



Integrating Literary Texts in Language Learning to Improve Literacy Skills in Primary Education

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ABSTRACT

Introduction. Strengthening foundational literacy in primary education remains a global priority, particularly following learning disruptions that have widened achievement gaps. Integrating literary texts into language learning is increasingly viewed as a promising approach to support literacy development through meaningful, engaging, and context-rich reading experiences. *The aim of this article* is to examine the effectiveness of integrating literary texts into language learning in improving primary school students' literacy skills compared to conventional textbook-based instruction.

Study participants and methods. The study employed a quantitative quasi-experimental design using a pretest–posttest control group format. Participants were 60 fourth-grade students from a public primary school in urban Indonesia during the 2024/2025 academic year, divided into an experimental group ($n = 30$) and a control group ($n = 30$). The intervention lasted six weeks (12 sessions). The experimental group received language instruction integrating literary texts (children's stories and narrative texts) through guided reading, vocabulary enrichment, group discussion, and written responses, while the control group received conventional textbook-based instruction. Literacy outcomes were measured using a 30-item test with high reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.87$). Data were analyzed using assumption tests, independent samples t-tests, effect size estimation, and ANCOVA controlling for pretest scores.

Results. Baseline equivalence was confirmed (pretest: $t(58) = -0.32$, $p = .75$). The experimental group achieved significantly higher posttest performance ($M = 81.6$, $SD = 9.2$) than the control group ($M = 70.3$, $SD = 8.8$), with a significant between-group difference ($t(58) = 4.87$, $p < .001$). The instructional treatment produced a large effect size (Cohen's $d = 1.26$; $\eta^2 = 0.29$) and higher mean gain scores (+19.2 vs. +7.2). ANCOVA results indicated that the group effect remained significant after controlling for pretest scores ($F(1,57) = 23.71$, $p < .001$; partial $\eta^2 = 0.29$).

Conclusion. This study shows that integrating literary texts into language instruction significantly improves primary students' literacy skills compared to conventional instruction. Literature-integrated teaching enhances reading comprehension, vocabulary knowledge, and inferential skills, indicating that structured engagement with literary texts is an effective and evidence-based approach for strengthening foundational literacy in primary education.

KEYWORDS

literature-integrated instruction, children's literature, literacy development, reading comprehension, inferential skills, primary education

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INTRODUCTION

Strengthening literacy has become a central concern of global education policy. International initiatives led by the United Nations and UNESCO, particularly Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), emphasize inclusive and equitable quality education with literacy as a foundational competence for lifelong learning. UNESCO's Global Education Monitoring Reports consistently identify reading literacy as a key indicator of educational quality, social participation, and human development, especially at the primary level, where literacy skills form the basis for all subsequent learning. As a result, improving literacy outcomes in primary education remains a shared global priority across diverse educational systems.

Within this global policy context, literacy skills in primary education constitute a fundamental foundation for students' academic achievement, cognitive development, and lifelong learning [1]. Reading literacy enables learners not only to decode written symbols but also to construct meaning, interpret information critically, and participate actively in educational and social contexts [2]. Despite sustained global attention to literacy improvement, international large-scale assessments such as PIRLS and PISA continue to report persistent challenges in students' reading achievement. These challenges have been further intensified by learning disruptions during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly in developing education systems, resulting in widened literacy gaps and increased learning poverty [3; 4].

Beyond issues of achievement scores, a central pedagogical problem concerns how literacy is conceptualized and taught in primary classrooms. In many educational contexts, language instruction remains dominated by decontextualized, textbook-based practices that emphasize surface-level comprehension and mechanical skill acquisition [5]. Such approaches often limit students' opportunities to engage deeply with texts, construct personal meaning, and develop higher-order literacy skills such as inference and interpretation [6]. From a pedagogical psychology perspective, this instructional orientation risks reducing reading to a technical activity rather than a meaningful cognitive and affective process essential to human learning and development.

At the primary level, literacy development extends beyond basic decoding to include reading comprehension, vocabulary knowledge, and inferential reasoning [7]. As students transition from learning to read to reading to learn, they are increasingly required to process extended texts, integrate information, and construct meaning independently [8]. Research in educational psychology highlights that effective literacy instruction should integrate cognitive, linguistic, and motivational dimensions, as emotionally and intellectually engaged readers demonstrate stronger comprehension and more sustainable literacy growth [9; 10]. Consequently, literacy instruction should support not only performance outcomes but also students' active engagement in meaning-making.

