Original Paper

Attitudes towards English Literature: The Case of EFL Students at Three Saudi Colleges

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Abstract

The primary aim of the study was to investigate the attitudes held by Saudi EFL students and the difficulties they have in studying English literature. Another aim was to explore gender differences in attitudes towards English literature. The relationships between (1) general motivational orientations to learn English and attitudes towards English literature, and (2) general motivational orientations to learn English and attitudes towards English literature, and performance in literary courses were also explored. A cohort of 180 Eighth level majors at three Saudi colleges completed a researcher-developed 28-item questionnaire probing their general motivational orientations to learn English and attitudes towards English literature in terms of emotions associating studying English literature, cultural and religious sensitivities about studying English literature and the importance of studying English literature. Participants were found to hold positive attitudes towards English literature. They reported no cultural or religious sensitivities about studying English literature in their context. The difficulties they reported facing when studying English literature included difficult vocabulary and literary terms, difficult content and long pieces of literature, lack of language proficiency, and having to exert great effort. No gender differences were found in attitudes. Intrinsic motivation was found to be a significant predictor of positive attitudes towards English literature. Finally, a significant positive relationship was found between general motivational orientations to learn English and attitudes towards English literature, and performance in literary courses. Instructional implications and suggestions for further research are provided.

Keywords

attitudes towards English literature, EFL students, Saudi colleges

1. Introduction

Researchers identified a number of challenges that Saudi college EFL students face in studying English literature. Some of the reasons for these challenges are unique to the Saudi context, while other reasons are common to all EFL settings. Of the reasons that are specific to the Saudi context are social, cultural, and religious sensitivities (Shah, Hussain, & Nasseef, 2013). Because of its religious status, Saudi Arabia is known to be the most conservative among all Arab and Muslim countries. Undoubtedly, this can affect the teaching and learning of foreign literature at Saudi universities. Foreign, especially western literature in Saudi Arabia is often conceived of as threatening to the national Muslim identity "which promotes anti-religious and anti-cultural values" (Hussein & Al-Emami, 2016, p. 126). There is no research-based evidence that these views are widespread in Saudi Arabia taking into consideration Faruk's (2014) assertion that Saudis' attitudes towards English are becoming highly positive because most Saudi people have come to believe that English is vital to the country's future prosperity. In fact, the extent to which these views are widespread needs to be explored and documented. But based on the unfavorable comments that students give from time to time about the literature of non-Muslim societies in Saudi universities, the researcher can allege that such views do exist. Another reason is that foreign literature is totally absent in the curricula of pre-university schools. High school curricula only include oversimplified and unrepresentative works of native male writers (Zaalah, 2010). Exclusion of foreign literature at pre-university schools is done with the purpose of averting such objectives of using multicultural literature as fostering acceptance and appreciation of cultural diversity and developing sensitivity to social inequalities (Hussein & Al-Emami, 2016, p. 126). Thus, students initiate their university education with almost no idea about English literature.

Hussein and Al-Emami (2016, p. 127) mention another important reason, i.e., lack of critical thinking which is required for understanding and appreciating literary texts. They attribute lack of this type of thinking to rote learning that is the dominant learning mode at Saudi schools where students, as asserted by Alkubaidi (2014), memorize answers and paragraphs sometimes without fully comprehending them. Like most students in all EFL settings, Saudi students find literary texts rather difficult as they lack language proficiency and reading strategies. This can reduce benefits students get from studying literature. Littlewood (1986, p. 181) asserts that appreciation of literary works is not likely without linguistic readiness, "it is fruitless to expect pupils to appreciate literary works for which they are not linguistically ready". Mohammed (2017) suggests that when literature is taught to students with poor language proficiency and reading strategies, the literary aspects of the text are de-emphasized. Finally, Saudi students lack interest in reading literature owing to cultural factors and to a factor that applies worldwide, i.e., the heavy dependence on the new technologies, particularly the Internet (Mohammed, 2017). The superficial nature of on-line reading has significantly changed people's reading habits (Birkerts, 1994). That is, most people no longer read in-depth to fully comprehend and appreciate what they read.

Despite the numerous benefits that students get from studying English literature and the several

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challenges they face in this area, the teaching and learning of English literature in academic programs at Saudi colleges is under-researched (Mekheimer, 2011; Hussein & Al-Emami, 2016). An area that needs to be researched is Saudi college EFL students' attitudes towards English literature. The challenges that Saudi students face with English literature provide convincing rationale for exploring the nature of their attitude towards English literature. There is a general consensus now that attitude is one of the affective factors that influence language learning. Positive attitudes are known to facilitate language learning, while negative attitudes inhibit it (DeBot, Lowie, & Verspoor, 2005; Visser, 2008). It is imperative that teachers and learners know how to "overcome problems created by negative emotions" and how to "create and use more positive, facilitative emotions" (Arnold & Brown, 1999, p. 2).

