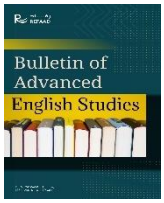
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When Texts Talk Back: Reflective Practices in the Literature Classroom

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Abstract:

Purpose: This study examines the impact of reflective practices on students' interpretations of literary texts. It shows how students' engagement and personal connection to literature can be improved. Hence, this study develops a culturally responsive framework for reflective teaching in Saudi EFL literature classrooms.

Methodology: This study adopts a conceptual and design-based approach to propose a model for integrating reflective practices in tertiary-level EFL classrooms in Saudi Arabia. The study is grounded in theoretical analysis and review of best practices from existing literature.

Findings: The findings of this study show that the reflective practice tasks included in the current syllabus will help students engage more with the literary texts they study Hence, the study concludes with some recommendations to incorporate reflective practices as alternative assessment tools rather than following the traditional assessment practices.

Keywords: *Learner-Centred Ideology; literary texts; literature pedagogy; reflective practices; Saudi learners.*

1 Introduction

As Carlos Rodgers states in the essay *Defining reflection: Another look at John Dewey and reflective thinking*, "Thinking, particularly reflective thinking or inquiry, is both essential to both teachers' and students' learning" (2002, p. 842). It also reminds the reader that reflection is a task that takes time to do and should be done well. Reflection is indispensable in studying literature. Harvey et al. (2025) state in their article that reflection supports learning. It may be engaged with at different levels, for different purposes, and from different perspectives. Reflection involves multiple ways of knowing and exploring.

Reading literary pieces introduces learners to a wide range of grammatical structures and vocabulary, as well as meaningful context and setting. It enhances reading skills, including skimming, scanning, inferring, and analysing. Moreover, it enhances cultural awareness and incorporates critical thinking skills and creativity. Literature also motivates learners to reflect on their learning experiences, making them more autonomous. Studies by (Ghosn, 2002; Van, 2009) show that "Literary texts are very motivating due to their authenticity and the meaningful context they provide" In another study, it is stated that literature excites our feelings. It orients readers in new directions. The work of literature also "changes our lives" Moya (2015). Literature deals with universal concepts. Fletcher (2018) argues in her book *Teaching Literature Rhetorically: Transferable Literacy Skills for 21st Century Students* that "integrative thinking helps students understand the complexities of a text" (p.15).

Hence, literature should be taught in class, aiming to help students broaden their way of thinking. The more learners can engage with literary texts, the better they can delve into the world of literature. Machost and Stains (2023) state in their article that "*Reflection* has become a buzzword in academia and has a vast array of implications across fields, disciplines, and subdisciplines." Hence, today's higher education practices cannot be carried out without applying reflective practices to the courses that students study. The goal of learning and teaching cannot be limited to passing a single course. In a course like literature at the tertiary level, it becomes a matter to ponder whether students are prepared only to answer objective questions without ever having to reflect on what/how and why they are learning the course.

Hence, this study aims to critique an existing syllabus used at one of the public universities in Saudi Arabia.

1.1 Rationale of the Study

In Saudi higher education, undergraduate students often lack interest in studying literature. They find literary texts uninteresting, long, and unlikely to be of much use to their careers. In a study by Hussein and Al-Emami (2016), several key factors were identified as contributing to Saudi students' lack of motivation to study literature. When Saudi undergraduate students join a university, they are only familiar with a limited section of literary texts. The discussion of these texts is often oversimplified, and all forms of analysis are not included. Moreover, although Saudi students begin taking English as a compulsory subject in grade four, English Literature is absent from public school curricula. A study conducted by Halim et al. (2020) states that most students are very much averse to studying literature because of their low proficiency level in English. For students with low proficiency, reading any piece of literature almost becomes a task impossible to accomplish. Moreover, when it comes to tests and assessments, teachers and students prefer to rely on objective questions, such as Multiple-Choice Questions (MCQs), True/False Questions, or Matching information. Only a few points are allocated to assess their writing skills in relation to literary texts.