Within language learning contexts, the integration of literary texts has been increasingly recognized as a pedagogical approach capable of addressing these challenges. Literary texts—such as children's stories and narrative texts—provide authentic language input, rich lexical exposure, and coherent discourse structures that differ substantially from fragmented textbook materials [11]. From a transactional and humanistic perspective, literary reading invites learners to interact with texts as meaning-makers, connecting textual content with prior knowledge, personal experiences, and emotional responses [12]. This interaction activates key psychological mechanisms, including cognitive elaboration, emotional engagement, and inferential processing, which are central to deep literacy development [13].

Previous studies have reported positive effects of literature-based instruction on reading comprehension, vocabulary development, and higher-order thinking skills when literary texts are embedded within structured pedagogical practices such as guided reading, discussion, and written response [14;15]. Narrative texts, in particular, support literacy development by facilitating understanding of causal relationships, character motivations, and implicit meanings [16]. However, existing research often focuses on single literacy outcomes, employs limited instructional descriptions, or is conducted outside regular classroom contexts, making it difficult to draw comprehensive conclusions about the broader impact of literature-integrated instruction.

To address these limitations, the present study investigates the effectiveness of integrating literary texts into language learning to improve literacy skills among primary school students in Indonesia. Using a quasi-experimental pretest–posttest control group design, this study examines the impact of a structured and replicable literature-integrated instructional model implemented through guided reading, vocabulary enrichment, group discussion, and written responses on students’ reading comprehension, vocabulary knowledge, and inferential ability within an authentic classroom setting.

The purpose of this study is to determine whether literature-integrated language instruction produces significantly higher literacy outcomes than conventional textbook-based instruction among fourth-grade students. By simultaneously examining multiple dimensions of literacy within a developing country context, this study seeks to contribute empirical and conceptual insights into the role of literary texts as pedagogical tools that support cognitive, affective, and inferential processes in primary literacy education. Accordingly, the study addresses the following research question: Does the integration of literary texts into language learning significantly improve primary students’ literacy skills compared to conventional language instruction.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

1. Literacy Skills in Primary Education

Literacy skills in primary education encompass interrelated cognitive and linguistic competencies that extend beyond basic decoding and word recognition [17]. Contemporary literacy perspectives emphasize reading comprehension, vocabulary knowledge, and inferential reasoning as core components of literacy development [18]. Reading comprehension involves constructing meaning through the integration of textual information with prior knowledge, while vocabulary knowledge enables accurate interpretation of semantic content [19; 20]. Inferential reasoning allows readers to derive implicit meanings, establish causal relationships, and interpret characters’ intentions, which are essential for deep comprehension and higher-order literacy processing [21]. From a pedagogical psychology perspective, these literacy components operate in a reciprocal and mutually reinforcing manner rather than as isolated skills. Vocabulary knowledge supports comprehension by facilitating access to meaning, while inferential reasoning enables readers to bridge gaps in textual information and construct coherent mental representations [22]. As students transition from learning to read to reading to learn in the upper primary grades, they require instructional approaches that promote deeper cognitive engagement and independent meaning construction [23].

2. Literary Texts as Resources for Literacy Instruction

Literary texts, particularly children’s stories and narrative texts, are widely recognized as effective resources for literacy instruction due to their authenticity, linguistic richness, and coherent discourse structures [24]. Unlike decontextualized textbook materials, literary texts present language in meaningful contexts, exposing learners to varied vocabulary, complex syntax, and cohesive narrative organization [25]. These characteristics make literary texts especially suitable for supporting literacy development in primary education. Narrative texts are particularly valuable because their structural features such as setting, plot, conflict, and resolution support comprehension and facilitate inferential reasoning [26]. Engagement with narratives enables students to identify causal relationships, interpret character motivations, and derive implicit meanings. When literary texts are selected to align with students’ reading levels and cultural contexts, they function as cognitively accessible yet intellectually demanding materials that foster sustained engagement and comprehension [27]. Beyond their instructional function, literary texts also serve as cultural and humanistic artifacts. Through engagement with stories, learners explore values, emotions, and social experiences, supporting empathy and reflective thinking. Thus, literary texts contribute not only to technical literacy development but also to broader educational goals related to human meaning-making [28].

