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Literature in language education: exploring teachers' beliefs, practices, creativity, and literary competence

Raees Calafato 

Department of Languages and Literature Studies, Faculty of Humanities, Sports, and Educational Science, University of South-Eastern Norway, Drammen, Norway

ABSTRACT

Given the growing movement in support of blurring the divisions between language and literature teaching, it has become increasingly vital to understand what language teachers think of literature as a language resource, the approaches they employ when teaching with it, the extent to which they can appreciate, understand, analyse, and interpret literary texts, that is, their literary competence, and whether certain traits predict such competence. Yet, research into the use of literature in language education has been primarily concerned with learners rather than teachers. This article reports on an online questionnaire-based study that explored the creativity, orientations towards literature, teaching approaches, and beliefs regarding literature of 170 language teachers in Central Asia and how these elements predicted their literary competence. Participants worked at universities in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan and were teaching Chinese, English, French, German, Russian, and Spanish as foreign languages. The findings revealed that their reading habits and creativity statistically significantly predicted their literary competence while their selection of texts was partly at odds with their professed orientations towards literature.

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Literature; foreign languages; literary competence; creativity; teacher beliefs; teaching practices

1. Introduction

There has been a growing consensus among researchers, international organizations, and education ministries about the need to blur the divisions between language and literature teaching so that learners can more comprehensively build on their ability to engage with a language and the cultures and speakers with which it is associated. For instance, the Modern Language Association (MLA) calls for “a broader and more coherent curriculum in which language, culture, and literature are taught as a continuous whole” to help learners acquire “critical language awareness, interpretation, and translation, historical and political consciousness, social sensibility, and aesthetic perception” alongside “functional language abilities” (MLA, 2007; see also Paesani, 2011). Similarly, the recently revised Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) descriptors from the Council of Europe, as some writers have pointed out, now “enable educators to measure aspects of

CONTACT Raees Calafato  Raees.Calafato@usn.no  Department of Languages and Literature Studies, University of South-Eastern Norway, Grønland 58, Drammen 3045, Norway

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literary competence and language competence at the same time, viewing them as intertwined instead of as discrete entities”, “reject the myth that literature is only for more advanced learners”, and “explicitly signal that even early-stage learners can deal with appropriately chosen literary texts and carry out language tasks connected to them” (Paran et al., 2020, p. 332).

Literature is a term that is 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, where the purpose is to purely provide information (e.g. an instruction manual) (Fabb, 2010; McRae, 1996). Literary (i.e. pertaining to literature and the representational language used therein) texts “convey their message by paying considerable attention to language, which is rich and multi-layered” (Lazar, 1993, p. 5). In terms of research on literature in language education (LLE), and keeping in mind that the CEFR is used by countries both within and outside of Europe as a basis for their school and university language programmes (Bezborodova & Radjabzade, 2022; Byram & Parmenter, 2012), studies have explored learners’ and teachers’ preferences for particular literary forms (e.g. whether they like poetry or novels, etc.) (Calafato, 2018a; Sirico, 2021), the development of learners’ intercultural competence via literary texts (Heggernes, 2021), teachers’ text selection strategies (Luukka, 2019), literature’s effects on learner achievement and language awareness (for a review, see Paran, 2008), the type of literary content found in language textbooks (Calafato & Gudim, 2022b; Calafato, 2018b; Skela, 2014), approaches to teaching with literature (Bloemert et al., 2016; Calafato, 2018a), pedagogical stylistics (Fogal, 2015), and literary competence (Calafato & Simmonds, 2022; Qutub, 2018; Sauro & Sundmark, 2016).

Among the various foci, literary competence has received the least amount of attention from researchers, and studies on specifically teachers’ literary competence are practically non-existent, representing a notable gap in our understanding of language teachers’ professional competence vis-à-vis the use of literature as a resource. Moreover, and just as importantly, few studies have looked at how traits, out-of-school behaviour, and other variables (e.g. age; see Calafato & Paran, 2019; for emotions, see Cheung & Hennebry-Leung, 2020), in short, anything beyond their classroom experiences, relate to language learners’ and teachers’ capacity to work with literature. Methodologically, studies have employed quantitative and qualitative approaches even if their geographic coverage is mostly restricted to Europe. This study contributes to LLE research by expanding the coverage to the Central Asian Republics, where no LLE studies appear to have been conducted. The study explored the beliefs of university teachers of Chinese, English, French, German, Russian, and Spanish (as foreign languages) regarding what they believed were the benefits of using literature as a resource, their orientations towards literature, teaching approaches, choice of literary texts used during lessons, free-time literary reading, creativity, and self-assessed literary competence.

Ultimately, the aim was to broaden the scope of the LLE research field to cover factors like traits, orientations, and literary competence and thereby provide a more holistic, multi-layered understanding of language teacher cognition and behaviour regarding the use of literature as a resource.

2. A competence framework for language teachers' use of literature as a resource

Learning and teaching outcomes depend on a mix of teacher characteristics like their beliefs, knowledge, values, motivations, and skills, among other things (Guerrero & Révai, 2017). These various aspects can be grouped under their professional competence, which Guerrero and Révai (2017, p. 261) describe as:

... a broad term referring to the ability to meet complex demands in a given context by mobilizing various psychosocial (cognitive, functional, personal, and ethical) resources. In this sense, competence is dynamic and process-oriented and includes the capacity to use and to adapt knowledge.