1.2 Theoretical Framework

The researchers have formulated their study based on John Dewey's extensive discussion of reflection, especially in his seminal work *"How We Think"* (1910, revised 1933) and Michael Schiro's (2013) Learner-Centred Ideology. The learner-centred ideology promotes a learning environment where learners are autonomous and learn based on the needs and concerns of individuals. "The goal of education is the growth of individuals, each in harmony with his or her own unique intellectual, social, emotional, and physical attributes" (Schiro, 2013: p. 5). The advocates of the learner-centered ideology believe in the growth of the individual and that education plays a vital role in helping learners grow intellectually and emotionally and relate their learning to their personal

experiences. This growth brings out learners' innate abilities. "Learning is thus considered a function of the interaction between a person and his or her environment" (Schiro, 2013, p.6). Educators should create the learning environment so that learners can interact with their peers, teachers, and, most importantly, the texts and materials themselves. Learning should not be an isolated task in which classroom lessons are not brought to practice or applied outside the class. When learners engage with the task, learning becomes effective.

The researchers based their study on the Learner-Centred Ideology to justify the necessity of incorporating reflective practices in the classroom. Studying materials only to prepare for tests and assessments is a traditional method in which students are more concerned with achieving high grades or passing the course than with learning. When students learn only to fulfil the requirements of the tests and exams, they fail to retain what they have learnt. With the growing popularity of reflective practices, the researchers' interest was triggered to explore the effects of reflective practices in literature classes in Saudi higher education.

However, when it comes to reflective practices, John Dewey's concept of 'Reflection' cannot be overlooked. In his book, he identified several modes of thought, including belief, imagination, stream of consciousness, but the mode he was most interested in was reflection. In Rodgers's essay (2002), Dewey's concept of reflection is analyzed by breaking them into criteria such as:

- Reflection is a meaning-making process that moves a learner from one experience into the next with a deeper understanding of its relationships with and connections to other experiences and ideas.
- It involves a systematic examination rather than an immediate reaction.
- Reflective thinking involves imaginative consideration of possible explanations or responses. Reflection requires an attitude that values personal and intellectual growth, both one's own and others'.

Dewey saw this kind of thinking as essential for learning and democratic participation. Literature cannot be taught in isolation. As Fletcher argues in her book, "Emotionally engaging students in literary texts helps them not only communicate more effectively by heightening their awareness of pathos and audience but also hold on to their thinking longer and make some meaningful connections" (p. 221). In a literature class, students can engage with the text by reflecting on the experiences they gain from reading literary pieces. Hence, writing or speaking about personal memories encourages students to find their voice, organize thoughts clearly, and express complex ideas with emotional depth. Reflective writing always creates a safe place to express emotions, hidden struggles, and pain. Moreover, writing slows down thoughts, helping students clarify what they feel and why. They learn to observe, understand, and reflect on their own emotions, which can sometimes help them to become better people. Reflecting on one's strengths and weaknesses as a human being can also help the person face life challenges. It also becomes a tool for emotional processing and healing.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

- To explore how reflective practices influence students' interpretation of literary texts.
- To improve students' engagement and personal connection to literature.
- To develop a culturally responsive framework for reflective teaching in Saudi EFL literature classrooms.

1.4 Context and Value

This work should be valuable to future educators in the Saudi context who seek to bring changes to the education system. The instructions and assessment practices in literature classes at the tertiary level in the Saudi context are in dire need of revision. Hence, this study will guide future educators in encouraging student engagement in literature classes and promoting learning and growth as autonomous learners. It will also be valuable to the current workforce, who truly want to see students' improvement, and to decision-makers who want to produce a competent labour force in the 21st century.

2 Literature Review

Previous studies show that there is considerable discussion about incorporating reflective practices in classrooms. Researchers and scholars have debated the pros and cons of reflective practices in the classroom. In the context of Saudi higher education, practices and methodologies for teaching literature in

the classroom are underexplored. Most Saudi students in higher education show little interest in studying literature, as they see no practical use for it in their careers. Literature courses are mostly studied because they are a requirement to complete the B.A. Honors Program at the undergraduate level.