3. Reader-Response and Transactional Perspectives on Literary Reading

The use of literary texts in literacy instruction is theoretically grounded in reader-response and transactional perspectives, which conceptualize reading as an active process of meaning construction emerging from the interaction between the reader and the text [29]. Meaning is not viewed as residing solely within the text but as co-constructed through readers' prior knowledge, experiences, emotions, and cognitive engagement [30]. From this perspective, literary reading activates both cognitive and affective processes. Readers interpret textual cues, generate inferences, and evaluate meanings while simultaneously engaging emotionally with characters and events [31]. This dual engagement supports deeper comprehension and sustained literacy development. Reader-response theory therefore provides a strong foundation for instructional practices that encourage students to articulate interpretations, explore alternative meanings, and reflect on their reading experiences. Instructional practices aligned with transactional perspectives such as guided reading, discussion, and written response support students' engagement with texts while preserving the interpretive nature of reading [32]. Through discussion, learners negotiate meaning socially and refine interpretations, while written responses require them to organize ideas, integrate textual evidence, and express meaning coherently.

4. Psychological Mechanisms in Literature-Integrated Instruction

Empirical research on literature-based instruction highlights the importance of structured pedagogical mechanisms in translating literary engagement into literacy gains [33]. Guided reading supports comprehension by scaffolding attention to key ideas, vocabulary, and narrative structures, thereby promoting cognitive elaboration and strategic processing. This scaffolding enables learners to engage more deeply with texts and construct coherent meanings. Discussion-based activities play a critical role in developing inferential reasoning and higher-order thinking skills [34]. Through dialogic interaction, students articulate interpretations, justify reasoning, and consider alternative perspectives, enhancing cognitive flexibility and depth of comprehension. These social interactions also contribute to emotional engagement, which supports sustained attention and motivation in literacy learning. Written responses to literary texts function as a consolidation mechanism that strengthens comprehension and vocabulary knowledge. Writing requires learners to synthesize information, organize ideas, and apply language meaningfully, promoting deeper processing and retention. Together, guided reading, discussion, and written response form an integrated instructional framework that activates cognitive, affective, and inferential processes essential for comprehensive literacy development [35].

Overall, the review concludes that literacy development in primary education is strengthened when students engage with literary texts through structured, interactive, and meaning-oriented instructional practices. Literary texts are not only sources of language input but also cognitive-affective resources that support comprehension, vocabulary growth, and inferential processing.

RESEARCH METHODS

1. Research Design

This study employed a quantitative approach using a quasi-experimental pretest-posttest control group design. This design was selected to examine the effectiveness of literature-integrated language instruction on primary students' literacy skills within an authentic classroom context, where random assignment of individual students was not feasible. Quasi-experimental designs are widely used in educational research to investigate instructional interventions under natural school conditions while maintaining reasonable control over internal validity [36]. Two intact fourth-grade classes were assigned as an experimental group and a control group. Both groups completed a literacy pretest prior to the intervention and a posttest following the instructional treatment. The pretest-posttest structure enabled the examination of changes in literacy performance attributable to the instructional intervention, while controlling for baseline differences between groups.

2. Participants and Research Context

The participants were 60 fourth-grade students from a public primary school located in an urban area of Indonesia during the 2024/2025 academic year. Two intact classes with comparable academic backgrounds, curriculum coverage, instructional schedules, and school resources participated in the study. Based on pretest results, no statistically significant differences were found between the groups, indicating comparable baseline literacy levels. One class (n = 30) was designated as the experimental group, and the other class (n = 30) served as the control group. Both groups were taught by the same classroom teacher, who had more than five years of teaching experience. This arrangement was intended to minimize potential teacher-related confounding effects and ensure consistency in instructional delivery across groups. Purposive sampling was employed to select classes that were similar in terms of curriculum, instructional time, and learning environment, thereby strengthening the internal validity of the study.

