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# Challenges Encountered in Teaching and Learning Literature: Perspectives from Higher Education Students and Faculty Members

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**Abstract**
With the great shift from face to face to virtual learning, various challenges are encountered both by the learners and the teachers. Although there were studies concerning the teaching of literature, only a few explored at various perspectives by which the literature courses are being taught in a remote situation. Thus, this descriptive study attempted to investigate the different challenges faced by the students and faculty members in learning and teaching literature across four angles: student- related challenges, literary text- related challenges, instruction and pedagogy- related challenges, and remote learning challenges. The study was conducted at Cavite State University Imus Campus during the First Semester of AY 2020- 2021. A modified survey adapted from Hussein and Al- Emami (2016) was used to gather pertinent data from 201 students and ten faculty members teaching literature.
Using descriptive statistics, results reveal that for the higher education students, literary texts and the remote distance learning were just moderate challenges for them. However, for the faculty members, they regard both the student and literary text- related challenges as high impediments in teaching literature. These findings from both perspectives are vital in rethinking, revising, and revitalizing the course syllabus, learning guides, teaching strategies, and lesson plans in teaching literature.

**Keywords:** teaching literature, learning literature, teaching- learning process, remote learning, challenges in teaching, challenges in learning.

**Introduction**
Literature is considered as the "mirror" of one's culture. That is why we still need to know the value of it even during this fast-phasing generation. English is one of the major subjects and languages used and taught in the Philippines. Undeniably, the English language has been used as an essential tool to reach and connect bridges across the globe in the international world of trade, business, transportation, communication, and technology. As globalization progresses, the need for English literacy also arises. This is also evident in teaching and learning literature.

In the Philippines, it is still an old-aged issue to sustain the interest of learning literature. Antonio, as cited in Corpuz and Velasco (2019) even points out that Filipino students ignore literature. He further adds, that the younger generation lack the interest in understanding cultural heritage because of colonialism. Literature however, is a gift from the ancestors, yet, students remain adverse. In other studies, one of the causes of low interest is the perception that literature may not be suitable at all levels with learners due to rich vocabulary that is often found to be different from everyday functional language (Hassan, 2018).

Meanwhile, in the modern age, people have no choice but dealing with English language as the main means of communication (Abu Quelbin, as cited in El-Helou, 2010, p.2) This fuels the pressing subject matter whereas, English, an essential tool for bridging language is seemed to become a barrier to students' understanding. In contrary, literature actually offers students a wide-array of benefits to student's academic and personal development.

In a study conducted by Carter and Long, as cited in El-Helou (2012, p.3), English literature helps students in understanding and appreciating a collective idea of various cultures, beliefs, attitudes, and ideologies presented in literary texts. It intends learners "to understand and

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appreciate cultures and ideologies different from their own in time and space, and to come to perceive traditions of thought, feeling and artistic form within the heritage the literature of such cultures endows." However, despite its lavish benefits, learners still find gap and perceive literature as a challenging and difficult course which somehow leads to poor academic performance.

Teaching and learning literature has always been considered challenging. Teachers must be able to successfully transfer necessary skills in reading, critical thinking, and literary criticism even while reading lengthy texts. At the same time, learners must showcase proficiency in literature.

In this study, researchers explored the different challenges encountered by both the learners and teachers of Literature. The study focused on the Literature instructors and students of Cavite State University Imus Campus. Specific literature courses are World Literature, Philippine Literature, Mythology and Folklore, Panitikang Panlipunan, Children and Adolescent Literature, and Literature, Man, and Society.

The participants will benefit from the results of this study since the results will serve as reference that will lead to better preparation of the literature courses to be delivered in remote learning. Moreover, faculty members may view the results of this study to be guided when reviewing, revising, and revitalizing course syllabus in literature courses. The challenges encountered may help improve the course contents (heart of the subject) to attain the literature course objectives

This study which focused on the challenges encountered by the higher education students taking literature and faculty members teaching the said course at Cavite State University Imus Campus answered the following questions:
1. What is the profile of the participants?
2. What are the challenges encountered by the students in learning literature?
3. What are the challenges encountered by the teachers in teaching literature?
4. Is there a significant difference between the challenges encountered by the teachers and the learners?