Blömeke (2017) suggests that the relationship between these different characteristics, both disposition- and performance-based, can be conceptualized as a horizontal continuum (see Figure 1) where teachers' affect-motivation, cognition, and conation (e.g. their beliefs about the content they teach, job motivation, the nature of learning and teaching, and their personality traits) are mediated in interactions with their performance (i.e. teaching practices and overall behaviour) through situation-specific skills (i.e. how they perceive and interpret any given situation). She notes that the interplay between these various characteristics in an individual represents their "competence profile". Her proposed framework proves useful in exploring the dynamics between language teachers' beliefs about literature as a resource, free-time literary reading habits, orientations towards literature, teaching approaches, creativity, and literary competence, all of which comprise a part of their competence profiles regarding literature as a language resource (see Sections 2.1. and 2.2.).

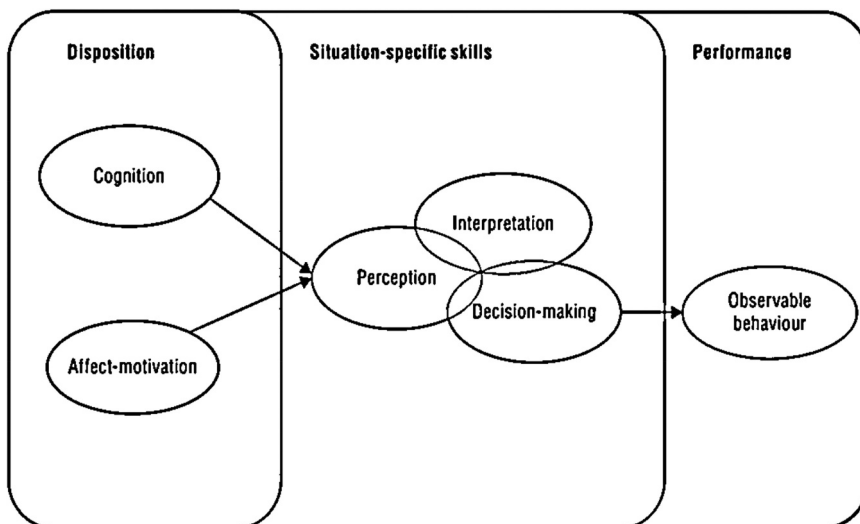


Figure 1. Components of teachers' professional skills conceptualized as a horizontal continuum. Note. From "Beyond dichotomies: Competence viewed as a continuum" by Blömeke, Gustafsson, and Shavelson, 2015, *Zeitschrift für Psychologie*, 223, p. 7.

Such a framework also underscores the importance of exploring several elements together rather than in isolation, which is what many LLE studies have often done, for example, by investigating teachers' beliefs without considering other aspects of their cognition and affect-motivation (or performance). Indeed, the complex nature of interactions that comprise teachers' professional competence means that it might be more useful to examine a "broad range of cognitive and affective-motivational teacher characteristics" if one is to draw valid conclusions about their teaching (Blömeke, 2017, p. 120). The characteristics examined in this study are described in detail in the subsections that follow.

2.1. Beliefs, orientations, and teaching approaches regarding literature

Generally defined, beliefs are "psychologically held understandings, premises, or propositions about the world that are felt to be true" (Richardson, 1996, p. 103). In terms of beliefs surrounding LLE, studies, employing qualitative methods like case studies and, to a lesser extent, quantitative instruments like questionnaires, have frequently investigated what teachers or learners believe concerning the appropriateness of a literary form (e.g. poetry) or the usefulness of literature as a resource (e.g. Bobkina et al., 2021; Boldireff & Bober, 2022; Calafato & Paran, 2019; Paran, 2008; Sirico, 2021). Oftentimes, since many studies comprise practitioner accounts and teachers' descriptions of their firsthand experiences, the participants' beliefs about literature are explored in general terms (e.g. literature being difficult or, conversely, beneficial, or enjoyable) without the data necessarily delving into what kinds of competences participants believe literature positively or negatively affects. Beyond beliefs about literature's appropriateness or usefulness, teachers may also have certain orientations towards literature, something that has seldom been investigated in studies.

Orientations are a middle ground between beliefs and practices: they are *value*-laden concepts that orientate an individual's approach towards certain practices (Choo, 2013). For example, a French language teacher with a nationalist orientation towards literature may view it in elitist terms, that is, as representing the apogee of French cultural achievement and civilization, including in moral and even religious terms. Such an orientation may prejudice them against the use of contemporary literary works in favour of classical texts that they would consider more valuable and representative of French culture and civilization. Likewise, they may favour authors from France over those from other countries, considering the latter's work less authentic and worthy of study. Besides a nationalist orientation, teachers may espouse world (i.e. promoting world citizenship and intercultural understanding through a sampling of literature from around the world even if depth is compromised for breadth), global (i.e. reading for empowerment, engaging literary texts actively and critically, and incorporating media content like images, radio, films, etc.), and cosmopolitan orientations (i.e. developing learners' extraterritorial consciousness and awareness of alterity by combining literature with philosophical/religious reflections) towards literature (Choo, 2013).