2. Statement of the Problem

Poor affect can, in part at least, explain learners' poor performance in language learning. This contention is what urged the researcher to investigate Saudi EFL college students' attitudes towards English literature as a factor that might explain their poor performance in literary courses. For several years, the researcher has been teaching literature to English majors at the College of Sciences and Humanities at Thadiq, Shaqra University, KSA. Throughout these years, the researcher has noticed that students' performance in literary courses is not satisfactory. The investigation was also inspired by the fact that students occasionally voiced negative comments about literature, e.g., "Why studying all these literary courses?", "Why placing all the emphasis on foreign literature to the neglect of national literature?", "skill-based courses are more beneficial to us than literary courses", and "If only we could study more linguistic courses and less literary courses". The present study therefore aimed to explore students' attitudes towards English literature and the difficulties they have in studying it. Gender differences in attitudes towards English literature would also be explored. Another aim was to explore the relationship between general motivational orientations (intrinsic and extrinsic) and attitudes towards English literature. A final aim was to explore the effect of students' attitudes on their performance in literary courses. More specifically, the study addressed the following questions:

1. What are students' motivational orientations to learn English and attitudes towards English literature?

2. What difficulties do students have in studying English literature?

3. Are there gender differences in general motivational orientations and attitudes towards English literature?

4. What is the relationship between general motivational orientations and attitudes towards English literature?

5. What is the relationship between attitudes towards English literature and performance in literary courses?

3. Literature Review

3.1 Why Literature in College EFL Curricula?

Integration of literature in EFL curricula, especially academic programs is advocated for several reasons. Literature allows for deductive learning of the language and reduces inductive learning that is tiring and boring if used all the time. Overdependence on inductive learning according to Alfauzan and Hussain (2017, p. 2) "burns learners' motivation to exert the required efforts for becoming a competent speaker in English". That is, literature increases incidental language learning or acquisition which is associated with better affective filter. Literary texts are highly motivating and allow for students' involvement (Moon, 2010). Furthermore, literary texts reinforce students' language proficiency (Savvidou, 2004), enhance language skills, especially critical reading and creative writing (Adam & Babiker, 2015) and stimulate higher cognitive skills such as critical thinking (Moon, 2010). Reflecting on the good effect of literature on reading, the main avenue for language input for FL students, Brumfit (1981, p. 5) suggests that "reading is the most autonomous and individualizable ability in language work and literature is a rich and widely-appealing source of material for reading". Adam and Babiker (2015) documented the positive effect of literature on creative writing among Saudi EFL students as judged by 50 university teachers. Perhaps the most significant benefit of using literary texts in EFL curricula is cultural enrichment. Students studying English as a FL at college academic programs need to know about the culture of the native speakers of English. This knowledge is valuable and even indispensable for language understanding and use. This benefit can only be achieved through interaction with literary texts (Tevdovska, 2016). Bataineh (2014) explored pragmatic competence in two groups of Jordanian EFL students: an experimental group that was taught a syllabus based on literary texts from all genres of English literature and a control group that was taught a syllabus without the literature component. The experimental group proved to have better pragmatic competence (discourse function, speech function and speech acts).

3.2 Challenges Saudi Students face with English Literature

Several factors have been reported to challenge the teaching/learning of English literature in Saudi Arabia. Some of these factors relate to the environment. One of such factors is social, cultural and religious sensitivities (Shah, Hussain, & Nasseef, 2013). In the theoretical background of their study, Hussein and Al-Emami (2016) mention six factors explaining the daunting task of teaching/learning literature in Saudi Arabia, two of which relate to the environment. The first factor is the conservative nature of the Saudi environment and the second is the view of literature as a threat to the national and Muslim identity. These two factors in the researchers' point of view result in "anti-religious and anti-cultural values" (p. 126) and explain the total absence of English literature from the curricula of public schools. The researchers contend that this exclusion of foreign literature is intended to avert some objectives of teaching literature, i.e., "challenging the dominant ideologies, fostering acceptance and appreciation of cultural diversity, developing sensitivity to social inequalities, and encouraging transformation of the self and society" (p. 126). These views are, in fact, theoretical contentions and

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need to be explored in large-scale survey studies, so valid and research-based conclusions on this issue can be reached. From my personal experience, such perceptions about English literature are not so widespread, even though one occasionally hears statements against English literature from some students. Furthermore, these views may be affected by students' economic background and geographical affiliation. Perhaps these views used to be more prevailing long time ago. Some researchers actually wrote about a general shift in attitudes towards the teaching/learning of English as a FL in Saudi Arabia. Alrabai (2016, p. 28) attributes this shift to positive attitudes among Saudis to "the growing access they have to the target language and its community and culture via the social network websites and media" and the increasing number of Saudi students' delegated to take courses in English-speaking universities. This shift is evident from research findings that will be presented in the next section. Such favorable attitudes are expected to be more prevailing with cultural openness that the country is making for nowadays. At present, cinemas and theatres are being established throughout the country and recreational and cultural events are being held guided by an entity established to open the Saudi society to other cultures. That is, traditional inhibitions on culture are now disappearing.

Unlike the above controversial context-specific factors, there are other factors on which there is a general consensus. The first factor is absence of English literature in public school curricula, especially the curricula of high school that only include oversimplified and unrepresentative works of native male writers (Zaalah, 2010; Hussein & Al-Emami, 2016). Thus, students initiate their university education with almost no idea about English literature. The second factor is "students' inability to understand literature due to their deficient proficiency in English and their poor reading skills" (Al-Mahrooqi & Al-Wahaibi, 2012, p. 78). Several studies reported poor language proficiency among Saudi students in all educational stages (e.g., Elyas & Picard, 2010; Al-Khairy, 2013; Alrabai, 2014; Alrashidi & Phan, 2015; Hussein & Al-Emami, 2016). What worsen the situation are the remoteness of literary texts and the use of odd language (Parkinson & Thomas, 2000). This is why literature teachers find themselves involved in two challenging missions: language teaching "since it is quite impossible for students to penetrate literary meanings without a minimum of language proficiency" and dealing with "students' lack of interest in reading literature" (Mohammed, 2017, p. 58). In fact, lack of interest or motivation is another factor that affects the teaching of English literature in Saudi Arabia negatively. Several researchers reported lack of motivation as a general characteristic of Saudi EFL learners (e.g., Fareh, 2010; Khan, 2011; Al-Khairy, 2013, Alrabai, 2014b).