**Methodology**
This study is quantitative in design and nature. Data collection was done through survey research and was facilitated by using two Google Forms: a] Challenges in Learning Literature and b] Challenges in Teaching Literature. According to Creswell (2009), survey research provides a numeric description of trends, attitudes, or opinions of a population by studying the sample population. A valid instrument adapted from Hussein and Al- Emami (2016) presented three challenges encountered in teaching literature: student- related challenges, literary text- related challenges, and instruction and pedagogy- related challenges.

Due to the COVID- 19 pandemic, the researchers modified the instrument, included remote learning challenges, and made revisions to extract the opposite perspectives of the students on the challenges encountered in learning literature. The modified instrument was subjected to reliability testing. A Cronbach alpha of 0.859 proved the reliability of the modified instrument in terms of item consistency. Using convenience sampling, a total of 201 students taking Literature courses and 11 faculty members (complete enumeration) participated in the study. Faculty members handling literature were first tasked to distribute the survey to their respective students. Afterwards, they answered the instrument allotted for them. Collection of data was easier due to real- time online retrieval. Data analysis was facilitated by using descriptive statistics and t- test for the significant difference

**Results and Discussion**
**Profile of the Participants**
Figure 1 shows the profile of the participants. From the total of 201 selected Higher Education Students of Cavite State University Imus Campus, 70.14% or more than half of them is female, most are taking the course World Literature, and majority are in the third year. For the Higher Education Faculty members, a complete enumeration of eleven participated in the study; five of them handle the course World Literature and six of them handle the same course along with other literature subjects like Philippine Literature, Mythology and Folklore, Panitikang Panlipunan, Children and Adolescent Literature, and Literature, Man, and Society.
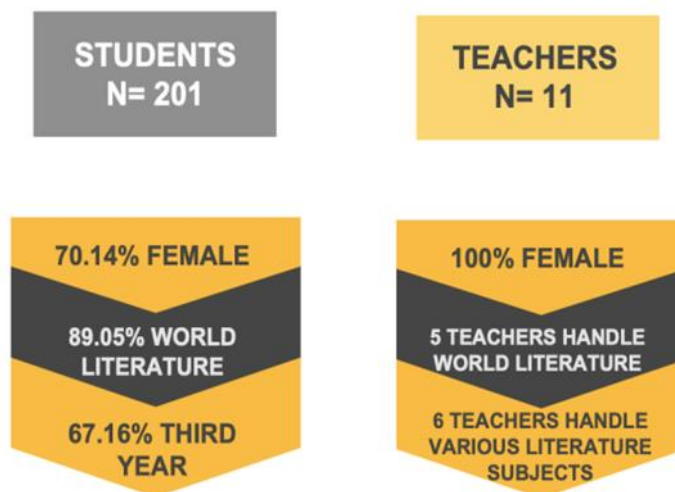


**Fig. 1:** Profile of the participants.

**Challenges in Learning Literature: Perspectives from          Higher Education Students**

**Table 1:** Student related- challenges in learning literature according to higher education students.

| Indicator (Student- Related Challenges) | Mean | Verbal Interpretation |
|---|---|---|
| I am not sufficiently familiar with the culture and social background of the literary texts given by my teacher. | 2.48 | Low |
| My level of language proficiency makes it difficult for me to understand and appreciate the literary texts. | 2.41 | Low |
| I am unfamiliar with the historical context of literature thus, makes it alien and less understandable for me. | 2.47 | Low |
| It is difficult for me to relate to the literary texts because it is irrelevant to my reality. | 2.14 | Low |
| I lack the motivation and the interest to engage actively with the literary texts. | 2.36 | Low |
| **Weighted Mean** | **2.37** | **Low Challenges Encountered** |

Table 1 shows that the weighted mean of 2.37 suggests that the student- related challenges encountered by the higher education students in learning literature are generally low.