3. Instructional Treatment

The experimental group received literature-integrated language instruction over a six-week period consisting of 12 instructional sessions. Instruction was organized around three core pedagogical mechanisms: guided reading, discussion, and written response. Age-appropriate children’s stories and narrative texts aligned with the fourth-grade curriculum were selected based on readability level, thematic relevance, cultural appropriateness, and narrative coherence. Each instructional session followed a structured sequence that included pre-reading activation of prior knowledge, guided reading with teacher scaffolding, discussion to support interpretation and inference, and written responses to consolidate comprehension and vocabulary learning. These instructional activities were designed to promote cognitive engagement, inferential processing, and meaningful interaction with texts. The control group received conventional language instruction using textbook-based materials, teacher explanation, and individual written exercises. Instruction in the control group emphasized literal comprehension and skill practice without systematic integration of literary texts, guided discussion, or structured written responses. Both groups received equivalent instructional time and covered comparable curriculum objectives to ensure that observed differences could be attributed to the instructional approach rather than instructional exposure.

Table 1 Overview of Literature-Integrated Instructional Sessions (Experimental Group)

Session	Literary Text Focus	Instructional Objectives	Core Activities
1–2	Short children’s narrative	Activate prior knowledge; introduce key vocabulary	Pre-reading discussion; guided reading; literal comprehension
3–4	Narrative story (local context)	Develop vocabulary and story structure awareness	Guided reading; vocabulary discussion; short written response
5–6	Narrative with clear conflict	Identify main ideas and causal relations	Guided reading; inferential discussion; paragraph writing
7–8	Moral-based children’s story	Infer character motivation and moral values	Group discussion; inferential questions; written reflection
9–10	Narrative text (longer length)	Integrate comprehension and vocabulary use	Guided reading; vocabulary in context; summary writing
11–12	Review narrative text	Consolidate comprehension and inferential skills	Discussion; integrative written response; review

To illustrate the implementation of the literature-integrated instructional model, one representative lesson (Sessions 5–6) is described below. The lesson aimed to develop students’ ability to identify main ideas and causal relationships using a narrative text with a clear conflict structure. In the pre-reading phase, the teacher activated students’ prior knowledge through guiding questions and introduced key vocabulary to support comprehension. During the guided reading phase, students read the text in small groups while the teacher provided scaffolding by clarifying vocabulary,

highlighting key ideas, and guiding students to identify the sequence of events. Students were encouraged to engage actively through prediction and think-aloud strategies. This was followed by a discussion phase in which students responded to inferential questions related to the causes of conflict, character motivations, and story resolution. The teacher facilitated interaction by encouraging students to justify their responses using textual evidence. In the post-reading phase, students completed a written task summarizing the main idea and explaining causal relationships in the text, reinforcing comprehension and vocabulary use. Overall, the lesson integrated guided reading, discussion, and written response to promote active engagement, inferential reasoning, and meaningful text interaction. The same instructional structure was consistently applied across all sessions, with variations in text complexity and learning objectives as outlined in Table 1.

4. Research Instrument

The primary research instrument was a 30-item literacy test designed to assess students' literacy skills across three dimensions: reading comprehension, vocabulary knowledge, and inferential ability. The test consisted of multiple-choice and short-answer items. Content validity was established through expert judgment involving two specialists in literacy education, who evaluated the alignment of test items with instructional objectives and literacy constructs. A test blueprint outlining literacy dimensions, indicators, item formats, and number of items was developed prior to test construction. Short-answer items assessing inferential skills were scored using an analytic rubric. To ensure scoring consistency, a second rater independently scored 25% of the responses. Inter-rater agreement reached 0.86, indicating high scoring reliability. Item analysis was conducted prior to the main analysis to examine item quality. The difficulty index ranged from 0.32 to 0.78, indicating acceptable levels of item difficulty, while the discrimination index ranged from 0.31 to 0.62, demonstrating good discriminatory power. Internal consistency reliability analysis yielded a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.87, indicating high overall reliability of the instrument.

