

EFL Teachers' Use of Literary and Creative Texts in Austrian Lower Secondary Schools

An Interview Study

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This interview study examines the role of literary and creative texts (LCT) in English language teaching (ELT) at the lower secondary level in Austria. Against the backdrop of current debates in foreign-language literary didactics and the implementation of the new Austrian EFL curriculum (Lehrplan 2023), the study investigates which LCT types teachers use, the objectives they pursue, the methods they apply, and the challenges they face. Drawing on 12 semi-structured interviews with EFL teachers from Compulsory and Academic Secondary Schools (Lower Cycle), the qualitative content analysis reveals that songs, graded readers, and films or video clips constitute the most frequently used LCT types, while newer forms such as graphic novels or digital games remain largely underutilised. Teachers predominantly employ LCT for functional-pragmatic purposes, particularly to support language-skill development and practise lexicogrammatical features. Emancipatory-reflective objectives – such as fostering intercultural learning, literary awareness, or reading for pleasure – emerge far less prominently, with motivation being the most frequently cited benefit. The findings indicate that curricular pressures, textbook-driven instruction, limited resources, and methodological uncertainties significantly restrict teachers' ability to exploit the full potential of LCT. The study highlights the need for expanded teacher education, more supportive teaching materials, and further large-scale research to strengthen LCT-based pedagogy in Austrian ELT.

KEYWORDS: literary and creative texts, lower secondary school, ELT in Austria

1. Introduction

Literature for all levels has been among the most visible trends in the field of English Language Teaching (ELT) literature didactics for several years, with its proponents arguing in favour of employing a wide range of literary and creative texts from the very beginning (Lütge, 2018, p. 190; see also Meyer, 2022, p. 190). But while young language learners in primary school already encounter short literary texts

such as nursery rhymes, songs, and picture books, literature in ELT is traditionally the domain of upper secondary academic schools, potentially leaving many learners who do not pursue this educational path without further contact with literary texts (Gardemann, 2021, p. 1).

Considering the host of benefits these texts are commonly expected to offer to EFL learners, ranging from authentic language learning opportunities to personal, inter- and transcultural learning (see, for example, Nünning & Surkamp, 2008; Paran, 2008; Paran & Robinson, 2016; Delanoy, 2015; Thaler, 2016; Lütge, 2018; Alter & Ratheiser, 2019; Gardemann, 2021), it is not surprising that researchers in this field still see a need for action. A recent study, for example, highlights “the profound impact of literature on language acquisition, cultural immersion, and cognitive development, providing empirical evidence to advocate for its integration into EFL curricula” (Shalim et al., 2024, p. 277). For the ELT context in Germany, this need is corroborated by Gardemann’s (2021) questionnaire study with almost 400 English teachers on the use of literary texts at lower secondary schools in Hamburg. While this study shows that literature already has “a firm place in the lower grades of secondary schools” (Gardemann, 2021, p. xii), the author also concludes that “the educational potential of literary texts in English lessons at lower secondary level is not exploited to the extent that would be desirable from the point of view of general didactics as well as foreign-language literary didactics (p. xii)”.

Gardemann’s study also opens up research avenues regarding the (under)use of literary and creative texts in the lower secondary school context in Austria. Here, EFL learners, similar to their peers in Germany, run the risk of missing out on valuable encounters with literary texts after primary education, unless they continue their education in upper secondary academic school (9th to 12th grade). Thus, with a comparative lens on Gardemann’s findings and with a focus on the new Austrian Curriculum for ELT (*Lehrplan 2023*), this study seeks to gain a deeper understanding of the role that literary and creative texts currently play in ELT at lower secondary school level in Austria.

2. Aim and Research Questions

As part of *Dr Cuelittle* (Doing Research into the Curricula for English to Facilitate Literature-based Teaching and Learning), a three-year curriculum-focused research project which explores the potential of using literary and creative texts for ELT in secondary schools (see <https://www.forschungslandkarte.at/tag/literarisch-kreative-texte/>), the study aims to reveal what kinds of texts teachers use in their lessons, what they use them for, how, and what challenges they face when working with them. The research questions addressed are:

- (1) *What literary and creative texts do EFL teachers use with learners in lower secondary schools?*