**Table 2:** Literary text- related challenges in learning literature according to higher education students.

| Indicator (Literary Text- Related Challenges) | Mean | Verbal Interpretation |
|---|---|---|
| The choice of literary texts of my teacher plays a crucial role in hindering or enhancing the processes of learning literature. | 3.03 | Moderate |
| A literary text which is in harmony with my age and interests will help me better understand literary works. | 4.13 | High |
| A literary text which involves many unfamiliar vocabulary and grammatical structures discourages me from reading and reacting to literature. | 2.92 | Moderate |
| A literary text which is extremely difficult on either linguistic or cultural level will have few benefits for me. | 3.06 | Moderate |
| A literary text from an alien culture written beyond my understanding discourages me from being motivated to learn literature. | 2.74 | Moderate |
| A literary text with too many figures of speech hinders my understanding. | 2.67 | Moderate |
| **Weighted Mean** | **3.09** | **Moderate Challenges Encountered** |

Table 2 shows that the weighted mean of 3.09 generally suggests that the literary text- related challenges encountered by the higher education students in learning literature are moderate. Despite being moderate, it is important to take note that the indicator "A literary text which is in harmony with my age and interests will help me better understand literary works" is relatively high in this part. This implies that the students highly regard their age and interests as basis for the literary texts they are reading (mean= 4.13).

**Table 3:** Instruction and pedagogy- related challenges in learning literature according to higher education students. (*Reversed Scoring).

| Indicator (Instruction and Pedagogy- Related Challenges) * | Mean | Verbal Interpretation |
|---|---|---|
| In my literature class, it is evident that my teacher's primary goal is to help us pass the exam. | 2.48 | Low |
| My teacher encourages me to relate the topics and themes of the literary texts to my personal experience, feelings, and opinions. | 1.67 | Very low |
| My teacher spends a substantial time on creating awareness about culture and history. | 2.02 | Low |
| My teacher improves my level of language proficiency. | 2.26 | Low |
| My teacher encourages us to read literary texts by themselves in our free time. | 2.10 | Low |
| My teacher unlocks the new words of the assigned literary texts. | 2.39 | Low |
| My teacher typically focuses on analyzing the main elements of the literary text (plot, theme, setting, characterization, etc.) | 2.20 | Low |
| My teacher encourages us to enjoy the literary texts as a whole and not to focus on details. | 2.16 | Low |
| **Weighted Mean** | **2.16*** | **Low Challenges Encountered*** |

*Computed through reversed scoring

Table 3 shows that the weighted mean of 2.16 (reversed scoring) generally suggests that the instruction and pedagogy- related challenges encountered by the higher education students in learning literature are low. This result implies that the students rarely find difficulties or challenges with Literature instruction and pedagogy. This also reveals that faculty members are able to do the tasks successfully in teaching literature without causing any difficulty to the students.

**Table 4:** Remote learning challenges in learning literature according to higher education students.

| Indicator (Student- Related Challenges) | Mean | Verbal Interpretation |
|---|---|---|
| I find it hard to connect in synchronous classes. | 2.89 | Moderate |
| I have difficulty accessing the provided reading materials or literary texts online. | 2.61 | Low |
| My classmates and I are more divided now more than ever. | 3.50 | High |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| I am conservative in expanding my capability in remote setting due to my privacy. | 3.19 | Moderate |
| Because the setting is online, I am more prone to submitting plagiarized papers when it comes to analyzing literary texts, providing literary criticisms, and making summary or gist. | 2.16 | Low |
| I feel that learning literature is better and more flexible if conducted online. | 3.41 | Moderate |
| **Weighted Mean** | **2.96** | **Moderate Challenges Encountered** |

Table 4 shows that the weighted mean of 2.96 suggests that challenges encountered by the higher education students in learning literature during remote learning are moderate. Among the indicators in the table, it is noticeable that the students are very much concerned with interpersonal relationship with their classmates. During this time that

online distance learning is being implemented in almost all schools worldwide, students felt that they [my classmates and I] are more divided now more than ever (mean= 3.50).