2.1 Factors Affecting Saudi Students' Interest in Studying Literature at the Tertiary Level

Previous research indicates that students' interest in studying literature at the tertiary level is influenced by a range of motivational, pedagogical, and contextual factors. Several studies have discussed the role of reflective practices in higher education classrooms, highlighting both their benefits and challenges in promoting student engagement and critical thinking (Al-Seghayer, 2014; Farrell, 2012). However, within the context of Saudi higher education, teaching practices and methodologies related specifically to literature instruction remain relatively underexplored.

Research suggests that many Saudi undergraduate students show limited interest in studying literature, particularly English literature, due to linguistic challenges and low perceived relevance to their future careers. Kassem (2020) found that Saudi EFL students often struggle with complex language, unfamiliar cultural references, and dense literary texts, which negatively affect their motivation and attitudes toward literature courses. These challenges are compounded when students lack sufficient language proficiency, making literary analysis cognitively demanding and discouraging.

Moreover, several studies indicate that Saudi students frequently perceive literature courses as having little practical or professional value. According to Al-Mansour (2017), students tend to prioritize language skills such as speaking, writing, and communication over literary studies, as they believe these skills are more directly applicable to the job market. As a result, literature courses are often viewed merely as compulsory requirements rather than meaningful academic experiences, especially within B.A. programs.

Cultural and curricular factors also play a significant role in shaping students' interest in literature. Research by Al-Qahtani (2019) indicates that some literary texts used in Saudi universities may feel culturally distant or irrelevant to students' lived experiences, thereby reducing emotional engagement and critical response. Additionally, traditional teacher-centred instructional approaches, which focus heavily on content delivery and examination, may further limit students' active involvement in literature classrooms.

Recent studies argue that adopting student-centred and reflective teaching approaches could help address these challenges. For instance, portfolio-based assessment and reflective activities have been shown to enhance motivation, autonomy, and deeper engagement with texts among Saudi university students (Al-Hassan & Al-Shahrani, 2021). Nevertheless, such approaches are not yet widely implemented in literature courses in Saudi higher education, indicating a gap between research recommendations and classroom practice.

Overall, the literature suggests that Saudi students' limited interest in studying literature at the tertiary level stems from a combination of perceived lack of practical relevance, linguistic difficulty, cultural disconnect, and traditional teaching methodologies. This highlights the need for further research into innovative instructional practices—such as reflective learning—to enhance students' engagement and appreciation of literature in Saudi universities.

2.2 Lack of Interest in Studying Literature

Literature is a term applied to representational language and materials, that is, where language is used creatively to engage readers' cognition, emotions, and imagination simultaneously (e.g., novels, short stories, poetry, and plays), as opposed to referential language and materials (Fabb, 2010). Apart from this, several other factors discourage students from exploring literary texts in depth. According to Albalawi (2015), it has been pointed out that students of literature are exposed to many varieties of literary works. They read literature and interpret it. As they do their research on it, literature flourishes and remains alive. In a study conducted by Alkodimi & Al-Ahadl (2020), it was found that literary elements, including prose, drama, and poetry, are included in curricula worldwide, and universities in Saudi Arabia are no exception.

However, EFL learners in Saudi Arabia are unwilling to have literature courses in their curriculum. Studies show that students in public schools are not familiar with literature. (Halim &Halim, 2023). In a study conducted by Hussein & Al-Emami (2016), several major factors were

identified as reasons why Saudi students are not motivated to study literature. When a Saudi undergraduate student joins a university, he/she is only familiar with a limited section of literary texts. It often happens that discussions of these texts oversimplify and exclude all forms of analysis. Moreover, though Saudi students begin taking English as a compulsory subject in grade four, English literature is entirely absent from public school curricula. Apart from this, in a study conducted by Al-Qahtany (2016), it is pointed out that most Saudi learners lack the necessary reading habits in L1 and L2. In addition, they rarely make use of important reading skills when they read English texts. As a result, some problems teachers face in teaching literature include low language proficiency, limited reading skills, low motivation, limited prior knowledge of literature, and limited student awareness of its importance (Sebastian, 2017).

