

## The Impact of English Literature (Story Reading) on ESP Learners' Emotion Regulation

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### Abstract

English story reading as a sub branch of literature plays a momentous role with an impressive function to accomplish divergent goals of skill mastery in ELT studies due to the fascinating pedagogical and psychological benefits embedded in it. English for Specific Purpose (ESP) learners encounter reading passages that can implicitly impress their psychological capabilities as they perceive the world from the characters' points of view, attitudes, and emotional expressions. This study aimed to explore the probable effects of English Literature (story reading) on ESP learners' emotion-regulation. Research design was Quasi-experimental. Research sample (with convenience sampling method) included ESP learners in West Tehran branch, Islamic Azad University, who were homogenized via Nelson English Proficiency Test and randomly assigned into two experimental (N=65) and control (N=62) groups. Emotion regulation questionnaire (Gross & John, 2003) with the Cronbach's alpha (0.82) was administered to both groups before and after the treatment. The experimental group received the instruction of English story reading in a seven-week period, while the control group received traditional training during this period. The obtained data were analyzed using the statistical method one independent sample *t*-test on the gain score. The data analysis confirmed the positive improvement in emotion regulation of ESP learners in the experimental group. Accordingly, it can be concluded that English story reading could sharpen, deepen, and broaden learners' insights towards emotion regulation. It can be incorporated in ESP curriculum plans and class syllabi as it facilitates learners to regulate their emotions.

**Keywords:** Literature, Story reading, Emotion-regulation, ESP learners

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### Introduction

Employing literature in foreign language teaching has started since 1980s and literature has been considered as a complementary constituent in education which encourages learners to learn efficiently (Nozen, Kalajahi, Abdullah, & Jabbarzadeh, 2017). Utilization of different genres of literature in education is not among the purposes of creating literary texts (Brumfit & Carter, 1986). At the same time, Oskarsson (2017) regarded using literature in education very difficult or not relevant for many decades and declared that the view of scholars and educators about literature has changed in the past few decade and they begin to consider literature as a means for teaching. Collie and Slater (1987) talked about the importance of selecting

the proper literary book in inspiring and affecting learners. Reading will almost certainly have enduring and gainful influences if a pleasant literary book were chosen.

Alemi (2011) presented that literary writings consist of the broad subject domain, which is the deficiency of common textbooks used in education. Therefore, Language specialists and researchers tried to prove that literature or literary text could be advantageous in language teaching classes. Littlewood (2000) declared that "literature has the capability to create its own context and go beyond the artificial situation of the classroom and present real world experiences and interactions among people" (p.3). Likewise, Sage (1987) talked about the interest of many teachers in applying different genres of literature like novels, plays, and short stories in their classes because of their values and attractiveness.

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Hişmanoğlu (2005) considered reading literature helpful in encountering learners with different points of view and emotions.

Defining the concept of literature is a complicated task. Violetta-Irene (2015) represented a number of definitions for literature, which perceive literature as the emotions, considerations, and attentions in dark and light. Literature is a universe of imagination, hatred, passions, dreams, and conception...put into expressions. Correspondingly, the classification of different genres of literature made by Benediktsdóttir (2016), as *Poetry, Novels, drama, and Short Stories* which considered as four prominent one. Essay and prose fiction are another genres of literature. Short story as a genre of literature highly fit for foreign language instruction because of their short length and the capacity of holding learners' consideration. Four advantages of utilizing short stories in ESL/EFL instruction was noted by Erkaya (2005), which considered short stories as literary, cultural, higher-order thinking, and motivational. Besides, reading high-quality stories in a proper length help language learners deal with the complexities and conflicts in their own lives, release their own emotions and strengthen their creativeness by presenting them a picture of real life and difficulties of characters (Pathan, 2012).

Pathan (2012) also referred to the potential advantage of stories in making learners understand how to establish their emotional balance by reading stories. Kohan and Pourkalhor (2013) considered stories as authentic materials which can be utilized in education to motivate learners, reduce their anxiety, and activate their creative and critical minds. The selection of proper stories related with the requirements of learners has been the challenge for teachers in the process of creating authentic materials based on the level of learners' language proficiency (Benediktsdóttir, 2016). Guber (2007) proposed that if teachers are interested in changing learners' attitudes of self-regulation, they should pay great attention to the application of reading stories in classes.