- (2) *What are the teachers' objectives when using literary and creative texts with lower secondary learners?*
- (3) *What teaching methods and techniques do the teachers use for working with literary and creative texts?*
- (4) *What difficulties do EFL teachers face when working with literary and creative texts?*

3. Literature Review

3.1 Defining Literary and Creative Texts for Lower Secondary ELT

The concept of *text* has been undergoing major changes. Texts cannot be considered as fixed and stable any more, they are more fluid with the changing affordances of new media, making them increasingly interactive and multimodal (Barton & Lee, 2013). This fluidity also applies to the teaching of and with literary and creative texts in the classroom where “broader definitions of what constitutes literature and ... broader concepts of classroom methodology in ELT are mirroring current trends” (Lütge, 2018, p. 177). In this paper, these trends are also reflected in the use of the term *literary and creative text(s)* (LCT), which, given that there are no clear boundaries between literary and non-literary uses of language on strictly linguistic principles (Hall, 2015), seeks to emphasise the importance of creativity as a key quality of the texts used for literary and language learning in lower secondary ELT. Thus, similar to Mc Rae’s (1991) notion of *literature with a small “l”*, LCT not only refers to texts that are commonly considered as literature (e.g., classic novels), but also to text types that are, traditionally speaking, not literary, but creative artefacts that teachers and learners can use and produce in the classroom. Thus, this broader definition not only comprises, for example, all kinds of poetic and short narrative forms (see Thaler, 2016), video clips or fanzines, but also online audiotexts (e.g., podcasts), blogs, comics, picture books, or learner texts (Legutke, 1996) created with or without the support of the “myriad of possible uses” of Generative AI (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2023, p. 7) or other AI technologies.

3.2 The Potential of LCT for EFL Teaching and Learning

Although empirical evidence for the value of literature in language education is still scarce (Hall, 2015) and the benefits of literary and creative texts for ELT still up for debate amongst EFL teachers and researchers in the field of English didactics and foreign language literature didactics, discussions about the potential of these texts often revolve around the two target areas of functional-pragmatic and emancipatory-reflective learning objectives (Gardemann, 2021, p. 40). While, not

least due to the interrelatedness of linguistic, literary, and more general educational learning processes in ELT contexts, this distinction is necessarily blurred, it can serve as a heuristic to identify arguments in favour of using LCT with EFL learners in lower secondary schools.

Functional-pragmatic learning objectives centre on the contribution of literary texts to the learners' language development. Here, as "genuine samples of a wide range of styles and text types at all levels of difficulty", literary and creative texts support the development of the basic skills, competences, and linguistic domains (Thaler, 2016, p. 23). Similarly, Lütge (2018) argues that literature and film, as "authentic language input from the target culture" (p. 180), can be employed for oral and written work, can encourage learners to become more creative, and may help learners begin to "appreciate the richness and variety of the language they are trying to master" (p. 179).

Focusing on the educational value of using LCT beyond their function as a vehicle for language development, Gardemann (2021) developed a model of emancipatory-reflective learning objectives that can be targeted when working with these texts. Here, drawing on various competence models and concepts for working with literature (e.g., Burwitz-Melzer, 2007; Hallet, 2015; Nünning & Surkamp, 2006; Thaler, 2016), she identified seven categories into which the potential of using literary texts at lower secondary school level can be subsumed (p. 54). These texts, Gardemann holds, can unfold their potential due to their (1) *interpretative openness* and (2) *fictionality*, and the opportunities they provide for (3) *intercultural learning*, (4) *reflection on the self and the world*, and for (5) *getting to know literary language and form*. Additionally, two categories focus on (6) *reading for the sake of reading*, where learners learn to experience reading as a pleasurable act itself, and the aspect of (7) *motivating through and for reading*. (For a detailed discussion, see Gardemann, 2021, pp. 54–76; italics indicate translation of categories from German by the authors).

It is interesting to note that arguments in support of the motivational value of literary texts in language learning, reflected in the last category above, are commonly shared in the specialist literature (see, for example, Thaler, 2016). Expectations in this regard are particularly prevalent in the context of action-oriented and production-oriented activities (Surdkamp, 2012, p. 493), which, alongside student-oriented and creative approaches to literary texts, are expected to "foster motivation and build up competences" (Lütge, 2018, p. 187). Similarly, motivational benefits are also generally expected in the field of teaching and learning with pop songs, where they have long been used "as a way to motivate students and expose them to authentic materials in the target language" (Odo, 2022, p. 1; for a recent discussion of the potential of pop songs in language teaching, see Werner, 2024).

