and strategies are necessary for English majors to complete literature courses?
2. What are university EFL and English literature tutors' perceptions of first-year English majors' reading habits, reading skills and reading strategies?
3. What possibilities and solutions to reading problems do EFL and English literature tutors find viable?

Participants and setting

The participants of the study were selected using purposive sampling strategies. As the focus of the study was on first-year English majors, the interviewees were selected from an English studies BA and teacher training programme at a prestigious university in Budapest, Hungary. It must be noted that first-year English majors indicate students who major in English and those who take part in the EFL teacher training programme as they attend the same English classes in the first couple of years during their studies. Regarding the tutors teaching in both the English and American Studies programme and in the EFL teacher training programme, the majority of them are also EFL speakers but they have near native proficiency in English.

Maximum variation sampling was used to ensure that a variety of participants is included in the study. As [Tables 1](#) and [2](#) show, eight participants, four English literature and four EFL tutors from two different departments participated in the research. The reason why these two particular groups were selected lies in the place reading takes in these courses. Although reading has an essential role both in literature and EFL courses, students usually read different texts for different purposes in a literature and in an EFL lesson. For instance, while the text is used for



Table 1. Profiles of the EFL tutors

Pseudonyms	Zsigmond	Rebeka	Allison	Mária
Teaching experience	40 years	4 years	9 years	40 years
Subjects taught	language-related courses, methodology, culture	language-related courses	language-related courses, culture, study skills	culture, language-related courses
Reading habits	He loves reading to develop his own language proficiency.	Reading means 'exploration'.	She distinguishes between reading for pleasure, reading for information and reading for work.	She is a really avid reader.

literary analysis (e.g., interpretation, critical evaluation) in literature lessons, it is mostly used for language learning (e.g., vocabulary building, skimming and scanning the text to answer reading comprehension questions) in EFL lessons. Since reading is present but in a very different way in literature and in EFL courses, the participants were selected from these two departments to explore first-year English majors' reading habits, reading skills and strategies, reading problems and solutions to them from two perspectives.

As it can be seen in Tables 1 and 2, seven participants were Hungarian speakers and one tutor was of American origin. The tutors had only two features in common: they all had had some teaching experience with first-year students and they all had rather positive attitudes towards reading. Regarding the differences, they had different lengths of teaching experience and they taught various courses in English. Apart from being tutors, two participants, Rebeka (EFL) and Zsombor (LIT) were also PhD students pursuing their studies in language pedagogy and in English literature. Regarding their reading habits, all EFL tutors had a positive attitude to reading, they all regularly read for pleasure both in their mother tongue and in foreign language(s). English literature tutors also expressed their love for reading, however, they tend to read more for work-related purposes than for pleasure.

Table 2. Profiles of the literature tutors

Pseudonyms	Dorottya	Emese	Zoltán	Zsombor
Teaching experience	30 years	25 years	17 years	5 years
Subjects taught	poetry, art history, culture	Victorian literature, Pre-Raphaelites	18–19th century literature	19–20th century literature, close reading seminars
Reading habits	Reading means flow, escaping reality.	Reading means experiences. She mostly reads texts connected to her work.	Reading is joy, entertainment, interpretation. He mostly reads texts connected to work.	He mostly reads texts connected to work. His 'guilty pleasure' is young adult literature.



Data collection and data analysis

The research took place between autumn 2019 and summer 2021 including piloting. In order to inquire into the tutors' expectations and perceptions of first-year students' reading habits, reading skills and strategies, semi-structured interviews were conducted. First, the interview was prepared in Hungarian as the native language of the interviewees was Hungarian with the exception of one tutor who was of American origin, therefore the questions were translated into English. The instrument was checked by the author's supervisor and her colleagues in the PhD programme she attends. Then, the instrument was piloted with two EFL and two literature tutors.

The purposes of the interview were to explore some reading-related issues in depth, to elaborate on them and to gain some ideas and practices from the tutors. Hence, the interview had three main sections: some general information about the participants, their expectations of reading skills and strategies needed in English literature classes, their perceptions of first-year students' reading habits, reading skills and strategies. In addition, the EFL tutors were asked about their opinions on the use of literature in the EFL classroom. The English literature tutors were asked to describe a general literature class with first-year students. The interview guide can be seen in the Appendices. The interviews took from 35 to 60 min. Four of them were recorded in the interviewees' offices and four of them were conducted on two video conferencing platforms due to the pandemic. The interviews were audio- and video-recorded, transcribed and sent back to the interviewees so that they could check and comment on the transcripts.