As stated by Hall (2017), learners learn how to solve their different problems by themselves and regulate their emotion by following the outcomes of the actions of characters. The influential impacts of story reading on mental, moral, and psychological growth have been supported by numerous studies (Durante, 2014; Lichtman, 2018; Sarıca & Usluel, 2016). In stories, learners also find many approaches on how to deal with emotions as a prominent personality feature that at times can inhibit them from a better life. Learning about emotion regulation can be one of the offshoots of teaching English in classes.

Due to this, attention to the concept of emotion and emotion regulation besides life satisfaction, hope, motivation, etc. has been raised recently (Canlı & Lesch, 2007). Psychologists rarely concentrated on emotions until the last fifty years. Emotion regulation as mentioned by Gross (1999) and other researchers came into utilization in the developmental literature in the mid-1980s. Psychologists inclined to consider emotions as possible obstacles to people making good choices and concentrating on tasks even as it gained some respect in the early 1900s (Fried, 2011).

The date of emotion regulation theorization goes to a century back and is established in analytic investigations on mental psychological cautious procedures and the stress and coping training which have prepared for recent exploration on emotion regulation in the children and adults (Gross, 2002). Today it is perceived that prospects of cognition that are the focal point of tutoring, learning, consideration, decision making, memory, social functioning, and inspiration are not just influenced by emotion yet interweaved inside the procedures of emotion. Concentration on emotion regulation can be helpful in education in a way that learners feel and comprehend the outside world beyond the classroom and the feeling of themselves (Fried, 2011). Transmitting beneficial knowledge and increasing cognitive methods are the reasons behind considering emotion as a basic component in the learning progression (Schutz & Lanehart, 2002).

Emotion regulation does not just include the "control" of individual's emotions. The capability to adapt to the needs and difficulties of various contexts and objectives is its important requirement which may include attenuating, maintaining, or expanding the individual's emotional expression or experience (Cole & Deater-Deckard, 2009). According to Gross (2002), "emotion call forth a coordinated set of behavioral, experiential, and psychological response tendencies that together influence how we respond to perceived challenges and opportunities" (p.281). The power of controlling and managing the experience and representation of emotions is a simple explanation of emotion regulation (Gross, 2002). Emotional competence as declared by Weare (2004) required three general aspects named as understanding or evaluation of emotion, expression of emotion, and regulation of emotion. Understanding of emotion is referred to the capability of individuals truly recognizing, appraising and understanding of emotional utterances and inner emotional attitudes. Expression of emotion is referred to the capability of individuals to communicate their emotions through spoken or verbal language and through vocal and

facial utterances, posture, gesture or non-verbal language. Although all three aspects are separate concepts, understanding of emotion and expression of emotion are in reality momentous stages of emotion regulation (Weare, 2004).

The regulation of emotion has possessed a noticeable place in the scientific investigation. The specialists have great trouble characterizing emotion regulation. Most scholars claim that an emotion fundamentally is not a feeling and a feeling is a thing that people subjectively encounter from the emotion; therefore, they differentiate feeling from emotion (Gross, 2007). Moreover, Emotion regulation, in other words, stands for the different type of strategies an individual may utilize to work or adjust the behavioral, physiological, and subjective prospects of emotional reaction and response (Gross, 2007). Specialists have come to understand a profitable place of emotion regulation in education. Melnick and Hinshaw (2000) declared that it empowers the individual to have control on his or her manner or behavior and stay connected with the environment. It empowers learners and educators to keep away from negative emotions and develop positive emotions. According to Gross and John (2003), the utilization of emotion regulation procedures can keep up singular prosperity and enhance interpersonal performances. Along these lines, emotion regulation techniques will likewise influence a learners' capacity to learn and perform at school.