3.3 LCT and the New Austrian Curriculum 2023

The affordances of LCT are only marginally reflected in the new national curriculum for English as a foreign language (EFL), which came into effect in Austrian lower secondary school education in 2023. Yet, while it foregrounds as its overarching aim the learners' (aged 10 to 14 years) development of communicative language competence from CEFR A1 to A2+/B1 proficiency level, one of its underlying pedagogical principles (*Didaktische Grundsätze*) also emphasises the importance of fostering inter- and transcultural learning. To achieve this goal, the curriculum explicitly points out various ways, such as the use of creative and ludic elements, songs, poems, short literary texts, film clips, and short videos (Bundesministerium Bildung, Wissenschaft und Forschung [BMBWF], 2023, pp.1-2), thus implicitly encouraging teachers to include more creative and literary work in the EFL classroom. For teachers, however, translating these curricular options into their own teaching practice may turn out to be a challenging endeavour. First, creative and literary work appears to be not always fully compatible with the current standardisation and output paradigm which is "in danger of fostering the skills of '*teaching to the test*' and the '*back-wash effect*' of bolstering up 'testable skills' (Volkmann, 2022, p.266; italics in the original). LCT-based work often aims to develop less easily testable, "less 'optimizable' skills, such as literary, aesthetic, and social ones" (p.266)". And, given that these skills are not tested in the Austrian national competence survey iKM PLUS (individual skills assessment PLUS), teachers may find themselves caught in the pedagogical dilemma of whether they should spend more class time on developing them and thus counteract the backwash effect or focus mainly on teaching testable language skills, later visible in iKM PLUS survey results. Second, teachers may have difficulty finding adequate teaching resources for LCT-based work, since the potential of this work seems not yet fully reflected in the official textbooks currently used in Austrian EFL lower secondary classrooms. With their focus on the learners' development of communicative language competence rather than on competences that are difficult to measure and therefore less accessible to standardised testing, these textbooks seem to provide only limited ready-to-use material to teachers who intend to adopt a more creative and literary approach. Due to their dominant role as a guiding force in the English classroom (Gardemann, 2021, p.322) where they are still considered the main teaching resource, often treated as the syllabus that determines the goals and content of teaching as well as the methods teachers use (Richards, 2015, p.594), this is particularly counterproductive. Against this background, it is therefore also important to collect data on the teachers' methods and techniques they currently employ in the EFL classroom. Here, following Larsen-Freeman and Anderson (2011), *method* refers to a coherent set of links between the actions (i.e., techniques) teachers use in a classroom and the thoughts that underlie the actions.

4. Methodology

To allow for a deeper insight into teachers' actual classroom practices, we carried out an interview study. To gain the saturated and rich data needed to understand the phenomenon under focus, we opted for purposive sampling with a sample size of 12, using the maximum variation sampling strategy (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 128). With EFL teachers who had markedly different lengths of teaching experience in two different school types (Mittelschule (MS) – Compulsory Secondary School and Allgemeinbildende Höhere Schulen Unterstufe (AHS Unterstufe) – Academic Secondary School lower cycle) located in both rural and urban areas, the aim was to explore variation within and commonalities among the respondents (p. 128).

4.1 Participants

12 EFL teachers (6 male, 6 female) participated in the study. At the time of the interviews (March to July 2025), nine of them taught at MS, 3 at AHS. As can be seen in Table 1, the number of years of teaching experience ranged from 3 to 36 years.

| Interview | Date | Duration (min: sec) | Current school type | Teaching experience (in years) |
|-----------|------------|---------------------|---------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1 | 18/03/2025 | 33:15 | MS | 30 |
| 2 | 04/04/2025 | 39:08 | MS | 6 |
| 3 | 07/04/2025 | 35:04 | MS | 10 |
| 4 | 11/04/2025 | 31:25 | AHS | 19 |
| 5 | 30/04/2025 | 37:20 | AHS | 24 |
| 6 | 05/05/2025 | 45:40 | MS | 9 |
| 7 | 12/05/2025 | 37:15 | MS | 36 |
| 8 | 19/05/2025 | 31:15 | MS | 4 |
| 9 | 10/06/2025 | 19:30 | MS | 24 |
| 10 | 18/06/2025 | 30:00 | MS | 3 |
| 11 | 24/06/2025 | 27:48 | MS | 30 |
| 12 | 08/07/2025 | 26:54 | AHS | 20 |