2.3 Why Reflective Practices

According to John Dewey, reflective thinking is essential for learning and democratic participation. His basic notion is that reflection is an active, deliberative cognitive process involving a sequence of interconnected ideas that includes an individual's underlying beliefs and knowledge. In recent years, incorporating reflective practices in higher education has become increasingly popular. "Through reflective practice, we can identify the factors, the consequences of and the assumptions that underlie our actions. In higher education, reflective practice has become a dynamic, participatory, and cyclical process that contributes to educators' professional development and personal growth" (AI et.al., 2017; Marshall, 2019). A study by Mohamed et al. (2022) concludes that the process of reflective practice requires three key aspects: problem-solving, critical reflection, and action-orientation. Moreover, reflections allow students to better understand themselves by expressing their thoughts and experiences in a focused and structured manner (Gelter, 2003; Ryan, 2011), and, in turn, improve their future learning pursuits. It also gives students the ability to solve problems by reflecting on and relating some of the problems to their own experiences. It makes them aware of their own actions, drawing upon their strengths and weaknesses as human beings.

Dewey (1993) describes reflective thought as "active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the conclusion to which it tends." They can also be interpreted and represented in multiple ways, such as through writing, visuals, orally, or performance (Moon, 2004; Ryan, 2011). Reflective practices can be done through writing, journaling, orally or visually. The goal is to give expression to the accumulated thoughts and experiences.

Moreover, in the context of reflection, Donald Schön's discussion of reflective practices cannot be overlooked. Schön (1987) defines reflective practice as a "dialogue of thinking and doing through which we become more skillful" (p. 31). Reflection is essential for the practitioner to not only think back on what they have done – reflection-on-action – but also to think while doing the action. Schön (1987) calls the latter reflection-in-action. Schön argues that practice is not the application of theory to a passive context. Instead, practitioner and situation co-construct meaning through action. When practitioners converse with the situation, they revise their understanding while still engaged in practice. Therefore, a teacher must reflect while teaching and on the outcomes of teaching.

2.4 Common Assessment Practices in Saudi Higher Education

Studies show that teachers are expected to have adequate knowledge of all aspects of assessment to effectively develop their teaching, support their students and respond to their needs, and meet the expectations of stakeholder groups (Herrera & Macías, 2015). Research has shown that students' learning outcomes can be heavily affected by poor decisions made about assessment methods and tasks (Galluzzo, 2005; Umer, 2015). Further, many teachers dislike assessment, leading them to design unsound tests that do not adhere to effective assessment principles (Brown and Abeywickrama, 2010; Herrera and Macías, 2015; Popham, 2004).

In Saudi higher education, summative assessments, such as exams and quizzes, are very common. Most of the participants sit for exams, which are part of the MOE's regulations for conducting assessment in higher education (40% weightage for final exams and 60% for mid-term examinations and coursework (Almossa & Alzahrani, 2022). Almost all of

these assessments include Multiple Choice (MCQ), True/False, Fill-in-the-Blanks, and Matching question types, with only limited points allocated to short notes or subjective questions. Even the subjective question which are included require the learners to depend on

When students only learn a subject to pass the course and move on to the next level, learning itself becomes ineffective because they fail to retain the information they memorize for long. All the previous studies have discussed incorporating reflective practices into EFL classes at higher education institutions. But none of these studies have discussed incorporating reflective practices in literature classes in Saudi higher education.