Stressing the importance of understanding teachers' orientations, Grossman and Shulman (1994, p. 8) note that teachers should "have explicit knowledge about their own theoretical stances, or predominant orientations towards literature, in order to help others see the assumptions guiding a particular reading of a text" (something that researchers should seek to study). In terms of research, language teachers' orientations

towards literature have been explored to a limited extent, despite evidence suggesting that they influence how teachers use literature (e.g. Choo, 2017; Sun, 2021). As for teaching approaches, LLE studies generally divide these into text-, language-, cultural-, reader-, stylistics-, paraphrastic-, and multimodal-based approaches (Bloemert et al., 2016; Calafato, 2018a; Talif, 1995; Thompson & McInay, 2019). The text approach involves looking at the formal elements of literature, literary terminology, conventions, and discourse; the language approach deals with raising learners' awareness of the contextualized use of morphosyntax in literary texts; the cultural approach entails exploring the cultural, historical, and social environment in which a text is situated; the reader approach encourages students to engage in independent meaning-making and draw on their personal experiences and opinions; and stylistics concerns studying language use and choice through a functional perspective (e.g. the significance of patterns, deviance, etc.).

The paraphrastic approach prioritizes the simplification of literary texts by using easier words, sentences, and even translation; and the multimodal approach is about developing students' visual literacy via content across multiple formats, such as graphic novels and comics. Studies indicate that teachers use a mix of approaches rather than exclusively adhering to one or another approach (e.g. Calafato & Gudim, 2022a; Calafato, 2018a). At the same time, while research tells us what approaches teachers employ, it is not always clear why they implement some approaches and not others. Beliefs (including those formed through the apprenticeship of observation) and orientations appear to play a role to some extent (Bobkina et al., 2021; Choo, 2013), as already mentioned, which is unsurprising as beliefs can influence (even if not always) teachers' classroom practices (Borg, 2011). Nevertheless, other factors could be at play, such as teachers' linguistic or literary competences, aesthetic experiences, traits, emotions, or out-of-school literacy practices. Exploring these factors would represent a move beyond solely considering teachers' professional experiences when researching the use of literature as a language resource and would accord with a growing consensus among researchers, as manifested in recent frameworks on language teaching, that more holistic approaches to understanding teacher behaviour are needed (see Blömeke, 2017).

2.2. *Literary competence, reading habits, and creativity*

Teachers and students should have a certain level of literary competence if they are to successfully work with literature, at least to the extent that they can experience and appreciate (aesthetic and stylistic competence), relate to and empathize with (empathetic competence), and infer meaning (interpretative competence) from literary content, as well as analyse and comment on the representation of different cultures and discourses found therein (cultural and discursive competence) (Alter & Ratheiser, 2019; see also Spiro, 1991; Torell, 2001). These subcompetences, of which literary competence is comprised, are explicitly enumerated in the revised CEFR descriptors (Council of Europe, 2020), where literature is mentioned in relation to analysing, critiquing, and expressing a personal response to creative texts and reading for leisure. Specifically, when referring to literature, the CEFR underscores the importance of developing learners' ability to give "a personal reaction to the language, style or content, feeling drawn to an aspect of the work or a character or characteristic of it", "ascribe meaning or significance to aspects of the work including contents, motifs, characters' motives, metaphor, etc.", analyse "certain aspects

of the work including language, literary devices, context, characters, relationships, etc.”, and “give a critical appraisal of technique, structure, the vision of the artist, the significance of the work” (Council of Europe, 2020, pp. 115–116).

The limited number of studies that have explicitly explored literary competence in language learning contexts have done so exclusively with respect to students (e.g. Calafato & Simmonds, 2022; Qutub, 2018; Sauro & Sundmark, 2016). As a result, we know little about the literary competence of the teachers that actually select the literary texts used in lessons and implement activities around them, nor do we know much about their personal reading habits and how these might influence such competence. As Hodges and Nash (1982, p. 70) note, “The matter of teachers’ reading habits is important. Men and women who profess to be educating young people should themselves value and use reading as a regular part of their daily lives.” Studies on teachers’ personal reading habits (generally those teaching in a first language context) report a positive relationship between their reading habits and instructional practices (McKool & Gespass, 2009) and overall reading competence (Benevides & Peterson, 2010; Can & Bicer, 2021). It is possible, then, that their literary competence, as part of their reading competence, may similarly be impacted by their personal reading habits, though one does not know to what extent due to the dearth of studies on this topic.

As for creativity, exploring it as part of a general focus on traits, and how these affect learners’ and teachers’ abilities, beliefs, and behaviour concerning LLE, has become relevant due to a limited number of studies indicating that creativity positively relates to the use of literature as a language resource, literacy attainment (of which LLE is a component), and motivation (e.g. Calafato & Gudim, 2022a; Katalikina et al., 2022; Putwain et al., 2012). For example, Putwain et al. (2012, p. 373) discovered that “pupils who perform better in their literacy work at school are also those who appraise themselves as being more creative” and that “such skills are valuable in the types of learning tasks and outcomes required for English Language and Literature (e.g. analysing the intentions of a character in a text)”. Creativity is defined as a domain-specific trait that comprises divergent thinking, that is, the extent to which an individual can produce, extend, and support ideas that are original and varied (Baer, 2015; Ellis, 2016). Regarding teachers, studies indicate that creativity positively affects their teaching styles (Ghanizadeh & Jahedizadeh, 2016), though no research appears to have been done to investigate whether their creativity correlates with their ability to use literature as a resource, including their literary competence.