TAB 1 Interviews: Duration, School Type, and Teaching Experience

4.2 Guided Interviews

Based on an interview guide, which was piloted with the first interview partner and, since no problems occurred, was kept unchanged, 12 semi-structured interviews were carried out. All interviews were conducted in person, 11 in German,

one in English. As can be seen in Table 1, the durations of the interviews, which were all recorded with the permission of the interviewees, varied between approx. 20 and 46 minutes. All interviews were transcribed by the authors verbatim.

4.3 Content Analysis

After transcription, the interview data yielded a text corpus of almost 130 pages, which were processed for data analysis in MAXQDA 2024 (VERBI Software, 2024). To address the four research questions, a qualitative content analysis (Mayring, 2014) was conducted based on concept-driven deductive category formation (Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2019, p. 96), followed by a process of inductive category formation (p. 100) for which the revised categories developed were based directly on the data. See the appendix for the complete code system, anchor examples and number of codings.

5. Results

In the following section, the results of the analysis are presented including examples of direct quotes, which, based on their illustrative potential, were selected by the authors.

5.1 EFL teachers' use of LCT

RQ₁ explored what different LCT types teachers use with their learners in ELT. In sum, the 131 coded segments showed a broad spectrum of text types that the teachers already employ in lower secondary school ELT. This literary and creative textual input comprises unabridged children's novels (e.g., Roald Dahl's *The Witches*), graded readers, songs, poems (e.g., haikus), short stories, comics, graphic novels, films and video (including YouTube and TikTok clips), computer games and tongue twisters. The analysis revealed, however, that while many of these text types are used only occasionally by a few interviewees, only songs (lyrics), graded readers, and films or video (clips), play at least a minor role for all the teachers interviewed in this study.

All twelve interviewees reported that they use songs or song lyrics in their teaching. However, their utterances also showed that the reasons why and to what extent this text type is employed varies widely (see RQ₂ below). Additionally, the data suggest preference for using songs that are not included in textbooks but rather of their own or their learners' choice. This is illustrated in the teacher's statement in (1).

(1) Also ich arbeite da lieber mit meinen Songs.ⁱ

Similar to songs and song lyrics, graded readers featured prominently in all twelve interviews. Here, not only simplified literary classics and contemporary novels, but also readers that address topics covered in textbooks are common. Compare the statement in (2).

(2) Oliver Twist ist halt ein Klassiker, genauso wie Robin Hood, und oft ... gibt es halt so neue Graded Readers wie zum Beispiel, ich glaube, Ricky und The American Girl.ⁱⁱ

Finally, all interviewees reported that films (or film clips) and video (clips) were part of their teaching. Given that most teachers estimated the percentage of using the textbooks at more than 70 per cent, it is not surprising that the videos included in current textbook packages were frequently used in the classroom where they tend to be highly popular with the learners. This is illustrated in (3).

(3) Diese Story of the Stones, kann man davon halten, was man will, aber die Schüler lieben es, also, die, ja wollen eigentlich immer nach jeder Unit ein Video sehen.ⁱⁱⁱ

As reflected in 18 codings for 'LCT types not used in ELT', some teachers explicitly reported text types they did not use at all. As shown in (4), explanations for this include references to their age, lack of experience with or no personal access to these text types.

(4a) Computerspiele, da bin ich, glaube ich zu alt.^{iv}

(4b) Graphic novels habe ich auch sehr wenig Erfahrung. ... sehr beliebt ... diese englischen Graphic Novels, ich aber selber jetzt ... habe ich weniger Zugang zu dem muss ich sagen.^v

5.2 EFL teachers' objectives when using LCT

RQ2 addressed the teachers' goals and expectations as decisive factors for incorporating LCT in their English lessons. Here, the data suggest two clear tendencies. First, there is a tendency towards functional-pragmatic learning objectives when they opted for working with these texts. Second, these functional-pragmatic objectives were accompanied by emancipatory-reflective ones, particularly motiva-

¹ All statements are left in the original here for authenticity and due to the assumed readership's proficiency in German. M365 Copilot supported translations are provided in the endnotes (i–xxviii).

tional reasons which the teachers brought forward on the basis of their teaching experiences.