**Challenges in Teaching Literature: Perspectives from Higher Education Faculty Members**

**Table 5:** Student- related challenges in teaching literature according to higher education faculty members.

| Indicator (Student- Related Challenges) | Mean | Verbal Interpretation |
|---|---|---|
| Students are not sufficiently familiar with the culture and social background of the literary texts given. | 3.60 | High |
| Students' low level of language proficiency makes it difficult to understand and appreciate the literary texts. | 3.80 | High |
| Students' unfamiliarity with the historical context of literature makes it alien and less understandable. | 3.80 | High |
| It is difficult for students to relate to the literary texts because it is irrelevant to their reality. | 3.30 | Moderate |
| Students lack the motivation and the interest to engage actively with the literary texts. | 2.90 | Moderate |
| **Weighted Mean** | **3.48** | **High** |

Table 5 reveals that the weighted mean of 3.48 suggests that the student- related challenges encountered by the higher education faculty members in teaching literature are actually high. Teacher participants affirmed that they encounter challenges with students who are not familiar with the culture and social background of the literary texts

(mean= 3.60). Therefore, in teaching any literary text, faculty members need to provide these two to the students. In addition, it is also challenging for the teachers that students' language proficiency affects their understanding and appreciation of texts (mean= 3.80).

**Table 6:** Literary text- related challenges in teaching literature according to higher education faculty members.

| Indicator (Literary Text- Related Challenges) | Mean | Verbal Interpretation |
|---|---|---|
| Choice of literary texts plays a crucial role in hindering or enhancing the processes of teaching literature. | 4.70 | Very High |
| A text which is in harmony with students' age and interests will help them better understand literary works. | 4.60 | Very High |
| A literary text which involves many unfamiliar vocabulary and grammatical structures discourage the students from reading and reacting to literature. | 4.20 | High |
| A literary text which is extremely difficult on either linguistic or cultural level will have few benefits. | 3.50 | High |
| A literary text from an alien culture written beyond students' understanding discourages them from being motivated to learn literature. | 3.50 | High |
| A literary text with too many figures of speech will hinder students' understanding. | 3.30 | Moderate |
| **Weighted Mean** | **3.97** | **High** |

Table 6 reveals that the weighted mean of 3.97 suggests that the literary text- related challenges encountered by the higher education faculty members in teaching literature are relatively high. Almost all of the indicators scored high and

very high. This proves that choice of literary texts does matter to better enhance the teaching of literature. Factors to consider are the age and interest of students. This finding coincides with the perspectives of the students.

**Table 7:** Instruction and pedagogy- related challenges in teaching literature according to higher education faculty members (*Reversed Scoring).

| Indicator (Instruction and Pedagogy- Related Challenges) | Mean | Verbal Interpretation |
|---|---|---|
| When teaching a course on literature, my primary goal is to help my students pass their exams. | 3.00 | Moderate |
| I encourage my students to relate the topics and themes of the literary texts to their personal experience, feelings, and opinions. | 1.30 | Very Low |
| I spend a substantial time of my classes on creating awareness about culture and history. | 1.90 | Low |
| I improve my students' level of language proficiency. | 1.80 | Very Low |
| I encourage my students to read literary texts by themselves in their free time. | 1.40 | Very Low |
| I unlock all the new words of the assigned literary texts. | 1.90 | Low |
| I typically focus on analyzing the main elements of the literary text (plot, theme, setting, characterization, etc.) | 1.90 | Low |
| I encourage students to enjoy the literary texts as a whole and not to focus on details. | 1.80 | Low |
| **Weighted Mean** | **1.88\*** | **Low** |

*Computed through reversed scoring

Table 7 reveals that the weighted mean of 1.88 (reversed scoring) suggests that the instruction and pedagogy- related challenges encountered by the higher education faculty members in teaching literature are low which implies that the process of teaching literature is not difficult for them.

**Table 8:** Remote learning challenges in teaching literature according to higher education faculty members.

| Indicator (Remote Learning Challenges) | Mean | Verbal Interpretation |
|---|---|---|
| Students find it hard to connect in synchronous classes. | 3.30 | High |
| Students have difficulty accessing the provided reading materials or literary texts online. | 2.90 | Moderate |
| Students are more divided now more than ever. | 3.40 | Moderate |
| Students are conservative in expanding their capabilities in remote setting due to privacy. | 3.10 | Moderate |
| Students are more prone to submitting plagiarized papers when it comes to analyzing literary texts, providing literary criticisms, and making summary or gist. | 3.60 | High |
| Teaching literature is better and more flexible if conducted online. | 3.80 | High |
| **Weighted Mean** | **3.35** | **Moderate** |

Table 8 reveals that the weighted mean of 3.35 suggests that the challenges encountered by the higher education faculty members in teaching literature during remote learning are moderate. Major concerns are the connectivity, submission of plagiarized papers, and the conduct of online classes.