The transcripts were coded by identifying and labelling patterns manually. The emerging patterns and themes were grouped into categories. The credibility of the study was established by member checking: the transcripts were read by the participants and some minor modifications (such as names, book titles) were made. The same questions were used during the interviews to ensure the dependability of the study. Lastly, a co-coder's help was sought in order to ensure the neutrality of the study; and the codes of the co-coder and those of the author were compared.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the study show that the tutors have a good understanding of reading skills their students have, the reading strategies they apply while reading and the challenges they face in literature classes. The following section presents and discusses the result of the interview study. Each research question is addressed and answered separately.

Reading skills and strategies: expectations

The aim of the first research question – *According to university EFL and English literature tutors, what reading skills and strategies are necessary for English majors to complete the literature courses?* – was to inquire into the participants' expectations towards first-year university students. Although the question addressed solely skills and strategies, all the participants mentioned knowledge, attitudes, skills and strategies. Therefore, four categories were formed based on their responses as presented in [Table 3](#).

There are some areas that were mentioned by both the literature and EFL tutors: *background knowledge, appropriate language skills, critical thinking skills, text analysis, dictionary skills*. Some notable differences could also be observed. Perhaps not surprisingly, the EFL teachers listed



Table 3. The necessary and required knowledge, strategies and skills connected to reading

	Knowledge	Attitudes	Skills	Strategies
EFL tutors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • background knowledge • text structure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • being critical • being curious 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • language skills • study skills • critical thinking skills • forming an opinion and discussing it • text analysis (cause-effect, important-unimportant) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • checking vocabulary • rereading • focusing on the gist • understanding the text • note taking strategies • asking questions about the text
Literature tutors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • background knowledge 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • being open-minded 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • language skills • forming an opinion and discussing it • text analysis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • understanding the text word for word • dictionary skills • seeing the text as a whole • selecting key words

more reading strategies on their own, they were more confident about and familiar with these strategies than the literature tutors. However, a surprising difference regarding the reading strategies should be highlighted. Three EFL teachers mentioned that it is important that students understand the gist of a text whereas the literature tutors complained about students not understanding the text word for word but focusing only on the gist. Mária (EFL tutor) highlighted that students seem to be accustomed to focusing only on the gist, which may be related to the fact that they are trained to do so in secondary EFL classes; nevertheless, this may cause some severe difficulties for them in university classes where they need thorough and deep understanding of the texts in their content subjects.

Reading skills and strategies in the classroom

To the second research question – *What are university EFL and English literature tutors' perceptions of first-year English majors' reading habits, reading skills and reading strategies?* – the responses were quite varied. Two EFL tutors with the most experience, Mária and Zsigmond said that nowadays students do not read. Rebeka and Allison (EFL) noted that students like reading when they can choose their readings. When asked about favourite books in EFL classes, students often mention compulsory readings from the previous studies or highly popular and well-known books such as *The Little Prince*. Interestingly, students rarely mention English writers, which may suggest that they are not familiar with English literature.

Similar responses were given by the literature tutors: two tutors claimed that students definitely read and two of them said that some read, some do not read at all, but the majority of their students focus solely on compulsory readings and shorter texts. Regarding specific examples, Dorottya (LIT) mentioned that various literary texts are mentioned by her students, there is no pattern, however, students mostly mention compulsory literary texts or sometimes popular literature as their favourite readings. Both the EFL and English literature tutors mentioned that reading habits had changed. For example, Emese (LIT) complained about students reading on their phones which has a significant impact on their reading skills and strategies:



“I assume – although I’m not sure that I’m right – that the fact that students read on small and constantly changing screens leads to losing their ability to regard the text as a whole, to treat the text as a unity. I know about a colleague who asks the students to bring printed texts to class, to read printed texts – exactly because of this.”

When participants were asked about the students’ reading skills and strategies, all the interviewees started to list problems and issues that they encounter in class (Table 4). Interestingly, similar problems were listed by the tutors which implies that the same difficulties are present both in EFL and in literature classes.

Both literature and EFL tutors highlighted language-related difficulties, namely that students do not have appropriate language skills. Moreover, the lack of sufficient background knowledge seems to be a common problem in both classes. The lack of motivation and interest was mentioned both by EFL and literature tutors: only a few students in a group are truly interested in reading. Dorottya (LIT) pointed out that students tend to read on the condition that they are motivated by the grade despite the fact that she would like to have a positive effect on her students’ reading habits, to motivate them to read for pleasure. As she summarises,

“Motivation... unfortunately, as far as I can see it, the grade is the most motivating factor for students. Telling them that it will be included in the test has an influence on them. I try to motivate them by pointing out how interesting this text is (...) I refrain from any disciplining, threatening and grading because these go against the stance I’d like to take (...) Students shouldn’t read because I say so. However, I am forced to do this because I have to give them a grade.”