As the analysis revealed, the teachers' predominantly functional-pragmatic stance is reflected in their frequent use of LCT types to develop and practise traditional language skills. Notice the interviewees' statements on the development of speaking and writing competence in (5).

(5a) ... aufgrund natürlich der textlichen Eigenschaften eignen sie [i.e., die Poems] sich meiner Meinung eigentlich auch recht gut irgendwie auch um die Pronunciation zu üben.^{vi}

(5b) ... ja, die Schreibkompetenz verbessert sich dadurch.^{vii}

This focus on the learners' language development as the primary reason for LCT use also becomes evident in the interviewees' statements on the potential of LCT for practising aspects of lexico-grammatical features. An example statement is given in (6).

(6) Wenn wir die die Present Progressive unterrichten in der ersten Klasse, dann machen wir das immer mit dem *Lemon Tree*.^{viii}

Our analysis also showed that the value of LCT use in ELT was mainly attributed to the motivational potential of these texts. Not only were they considered as a source of authentic language input that challenged the learners and fostered their interest, but they were also seen as a motivational tool that helped counteract solely textbook-focused or grammar-focused approaches to language teaching (7).

(7a) Ich habe einfach festgestellt, dass in der Unterstufe die Freude, ein Buch zu lesen oder lesen zu können, das ganz auf Englisch ist, extrem hoch und die Motivation sehr, sehr groß ist.^{ix}

(7b) ... für mich das Wichtigste ist Schülermotivation, weil es eben weggeht von diesem, ja, Lehrbuch fokussierten oder vielleicht sogar grammatikorientierten Lernen.^x

Except for motivational aspects, the analysis yielded comparatively few results that warrant categorisation as emancipatory-reflective learning objectives according to Gardemann (2021). Yet, while there are no references to the potential of LCT in terms of their interpretative openness and fictionality, some utterances reflect the educational value teachers attach to LCT-based work. As the statements in (8)

show, teachers also use these texts to make learners familiar with different facets of literature, form and language, and to open up new worlds to them.

(8a) Und dass sie einfach mal die verschiedenen Facetten von Literatur kennenlernen können plus verschiedene Facetten von der Sprache an sich.^{xi}

(8b) Ich glaube, dass es vielen Schüler*innen helfen kann, dass sie einfach mehr eintauchen. Das heißt, dass man ihnen, ich sage mal, neue Welten eröffnet.^{xii}

In addition, the educational value of LCT is also addressed in the interviewees' utterances that emphasise the significance of these texts for historical and (inter) cultural learning or philosophical reflection. This is illustrated in (9).

(9a) Zombie Song von den Cranberries, weil da halt viel geschichtlich auch vorkommt von der Easter Rebellion und von dem Easter Rising.^{xiii}

(9b) Viele sind Hip-Hop Fans, ja, wenn dann ganz andere Begriffe kommen, die jetzt im Standard Englisch eher nicht vorkommen, dann sind das natürlich auch kulturelle Diskussionen.^{xiv}

It is interesting to note that only one statement (10) referred to providing opportunities for the learners to experience reading as a pleasurable act itself (cf. Gardemann's category 'Reading for the sake of reading').

(10) Wir wollen ihnen nicht vorgeben, was genau sie lesen müssen, weil wir einfach sagen, sie sollen eine Freude beim Lesen haben und sollen es einfach mal probieren.^{xv}

5.3 EFL teachers' methods and techniques for LCT

RQ3 examined the teachers' methodological repertoire to find out how they applied LCT work in their ELT teaching practice. A large number of statements conveyed the idea of integrating LCT into 'everyday' lessons as a textual basis for predominantly language-focused activities, such as gap-fill exercises, speaking exercises (e.g., giving presentations) or reading tasks (e.g., answering comprehension questions) (11):

(11) Ich nehme einfach die Songs, die passen, die sich gut eignen und die man natürlich auch verwenden kann für den Text als eine Gap-filling Activity.^{xvi}

However, quite a few interviewees' utterances suggest that LCT work was used as a tool to add variety to their lessons. Accordingly, these texts were also incorporated in interdisciplinary lessons or teaching phases during which learners were expected to work autonomously (12).