In addition to poor reading skills, students lack interest in reading in general and reading literature in particular. Mohammed (2017, p. 59) suggests that this has become a universal issue "owing to the heavy dependence on the new technologies, particularly the Internet". Birkerts (1994) attributes this phenomenon to on-line reading that has significantly changed people's reading habits. Owing to on-line reading people' reading has become unfocused. Saudi students are no exception and they are affected by this modern trend. In addition to this factor that applies worldwide, Saudi students lack interest in reading because the culture of reading is absent in their context. This is why they lack reading habits

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(Shah, Hussain, & Nasseef, 2013). Hussein and Al-Emami (2016, p. 127) mention another important factor, i.e., lack of critical thinking which is required for understanding and appreciating literary texts. They attribute lack of this type of thinking to rote learning that is the dominant learning mode at Saudi schools where students, as asserted by Alkubaidi (2014), memorize answers and paragraphs sometimes without fully comprehending them.

3.3 Attitudes towards English Literature

In his socio-educational model, Gardner (1985) includes attitudes towards the target language as a major component of motivation along with motivational density and desire to learn the target language. Ajzen (1989, p. 241) defines attitudes as "an individual's disposition to respond favorably or unfavorably to an object, person, institution, or event". Referents of FL attitudes include, among others, attitudes towards the target language, its community, its culture and social values associated with target language (Gardner, 2001). Attitudes are conceived to have three components: cognitive, affective and behavioral (Wenden, 1991). Beliefs, thoughts or viewpoints about the referent constitute the cognitive component. The affective component refers to the individual's feelings and emotions towards the referent. The tendency to adopt particular learning behaviors shapes the behavioral component. Surveying a large number of studies about the effects of attitude on language learning, Brown (2000, p. 181) concludes "positive attitudes towards the self, the native language group, and the target language group enhance proficiency". Research documented a strong correlation between positive attitudes to the target language and language learning achievement (e.g., Alrahaili, 2013; Gardner, 2001, 2010; Al-Tamimi & Shuib, 2009). Negative attitudes on the other hand were found to correlate with poor performance (e.g., Kiptui & Mbugua, 2009).

Few studies explored Saudi college students' attitudes towards English literature. Some of these studies supported the existence of social, cultural, and religious sensitivities about English literature. In a study by Shah, Hussain and Nasseef (2013), five EFL professors were interviewed to share their experiences and ideas about factors influencing the teaching/learning of English as a FL in Saudi Arabia. Major factors identified included social, cultural, and religious sensitivities and lack of motivation. Choudhury (2016) administered a questionnaire with 10 items to the students of Bisha University to obtain data about their attitudes towards English literature. Examples of questionnaire items are "From my English literature classes, I feel English culture is better than other cultures" and "I sometimes worry for losing my identity and Islamic culture in English literature classes". Of the findings reached in the study is that 33% of the students were worrying about losing their identity and Islamic culture in English literature classes. However, participants showed a general disposition to learn English literature. The other studies revealed that the Saudi context is not unsupportive of the teaching/learning of English literature. Alrahaili (2013) analyzed data collected from 510 Saudi university students. It was found that participants generally held positive attitudes towards English and its speakers. However, they rejected the target language group's social and religious values. This means that students accept western literature even though they reject its social and religious values. In other words, students are

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aware that inclusion of western literature in their curricula is beneficial to them and that this literature should not be rejected altogether for its social and religious values that clash with theirs. A similar finding was reached in a study conducted long ago (Al-Haq & Smadi, 1996) where 1,176 undergraduate university students representing all universities in Saudi Arabia were surveyed for the impact of English on the local culture. The vast majority of students did not believe the learning of English to push them away from their Arab/Muslim culture towards a more westernized lifestyle and belief system.

In another study (Hagler, 2014), Saudi EFL students' positive attitudes extended to the target language culture. A cohort of 210 male and female Saudi university students responded to an open-ended questionnaire groping their attitudes towards western culture. A clear majority showed a positive disposition towards Western culture and indicated that they liked some aspects of the Western culture. Mekheimer (2011) explored the attitudes of faculty and students at King Khalid University towards English literature. Instructors and students showed positive attitudes towards teaching/learning English literature. Based on this finding, the researcher concluded that the participants recognized the important role of literature in learning about other cultures. Of the factors reported in the study to negatively impact the teaching/learning of English literature in Saudi Arabia are the rigid socio-religious context and the inappropriate selection of literary texts. Alfauzan and Hussain (2017) investigated the attitudes and perceptions of Saudi English majors at a large public university. A total of 59 students (25 studying a literature course, 25 linguistics course and nine had already passed at least one literature course) participated in the study. Questionnaires were used to collect quantitative data and retrospective essays were used for qualitative data. The results of the study showed that the participants had positive attitude towards literature courses. The findings also revealed that learners' social environment (family, friends, classmates, teachers, etc.) significantly contributed in constructing positive attitudes towards literature. This finding again supports the shift to positive views about English literature in the general Saudi context. In brief, the aforementioned studies reveal that Saudi students' attitudes towards English literature are generally positive. However, results about the Saudi environment being supportive of the teaching of English literature are inconsistent.

3.4 Gender Differences in Attitudes towards English Literature

To the best of the researcher's knowledge, gender differences were not explored in studies that investigated attitudes towards English literature in Saudi Arabia or other countries. However, studies that explored attitudes towards general FL learning reported mixed results concerning gender differences, with some studies reporting either males of females as having more positive attitudes (e.g., Abidin, Mohammadi & Alzwary, 2012; Soleimani & Hanafi; 2013; Abu-Snoubar, 2017), and other studies reporting equal attitudes (e.g., Durer & Sayar, 2012). For instance, Abu-Snoubar (2017) explored the attitudes of Al-Balqa Applied University students towards learning English as a foreign language. The effect of gender on attitudes was also explored. Females proved to be more positive in their attitudes. Conversely, Soleimani and Hanafi (2013) investigated the attitudes of a group of Iranian

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EFL students towards English language learning. Male students' positive attitude was found to be higher than that of female students'.