2.3. Research questions

Given the paucity of LLE research from the Central Asian Republics, the dearth of studies that have explored the literary competence of language teachers vis-à-vis the languages they teach, and gaps in our knowledge of how certain variables like traits and free-time literary reading habits relate to this competence, this study explored the following questions as part of its research focus:

- (1) What benefits do participants identify with using literature?
- (2) What are their orientations and teaching approaches regarding literature?
- (3) How do they assess their literary competence in the languages they teach?

- (4) To what extent is their literary competence predicted by their orientations and approaches?
- (5) How do their creativity and free-time literary reading habits relate to their literary competence?

In exploring these research questions, the study also examined the types of literary content participants reported using when teaching their languages.

3. Methods

3.1. Data collection

The study used an online 104-item questionnaire in English and Russian to collect data from participants. The questionnaire was divided into six sections comprising 5-point Likert batteries and open-ended questions. The first section contained Likert items on participants' beliefs regarding the benefits of using literature as a resource. The items were designed based on works and content covered in Paran (2008) and Sirico (2021) and separated into Cognitive (e.g. better memory, visual-spatial skills, creativity, etc.), Emotional (e.g. self-confidence, emotional stability, positive mood, worldview, etc.), Aesthetic (e.g. attention to detail, appraisal skills, deeper understanding of art, nature, and beauty, creative and critical thinking skills, etc.), Academic (e.g. analytical ability, interdisciplinary transfer of skills, etc.), Linguistic (e.g. vocabulary, grammar, reading skills, etc.), Epistemological (e.g. reasoning skills, a better understanding of the nature of human knowledge, etc.), and Therapeutic (e.g. reduces stress, anxiety, depression, etc.) benefits. The second section explored participants' creativity using the 20-item Kaufman Domains of Creativity Scale (Tan et al., 2021).

The third section focused on participants' orientations towards literature, that is, nationalist ($n = 10$, $\alpha = .84$; example item: I give students a literary extract or poem to learn by heart and rewrite from memory), world ($n = 9$, $\alpha = .91$; example item: I give students literary works from different countries to read), global ($n = 7$, $\alpha = .88$; example item: I use literary texts to teach students about humanism, that is, the human condition regardless of nationality or race), and cosmopolitan ($n = 6$, $\alpha = .89$; example item: I use literary works as an entry point to ethical, philosophical, and religious discussions). These multi-item scales were developed based on Choo's (2013) elaboration of diverse orientations towards literature. Cronbach's alpha (α) for each of the orientation subscales, as indicated, showed sufficient internal consistency. The fourth section comprised multi-item scales on the teaching approaches that participants reported employing with literature, using the common groupings found in several studies (e.g. Bloemert et al., 2016; Bobkina et al., 2021; Calafato, 2018a). These groupings included the Text ($n = 5$, $\alpha = .89$; example item: I teach my students literary terminology), Cultural ($n = 3$, $\alpha = .84$; example item: I discuss the historical, cultural, and social contexts in which the work was published), and Language ($n = 7$, $\alpha = .90$; example item: I teach grammar through literature) approaches.

Other groupings fell under the Reader ($n = 4$, $\alpha = .81$; example item: I focus on students' and my personal responses to literature), Stylistics ($n = 4$, $\alpha = .86$; example item: I focus on linguistic patterns like alliteration and the effects they create), Multimodal ($n = 3$, $\alpha = .70$;

example item: I use literature where text is accompanied by visual elements like pictures and images), and Paraphrastic ($n = 4$, $\alpha = .81$; example item: I use simple words to describe story elements) approaches. The fifth section contained literary extracts in Chinese (第七天; *The Seventh Day* by Yu Hua), English (*The Bell Jar* by Sylvia Plath), French (*Ensemble, C'est Tout; Hunting and Gathering* by Anna Gavalda), German (*Tschick; Why We Took the Car* by Wolfgang Herrndorf), Russian (*На Солнечной Строне Улицы; On the Sunny Side of the Street* by Dina Rubina), and Spanish (*Sangre en el Ojo; Seeing Red* by Lina Meruane) that participants were asked to study, followed by a five-item assessment rubric (25 points in total) to complete (for a similar approach to assessing literary competence, see Qutub, 2018). The rubric was based on the revised CEFR descriptors concerning the skills needed to work with literary texts (Council of Europe, 2020) and the literary competence components discussed by Alter and Ratheiser (2019; see also Paran et al., 2020). The selected works were all examples of popular contemporary literature.

The last section collected sociobiographical data from participants like age and gender and contained questions about participants' literary reading habits and text selection.

3.2. Participants and context

One hundred and seventy language teachers (127 females, 15 males, and 28 abstentions), employed at universities in the Central Asian republics of Kazakhstan ($n = 98$), Kyrgyzstan ($n = 45$), and Uzbekistan ($n = 27$), participated in the study. Participants had a mean age of 45.22 ($Mdn = 42$, $SD = 10.47$) and were teaching Chinese ($n = 4$), English ($n = 92$), French ($n = 10$), German ($n = 22$), Russian ($n = 58$), and Spanish ($n = 2$) as foreign languages. Note that participants taught Russian as a foreign/second language (and not as a first language) to students given its status as a language of primarily interethnic communication in the three countries (Bezborodova & Radjabzade, 2022; Zhunussova et al., 2022). In other words, while people might be able to understand and speak Russian to a certain extent in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan, it does not mean that everyone is proficient or literate in it. In Kyrgyzstan, for instance, despite Russian being an official language (like in Kazakhstan), only 9% of people report speaking it (CIA, 2020). Indeed, none of the participants were teaching any language as a first language. 154 participants reported teaching one language, 15 taught two languages (i.e. English and French, German, Russian, or Spanish) and one participant taught three languages (i.e. English, German, and Russian).