(12 a) ... fast ein bisschen fachübergreifend mit Zeichnen, wo (wir dann) denn Paddington Bear gezeichnet haben ...^{xvii}

(12 b) ...in diesen Selbstlernphasen haben sie jetzt mit Comics gearbeitet ...^{xviii}

In this context, as shown in (13), the analysis revealed that LCT input was also employed for differentiated instruction and individualisation.

(13 a) ... Schüler*innen, die einfach leseschwach sind, ... dass man ein Audiobook dazu (hat).^{xix}

(13 b) Wir haben manchmal so zwei, drei Kinder, die wirklich noch schneller sind trotz der Differenzierung, und da nehme ich dann auch gerne so Bücher, dass ich denen sowas anbiete.^{xx}

Additionally, LCT input also played a major role in project work, for example as part of a reading scheme. And, as the references to films suggest, it is also widespread in lessons for special occasions (e.g., Christmas, Easter) (14):

(14) Wir haben auch zum Beispiel eine Leseviertelstunde in der Schule.^{xxi}

Another trend which could be seen is the use of songs as fillers or lesson starters (15):

(15 a) Das ist nur ein Lückenfüller, öfter nur im Unterricht, wenn man sich denkt, eine Viertelstunde ist noch über und die sind schon müde.^{xxii}

(15 b) Wenn ich meine Songs verwende, die ich mir suche, dann dienen sie als Einstieg in den Unterricht.^{xxiii}

LCT seems to play a minor part in the assessment of learners' performances, statements like the following are rare among the data which was analysed (16):

(16) ... sie fassen das Buch zusammen als powerpoint, und diejenigen, die noch die Note sich verbessern wollen, präsentieren noch und das hat sehr gut funktioniert.^{xxiv}

5.4 Difficulties EFL teachers face when working with LCT

RQ 4 aimed to gain insight into the difficulties that LCT-based work poses for the teachers. The data shows that, to a large extent, the teachers' decision-making for or against using LCT is determined by curricular constraints, i.e., the expectations of what learners should be able to achieve according to the national guidelines, which, in turn, are reflected in the coursebooks they use. This is encapsulated in (17).

(17) Wir laufen meistens hinterher im Stoffinhalt, ... dass wir alles unterbringen können, und diese besondere Zeit des Lesens ist dann für uns fast nicht gegeben.^{xxv}

Some statements reflect system constraints, such as lack of autonomy for teachers. One interviewee, for example, stated that since they were expected to coordinate their teaching with their colleagues who teach classes at the same level at their school, implementing LCT work was difficult. This issue of teachers 'blocking' each other is illustrated in (18).

(18) ... und das Teamteaching, dass man die Vorteile aus der kollegialen Zusammenarbeit nimmt, aber man soll sich nicht blockieren.^{xxvi}

Some utterances suggest that teachers were concerned about the availability of teaching resources, not least because lower secondary school textbooks did not offer sufficient LCT material. And, particularly with the songs provided in textbooks, there is a lack of methodological affordances (cf. Anderson, 2015). This is shown in (19).

(19) ... da ist ein Lied, aber ich kann ehrlich gesagt nichts damit anfangen, nicht wesentlich ...^{xxvii}

With regard to the songs in textbooks, the analysis not only revealed emotional-behavioural issues (e.g., learners' refusal to sing along), but also genre-related (i.e., song specific) difficulties teachers face. As illustrated in (20), the latter are often caused by song quality features that make singing along difficult.

(20) Mitsingen ist gar nicht so einfach, weil sie erstens rhythmisch relativ anspruchsvoll sind und auch von der Melodieführung her nicht besonders singbar sind.^{xxviii}

In addition, some statements point towards content and language-related issues (e.g., lack of background knowledge, learners' low language levels), concerns about the legality of Netflix use in the classroom, lack of financial resources for purchasing LCT materials, and technical issues.

6. Discussion and Conclusion

Drawing on Gardemann's (2021) findings on the use of literary texts in lower secondary schools in Germany, this interview study set out with the aim of gaining a clearer picture of the role that LCT work currently plays in Austrian lower secondary ELT. The most obvious finding to emerge from this analysis is that LCT-based work, particularly based on songs, graded readers, films and video clips, already has a place in the lower secondary ELT classroom. This place, however, is not yet central. On the contrary, the findings suggest a rather marginalised existence of these texts, which can be accounted for by two reasons.