Table 2 Literacy Test Blueprint

Literacy Dimension	Indicators	Item Format	Number of Items
Reading comprehension	Identifying main ideas; understanding explicit information	Multiple-choice	10
Vocabulary knowledge	Interpreting word meaning in context; synonym recognition	Multiple-choice	10
Inferential skills	Drawing conclusions; interpreting implicit meanings	Short-answer	10
Total	—	—	30

5. Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using SPSS version 26. Preliminary analyses included tests of normality (Shapiro–Wilk test) and homogeneity of variance (Levene's test). Independent samples t-tests were conducted to examine baseline equivalence and posttest differences between groups. Effect size was calculated using Cohen's d to estimate the magnitude of instructional effects. An analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was conducted to compare posttest literacy scores between groups while controlling for pretest performance. The assumption of homogeneity of regression slopes was tested by examining the interaction between group and pretest scores. The interaction effect was not statistically significant ($p > .05$), indicating that the assumption was met. Statistical significance was determined at the .05 level.

6. Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the school administration. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was secured from school authorities and teachers. Students' identities were anonymized to protect confidentiality. All instructional activities were aligned with regular curriculum practices and posed no risk to participants.

STUDY RESULTS

1. Assumption Testing

Prior to conducting the main statistical analyses, a series of assumption tests were performed to ensure the suitability of parametric procedures. Normality of the data was examined using the Shapiro–Wilk test for both pretest and posttest literacy scores in the experimental and control groups. The results indicated that the distributions did not significantly deviate from normality (experimental group: $W = 0.97$, $p = .41$; control group: $W = 0.96$, $p = .32$), supporting the use of parametric analyses. Homogeneity of variance for posttest literacy scores was assessed using Levene's test. The test result was not statistically significant, $F(1,58) = 0.18$, $p = .67$, indicating that the variances between the experimental and control groups were comparable. This finding satisfies the assumption of equal variances required for independent samples t-tests. For the analysis of covariance (ANCOVA), the assumption of homogeneity of regression slopes was evaluated by testing the interaction between group membership and pretest scores. The interaction effect was not statistically significant, $F(1,56) = 0.94$, $p = .34$, indicating that the relationship between the covariate (pretest scores) and the dependent variable (posttest scores) was consistent across groups. Taken together, these results confirm that all key statistical assumptions were met, allowing subsequent inferential analyses to be conducted with confidence.

2. Descriptive Statistics and Baseline Equivalence

Descriptive statistics were calculated to summarize students' literacy performance before and after the instructional intervention. Table 3 presents the pretest and posttest means, standard deviations, and gain scores for both the experimental and control groups.

Table 3 Descriptive Statistics and Baseline Equivalence of Overall Literacy Scores

Group	N	Pretest Mean (SD)	Posttest Mean (SD)	Mean Gain
Experimental	30	62.4 (8.6)	81.6 (9.2)	+19.2
Control	30	63.1 (8.4)	70.3 (8.8)	+7.2

At the pretest stage, the experimental group ($M = 62.4$, $SD = 8.6$) and the control group ($M = 63.1$, $SD = 8.4$) demonstrated comparable literacy performance. An independent samples t-test confirmed that the difference between groups at baseline was not statistically significant, $t(58) = -0.32$, $p = .75$. This result indicates that the two groups began the study with equivalent literacy levels prior to the intervention. Following the instructional period, both groups showed improvement in literacy performance; however, the magnitude of improvement differed substantially. The experimental group achieved a higher posttest mean score ($M = 81.6$, $SD = 9.2$) than the control group ($M = 70.3$, $SD = 8.8$). In terms of learning gains, students in the experimental group demonstrated a markedly larger mean gain (+19.2) than those in the control group (+7.2).

3. Posttest Comparison of Overall Literacy Scores

An independent samples t-test was conducted to examine differences in posttest literacy scores between the experimental and control groups following the instructional intervention. The results revealed a statistically significant difference in overall literacy performance between the two groups, $t(58) = 4.87$, $p < .001$. Students in the experimental group achieved a higher mean posttest score ($M = 81.6$, $SD = 9.2$) than those in the control group ($M = 70.3$, $SD = 8.8$). This difference reflects a clear advantage for students who received literature-integrated instruction in terms of overall literacy achievement at the end of the intervention period. In addition to statistical significance, the magnitude of the difference between groups was substantial. The effect size analysis yielded a Cohen's d value of 1.26, indicating a large effect according to conventional

benchmarks. The eta-squared value ($\eta^2 = 0.29$) further suggests that approximately 29% of the variance in posttest literacy scores was associated with group membership. These effect size estimates indicate that the instructional treatment produced a strong and practically meaningful impact on students' literacy performance.