In any case, particular emotion regulation studies need to happen with a specific goal to comprehend how it could be gained and developed in the classroom (Fried, 2011). Because learners do not naturally prefer to be at school or to take part in specific learning exercises, they may need to regulate different types of emotion in the classroom (Turner, Meyer & Schweinle, 2003). Learners who considered themselves as encountering negative emotions throughout the academic responsibilities and tasks had an inferior sense of their academic capability and lower attainment scores. Furthermore, instructors were rated learners with higher levels of emotion regulation as having additional positive impact and these learners announced fewer negative academic impacts. The usefulness and efficiency with which offspring can regulate their emotions might have significant outcomes for education and remembrance.

In supplementary words, Rowley (2015) discussed the difference between regulating an emotion and coping an emotion and represented that the center of attention in emotion regulation might be negative or positive. Emotions are interpreted as comparatively short-lived experiences. Recent theorists of emotion

regulation have tried to recognize further adaptive emotion regulation strategies. For instance, a learner's anxiety about a forthcoming examination could be made out of nervous and anxious feelings (emotional constituent), worry about not performing admirably (cognitive constituent), increased sympathetic and decreased parasympathetic tendency (physiological constituent).

As stated by Lamri (2016), the role of ESP is to assist language learners to develop the required capabilities to utilize them in a particular field of occupation, inquiry, or working environment. Lamri paid special attention to the importance of position and feeling of learners in learning foreign languages and considered fostering critical awareness of learners as one of the benefits of ESP courses. In sum, due to the specificity of different genres of literature in education, it can be said that not only teachers but also institutes, universities, and schools should try to implement extra authentic materials, activities, and strategies to make an improvement in education (Arias Rodriguez, 2017). Additionally, the systematic examination of literature, in particular, story reading and the possible impacts of it on learners' psychological mechanisms is the concern of this study to make learners successful in comprehending and regulating their emotion in various situations. The present study aimed to answer this question that whether literature, in particular, story reading, had any significant impact on ESP learners' emotion regulation.

## Method

### Participants

In order to investigate the effect of English literature in particular story reading on ESP learners' emotion regulation, the participants were selected from among the learners of West Tehran branch, Islamic Azad University who attended the course "English for specific purpose" with the age range of 18-27 and homogenized. Actually, as stated by Stern (2017), this age range considered the critical age of the learners, because their characteristics and personalities are fully shaped and they are able to measure their psychological manners. Among all the learners, only 127 learners were selected as participants of the study and randomly assigned into two experimental (N=65) and control (N=62) groups.