2.5 Challenges of Incorporating Reflective Practices

However, incorporating reflective practices at the tertiary level has several challenges. Research shows that higher education institutions tend to prioritize academic achievement, student retention, and student satisfaction over innovative pedagogical approaches such as reflective practices (Davis, 2003; Lo, 2010; Richards & Richards, 2013). There are several reasons why the concept of including reflective practices is still new in some institutions. With institutional focus on priorities such as academic outcomes and student satisfaction, there may not be sufficient resources allocated to supporting the use of reflective practice in the classroom (Davis, 2003; Threlfall, 2014). As reflection requires a deep learning approach, universities should provide appropriate curricula, assessment policies, and student support and teacher training to assist students' uptake of reflective practice (Chan et al., 2020; Davis, 2003; Wong-Wylie, 2007).

Moreover, due to time constraints during a semester, institutions are more focused on completing the syllabus and preparing students for tests/exams. As a result, teachers are occupied with teaching to the test. This was supported by Grant and Zeichner's (1984) study, which found that the lack of classroom time and the conflict between the dominant institutional norms of teaching and the desired course of action are major challenges that reflective teachers face in their practice. In a study by Halim et.al (2025) it is stated that because of teaching to the test, students can be successful in passing exams. However, their creativity memorizing information from the text. Because of their lack of efficiency in critical thinking or creativity, to achieve high grades or at least pass the course, most students prefer to memorize the answers and reproduce them during the exam.

and critical thinking are affected because they cannot apply their knowledge in real-world contexts. There are hardly any opportunities for students to reflect on the course materials or on their progress, with a special focus on their strengths and weaknesses. Moreover, another major challenge is that most teachers in the Saudi higher education context are not sufficiently familiar with or trained to incorporate reflective practices in their classrooms. Therefore, such practices, if not handled properly, will overwhelm both teachers and students.

2.6 Reflective Practices in Saudi Arabia at the Tertiary Level

Over the years, as the classroom setting has shifted from teacher-centred to learner-centred, reflective practices have played a significant role. Considering Schiro's Learner-Centred Ideology, the curriculum should be tailored to meet the interests and needs of each individual learner, granting them autonomy and self-determination (Schiro, 2013). Learners' interests significantly influence curriculum content, and students actively participate in organizing this content, planning their educational journey, and managing their own learning experience (Schiro 2013).

2.7 Critiquing the Current Syllabus at the Researchers' Institution

The existing tertiary-level literature syllabus demonstrates a traditional orientation toward instructor-centred interpretation and product-based assessment. While it succeeds in exposing students to a broad range of literary texts and theoretical concepts, it does not adequately cultivate the reflective, metacognitive, and process-oriented skills that contemporary literature pedagogy emphasizes. The current syllabus prioritizes the delivery of literary content—historical background, authorial biography, and standard critical interpretations—often presented through lectures or instructor-led discussions. This approach positions students primarily as recipients of knowledge rather

than co-constructors of meaning.

Assessment in the existing syllabus focuses almost entirely on summative products, such as formal essays and exams. Such tasks measure final performance but obscure the interpretive processes through which students arrive at their conclusions. Without guided reflection, students are rarely prompted to examine their reading strategies, identify challenges, or understand how their assumptions influence interpretation. The syllabus frames literary interpretation largely as an external authority to be mastered, rather than an active, situated practice that benefits from students' diverse experiences and viewpoints. Class discussions and written assignments seldom ask students to reflect on how their positionalities, cultural backgrounds, or disciplinary interests shape their readings.

Moreover, although the syllabus states goals related to critical thinking, interpretive creativity, and appreciation of literary complexity, the absence of structured reflective practices means that these objectives are not meaningfully operationalized. Learning activities do not explicitly guide students to interrogate their reasoning, trace conceptual growth, or synthesize insights across texts. The result is a gap between the stated pedagogical aims and the actual learning experiences students receive.

Therefore, the proposed redesign—grounded in reflective practices—seeks to address these gaps by aligning instructional methods, assessment practices, and course objectives with a more student-centred, process-oriented vision of literary learning. The researchers aim to fill the gap in the literature by addressing the following research questions.

- What are effective strategies for integrating reflection into literature syllabi at the tertiary level?
- How does incorporating reflective practices impact students' engagement in literature classes?