Another common problem is that students read quite superficially: they do not notice the key words, they understand the gist but not the meaning of a text. This may be related to the changes in the reading process caused by online reading. Nowadays, readers have to cope with constant distractions and new stimuli “which affects how much we read, how we read, the characteristics of what we read, and finally, what is written” (Wolf, 2017, p. 11). For instance, the presence of multimodal texts makes readers process texts simultaneously and not linearly (Manderino, 2015); skimming becomes more and more significant in the reading process (Wolf, 2017).

Another issue is related to dictionary skills. Students are not accustomed to using dictionaries, it seems that either they do not know how to use one appropriately, or they do not have the necessary patience. Mária (EFL) tries to make them look up new words, however, she had experienced severe issues related to basic dictionary use such as choosing the first dictionary

Table 4. Reading skills and strategies in the classroom

EFL tutors	Literature tutors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • language-related difficulties • lack of background knowledge • lack of appropriate study skills • lack of attention and focus • lack of critical thinking skills • attitude towards reading • lack of interest • reading superficially: students understand the gist but not the deeper meaning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • language-related difficulties • lack of background knowledge • extrinsic motivation or lack of motivation • focusing on the story but not on the plot • not noticing the key words • lack of interest towards compulsory readings • not understanding the text word for word



entry unthinkingly. In a study conducted at a British university international students' dictionary skills were investigated by analysing 89 assignments (Nesi & Haill, 2002); and some of its findings coincide with the problem mentioned by Mária. Choosing the wrong dictionary entry or sub-entry was the most common problem partly due to the fact that the participants selected the first meaning of the word without taking a look at the context (Nesi & Haill, 2002). As using a dictionary appropriately and effectively is an expectation both in EFL and literature classes at university, it is highly important that students learn how to use one properly. Therefore, it is essential to focus on teaching and improving dictionary skills in university courses, too.

Possibilities and solutions

In order to answer the third research question – *What possibilities and solutions to reading problems do EFL and English literature tutors find viable?* –, at the end of the interview, the tutors were asked to mention some possibilities for students to improve their reading skills and strategies, and some solutions to the most common reading-related problems. Concerning the solutions, the participants agreed that tutors have a responsibility in enabling students to make the most of their studies. The EFL tutors mentioned that study skills should be taught in courses as they can help students read and write in English, which seems to be another problematic skill. Selecting relevant and appropriate texts could be another solution to some of the reading-related problems. Literature tutors agreed that text selection is indeed important and the criteria for text selection include the first-year students' age and interest for three tutors as they try to find interesting, relevant and enjoyable texts for their introductory course. Despite this, only two tutors tend to ask their students about their reading preferences, two of them have no information on their students' favourite readings.

An important point was made by Zoltán (LIT) who said that one can improve their reading skills only by reading more. Zsombor (LIT) remarked that tutors should show how a certain text should be read, thus provide some strategies for the students. Emese (LIT) also brought up Zsombor as an example of good practice: he compiles some guiding questions for his students. He shares the questions in advance and students are expected to use them while reading – thus, he ensures that students have some help and guidelines while they read an unfamiliar text in English. Despite this good example, which seems to be known by some tutors at the department, not every tutor provides help for each assigned text which presents problems and difficulties for the students, as Zsombor remarked. Allison (EFL) also provides a reason why students struggle with reading L2 texts. She shared her views as follows:

“So I think this is part of the biggest problem for them. Learning to read at university is [something] that they are just not used to. They are used to reading... Also paragraph structure. So if they are used to reading things on Instagram or news articles, many of the students think that a sentence can be a paragraph because a lot of news articles do this and it is very difficult for them to understand why this cannot happen in an academic paper or whenever they are confronted with a paragraph that's six sentences long instead of one-sentence-long, I can tell they struggle to tell me what it's about or to find the key information because it's too long for them based on what they are used to reading of these news articles with one sentence paragraphs.”

University students experience difficulties related to reading in both EFL and literature classes (e.g., text comprehension, deep reading, vocabulary-related issues), however, “once within the tertiary institution, they [students] frequently receive neither instruction in language



nor activities designed to improve their reading skills” (Short & Candlin, 1986, p. 92). Additional help and guidance are very much needed both in EFL and in literature classes to teach students how to read texts, therefore as a solution, guided reading should be introduced both in EFL and in literature classes as proposed by the interviewees. Explicit instruction can have a significant positive impact on reading skills and strategies applied by the students, as suggested by Yapp, de Graaf, and van den Bergh (2021). Their study focused on L2 students at a Dutch college, 801 first-year polytechnic students were taught seven reading strategies. The results imply that explicit instruction is effective as students developed their “average scores in L2 reading comprehension after following the intervention” (Yapp et al., 2021, p. 17), especially weaker readers who seemed to improve more than proficient readers (Yapp et al., 2021).