## Instruments

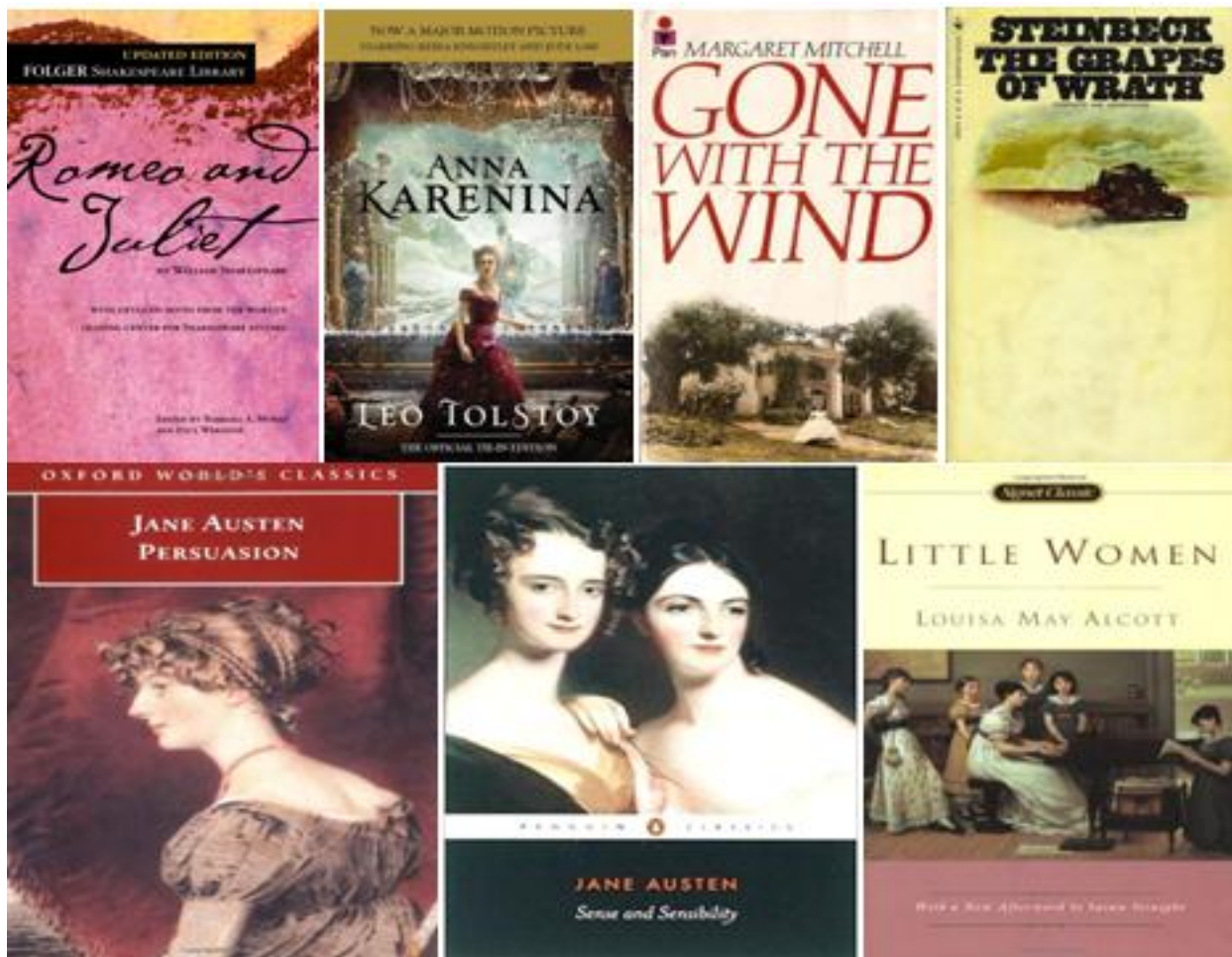
### Nelson Proficiency Test (NPT)

The Nelson proficiency test developed by (Fowler & Coe, 1976) consists of 50 multiple-choice items show particular emphasis on vocabulary development in 10 question items, grammar in 30 question items and reading in 10 question items and each item valued two point. This test was used in this study for the purpose of estimating the language proficiency of the sample population and homogenizing them based on their level of English proficiency which considered intermediate in the present study. Those participants, whose scores fell between the range of one standard deviation above and one standard deviation below the

mean, were regarded as the intermediate level. This test was considered as a highly reliable test with the number of Cronbach's alfa (0.78) and the validity of the test was also insured.

### Stories

Seven well-known intermediate level stories were selected for the objective of this study as *The Grapes of Wrath* Written by *John Steinbeck*; *Gone with the Wind* written by *Margaret Mitchell*; *Romeo and Juliet* Written by *William Shakespeare*; *Anna Karenina* Written by *Leo Tolstoy*; *Sense and Sensibility* Written by *Jane Austen*; *Little Women* Written by *Louisa May Alcott*; and *Persuasion* Written by *Jane Austen*. These stories were instructed to the experimental group in both printed and audio-version.



**Figure 1.**  
The Cover pages of the Selected Books

### Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ)

A 10-item emotion regulation questionnaire (Gross & John, 2003) was used to assess respondents' tendency to regulate their emotions through (1) Cognitive Reappraisal and (2) Expressive Suppression on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The scale has been shown to identify emotion regulation. In scoring, a value of 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7 is assigned to a response. Items 1, 3, 5, 7, 8, 10 make up the Cognitive Reappraisal facet. Items 2, 4, 6, 9 make up the Expressive Suppression facet. Items 1 and 3 at the beginning of the questionnaire define terms "positive emotion" and "negative emotion". The items on the two subscales are summed. The total score of the scale ranges from 1 to 10. Although some of the questions may seem similar to one another, they differ in important ways. Evaluation of the validity and reliability of this test showed that this is a valid test and is highly reliable with the number of Cronbach's alpha (0.82). It is worth noting, Spaapen, Waters, Brummer, Stopa, and Bucks (2014) assessed the validation of this questionnaire, in two community samples.