3 Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a conceptual and design-based approach to propose a model for integrating reflective practices in tertiary- level EFL classrooms in Saudi Arabia. The study is grounded in theoretical analysis and review of best practices from existing literature, aiming to offer actionable recommendations. A conceptual framework sets forth the standards for defining a research question and for finding appropriate, meaningful answers to it. It is typically crafted specifically for the research project it supports. A conceptual framework draws upon existing theories, models, or established bodies of knowledge to provide a structure for understanding the research problem. It defines the scope of the research, identifies relevant variables, establishes research questions, and guides the selection of appropriate methodologies and data analysis techniques (Singh, 2023). Therefore, it connects the theories, assumptions, beliefs, and concepts behind the research.

3.2 Current Syllabus

Drawing on the researchers' first-hand experiences teaching the course 'Short Story' to Saudi students, they have proposed a model for incorporating reflective practices into literature classes at the tertiary level in Saudi higher education. To this end, some short stories have been selected to illustrate how reflection in literature classes can enhance students' critical thinking, creativity, analytical skills, and, most importantly, reflective skills. For this study, five short stories have been chosen that are currently taught at the researchers' institution. See Table 1. The semester lasts for 16 weeks.

Table 1: Selected Short Stories at the Researchers' Institution

The Necklace	**How Much Land Does a Man require?**	**The Story of an Hour**	**The Gift of the Magi**	**Old Man at the Bridge**
Guy de Maupassant	Leo Tolstoy	Kate Chopin	O' Henry	Ernest Hemingway
1884	1886	1894	1905	1938

3.3 Students Who Study Short Story (ENG 2362-2)

Table 2 gives an overview of the students who study the course Short Story (ENG-3262-2)

Table 2: An Overview of the Students

Pre-requisite	**Course title and code**	**Mode of Instruction**	**Students**	**Level**	**Age**
Introduction to Literature ENG-2361-3	Short Story ENG 2362-2	Face-to-face	Saudi undergraduates	5 (3rd year) B. A. Honors	20-21

Drawing upon Schön's concept of reflective practice—particularly reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action (Schön, 1983; 1987)—this paper proposes a contextualized Reflective Writing Integration Model (RWIM) for literature classes at the tertiary level. The researchers selected these specific short stories based on the curriculum followed at their institution in Saudi Arabia. The curriculum, which is currently in use, includes assessments such as Formative Assessments, Quiz, Midterm, Seminar and Final Exam. As mentioned earlier, objective questions such as Multiple-Choice Questions, True/False statements, Fill-in-the- Blanks, and Sentence Matching cannot assess students' ability to reflect. Through these assessments, students will demonstrate their performance through various practices, such as classroom discussions, critical analysis of texts, and cooperative learning. Their focus will be on identifying characteristics, technicalities, and components of the short story, recognizing the critical theories and fundamentals and notable modern short story writers, critically comparing and contrasting different short stories, explaining the distinguishing principles and aspects of modern short story.

Hence, the researchers have proposed a conceptual model for incorporating reflective practices in classes through these selected short stories. The researchers have set realistic goals, proposing to incorporate these reflective practices through Formative Assessments.

3.4 Proposed Model

Table 3: Reflective Tasks While Reading "The Necklce" by Guy De Maupassant

Readers' Journal	What was your first reaction to Mathilde's character? Did it change by the end? Why?
Think-aloud-Reading	After reading a passage (What did you notice in this passage? How did it make you feel?
Creative and Reflective Task	Students re-write a short scene from another character's perspective (e.g Mathilde's husband or Madame Forestier). Afterwards they will write on- what new insight they gained from the story by stepping in to this character's shoes?

Table 4: Reflective Tasks While Reading "The Story of an Hour" By Kate Chopin

Readers' Journal	What/ How did you feel about Louise's response to the news of her husband's death?
Think-aloud-Reading	Why is Louise happy to hear the news of her husband's death? Is it called being selfish or does she feel liberated?
Creative and Reflective Task	Write a diary entry from Louise Mallard's perspective during her hour of freedom, expanding on her thoughts about the future.