Regarding participant recruitment, a list of universities in the three countries was compiled through online education portals, after which the universities' language departments (i.e. the heads of department) were contacted via email and asked for help in finding potential teacher participants (a link to the questionnaire, an invitation to participate, and an overview of the study and its ethical framework accompanied the email). The heads were asked to forward the email to teaching staff, with the only selection criterion being that staff should be teaching in a foreign/second language context (i.e. not philology or linguistics). Interested teachers, on receiving the email, could click on the link contained therein and complete the questionnaire. As for using literature in the language classroom, it is part of the language curriculum at the tertiary level in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan, with the countries having aligned state requirements concerning language education with the CEFR (Bezborodova & Radjabzade, 2022; Kazakbaeva, 2021). This is reflected in the programme descriptions that the language

and literature departments at universities in the three countries have published, where one of the key competences is for students to be able “to read, understand and write a variety of texts on topics relevant to Level B1 and C1” in accordance with the CEFR (NUUZ, 2022).

3.3. Analysis

Quantitative data from the questionnaire were analysed using SPSS 28, whereas those from the open-ended questions were reviewed and coded thematically in Atlas.ti following the steps outlined by Braun and Clarke (2013). An alpha level of .05 was used for all statistical tests, with Hedges g and post-hoc power ($1-\beta$) reported alongside all results where possible to provide readers with a better overall understanding of the import of the findings. Paired sample t-tests were conducted to ascertain differences in the participants’ approaches to teaching literature while the Mann-Whitney U test was performed to determine if there were statistically significant differences in the participants’ approaches based on whether they taught Russian or another foreign language (as already mentioned, Russian, unlike other foreign languages, is considered the language for interethnic communication in the three countries). Finally, the participants’ literary reading habits, languages taught, creativity, teaching approaches, and literary orientations were used as variables in predicting their literary competence (obtained from the assessment rubric) via regression analysis. As for the qualitative data, which concerned their literary reading habits and literary text selection, these were first read multiple times to familiarize oneself with the patterns and relationships therein.

Next, each response was read and coded primarily inductively, and the codes were refined following subsequent readings. Two things became apparent during the coding and recoding process when it came time to identify salient themes. Regarding the literary texts they used, participants mostly provided the names of the works’ authors and, in response to the question on their literary reading habits, mentioned the languages in which they read (and whether they read literature in their free time; this latter was coded dichotomously using a simple yes/no format).

4. Results

Table 1 displays the descriptive statistics regarding what participants believed were the potential benefits of using literature as a resource and their creativity, as examined across five domains (and overall), orientations towards literature, and teaching approaches. As can be seen in the table, participants had positive opinions about the potential benefits of literature overall, though they appeared less positive about its academic (e.g. boosting analytical ability, interdisciplinary transfer of skills, etc.) and therapeutic benefits (e.g. reducing stress, anxiety, depression, etc.). They also reported possessing moderate everyday and scholarly creativity, even if their creativity in the other domains was quite low. Moreover, participants tended towards World and Global over Nationalist or Cosmopolitan orientations and seemed to favour language and reader approaches when using literature.

Paired sample t-test results indicated that participants preferred the reader approach statistically significantly more than the other approaches, that is, text [.35, 95%CI(.25, .44),

Table 1. Participants' beliefs about the benefits of literature, creativity, orientations, and teaching approaches.

		N	M	SD	U	p	g	1- β
Creativity	Everyday	169	3.71	.69				
	Scholarly	168	3.45	.78				
	Performative	168	2.07	.95				
	Scientific	167	1.69	.67				
	Artistic	169	2.86	.83				
Benefits of literature	Cognitive	170	4.28	.74				
	Emotional	170	4.19	.75				
	Aesthetic	169	4.40	.73				
	Academic	164	3.87	.84				
	Linguistic	169	4.62	.68				
	Epistemological	168	4.27	.70				
Orientations towards literature	Therapeutic	167	3.64	.95				
	Nationalist	170	3.68	.70	3281.50	.470	.15	.14
	World	169	3.94	.79	3062.50	.944	.08	.08
	Global	164	3.91	.82	2656.50	.365	.03	.05
Teaching approaches with literature	Cosmopolitan	157	3.75	.89	2321.50	.218	.05	.04
	Text	168	3.96	.79	3696.50	.019	.38	.60
	Cultural	168	3.65	.89	3195.50	.534	.18	.18
	Language	168	4.18	.72	2635.00	.189	.18	.18
	Reader	168	4.31	.61	3008.50	.930	.02	.05
	Stylistics	167	3.97	.79	2854.50	.717	.03	.05
	Multimodal	163	3.88	.80	2599.00	.302	.16	.15
Paraphrastic	168	3.95	.73	2560.00	.142	.22	.25	

$t(166) = 7.00, p < .001, g = .54, 1-\beta = 1.00$], cultural [.66, 95%CI(.54, .79), $t(166) = 10.28, p < .001, g = .79, 1-\beta = 1.00$], language [.13, 95%CI(.02, .24), $t(166) = 2.40, p = .017, g = .19, 1-\beta = .68$], stylistics [.33, 95%CI(.24, .43), $t(166) = 6.85, p < .001, g = .53, 1-\beta = 1.00$], multimodal [.42, 95%CI(.29, .55), $t(161) = 6.51, p < .001, g = .51, 1-\beta = 1.00$], and paraphrastic [.36, 95%CI(.26, .45), $t(167) = 7.54, p < .001, g = .58, 1-\beta = 1.00$], with small to medium effect sizes.