3.5 Motivational Orientations

According to Gardner and Lambert (1972), there are two types of motivation. These are integrative and instrumental. Integrative motivation refers to the desire to integrate into the culture of the second language group. Instrumental motivation on the other hand means learning the language for instrumental goals such as getting a good job and reading technical material. Another view of motivation was later proposed by Deci and Ryan (1985) who classified motivation into intrinsic and extrinsic with intrinsic motivation referring to motivation "to engage in an activity for its own sake" and extrinsic motivation to motivation to engage in an activity as a means to an end" (Pintrich & Schunk, 2002, p. 245). Students who perceive learning as a goal in itself and find learning interesting and challenging are intrinsically motivated. Those who engage in learning for external factors such as earning a reward or avoiding punishment are extrinsically motivated (Ehrman, Leaver, & Oxford, 2003; Slavin, 2003).

Until recently integrative motivation was claimed to be more influential in effective learning than instrumental motivation (Gass & Selinker, 2001). However, there is no sufficient research base for this claim. On the contrary, there is some research evidence against this claim. For instance, Wong (2011) explored which type of motivation played a more important role among third-year Chinese ESL undergraduates. Instrumental motivation was found to be more important for those students. Owing to the controversy over the relative importance of the two types of motivation, some scholars included the context where language learning takes place in their view of motivation. In this respect, Dörnyei (1990, p. 48) writes "The nature and effect of certain motivation components might vary as a function of the environment in which the learning takes place". This means that instrumental motivation may work better than integrative motivation in FL contexts (Dörnyei, 1994), where learners have limited access to the L2 culture (Oxford, 1996). Instrumental motivation was empirically found to be more influential than integrative motivation in FL settings (e.g., Moskovsky & Alrabai, 2009; Bobkina & Fernandez, 2012; Tahaineh & Daana, 2013; Goktepe, 2014). For some researchers, the reason why instrumental motivation is more influential in FL contexts is that language in FL contexts are learned away from the target language speakers and their culture (Al-Amer, 1998).

4. Method

4.1 Participants

A cohort of 180 English majors (104 males and 76 females) from three colleges (Thadiq College of Science and Humanities, Hurrymila College of Science & Humanities and Shaqra College of Arts) at Shaqra University, KSA participated in the study. They were enrolled in levels four, seven and eight in the first semester of the academic year 2019/2020. These levels were selected because they have a literary concentration. More specifically, there are two literary courses in level four (Appreciating

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Poetry & Introduction to American Literature), four courses in level seven (Shakespeare, 19th Century Novel, Literary Criticism 1 & Victorian Poetry), and four courses in level eight (Modern Poetry, Modern Drama, Modern Novel & Literary Criticism 2).

4.2 The Instrument

A questionnaire was developed by the researcher to identify students' general motivational orientations and attitudes towards English literature. Relevant questionnaires (Mainly, Gardner, 1985; Boonrangsri, Chuaymankhong, Rermyindee, & Vongchittpinyo, 2004; Kassem, 2019) were surveyed to construct this questionnaire. Initially 38 items were developed around the themes of motivations to learn English, emotions associating studying English literature, the importance of studying English literature, cultural and religious sensitivities about studying English literature and perceived self-efficacy in studying English literature. This preliminary version was submitted to three TEFL specialists to decide on its validity for assessing EFL students' motivation for learning English in general and attitudes towards English literature. Based on the specialists' feedback, six items that related to perceived self-efficacy were deleted because of being irrelevant to motivation or attitude. This left the questionnaire with 32 items. Students responded to questionnaire items based on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 5 "Strongly agree" to 1 "Strongly disagree". Items with negative statement were reverse coded so that higher means indicated higher motivation and attitude.

The questionnaire was then administered to the participants (an Arabic version so language would not affect the results negatively). A factor analysis with Varimax rotation and eigenvalues of >1 was conducted on the responses of the participants to decide on the items to be included in data analysis. Items with factor loadings less than .4 or those that loaded significantly on more than one factor were deleted (6 items) and the correlation matrix was reanalyzed. A five factor solution (see Figure 1) was found, which accounted for 62.21% of the total variance. Examination of the content of items that loaded onto the factors resulted in labeling them as: emotions associating studying English literature (10 items accounting for 28.98% of the variance), cultural and religious sensitivities (7 items accounting for 14.59% of the variance), intrinsic motivation (3 items accounting for 7.65% of the variance), extrinsic motivation (3 items accounting for 6.16% of the variance), and importance of studying English literature (3 items accounting for 4.83% of the variance). The alpha estimates of internal consistency for emotions associating studying English literature, cultural and religious sensitivities, intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, importance of studying English literature and the whole questionnaire were .93, .75, .72, .67, .69, and .92 respectively. These values indicate that the questionnaire was quite reliable.
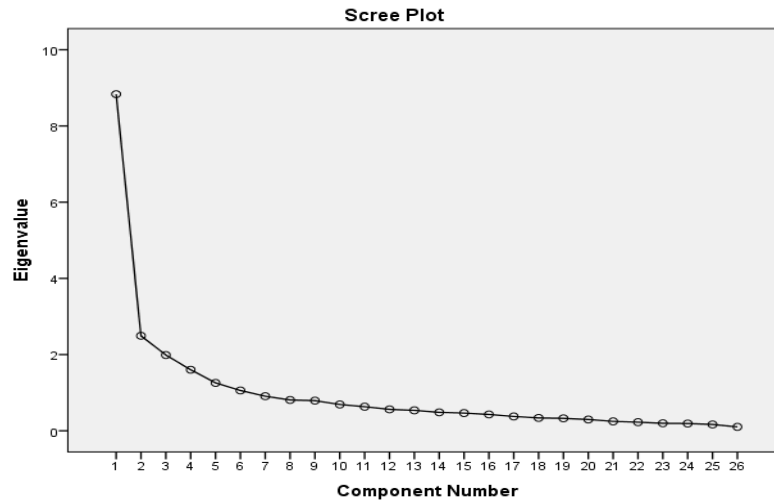
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Figure 1. The Scree Plot of the Extracted Factors