Table 5: Reflective Tasks While Reading "The Gift of the Magi" By O'henry

Readers' Journal	What emotions do you feel for Della when she is unable to buy a gift for Jim?
Think-aloud-Reading	After reading the story, write about a time when you made a sacrifice for someone you cared about.
Creative and Reflective Task	Write a reflective piece connecting the story to your own life or society today. Consider: What the story teaches us about the difference between price and worth.

Table 6: Reflective Tasks While Reading "How Much Land Does a Man Require?" By Leo Tolstoy

Readers' Journal	The story ends with irony. Reflect on what you think Tolstoy meant when he concluded that "a man needs only six feet of land."
Think-aloud-Reading	As you read, pause at key points and say what's going through your mind — your thoughts, doubts, reactions, and predictions.
Creative and Reflective Task	Imagine the story happening today. Instead of land, what might the protagonist Pahom desire, (money, fame, property or social media following?) Reflect on whether Tolstoy's lesson is still applicable to modern man?

Table 7: Reflective Tasks While Reading "Old Man at the Bridge" By Ernest Hemingway

Readers' Journal	Consider the encounter between the old man and the soldier. Have you ever faced a choice between doing what's required and doing what feels right?
Think-aloud-Reading	Can you think of a real-world situation today that echoes the old man's quiet suffering?
Creative and Reflective Task	Reflect on the difference between seeing suffering and doing something about it.

Having included these reflective tasks in the selected short stories, the researchers recommend engaging students in reflecting during reading and in thinking about what to do next regarding the texts read. As society increasingly values soft skills and competencies, reflective practices are increasingly adopted in higher education, particularly for experiential learning (Chan et al., 2020).

4 Findings

The proposed model in this study shows that the reflective practice tasks included in the current syllabus will help students engage more with the literary texts they study. Saudi EFL learners at the tertiary level do not show much interest in studying literature, as they see no use for it in their careers. They complete the literature courses because they are required to complete their B.A. Honors program.

Reflection requires students to pause, reinterpret, and articulate their evolving understanding of a text. It shifts them from *surface reading* (plot, character identification) to *interpretive engagement* (theme, ideology, narrative strategy). Students learn to track how their thoughts change across drafts, discussions, and re-readings, reinforcing the recursive nature of literary interpretation. It also strengthens metacognition, such as how they read, which interpretive strategies they rely on, where their biases or assumptions influence textual interpretation, and how they can adjust their approaches. Metacognition directly improves academic performance because students learn *how* they learn, not just *what* they learn.

Once students know how to critique the texts, it opens a variety of options for them. They can connect texts to their lived experiences. They get familiar with real-world issues and literary themes. When learners reflect, they can be more aware of self-assessment and growth. They do not rely solely on the instructor's judgement, which supports agency and autonomy. Moreover, students who reflect on their learning become more strategic, better problem-solvers, and more independent learners. Thus, enhanced metacognition provides a clear theoretical justification for the claim that reflective practices improve learning.

Moreover, it challenges the assessment practices currently used at the researchers' institution. Teachers can re-design mainly Formative Assessments for students instead of assessing them with objective questions like Multiple-Choice Questions, True/False statements / Matching statements. When students are challenged to think and interpret texts, they get more involved in the learning process because for objective questions, they depend solely on memorization.

Unlike disciplines that focus on factual recall, literature is inherently interpretive. Meaning is not extracted; it is constructed. Reflective activities help students trace the development of interpretations across multiple readings and identify shifts in perspective. Reflection strengthens critical thinking skills, engagement and personal connection. Also, reflective components document progress over time, help students articulate their growth, and allow instructors to provide targeted feedback.