**Table 9:** Test of difference between the perception of students and teachers on student-related challenges encountered in teaching and learning literature.

| Group | n | Mean | SD | Mean Difference |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Students | 201 | 2.3731 | 0.73394 | -1.10687$^{hs}$ |
| Teachers | 11 | 3.4800 | 0.71926 | |

$t(209) = -4.659, p < 0.01$
hs – highly significant

Table 9 shows the test of difference between the perception of students and teachers on student-related challenges encountered in teaching and learning literature. Independent samples t-test was used and the computed statistic is -4.659 *(df = 209)* with its associated value p < 0.01. This suggests that there is high significant difference between the perception of the students and teachers on student-related challenges encountered during the teaching and learning of literature.

**Table 10:** Test of difference between the perception of students and teachers on literary text-related challenges encountered in teaching and learning literature.

| Group | n | Mean | SD | Mean Difference |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Students | 201 | 3.0912 | 0.71587 | -0.87546$^{hs}$ |
| Teachers | 11 | 3.9667 | 0.61262 | |

$t(209) = -3.796, p < 0.01$
hs – highly significant

Table 10 shows the test of difference between the perception of students and teachers on literary text-related challenges encountered in teaching and learning literature. Independent samples t-test was used and the computed statistic is -3.796 *(df = 209)* with its associated value p < 0.01. This suggests that there is high significant difference between the perception of the students and teachers on literary text-related challenges encountered during the teaching and learning of literature.

**Table 11:** Test of difference between the perception of students and teachers on instruction and pedagogy-related challenges encountered in teaching and learning literature.

| Group | n | Mean | SD | Mean Difference |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Students | 201 | 2.1617 | 0.61210 | 0.28269$^{ns}$ |
| Teachers | 11 | 1.8790 | 0.61656 | |

$t(209)$ 1.425, p = 0.156
ns – not significant

Table 11 shows the test of difference between the perception of students and teachers on instruction and pedagogy-related challenges encountered in teaching and learning literature. Independent samples t-test was used and the computed statistic is 1.425 *(df = 209)* with its associated value p = 0.156. This suggests that there is **no** significant difference between the perception of the students and teachers on instruction and pedagogy-related challenges encountered during the teaching and learning of literature.

**Table 12:** Test of difference between the perception of students and teachers on remote distance learning challenges encountered in teaching and learning literature.

| Group | n | Mean | SD | Mean Difference |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Students | 201 | 2.9585 | 0.62888 | -0.39146[ns] |
| Teachers | 11 | 3.3500 | 0.87880 | |

$t(209) = -1.883$, p = 0.061
ns – not significant

Table 12 shows the test of difference between the perception of students and teachers on remote distance learning challenges encountered in teaching and learning literature. Independent samples t-test was used and the computed statistic is -1.883*(df = 209)* with its associated value p = 0.061. This suggests that there is no significant difference between the perception of the students and teachers on remote distance learning challenges encountered during the teaching and learning of literature.

**Conclusion**
Overall, the challenges in learning literature encountered by the Higher Education students are low in terms of student, instruction and pedagogy but are moderate in terms of literary text and remote learning challenges. It is perplexing for students if the literary texts are not attuned with their age and interests. Therefore, these two must be given high consideration when selecting course contents. Moreover, the admission of the students that they felt more divided now more than ever also becomes challenging on the part of the teachers.

On the other hand, for the Higher Education faculty members, the student- related and literary text- related challenges they encountered are high. On the bases of the findings, the following are being recommended: choice of literary texts to be included in the course syllabus must enhance the teaching of literature and must be in harmony with the students' age and interests; it is vital that in teaching literature, culture, social background, and historical of the text must be provided first; unlocking of difficulties must be done for better understanding of the literary text; interventions/ alternatives must be done to solve connectivity issues; and authentic or performance-based assessments must be promoted in the teaching of literature during remote learning.

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