Table 1. Factors and Items Loaded on Them

Item		Loading
Factor 1: Emotions associating studying English literature		
2	Studying English literature is a lot of fun.	.783
4	Studying English literature makes me feel proud.	.682
8	I feel excited when I'm on my way to a literary class.	.840
13	Before I started the English program, I was eager to study literature.	.753
14	Reading English novels is amusing.	.598
17	I like analyzing English literary works.	.828
18	I feel happy when I read English poems.	.768
22	The study of English literature turned out to be more enjoyable than I thought before I started my study in the English department.	.581
25	I feel happy when I study English literature at home.	.868
26	I will keep in touch with English literature after I graduate.	.757
Factor 2: Cultural and religious sensitivities		
9	People around me have good perceptions of the study of English literature.	.581
15	Studying English literature can make students adopt values against their religion and culture.	.815
19	My native culture does not encourage the study of English literature.	.539
20	I do not like English literature because it is different from our culture, habits, and religion.	.578
21	English literature can affect my native culture negatively.	.700
23	People around me see that studying English literature is threatening to our religion	.824
24	Knowing about the culture of native speakers of English is good even if it has elements that clash with our culture.	.491

Factor 3: Intrinsic Motivation

10	I study English because I'm interested in English culture.	.633
11	I would like to continue to learn English after I graduate.	.779
12	Knowing English gives me a feeling of success.	.809

Factor 4: Extrinsic Motivation

1	I study English to get a good job.	.718
3	I study English because it will be helpful for my future career.	.543
7	I study English because people respect persons who know English.	.651

Factor 5: Importance of studying English literature

5	I see no point in studying English literature.	.444
6	Studying literature enhances my vocabulary knowledge.	.679
16	Studying English literature increases my understanding of the culture of native E. speakers.	.632

To further establish the internal consistency of the questionnaire, correlations among items and the total scores of the dimensions to which they belonged (see Table 2) were computed. All correlation coefficients were significant at the 0.01 level, which indicates high internal consistency. The final version of the questionnaire had 26 items probing emotions associating studying English literature (items 2, 4, 8, 13, 14, 17, 18, 22, 25, 26), cultural and religious sensitivities about studying English literature (items 9, 15, 19, 20, 21, 23, 24), intrinsic motivation to learn English (items 10, 11, 12), extrinsic motivation to learn English (items 1, 3, 7), and the importance of studying English literature (items 5, 6, 16).

Table 2. Internal Consistency of the Questionnaire

Dimension	Item	Pearson Correlation coefficient
Emotions associating studying English literature	2. Studying English literature is a lot of fun.	.810**
	4. Studying English literature makes me feel proud.	.740**
	8. I feel excited when I'm on my way to a literary class.	.838**
	13. Before I started the English program, I was eager to study literature.	.757**
	14. Reading English novels is amusing.	.670**
	17. I like analyzing English literary works.	.844**
	18. I feel happy when I read English poems.	.794**
	22. The study of English literature turned out to be more enjoyable than I thought before I started my study in the English department.	.683**
	25. I feel happy when I study English literature at home.	.873**
	26. I will keep in touch with English literature after I graduate.	.799**

Cultural and religious sensitivities	9. People around me have good perceptions of the study of English literature.	.565**
	15. Studying English literature can make students adopt values against their religion and culture.	.688**
	19. My native culture does not encourage the study of English literature.	.568**
	20. I do not like English literature because it is different from our culture, habits, and religion.	.705**
	21. English literature can affect my native culture negatively.	.741**
	23. People around me see that studying English literature is threatening to our religion	.625**
	24. Knowing about the culture of native speakers of English is good even if it has elements that clash with our culture.	.538**
Intrinsic motivation	10. I study English because I'm interested in English culture.	.846**
	11. I would like to continue to learn English after I graduate.	.744**
	12. Knowing English gives me a feeling of success.	.786**
Extrinsic motivation	1. I study English to get a good job.	.662**
	3. I study English because it will be helpful for my future career.	.569**
	7. I study English because people respect persons who know English.	.860**
Importance of studying English literature	5. I see no point in studying English literature.	.684**
	6. Studying literature enhances my vocabulary knowledge.	.809**
	16. Studying English literature increases my understanding of the culture of native English speakers.	.815**

[**]p<0.01 level (2-tailed)

In addition, there were two open-ended questions about (1) the difficulties students face when studying English literature and (2) the presence of cultural and religious sensitivities about studying English literature in the Saudi context. The purpose of including these two questions was to give the participants a greater opportunity to reflect on difficulties and sensitivities. Answers to these questions would be treated both quantitatively and qualitatively.

4.3 Data Analysis

The data obtained from completed questionnaires were analyzed using the SPSS 15.0 package program. Means and standard deviations were used to identify the nature of students' motivation and attitudes. To identify whether means are high, medium or low, the researcher followed Oxford's (2001) scoring system: high (mean of 3.5 or higher), medium (mean of 2.5-3.4), and low (mean of 2.4 or lower). Correlations were used to identify the relationship between type of motivation and attitudes towards literature, and attitudes towards literature and performance in literary courses. Gender differences in

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motivation and attitudes were explored using independent samples t-test. Finally, difficulties students face when studying literature were explored via percentages.