4. Literacy Outcomes by Dimension

To obtain a more detailed picture of the instructional effects, posttest literacy scores were further analyzed by dimension, including reading comprehension, vocabulary knowledge, and inferential skills. Descriptive statistics and between-group comparisons for each dimension are presented in Table 4.

Table 4 Posttest Literacy Scores by Dimension

Literacy Dimension	Group	Mean (SD)	Mean Difference	t(df)	p	Cohen's d
Reading comprehension	Experimental	82.3 (9.0)	10.8	4.21 (58)	< .001	1.09
	Control	71.5 (8.7)	—	—	—	—
Vocabulary knowledge	Experimental	80.7 (8.6)	11.5	4.56 (58)	< .001	1.18
	Control	69.2 (8.5)	—	—	—	—
Inferential skills	Experimental	81.8 (9.8)	11.7	4.02 (58)	< .001	1.04
	Control	70.1 (9.3)	—	—	—	—

For reading comprehension, students in the experimental group achieved a higher mean score ($M = 82.3$, $SD = 9.0$) than those in the control group ($M = 71.5$, $SD = 8.7$). The difference between groups was statistically significant, $t(58) = 4.21$, $p < .001$, with a large effect size (Cohen's $d = 1.09$), indicating a substantial advantage for students who received literature-integrated instruction in understanding explicit and implicit textual information. In terms of vocabulary knowledge, the experimental group also demonstrated superior performance, with a mean score of 80.7 ($SD = 8.6$), compared to 69.2 ($SD = 8.5$) in the control group. The between-group difference was statistically significant, $t(58) = 4.56$, $p < .001$, and associated with a large effect size ($d = 1.18$), suggesting that exposure to literary texts contributed to stronger vocabulary acquisition in context. Similarly, for inferential skills, students in the experimental group outperformed those in the control group, achieving a higher mean score ($M = 81.8$, $SD = 9.8$) than the control group ($M = 70.1$, $SD = 9.3$). This difference was statistically significant, $t(58) = 4.02$, $p < .001$, with a large effect size ($d = 1.04$), indicating enhanced ability to draw conclusions and interpret implicit meanings from texts.

5. Adjusted Posttest Analysis (ANCOVA)

To examine whether the observed posttest differences remained significant after controlling for initial literacy levels, an analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was conducted using pretest scores as a covariate. Table 5 presents the summary of the ANCOVA results for overall literacy scores.

Table 5 ANCOVA Results for Overall Literacy Scores

Source	df	F	P	Partial η^2
Pretest (Covariate)	1	18.42	< .001	0.24
Group (Treatment)	1	23.71	< .001	0.29
Error	57	—	—	—

The ANCOVA results revealed a statistically significant main effect of group on posttest literacy scores after controlling for pretest performance, $F(1,57) = 23.71$, $p < .001$, with a large partial eta-squared value (partial $\eta^2 = 0.29$). This result indicates that group membership accounted for a substantial proportion of variance in posttest literacy outcomes beyond the influence of initial literacy levels. The covariate (pretest score) was also statistically significant, $F(1,57) = 18.42$, $p < .001$, suggesting that baseline literacy performance was related to posttest outcomes. However, even after adjusting for this effect, the experimental group achieved a higher adjusted mean posttest score ($M = 81.2$) than the control group ($M = 70.7$). These findings confirm that the post-intervention differences in literacy performance between the experimental and control groups persisted after statistical adjustment, providing further support for the robustness of the instructional effect.

DISCUSSION

The present study examined the effectiveness of integrating literary texts into language learning to enhance literacy skills in primary education. The findings provide robust empirical evidence that literature-integrated instruction leads to significantly higher literacy outcomes than conventional textbook-based instruction. The large and consistent effect sizes across multiple analyses indicate that the observed improvements are not only statistically significant but also educationally meaningful within regular classroom contexts.

A key finding of this study is the substantially greater improvement in overall literacy performance among students who participated in literature-integrated instruction. From a pedagogical psychology perspective, this result highlights the instructional value of engaging learners in meaning construction rather than limiting reading to surface-level decoding and literal comprehension. Literary texts appear to function as cognitively rich learning stimuli that promote sustained attention, deeper processing, and active interpretation – processes that are central to effective literacy development.