5 Discussion

In an era where AI is taking over all spheres of education, it is challenging for educators and institutions to keep students engaged and motivated to interact with the texts. The findings show that reflective practices in literature classes can help students to engage personally with literature. Students who reflect on their thinking become more strategic, better problem- solvers, and more independent learners. As discussed earlier, Saudi students come from a background with little exposure to English literary texts. This aligns with the study by Alqahtany (2016) that "Most Saudi learners lack the necessary reading habits in L1 and L2." In addition, they rarely make use of important reading skills when they read English texts." As a result, some of the problems teachers face in teaching literature include low language proficiency, limited reading skills, low motivation, limited prior knowledge of literature, and limited student awareness of its importance (Sebastian, 2017).

Unlike disciplines that focus on factual recall, literature is inherently interpretive. Meaning is not extracted; it is constructed. Reflective activities help students trace the development of interpretations across multiple readings, identify shifts in perspective, evaluate competing critical viewpoints, and engage in critical reflection. This is strongly supported in Fletcher's book *Teaching Literature Rhetorically* (2018), where it is argued that

literature cannot be taught in isolation. "Emotionally engaging students in literary texts helps them not only communicate more effectively by heightening their awareness of pathos and audience but also hold on to their thinking longer and make some meaningful connections" (p. 221). In a literature class, students can engage with the text by reflecting on the experience they gain from reading literary pieces. In such cases, teachers have to use various strategies to engage learners through reflective tasks when they read the prescribed literary texts. The more varied the reflective tasks are, the more engaged students will be. This addresses the research question no. 1.

Moreover, according to John Dewey, reflective thinking is essential for learning and democratic participation. His basic notion is that reflection is an active, deliberative cognitive process involving a sequence of interconnected ideas that includes an individual's underlying beliefs and knowledge. In higher education, reflective practice has become a dynamic, participatory, and cyclical process that contributes to educators' professional development and personal growth" (AI et al., 2017; Davies, 2012; Marshall, 2019). In addition, reflections allow students to better understand themselves by expressing their thoughts and experiences in a focused and structured manner (Gelter, 2003; Ryan, 2011), and, in turn, improve their future learning pursuits. This addresses the research question no. 2.

Finally, Schiro's Learner-Centred Ideology promotes a learning environment where learners are autonomous and learn based on the needs and concerns of individuals. "The goal of education is the growth of individuals, each in harmony with his or her own unique intellectual, social, emotional, and physical attributes" (Schiro, 2013: p.5). Hence, when students reflect while engaging with literary texts, they can express their individual experiences, which makes them more autonomous. It also gives students the ability to solve problems by reflecting on and relating some of the problems to their own experiences. It makes them aware of their own actions, drawing upon their strengths and weaknesses as human beings. Students move beyond surface-level reading to personal interpretation, analysis, and emotional/critical engagement. In addition, studies show that when students learn only to pass the course and move on to the next level, learning itself becomes ineffective because they fail to retain the memorized information for long.

6 Conclusion

Teaching literature is much more than only reading it to answer test-based questions. It is about shaping minds, cultivating empathy, and nurturing creativity. Literature can transform individuals, offering them the chance to explore humanity's complexities, emotions, and ideas in personal and universal ways.

Today's educators have the responsibility to educate a generation who are changing every day. Due to technological interventions, and not to mention AI, there is a tendency among students to deviate from traditional classrooms and become overly reliant on technology. Educators, therefore, have a responsibility to guide students from surface-level reading to deeper meaning-making by providing structured reflection. The current generation no longer spends hours reading a literary text and trying to understand the meaning. They get easily distracted by their devices. Hence, when they are engaged in reflective practices, it gives them more opportunities to engage with texts. Reflection is a foundational concept and practice across the higher education sector, recognized for its role in supporting student learning and professional development (Harvey et al, 2025). Therefore, reflective practices promote metacognition, which improves long-term learning.

6.1 Recommendations

Based on the study findings, the following are the recommendations:

- Teachers who teach literature should integrate structured reflective activities into the syllabus.
- Teachers must be well-trained to design reflective prompts, to facilitate reflective discussions.
- Institutions should re-think assessment practices and include more reflective tasks for students.
- Institutions should ensure that selected literary texts support reflective engagement.
- Teachers need to create opportunities for peer reflection and dialogue.

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The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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