First, as assumed (see Literature Review), it appears that the teachers find themselves in a dilemmatic position caused by curricular constraints. While they do appreciate the motivational value of LCT materials and while most of them would therefore like to include more LCT work in their lessons, they often also feel that they do not have enough time for this kind of work. This perceived lack of time may at least be partly rooted in their time-consuming and often stressful efforts to meet the curricular requirements, eventually reflected in their learners' (standardized) test results (e.g., Schularbeiten, iKM PLUS). Thus, unsurprisingly, teachers give priority to current textbooks, trying to cover most (if not all) units and ready-made teaching-to-the-test materials to systematically prepare their students for these exams. This 'test-and-textbook-first' approach may also partly explain why, as the findings suggest, LCT materials, particularly song lyrics, are often used as fillers, lesson starters or for spicing up lessons, rather than as a basis for stand-alone lessons that offer multiple LCT-based learning opportunities (see, e.g., Thaler (2016), for examples of such opportunities).

Second, as already implied above, current textbooks for lower secondary schools in Austria do not yet encourage teachers to tap into the potential of LCT to the full. With their focus on the traditional four skills, vocabulary, and grammar, they help to standardise instruction, thus ensuring that learners in different classes receive similar content and therefore can be tested in the same way (Richards, 2001, p. 255). This advantage, however, is undermined by a shortage of LCT-based activities and tasks that come with LCT (e.g., songs, song lyrics, poems) included in the textbooks. Thus, given that this study revealed the teachers' predominant use of LCT materials as a resource for developing language skills and for practising lexico-grammatical features, ELT might benefit from (supplementary) textbook materials that invite teachers to adapt their primarily functional-pragmatic approach by incorporating LCT work that foregrounds the learners and their interaction with these texts. Such materials could also include texts that are geared towards developing the learners' intercultural and transcultural competences as specified in the *New Austrian Curriculum 2023*.

Similar to Gardemann's (2021) findings regarding the German context, this study substantiates the assumption that the educational potential of LCT-based work is not yet fully exploited in the practice of everyday ELT. Gardemann's emancipatory-reflective learning objectives, for example, are only rarely reflected in the data. And, since creative tasks, such as action- and production-oriented activities (Surkamp, 2012), do not often feature in the teachers' statements either, there seems to be a considerable imbalance between subjective responses, creative tasks, and more analytical approaches to working with LCT. This, in turn, may result in missing out on the opportunity for teachers to "combine the strengths of the diverse approaches to teaching literature (here: LCT) and counter-balance their weaknesses" (Meyer, 2022, p. 189).

The findings also suggest that more recent types of LCT, such as graphic novels and computer games, do not yet play a major role in lower secondary ELT. This can at least partly be explained by the fact that teachers are not yet familiar enough with these resources and are therefore worried about incorporating them in their teaching (For teacher worries regarding the use of lyrical texts in ELT, see Fischer & Summer, 2024). Thus, pre-service and in-service EFL teacher education programmes are required to prepare teachers to take the 'LCT plunge' by equipping them with the necessary knowledge of different LCT materials and with the pedagogical and methodological skills to integrate them into their lessons.

With only 12 teachers from the Upper and Lower Austrian regions taking part in this qualitative study, its principal limitation is arguably its rather small sample size. Thus, what is now needed, is a follow-up quantitative study, which, similar to Gardemann's in Germany, explores the teachers' use of and their objectives for using LCT with learners in lower secondary schools across the country. Additionally, ELT pedagogy would benefit from action research projects (Feldman et al., 2018) that investigate LCT teaching and learning processes in the classroom. The case studies that emerge from such projects would not only make a valuable contribution to the further development of LCT pedagogy and methodology, they would also lend themselves to critical reflections on the theory and practice of LCT work in EFL teacher education courses, thus familiarising EFL student teachers with this approach already at an early stage.