### Procedure

The present research is a type of quasi-experimental study with a pre-test-post-test experimental-control group design. To assess ESP learners' English proficiency level, Nelson Proficiency Test (NPT) was utilized. Then learners were randomly divided into two control (N=62) and experimental (N=65) groups, based on their scores which were considered as intermediate level. The emotion regulation questionnaire was administered to all the learners in both groups for the purpose of implementing pretest. The objective was to assess the competence of learners

in regulating their emotion before any treatment. The learners in the experimental group were asked to read seven stories in the period of seven weeks (1 session per week) as a treatment. It is worth noting that participants of control group attended the general English classes without any story reading in the specified period. The emotion regulation questionnaire was answered by both groups again as a posttest to investigate any improvement in the competence of the experimental group in regulating their emotion after treatment in contrast to the control group. As a final point, the data were analyzed through one independent-samples *t*-test by using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS).

### Findings

To investigate the effect of story reading on ESP learners' emotion regulation across time, from the pretest to the posttest, one independent-samples *t*-test was conducted on the gain scores (the deviation score), the difference between the pretest and the posttest of learners in both experimental and control groups. The improvement (gain) from the pretest and to the posttest can be computed for each participant by subtracting each person's posttest score from his or her pretest score. The emotion regulation was regarded as a latent composite, so the means of learners' responses to questions of the scale were estimated and used in the *t*-test. It should be pointed out that before conducting *t*-test, the normality assumption was investigated and the skewness and kurtosis of the pretests and the posttests in both groups, experimental and control, were between -2 and +2 (See Table 1 and Table 2), therefore, the normality assumption of independent-samples *t*-test was tenable.

**Table 1.**

*The Descriptive Statistics of Two Times of Testing of Experimental Group (N = 65)*

	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. D	Skewness		Kurtosis	
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
pretest	65.00	1.00	7.00	3.46	1.55	0.26	0.60	0.81	0.51
posttest	65.00	2.00	10.00	6.63	2.07	0.19	0.60	0.84	0.51

**Table 2.**

*The Descriptive Statistics of Two Times of Testing of Control Group (N = 62)*

	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. D	Skewness		Kurtosis	
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
pretest	62.00	1.00	6.00	3.38	1.44	0.23	0.30	-0.81	0.59
posttest	62.00	1.00	7.00	3.96	1.31	0.23	0.30	-0.33	0.59

The results of the independent-samples *t*-test on gain scores of emotion regulation from the pretest to the posttest indicated that there was a significant difference between the means of gain of the experimental group ( $M = 3.16$ ,  $SD = 2.08$ ) and that of the control group ( $M = 0.58$ ,  $SD = 1.03$ ),  $t(94.52) = 8.91$ ,  $p = .00$ , equal variance not assumed (See Tables 3 and 4), with Cohen's *d* effect size of 1.57 which was considered a large effect (Sawilowsky, 2009). It can

be said that learners in the experimental group had far more advances from the pretest to the posttest (an average 3.16-point increase) in comparison with that of their counterparts in the control group (an average 0.58-point increase). Consequently, it can be concluded that story reading had a statistically significant large effect on ESP learners' emotion regulation.