5. Results

5.1 Students' Motivational Orientations to Learn English and Attitudes towards English Literature

Means and standard deviations were computed to answer the first research question about motivational orientations and attitudes that students held about English literature. Table 3 presents this data.

Table 3. Means and Standard Deviations of Students' Responses to the Questionnaire

No.	Item	M	SD
	Emotions associating studying English literature.		
14	Reading English novels is amusing.	3.68	1.18
2	Studying English literature is a lot of fun.	3.56	1.21
4	Studying English literature makes me feel proud.	3.55	1.08
26	I will keep in touch with English literature after I graduate.	3.37	1.38
22	The study of English literature turned out to be more enjoyable than I thought before I started my study in the English department.	3.22	1.21
8	I feel excited when I'm on my way to a literary class.	3.07	1.13
18	I feel happy when I read English poems.	2.99	1.35
13	Before I started the English program, I was eager to study literature.	2.91	1.23
17	I like analyzing English literary works.	2.88	1.25
25	I feel happy when I study English literature at home.	2.86	1.24
	Total	**3.21**	.960
	Cultural and religious sensitivities		
23	People around me see that studying English literature is threatening to our religion.	4.18	.964
21	English literature can affect my native culture negatively.	4.00	1.11
20	I do not like English literature because it is different from our culture, habits, and religion.	3.84	1.21
15	Studying English literature can make students adopt values against their religion and culture.	3.80	1.23
24	Knowing about the culture of native speakers of English is good even if it has elements that clash with our culture.	3.80	1.03
19	My native culture does not encourage the study of English literature.	3.43	1.19
9	People around me have good perceptions of the study of English literature.	3.24	1.23
	Total	**3.75**	.710
	Intrinsic motivation		
11	I would like to continue to learn English after I graduate.	4.63	.589

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12	Knowing English gives me a feeling of success.	4.47	.712
10	I study English because I'm interested in English culture.	4.17	.902
	Total	**4.42**	.734
	Extrinsic motivation		
3	I study English because it will be helpful for my future career.	4.55	.662
1	I study English to get a good job.	4.55	.687
7	I study English because people respect persons who know English.	3.30	1.23
	Total	**4.13**	.872
	Importance of studying English literature		
6	Studying literature enhances my vocabulary knowledge.	4.11	1.08
16	Studying English literature increases my understanding of the culture of native English speakers.	3.96	1.07
5	I see no point in studying English literature.	3.77	1.21
	Total	**3.95**	1.12

As presented in Table 3, means of items under emotions associating studying English literature ranged from 3.68 (SD=1.18) to 2.86 (SD=1.24), with a total mean of 3.21 (SD=0.960). Three items received high means and the other seven items received medium means. The total mean for the ten items is medium. This indicates that students held positive emotions concerning studying English literature.

As to cultural and religious sensitivities about studying English literature, means ranged from 4.18 (SD=.964) to 3.24 (SD=1.23), with a total mean of 3.75 (SD=0.710). Of the seven items, five items received high means and two items received medium means. The total mean for the seven items is high. This indicates that cultural and religious sensitivities that some researchers referred to are not existent. That is, the Saudi context is supportive of English literature being integrated in college English programs.

Students proved to be both extrinsically and intrinsically motivated to learn English. The total means for extrinsic and intrinsic motivation to learn English are 4.42 (SD=0.734) and 4.13 (SD=0.872) respectively. All three items of intrinsic motivation achieved high means. Means of two items of extrinsic motivation are high and the mean of the remaining item is medium. As to the final dimension, the importance of studying English literature, means ranged from 4.11 (SD=1.08) to 3.77 (SD=1.21), with a total mean of 3.95 (SD=1.12). All three items achieved high means.

As to responses to the open-ended question "Is the teaching/learning of English literature in your country unfavorable for cultural and/or religious considerations?", 93% (N=168) of the students reported absence of such considerations. Of those 168 students, 55% (N=92) reported absence of unfavorable cultural and/or religious considerations and gave comments to account for their position. The remaining 76 students just gave the response "There are no cultural and/or religious considerations". Overall, students gave sound explanations for absence of cultural and religious

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sensitivities about studying English literature in their university study. This is a sample of comments given by students in response to this question:

Table 4. Favorable Comments in Response to the Open-ended Question about Cultural & Religious Sensitivities

- The belief that English literature can affect one's religion negatively is erroneous.
- Our religion directs us to seek knowledge everywhere.
- It depends on learners. If learners are religiously and culturally aware, it cannot affect them negatively.
- We can take good aspects of other cultures and overlook bad ones. We need to be critical thinkers.
- The irreligious ideas that exist in some literary works are everywhere in various information sources. It's better if we tackle them critically in our university study.
- All the literary courses I studied had no elements that could threaten my religious and cultural beliefs.
- Prophet Mohammed sent a companion to learn the language of the Jews and Ancient Arabs said who knows a tribe's language is safe from their cunning.
- It can never change one's religious/cultural beliefs and it's good to know about other countries' civilizations.
- It can only change cultural beliefs and this change is inevitable and can be positive.
- The English language is today the first language in the world and it is not associated with a given religion, so learning it has become highly recommended.
- Nothing in our religion or culture is against the study of English literature.
- It widens our culture, which has a positive effect on our today's and future life.
- On the contrary, our religion and culture encourage it.
- It cannot affect our religion and culture. Furthermore, if we learn English we can inform people from other religions about Islam.
- The study of English literature is highly recommended and it has no adverse effects on our religion or culture.
- Our religion isn't against any kind of learning.
- It's good for our development, but it must be treated cautiously to avoid works that violate our religious beliefs.
- We can study it and cling to our habits in the same time.
- I think it is recommended and useful both religiously and culturally.
- It is no threat to individuals who are fully aware of the tenets of their religion and culture.