Mann-Whitney U test results indicated that there were no statistically significant differences in participants' orientations towards literature or their teaching approaches based on whether they taught Russian or another foreign language except when employing the text approach (see Table 1). Here, participants who taught Russian ($n = 52, M = 4.17, SD = .70$) were found to do this to a statistically significantly greater extent than did those teaching other foreign languages ($n = 116, M = 3.87, SD = .82$). There was a very weak effect size. Table 2 contains the paired sample t-test results for the differences between participants' orientations towards literature. The results showed that participants possessed world and global orientations to a statistically significantly greater degree than they did nationalist and cosmopolitan orientations (there was a weak effect size).

Table 2. Paired sample t-test results for orientation pairings.

	M	SD	95%CI		t	df	p	g	1- β
			Lower	Upper					
Nationalist – World	-.26	.67	-.36	-.16	-5.06	168	<.001	.39	1.00
Nationalist – Global	-.23	.72	-.34	-.12	-4.11	163	<.001	.32	.99
Nationalist – Cosmopolitan	-.07	.81	-.20	.06	-1.07	156	.286	.09	.21
World – Global	.03	.45	-.04	.10	.93	162	.354	.07	.15
World – Cosmopolitan	.20	.64	.09	.30	3.81	155	<.001	.30	.97
Global – Cosmopolitan	.17	.66	.06	.27	3.16	156	.002	.25	.90

A tabulation of participants' literary competence scores for the extracts they were asked to read in the languages they taught revealed that they rated their competence as being moderately high for Chinese ($n = 2, M = 20.50, SD = 3.54$), English ($n = 78, M = 20.41, SD = 3.78$), German ($n = 20, M = 20.05, SD = 4.70$), and Russian ($n = 53, M = 20.62, SD = 3.39$), and weaker for French ($n = 7, M = 18.43, SD = 6.45$) and Spanish ($n = 1, M = 9.00$) (though very few participants reported teaching Chinese, French, and Spanish).

Figure 2 lists the authors that participants mentioned when asked about the literary texts they used. As can be seen from the figure, participants preferred authors who were active during the 19th and 20th centuries, with fewer authors cited whose works were published in the 21st century. Participants who taught English referenced authors who were primarily from the United States and the United Kingdom, whereas those who taught Russian appeared to prefer exclusively authors from Russia. Moreover, none of the participants provided the names of authors who were known for having produced multimodal literary works (e.g. graphic novels), and those teaching Chinese and Spanish did not provide any details about the literary works they used.

Participants were also asked about their free-time literary reading habits. Ninety-seven participants stated that they read literature in their free time, whereas 73 signalled that they did not. Among those who read literature in their free time, 30 reported that they read solely in Russian, whereas 10 read in English, three in German, and one each in French, Kyrgyz, or Uzbek (see Figure 3). Thirty-five participants reported reading literature in two languages, whereas 16 said that they read literature in three or more languages.

Table 3 contains the results of the regression analysis regarding the extent to which the participants' orientations towards literature, teaching approaches, creativity, and the



Figure 2. Authors whose literary works the participants reported using.



Figure 3. Languages in which the participants reported reading. *Note.* NL = National language (i.e. Kazakh, Kyrgyz, or Uzbek)

Table 3. Regression analysis results using literary competence as the dependent variable.

		<i>B</i>	<i>SD</i>	β	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	Tolerance	VIF
	(Constant)	3.38	.62		5.42	<.001		
	Literary reading habits	.47	.14	.29	3.48	<.001	.87	1.15
	Number of languages taught	-.42	.19	-.18	-2.17	.032	.87	1.15
Orientations towards literature	Type of language taught	-.19	.15	-.12	-1.28	.202	.75	1.34
	Nationalist	.09	.12	.09	.74	.460	.45	2.23
	World	.20	.19	.21	1.10	.275	.16	6.13
	Global	.06	.16	.07	.40	.693	.20	5.12
Approaches to using literature	Cosmopolitan	-.04	.11	-.05	-.38	.704	.39	2.56
	Text	.07	.13	.07	.53	.600	.31	3.19
	Cultural	-.07	.10	-.08	-.68	.500	.43	2.33
Creativity	Language	-.02	.12	-.02	-.18	.860	.62	1.62
	Reader	-.19	.15	-.15	-1.23	.222	.41	2.44
	Stylistics	.06	.13	.06	.48	.630	.39	2.55
	Multimodal	.13	.11	.13	1.16	.247	.48	2.09
	Paraphrastic	-.13	.12	-.13	-1.08	.281	.46	2.19
	Everyday	.08	.12	.07	.66	.511	.58	1.73
	Scholarly	.11	.11	.12	1.04	.301	.49	2.03
	Performative	-.05	.07	-.06	-.68	.495	.70	1.42
Scientific	-.23	.11	-.20	-2.10	.038	.67	1.50	
	Artistic	-.04	.09	-.04	-.46	.646	.66	1.52

Note. Dependent Variable: Literary competence.

number and type of languages they taught were predictive of their literary competence. Durbin-Watson test results indicated that the data were not autocorrelated ($d = 2.10$) while standard likelihood-ratio test results revealed that the regression model statistically significantly outperformed the null model [$\chi^2 (19, n = 140) = 2.26$, Nagelkerke $\rho^2 = .26$, $p = .004$]. Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) scores indicated that multicollinearity was not a concern.