Another solution to these difficulties could be the use of literature in EFL classes. Using literary texts has countless benefits related to language proficiency, skills development and culture (Ghosn, 2002; Hall, 2005; McKay, 1982; Parkinson & Thomas, 2000; Paran & Robinson, 2016). However, what makes literary texts remarkable is that these texts encourage students to interact with the text, in other words, they have to “employ interpretative procedures in a way which isn’t required (...) in the normal reading process” (Widdowson, 1983, p. 31). Literary texts enable students to improve their reading skills by reading more; EFL tutors can teach reading strategies that are required both by EFL and literature tutors, and to encourage students to form an opinion on a literary text in a safe environment. Therefore, EFL tutors were also asked about the use of literature in the EFL classroom: whether they had had any previous experience and how they would incorporate such texts into their language classes.

All the four EFL tutors had had some previous experience with using literary texts for language development purposes. Mária and Zsigmond rarely use literary texts in their classes, but if they do, they choose really short texts such as poems. Mária added that she regularly uses articles and rarely poems in her classes. Rebeka had not had much experience with literature, she had used mainly abridged literary texts from coursebooks. Allison also rarely uses literature in her classes: once or twice each semester. Interestingly, the two participants with less teaching experience, Rebeka and Allison were more positive about the use of literature than Zsigmond and Mária, who were rather cautious. They noted that although a good literary text can be really interesting and enjoyable, not every student is interested in literature and in reading, moreover, they already have a lot of texts to read for other courses – which is truly worrisome as reading is a fundamental requirement and a vital need in the fields of humanities.

The participants were asked about obstacles and problems that may prevent EFL teachers from incorporating literature in their classes. All the participants highlighted problems related to text selection since it is strenuous to find appropriate and relevant texts which are also short. However, Mária also added that finding an appropriate reading with good tasks even in a coursebook is time-consuming and challenging. Other factors included lack of time to prepare worksheets and lack of resources. As Rebeka put it: she would be eager to use literature in her classes but she would need access to ready-made worksheets to do so.

CONCLUSION

The main purpose of the present study was to explore university EFL and literature tutors’ expectations towards first-year English majors and their perceptions of the students’ reading



habits, reading skills and strategies. Some solutions to the common reading-related problems were also offered with the help of the interviews.

Based on the findings, it seems that English majors' reading habits are quite varied ranging from unmotivated and uninterested students to motivated readers. Despite the variety, there are some severe issues and reading problems that seem to be common both in EFL and literature classes. Since the lack of appropriate reading skills and strategies is an interdisciplinary issue affecting both language and literature classes, closer cooperation and communication should be encouraged between the two fields. The interviewees agreed that students need additional help in their courses since they do not have the necessary language proficiency, they lack background knowledge and they do not have appropriate reading skills. It is generally assumed – also mentioned by one of the literature tutors – is that reading development can be enhanced by reading more. Nevertheless, reading a lot is not sufficient to improve one's reading skills but “[e]ffective and focused reading instruction does make a difference” (Grabe, 2014, p. 12). In case of some students, it may be enough to provide proper texts, however, some students may require more help from the tutor (Eskey, 2002). Some skills and strategies (e.g., using a dictionary, finding key words, deep reading) with appropriate readings in language classes as well. For instance, literary texts could be an option for EFL tutors, however, a lack of appropriate materials and resources may prevent many EFL teachers – as the EFL participants stressed – from incorporating literature in their language classes.

Although the research has yielded some important results, it has its limitations as well. The study inquired into the perceptions and experience of eight participants teaching at the same institution. In order to gain more insight into the above-mentioned issues, the students' perspective should be included in a future study. By comparing the teachers' and the students' viewpoints, a more detailed picture of the topic could be provided. Additionally, a follow-up focus group interview involving tutors from other institutions could broaden the scope of the present study.

It can be concluded that reading should be taught effectively with appropriate materials and activities; reading skills and strategies should be taught so that the students as readers are capable of overcoming the difficulties related to reading they may encounter. However, these issues do not concern solely university tutors but secondary EFL teachers as well. Students should be used to reading various texts – including longer ones – earlier in their studies to gain some solid reading experience that could help them later on. It is a highly important issue since having good reading skills and strategies is a requirement in many university courses. As Zoltán (LIT) put it: “When students start their literary history classes and elective literature courses, it is rather an expectation than a goal that they should reach.”