Only 7% (N=12) of the students reported cultural and religious fears about studying English literature in Saudi Arabia. Of those 12 students, only 5 students provided explanations for their position. These were:

Table 5. Unfavorable Comments in Response to the Open-ended Question about cultural & Religious Sensitivities

- It doesn't fit with my native culture and it is focused on western literature to the neglect of Arab literature.

- Some western writers criticize religion in general. They see it as the reason for the retardation of past Europe, so they have developed negative attitude towards all religions.

- It sometimes changes native culture and religious beliefs that we've internalized from childhood.

- It includes concepts that do not fit with our religion.

- It strongly contradicts with Islamic values and virtues.

5.2 Difficulties Students Face when Studying Literature

To answer the second research question about difficulties students have in studying English literature, percentages of difficulties given by students in response to the second open-ended question were computed. Table 6 below shows this data.

Table 6. Frequency of Difficulties Students Face when Studying Literature

No.	Difficulty	Mention	%
1.	Difficult vocabulary and literary terms	112	62
2.	Difficult content and long pieces of literature	104	58
3.	Lack of language proficiency	96	53
4.	Having to exert great effort	92	51
5.	Having to study several works within each genre	74	41
6.	A lot of memorization, e.g., poems	68	38
7.	No difficulties	88	49

It is clear from the above table that 49% of the students (88 out of 180) reported that they did not face any difficulties with English literature. The other 92 reported six major difficulties. The two difficulties that the highest percentage of students reported were difficult vocabulary and literary terms (62%) and difficult content and long pieces of literature (58%). Slightly more than half of the participants reported two difficulties: lack of required language proficiency (53%) and having to exert great effort (51%). The remaining two difficulties were reported by 41% (having to study several works within each genre) and 38% (a lot of memorization, e.g., poems) of the students.

5.3 Gender Differences in General Motivational Orientations and Attitudes towards English Literature

To answer the third research question about gender differences in general motivational orientations and attitudes towards English literature, independent samples t-test was used. Table 7 shows the results of this statistics.

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Table 7. Means, Standard Deviations and t-values for Mean Differences between Male and Female Students on Motivational Orientations and Attitudes towards English Literature

Test	Group	N	M	SD	t-value	Sig.
Emotions associating studying English literature	Males	104	3.15	.860	-.118-	.906
	Females	76	3.17	1.09		
Cultural and religious sensitivities	Males	104	3.74	.731	-.248-	.804
	Females	76	3.77	.684		
Intrinsic motivation	Males	104	4.33	.633	**-2.66-**	**.009**
	Females	76	4.55	.479		
Extrinsic motivation	Males	104	4.04	.593	**-2.43-**	**.016**
	Females	76	4.27	.662		
Importance of studying English literature	Males	104	3.95	.889	-.023-	.981
	Females	76	3.95	.823		

Data in Table 7 reveal that there were no statistically significant differences between male and female students in emotions associating studying English literature (t=0.118, p=0.906), cultural and religious sensitivities (t=0.248, p=0.804) and importance of studying English literature (t=0.023, p=0.981). However, there were statistically significant differences between male and female students in intrinsic motivation (t=2.66, p=0.009) and extrinsic motivation (t=2.43, p=0.016) in favor of female students. That is, both male and female students held similar attitudes towards English literature that proved to be positive as shown by descriptive statistics, while female students outperformed male students in both types of motivational orientations.

5.4 The Relationship between General Motivational Orientations and Attitudes towards Literature

Correlations between types of motivation and attitudes towards literature were also computed to explore the nature of the relationship between motivational orientations (extrinsic and intrinsic) and attitudes towards English literature. Data of this statistics is presented in Table 8.

Table 8. Correlations between Motivational Orientations and Attitudes towards English Literature

		Intrinsic motivation	Extrinsic motivation
Emotions associating studying English literature	Pearson Correlation	.26**	.103
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.168
	N	180	180
Cultural and religious sensitivities	Pearson Correlation	.28**	.139
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.063
	N	180	180

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Importance of studying English literature	Pearson Correlation	.22**	.139
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.062
	N	180	180

**p<0.01 level (2-tailed)

Data in Table 8 reveal that intrinsic motivation correlated significantly with emotions associating studying English literature (r=0.26, p=0.000), cultural and religious sensitivities (r=0.28, p=0.000) and importance of studying English literature (r=0.22, p=0.000). Extrinsic motivation, on the other hand, did not correlate with any of the three dimensions of attitudes towards English literature. This indicates that intrinsically motivated students tend to hold more positive attitudes towards English literature than do extrinsically motivated students.

5.4 The Relationship between General Motivational Orientations to Learn English and Attitudes towards Literature and Performance in Literary Courses

Correlations were computed to answer the fourth research question about the relationship between general motivational orientations to learn English and attitudes towards English literature and performance in literary courses. For this purpose, the average of students' scores in the literary courses included in their level of study (a score out of 100) was used as an index of performance in literature. These results are shown in Table 9.