As can be seen from [Table 3](#), the regression analysis results revealed that the participants' literary competence assessment was positively and statistically significantly

predicted by their literary reading habits (i.e. whether they read literature in their free time) and negatively and statistically significantly predicted by their scientific creativity and the number of languages they taught.

5. Discussion

This study investigated 1) the benefits that participants identified with using literature, 2) their orientations towards literature and approaches to teaching with it, 3) their literary competence in the languages they taught via a self-assessment rubric, 4) the extent to which their literary competence was predicted by their orientations and teaching approaches, and 5) how their literary competence related to their creativity and free-time literary reading habits. The study also examined the types of literary texts that participants reported using when teaching their languages.

In terms of the first research question, the findings indicated that, overall, participants were very positive about the benefits of using literature, regardless of whether these benefits were aesthetic or cognitive. It was also apparent, however, that they most strongly believed that literature benefitted learners linguistically while expressing less agreement (albeit still notably positive) regarding its therapeutic and academic benefits. Their beliefs about literature's linguistic benefits accord well with the ongoing attempts to blur the boundaries between literature and language teaching (Paesani, 2011; Paran et al., 2020), under which literature is touted as enhancing students' linguistic competence, among other things (see Calafato & Gudim, 2022a; Calafato & Paran, 2019). At the same time, even if the findings represent the first time that language teachers' beliefs about literature as a resource have been empirically researched in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan, they are somewhat unsurprising in that several studies have reported on the generally positive views that language teachers (mostly those teaching English) hold about literature, both in general and specific terms (Bobkina et al., 2021; Calafato & Paran, 2019; Sirico, 2021).

Concerning the second research question, the findings showed that participants subscribed to several orientations, albeit leaning most strongly towards world and global orientations, meaning that they strongly valued literature as promoting world citizenship through a sampling of literature from diverse cultures and reading for empowerment (while also incorporating diverse media) (see Choo, 2013). Their author references, nevertheless, appeared to suggest that the text selection process for their courses had a markedly nationalist orientation. For example, participants teaching English almost exclusively cited authors from the United Kingdom and the United States, and those teaching Russian mentioned authors from primarily Russia, which does hint at a somewhat elitist view of literature. Several of the authors cited by participants who taught English have also been mentioned by teachers of English from other post-Soviet states (Calafato, 2018a), indicating that, perhaps, these authors represent a relic of the Soviet era that teachers from such states continue to use (to some extent).

Moreover, the authors that participants cited were overwhelmingly active between the 19th and 20th centuries, implying a preference for relatively classical works over more contemporary ones. These contradictions (i.e. subscribing to world, global, and nationalist orientations) are not unexpected since teachers can have beliefs that are in conflict (Pajares, 1992), though possessing world and global orientations does require teachers to select more diverse literary texts (including multimodal ones; see Calafato & Gudim, 2022a) from around the

world, not just from one or two countries. In English lessons, this could entail using the works of authors from elsewhere, for instance, India or the Caribbean, or even translated works from countries where English is not an official language. Concerning Russian, teachers could think to incorporate a greater number of works from Kazakh, Kyrgyz, or Uzbek writers (or use translated works or those from countries other than Russia where Russian is spoken) than what was apparent from their responses.

As for participants' teaching approaches, these were strongly language- and reader-focused, even if they also implemented stylistics, paraphrastic, and text-based approaches. The findings support evidence from several other studies (albeit those conducted in other countries) where a preference for language- and reader-based approaches were discovered among the language teacher participants (Bobkina et al., 2021; Calafato & Gudim, 2022a; Calafato, 2018a). What was interesting in this study was that there were no statistically significant differences between participants' use of one or another teaching approach based on whether they taught Chinese, English, French, German, Russian, or Spanish, except concerning the text approach, which was used by participants to a greater extent when teaching Russian than the other languages (though with a weak effect size). Studies on the presence of literature in foreign language textbooks in post-Soviet states have shown that, depending on the language, textbooks reflect different teaching approaches (Calafato & Gudim, 2022a), with German textbooks, for instance, incorporating primarily language and cultural approaches and English textbooks relying on language, reader, and paraphrastic approaches.