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Interview guides (EFL and literature tutors) in Hungarian

1. Hány éve tanítasz?/Hány éve tanít?
2. Milyen tárgyakat tanítasz?/Milyen tárgyakat tanít?
3. Mit szeretsz a legjobban a tanításban?/Mit szeret legjobban a tanításban?
4. Mit jelent számodra az olvasás?/Mit jelent Önnek az olvasás?
5. Milyen műfajú szövegeket szeretsz leginkább olvasni? Említenél pár kedvencet az olvasmányaid közül?
LIT: Milyen műfajú szövegeket szeret a leginkább olvasni? Említene néhányat az aktuális kedvenc olvasmányai közül?
6. Mi a benyomásod az elsőéves hallgatók olvasási szokásairól?/Mi a benyomása az elsőéves hallgatók olvasási szokásairól?
7. Szerinted milyen olvasási készségek szükségesek ahhoz, hogy az anglisztika alapszakos, illetve a tanárszakos hallgatók sikeresen teljesítsék az irodalomkurzusokat?/Ön szerint milyen olvasási készségek szükségesek ahhoz, hogy az anglisztika alapszakos, illetve a tanárszakos hallgatók sikeresen teljesítsék az irodalomkurzusokat?



8. Mi a benyomásod az elsőéves hallgatók olvasási készségeiről?/Mi a benyomása az elsőéves hallgatók olvasási készségeiről?
9. Milyen lehetőségeik vannak az elsőéveseknek arra, hogy olvasási készségüket fejlesszék?
10. Szerinted élnek is ezekkel a lehetőségekkel?/Ön szerint élnek is ezekkel a lehetőségekkel?
11. Milyen olvasási stratégiákat alkalmaznak az elsőévesek?
12. Mely olvasási stratégiákat tartod fontosnak? Miért?/Mely olvasási stratégiákat tartja fontosnak? Miért?
13. Az óráidon foglalkoztok-e olvasási stratégiák fejlesztésével? Ha igen, hogyan? Tudnál példát mondani?
LIT: 13. Mi alapján választod ki azokat a szövegeket, amelyekkel az óráidon foglalkoztok?/Mi alapján választja ki azokat a szövegeket, amelyekkel az óráin foglalkoznak?
14. Véleményed szerint melyek a leggyakoribb irodalmi szövegolvasással kapcsolatos problémák?
LIT: 14. Hogyan dolgozzátok fel az irodalmi szövegeket az órán?/Hogyan dolgozzák fel az irodalmi szövegeket az órán?
15. Hogyan orvosolhatók ezek a problémák?
LIT: 15. Véleményed szerint melyek a leggyakoribb irodalmi szövegolvasással kapcsolatos problémák?/Véleménye szerint melyek a leggyakoribb irodalmi szövegolvasással kapcsolatos problémák?
16. Hogyan orvosolhatók ezek a problémák?
16. EFL: Mi a véleményed az irodalmi szövegek használatáról a nyelvórán?
17. EFL: Dolgoztál már angol nyelvű irodalmi szövegekkel a nyelvóráidon? Hogyan használtátok a szövegeket? Mik az órával kapcsolatos tapasztalataid?
(Ha nem: Miért nem használsz irodalmi szövegeket a nyelvóráidon?)

Appendix 2. Interview guides (EFL and literature tutors) in English

1. How long have you been teaching?
2. What subjects do you teach?
3. What do you like the most in teaching?
4. What does 'reading' mean to you?
5. Which genres do you prefer? Could you mention some examples of your favourite readings, texts?
LIT: Which genres do you prefer? Could you mention some examples of your recent favourite readings, texts?
6. What are your impressions of first-year students' reading habits?
7. What reading skills are needed so that students majoring in English can accomplish literature courses successfully?
8. What are your impressions of first-year students' reading skills?
9. What opportunities are available for first-year students to improve their reading skills?
10. Do you think they grasp these opportunities?
11. What reading strategies do first-year students use?
12. What reading strategies do you find important?



13. In your classes, do you develop students' reading strategies? If so, how? Could you mention an example?
LIT: 13 What criteria do you set for text selection in your classes? How do you choose the texts?
14. In your opinion, what are the most common problems when it comes to reading literature in English?
LIT: 14 How do you use those texts in class?
15. How could one fix these problems?
LIT: 15 In your opinion, what are the most common problems when it comes to reading literature in English?
16. How could one fix these problems?
16. EFL: What do you think about using literature in the EFL classroom?
17. EFL: Have you ever used literature in your classes? How did you use the texts?
(If not: Why don't you use literary texts in your classes?)

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