Table 9. Correlations between General Motivational Orientations and Attitudes towards English Literature and Performance in Literary Courses

	Performance in literary courses	
Emotions associating studying English literature	Pearson Correlation	.74**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	180
Cultural and religious sensitivities	Pearson Correlation	.61**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	000
	N	180
Importance of studying English literature	Pearson Correlation	61**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	000
	N	180
Intrinsic motivation	Pearson Correlation	.41**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	000
	N	180
Extrinsic motivation	Pearson Correlation	.24**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	000
	N	180

**p<0.01 level (2-tailed)

It is obvious from Table 9 that there were strong positive relationships between performance in literary courses and emotions associating studying English literature (r=0.74, p=0.000), cultural and religious sensitivities (r=0.61, p=0.000), importance of studying English literature (r=0.61, p=0.000), intrinsic motivation (r=0.41, p=0.000) and extrinsic motivation (r=0.24, p=0.000). That is, students with higher motivation to learn English (intrinsic and extrinsic) and/or students with positive attitudes towards English literature tend to perform better in literary courses.

6. Discussion

Data analysis revealed a number of significant findings about Saudi EFL students' attitudes towards English literature. Contrary to several theoretical claims, students proved to have positive attitudes towards English literature. The most interesting finding is that social, cultural, and religious sensitivities that some researchers referred to as a factor deterring students from studying English literature (e.g., Shah, Hussain, & Nasseef, 2013) did not exist. Perhaps the deterring sensitivities existed in the Saudi context long ago when the Saudi context was extremely conservative. But now with openness to other cultures there seems to be a positive shift in perceptions about English literature. Students' negative comments about English literature referred to in the statement of the problem section proved to be the exception, not the role. However, the case of the few students voicing such comments needs to be researched. This finding concurs with Faruk's (2014) assertion that Saudis' attitudes towards English are becoming highly positive because most Saudi people have come to believe that English is vital to the country's future prosperity. Alrabai (2016, p. 28) attributes this shift to "the growing access [Saudis] have to the target language and its community and culture via the social network websites and media" and the increasing number of Saudi students' delegated to take courses in English-speaking universities. This finding is also in line with other studies that reported positive attitudes towards English literature among Saudi students (Alrahaili, 2013; Hagler, 2014; Alfauzan & Hussain, 2017).

Students mentioned several difficulties they face with English literature. The difficulties reported by the biggest percentages of students included difficult vocabulary and literary terms, difficult content and long pieces of literature, lack of language proficiency and having to exert great effort. A significant point to mention here is that there is no contradiction between holding positive attitudes towards English literature and reporting facing difficulties in studying it. Students can face difficulties in studying literature and yet like it. In fact, positive attitudes make students persist in the face of challenges. This is in line with the study conducted by Al-Mahrooqi and Al-Wahaibi (2012) where similar difficulties were reported by Omani students with positive and negative perceptions regarding literary courses. Other studies reporting similar difficulties are the studies conducted by Shakfa (2012), Hussein and Al-Emami (2016) and Mohammed (2017).

No gender differences in attitudes towards English literature were found in the present study. Both male and female students held similar positive attitudes. This finding is consistent with other studies that

explored attitudes towards general FL learning (e.g., Durer & Sayar, 2012). However, it is inconsistent with other studies reporting either males of females as having more positive attitudes (e.g., Abidin, Mohammadi, & Alzwary, 2012; Soleimani & Hanafi; 2013; Abu-Snoubar, 2017). As to the relationship between general motivational orientations, intrinsic motivation correlated significantly with positive attitudes towards English literature. The relation of extrinsic motivation to attitudes was insignificant. That is, intrinsically motivated students tend to hold more positive attitudes towards English literature than do extrinsically motivated students. This finding concurs with the contention of Deci and Ryan (1985) that intrinsic motivation improves the quality of language learning. It is also in line with other studies where intrinsic motivation had stronger effect on various aspects of FL learning than extrinsic motivation (e.g., self-efficacy, Fatemi, 2013). However, this is not the same as contending that intrinsic motivation is better than extrinsic motivation. That is why when researchers reflect on intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, they do not view them as categorically different. Rather, they conceive of them as lying along a continuum of self-determination (Deci & Ryan, 1985), i.e., they just differ in the extent to which motivation is self-determined. That intrinsically motivated students have more positive attitudes towards English literature seems logical since those students show greater interest in FL culture. Literature satisfies those students' need to know about the culture of the FL and its native speakers.

Finally, a significant correlation was found between attitudes towards English literature and achievement in literary courses. A possible explanation for this is that students with positive attitudes towards English literature exert greater effort when studying it and show more persistence in the face of challenges. This finding is consistent with the mainstream of attitude research where positive attitudes always correlated significantly with language learning achievement (e.g., Al-Tamimi & Shuib, 2009; Gardner, 2001, 2010; Alrahaili, 2013; Al-Samadani & Ibnian, 2015).

7. Implications

Saudi EFL college male and female students were found to have positive attitudes towards English literature. However, it is highly recommended that teachers of literature grope their students' attitudes to identify students with negative attitudes or erroneous beliefs about English literature. Dispelling such beliefs can have a noticeable effect on students' willingness to study English literature and ultimately their performance in literary courses. Furthermore, no social, cultural and religious sensitivities deterring students from studying English literature were found in the present study (an area that needs further investigation). Thus, teachers of literature should not worry about such sensitivities. This means that they can easily help students to develop more positive attitudes towards English literature through their supportive practices. Careful selection of literary texts is also recommended. Students in the present study complained about having to study long and complicated literary texts. Therefore teachers should use graded literary texts by using simple and short texts with beginning students and gradually increasing the length and complexity of texts. Teachers also need to help students with difficult vocabulary that they encounter in literary texts. Perhaps teachers can teach students word attack

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strategies, e.g. guessing vocabulary from context and identify the meaning of words by structurally analyzing them. A delimitation that should be mentioned here is the small number of participants. The generalizability of results would have been better if the sample was much larger. It is therefore recommended that the study be replicated with a larger sample from different Saudi colleges and universities. Detailed case studies of students with negative attitudes are also recommended for further research in the area.

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