Since textbooks are a standard part of school and university language programmes, it would follow that language teachers' practices would inevitably be influenced, at least to some extent, by the textbooks that they used. In this study, given the overall absence of significant differences in the use of teaching approaches by participants, regardless of the language taught, this does not appear to have been the case (bearing in mind that languages like Chinese and French were taught by a small number of participants in this study, which affects the reliability of the findings). In response to the third research question, the findings revealed that, on average, participants assessed their literary competence, based on the extracts from the questionnaire, as being moderately high, irrespective of the language taught (except for Spanish, where only one participant completed the rubric). Before discussing the participants' literary competence further, it should be noted that, as already stated, some language teachers were notably less represented in the sample than others (e.g. teachers of Chinese, French and Spanish versus those teaching English, Russian, and German; recruitment issues were exacerbated by the coronavirus pandemic), so that the generalizability of the competence assessments for specific participant groups is quite weak (and makes comparisons challenging).

The assessment was also entirely self-administered, which raises its own issues in terms of reliability. Still, this study represents one of the first attempts at having language teachers evaluate their literary competence, and the use of a rubric resembles the approach to literary competence assessment employed by Qutub (2018). The study also covered not only teachers of English but also other languages, which helped provide a comprehensive overview of how literature is used in multiple foreign language classrooms (and not just in the English one) at the tertiary level in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan. Delving deeper into participants' literary competence (and answering the fourth and fifth research questions), the findings indicated that participants' literary

competence was positively related to their free-time literary reading habits, whereas it was negatively predicted by their scientific creativity. Neither participants' teaching approaches, the languages they taught, nor their orientations were found to relate statistically significantly to their literary competence. Regarding the effects of their reading habits, the findings expand on those reported in studies like Benevides and Peterson (2010) and Can and Bicer (2021), though, in this study, participants were teaching foreign languages at the tertiary level.

As such, the findings show that personal reading habits can not only affect general reading ability (as was the case in Benevides & Peterson, 2010) but also teachers' literary competence, which is a new finding. Furthermore, like participants surveyed by McKool and Gespass (2009), slightly more than half of the participants in this study reported reading in their free time, frequently in multiple languages (see Figure 3). Creativity, on the other hand (and quite unexpectedly given the links that previous studies have established between literary competence, creativity, and outcomes, at least in learners; see Putwain et al., 2012), was not predictive of the participants' literary competence, except in the case of scientific creativity, and then only negatively. Here, the negative relationship between scientific creativity and literary competence could be the result of differences in convergent and divergent thinking, with scientific creativity being influenced more by the former than the latter (Zhu et al., 2019); however, this does not explain why none of the other creativity domains related to literary competence. Perhaps a more detailed scale for measuring literary competence would have led to different results. At any rate, the findings concerning creativity and its effects on literary competence require further study, especially the extent to which certain domains of creativity may negatively influence literary competence in individuals (and what implications this holds for using literature as a language resource).

6. Conclusion

In concluding, it is worth noting that the findings contain several implications for language teachers and students concerning the use of literature as a language resource, at least in the Central Asian republics of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan, as well as for researchers. First, while participants strongly identified literature with numerous benefits, espoused a mix of orientations (some more deeply than others), and reported implementing diverse teaching approaches vis-à-vis literature, their selection of works from primarily the 19th and 20th centuries, coupled with an almost exclusive focus on those countries with which their taught languages have traditionally been associated, suggests that their students were being exposed to content that did not fully reflect the cultural and linguistic dynamics that one encounters regarding these languages in the 21st century (with implications for their cultural knowledge and literary experiences). For teachers, the findings signal that they should broaden their selection of literary texts, which would be more in line with their professed world and global orientations, and even incorporate multimodal literature like graphic novels into their lessons.

Second, given the relationship between participants' free time reading habits and literary competence, teachers should be encouraged to read literature more frequently as a leisure activity. In this study, almost half of the participants reported not reading literature in their free time, despite all participants, on average, strongly endorsing several benefits in relation to it. Similar findings have been reported in other studies, and so, taken collectively, they

point to a widespread trend that underscores the need for a more systematic approach to encouraging teachers to read. It is by reading themselves that teachers will be in a better position to encourage their students to read literature because they will serve as better role models for them in this respect. This is crucial seeing as how more attention has been given to literature in frameworks like the CEFR that form the basis of language programmes in many countries around the world, including the ones that comprised the focus of this study. Encouraging teachers to read would likely be best accomplished through seminars or workshops where the benefits of engaging in such activity, for themselves and their students, can be reinforced with reference to research studies.

Third, it is hoped that this study will stimulate researchers to explore literary competence in connection with teachers more deeply. As already mentioned, the blurring of the divisions between language and literature teaching necessitates a closer look at literary competence in both learners *and* teachers since it is unlikely that teachers can help their learners to develop their literary competence without being competent themselves in this respect. This means designing and trialling literary competence measures for language teachers that are reliable and not time-consuming to complete. A deeper exploration of how traits influence literary competence would also be very welcome. This is an area that has received scant attention with respect to the use of literature as a language resource, even though traits have been heavily researched in relation to other areas of language learning and teaching. Finally, future studies that can recruit larger participant samples for languages other than English (like Chinese) would help us better understand how teachers use literature as a language resource in their lessons across languages and if there are any differences in how they value literature.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Notes on contributor

Dr. Raees Calafato is an associate professor in English at the University of South-Eastern Norway's Department of Languages and Literature Studies. His research interests include multilingual pedagogy, teacher education, the psychological effects of multilingualism, language policy in multilingual families, language learning motivation, and the use of literature in language teaching. Geographically, his focus covers the Nordic countries, France, Russia, the Central Asian Republics, China, and the Gulf States.

ORCID

Raees Calafato  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-8222-6772>

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