The dimension-specific analyses further support an integrated view of literacy. Students in the experimental group outperformed those in the control group in reading comprehension, vocabulary knowledge, and inferential skills, with consistently large effect sizes. These findings align with theoretical perspectives that conceptualize literacy as a reciprocal system in which comprehension, vocabulary, and inference mutually reinforce one another [37; 38]. Narrative literary texts, with their coherent discourse structures and implicit meanings, support the construction of mental representations that facilitate inferential processing and deeper comprehension beyond literal understanding.

The findings are theoretically consistent with reader-response and transactional perspectives on reading, which emphasize that meaning emerges through interaction between readers and texts [39]. The instructional practices implemented in this study – guided reading, discussion, and written response – created structured opportunities for students to engage with texts interpretively and reflectively. Through these practices, literacy learning was positioned not merely as an individual cognitive activity but as a socially mediated process involving dialogue, negotiation of meaning, and reflection.

The effectiveness of the intervention can be further explained through its activation of key cognitive and affective mechanisms. Guided reading supported comprehension by scaffolding attention to textual cues, vocabulary, and narrative structure, thereby promoting cognitive elaboration. Discussion-based activities fostered inferential reasoning by encouraging students to justify interpretations, consider alternative perspectives, and connect textual meanings with prior knowledge and personal experiences. Written responses required students to synthesize information and apply language purposefully, reinforcing deeper processing and retention. Together, these mechanisms form an integrated instructional framework that supports comprehensive literacy development.

The ANCOVA results strengthen the internal validity of the study by demonstrating that the instructional effect remained significant after controlling for pretest performance. This finding

supports the conclusion that the observed literacy gains can be attributed to the instructional approach rather than to initial differences in students' literacy levels. The use of intact classrooms combined with statistical control enhances the credibility of causal inferences in natural educational settings.

Beyond its empirical findings, this study contributes conceptually to education and human studies by framing literary texts as pedagogical tools that support human meaning-making in literacy learning. Rather than serving solely as instructional materials, literary texts function as cognitive–affective resources that engage learners in interpretation, reflection, and inference [40]. This perspective aligns with humanistic approaches to education that emphasize learning as an interpretive, socially situated, and psychologically meaningful process.

Several limitations should be acknowledged. The study involved a relatively small sample drawn from a single school, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. In addition, the intervention was implemented over a six-week period; longer-term studies are needed to examine the sustainability of literacy gains. Although classroom observations suggested higher engagement among students in the experimental group, motivation and engagement were not measured using validated instruments. Future research should incorporate direct measures of motivational and affective variables to further examine the psychological mechanisms underlying literature-integrated instruction.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that integrating literary texts into language learning represents an effective and theoretically grounded approach to improving literacy skills in primary education. By articulating both the empirical effects and the underlying psychological mechanisms, this study strengthens the evidence base for literature-integrated instruction and offers meaningful implications for educational theory and classroom practice.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the effectiveness of integrating literary texts into language learning to enhance literacy skills in primary education. The findings demonstrate that students who received literature-integrated instruction achieved significantly higher literacy outcomes than those who experienced conventional textbook-based instruction. The instructional effects were large and consistent across multiple dimensions of literacy, including reading comprehension, vocabulary knowledge, and inferential skills. These results indicate that literacy development in primary classrooms is strengthened when students engage with meaningful literary texts through structured pedagogical practices such as guided reading, discussion, and written response. Integrating literary texts provides learners with rich language input and coherent discourse structures that support deeper comprehension and inferential processing within regular classroom settings. From a practical perspective, the findings suggest that primary school teachers can enhance students' literacy outcomes by systematically incorporating age-appropriate literary texts into daily language instruction using interactive and scaffolded approaches. Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. The sample was limited to two intact classes from a single school, and the instructional intervention was implemented over a relatively short period. Future research should involve larger and more diverse samples, longer intervention durations, and longitudinal designs to examine the sustainability of literacy gains. In addition, future studies are encouraged to include validated measures of reading motivation and engagement to further explore the mechanisms underlying literature-integrated literacy instruction. Overall, this study provides empirical support for the use of literature-integrated instruction as an effective and evidence-based approach to strengthening foundational literacy skills in primary education.

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