**Table 3.**

*The Descriptive Statistics of Emotion Regulation Gain Scores of Different Groups from Pretest to Posttest*

Group	N	Mean	Std. D	Std. Error Mean
Gain score	EXP	65.00	3.16	2.08
	CNT	62.00	0.58	1.03

Note: EXP = Experimental, CNT = Control

**Table 4.**

*Independent Samples t-test of Gain Scores from Pretest to Posttest*

Gain Score		Levene's Test		t-test			95% CI	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig.	Lower	Upper
		Equal variances assumed	13.13	0.00	8.78	125.00	0.00	2.00
Equal variances not assumed			8.91	94.52	0.00	2.00	3.16	

## Discussion and Conclusion

The finding of the current research revealed that ESP learners can learn regulating their emotion by reading different versions of famous psychological stories about the up and downs of life that every individual can experience in real life because literature, as Ghosn (2000) presented can be used to make sensational experiences about life to foster advancement of emotional intelligence crucial for tolerance and empathy. Psychological aspects of learning languages like emotion regulation are also mentioned in the studies of Gross (1999), Fried (2011), Lu and Wang (2012), Ghosn (2002) that can be considered as a support to the present study. Researchers like Gumora and Arsenio (2002), Boekaerts and Corno (2005), Fried (2011) tried to find authentic materials and different ways for teachers and instructors to help individuals regulate their emotion through education and promote learning. The existing study built upon the theory mentioned by Kivisto (2011) that teenagers psychopathology is interrelated to several contextual and developmental issues; specifically, the family context prepares adolescents for emotion regulation, temperamental and biologically determined

capabilities to deal with the stimulus that causes stress and negative feeling.

Studies tried to explore how learners decide when and how they experience emotions and how they show them and found emotions constantly useful or when it must be regulated in several phases. Scholars stated that emotion regulation is rooted in the psychological bases, and can regulate the performances of learners (Gumora & Arsenio, 2002). In addition, the findings of the present study are consistent with those reported by Al-Mahrooqi and Sultana (2008) who investigated the role of short stories in fostering integrated language proficiencies and skills. They declared that literature (story reading or telling) is fundamental to English language learning context and learners can benefit critically, emotionally, and intellectually from reading the well-known stories.

Ghosn (2002) referred to the potential impact of literature in individuals' emotion by citing the Goleman (1995) definition of emotional intelligence which is concerned with good decision making when confronting setbacks. By interaction with other people and gaining experiences about different lives, learners can learn how to improve their emotional intelligence and regulate them successfully. Therefore, the findings of some studies on the application of literature are in

line with the findings of this study which indicated that learners' skills are positively connected with the reports of teachers about learners' academic achievement and productivity in class (Roopnarine & Dede Yildirim, 2018; Violetta-Irene, 2015). Further, Fried (2011) concluded that emotion regulation is involved heavily in every aspect of the teaching and learning procedures.

Findings also showed that the scores of experimental group in answering emotion regulation questionnaire increased; compared to those in pretest which indicated that instructing literary stories in ESP classroom help learners to change their ways of thinking about life and themselves and try to be competent in regulating their emotion which is in line with Ceylan's (2016) study that regarded literature in particular short story effective in increasing critical abilities, linguistic understanding, and emotional awareness of the university learners. Moreover, English literature and short stories could have a large impact on the improvement of learners' emotion regulation as they explore how characters behave and treat with others in social contexts and how they show their emotions or control and regulate them and how they come up with the sequences of their various emotions.

The findings of the present study confirmed that literary story reading enables learners to think about the reasons of events rather than the results and try to analyze and interpret the plot of the story according to their own critical thinking which is compatible with the research of Pathan (2012) that verified the emotional and personal advantages of reading stories in EFL classroom by demonstrating how characters face psychological, personal, and emotional problems. Correspondingly, Marsh (2013) tried to examine the behavioral and psychological aspects of emotion regulation in preschoolers as their parents read two sad and happy stories for them and discussed their feelings about the content of stories. The findings of the study proved multiple extrinsic and intrinsic pathways to develop emotional regulation and empathy in children.

The restricted access to all Iranian ESP learners and the limited time available for the treatment (seven weeks, one session per week) might be regarded as the difficulties of the present study. Considering the psychological and behavioral enhancement of learners and the importance and application of English as the most useful international language, the findings of this study have some useful implications for ESP teachers, ESP instructors, EFL teachers, EFL administrators, curriculum planners, syllabus designers, material developers, analysts, educators, and psychologists.

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