Reference

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Appendix. Deductive and Inductive Coding Categories

| Deductive Coding Categories | Category Definition | Inductive Coding Categories | Number of codes (out of 524) | Unrevised Anchor Examples |
|---|---|---|------------------------------|---|
| Literary and creative texts (LCT) in ELT | Literary and creative texts, including literature with a small 'l' (McRae, 1991), all kinds of poetic and short narrative forms (Thaler, 2016), video clips, fanzines, online audiotexts (e.g. podcasts), blogs or other materials, already published or created by teachers, learners and/or AI. | LCT types used in ELT | 131 | "Wir haben insgesamt 8 bis 10 Filme an der Schule, 2 pro Jahrgang, die wir mit den Kindern machen." |
| Functional-pragmatic learning objectives | Use of literary and creative texts to develop the learners' language skills. (cf. Gardemann, 2021) | LCT types not used in ELT | 18 | "Ich meine, ich tue jetzt keine Computerspiele per se im Unterricht einsetzen" |
| Emancipatory-reflective learning objectives | Use of literary and creative texts because of their educational value, i.e. for purposes that go beyond their function as a vehicle for language development (cf. Gardemann, 2021) | LCT as a source of authentic language input | 10 | "Ich möchte Ihnen einfach zeigen, was ein richtiger, authentischer Text für Muttersprachler, wie das dann aussieht" |
| Teaching methods and techniques | Method refers to a coherent set of links between the actions (or techniques) teachers use in a classroom and the thoughts that underlie the actions. (cf. Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011) | LCT to practise the traditional language skills | 30 | "damit einfach die die Leseflüssigkeit schneller wird, auch die Aussprache besser wird" |
| | | LCT to practise aspects of lexicogrammatical features | 40 | "zu Schulbeginn haben wir heuer Matilda geschaut, weil die hat wahnsinnig viel Passformen drinnen" |
| | | Philosophical reflection | 4 | "Ich baue schon viele philosophische Sachen (...) ein, manche Schüler lieben es zu diskutieren." |
| | | LCT as part of general education | 12 | "(...) dass das auch ein bisschen zur Allgemeinbildung gehört" |
| | | Motivation | 59 | "Und natürlich packt man die Kinder da so ... in ihrer Welt." |
| | | (Inter)cultural learning | 8 | "Beim Jungen im gestreiften Pyjama war Kultur natürlich sehr wichtig." |
| | | LCT to add variety to ELT | 21 | "(...) so ein Filmprojekt, (...) das dauert dann schon. Aber ich finde, dass diese Zeit sehr viel bringt und dann muss ich halt aus dem Buch ein paar Sachen weglassen." |
| | | LCT as part of lesson planning | 30 | "Wir machen das so, sie haben da eine Aufgabe dazu, dass sie eine Powerpoint dann dazu erstellen und (...) ein Kurzreferat" |
| | | LCT to support differentiation/individualisation | 13 | "Wir haben manchmal so zwei drei Kinder, die wirklich noch schneller sind trotz der Differenzierung, und da nehme ich dann auch gerne so Bücher, dass ich denen sowas anbiete." |
| | | LCT as part of a reading scheme | 17 | "Wir haben auch zum Beispiel eine Leseverlektunde in der Schule." |
| | | LCT as a form of assessment | 4 | "(...) bei manchen ist es noch um die Note gegangen, dass ich gesagt habe, wir arbeiten das jetzt noch aus im Unterricht, wir lesen im Unterricht, sie fassen das Buch zusammen als powerpoint, und diejenigen, die noch die Note sich verbessern wollen" |
| | | LCT as a lesson starter | 6 | "Dann dienen sie als Einstieg in den Unterricht, (...), die Diskussion zu starten und in das Thema einzuführen" |
| | | LCT as fillers | 14 | "Aber das ist auch eher so eine Zwischenschicht, die man halt so macht." |
| | | Content-related issues | 1 | "(...) das kann man eigentlich nicht lesen, das ist nicht wirklich, ja, politisch korrekt." |
| | | Technical issues | 1 | "Ja, öfter auch die Technik, die bei uns nur auslässt." |
| | | Emotional-behavioural issues | 7 | "(...) die toben sich da gerne in der vulgären Sprache aus (...) bei den Songs." |
| | | Lack of methodological affordances | 7 | "es ist mir viel zu wenig damit zu tun, sie beinhaltet keine Lückentexte, keine Übungen, es ist nichts zu tun, außer, dass man sie anhört" |
| | | Curricular constraints | 31 | "Ja, also wenn das Korsett vom Lehrplan nicht wäre." |
| | | Availability of teaching resources | 21 | "(...) aber ansonsten ist es wirklich schwierig, an Material für die Unterstufe zu kommen" |
| | | Genre-related issues | 12 | "Da sind nur ein paar, die vielleicht mitsingen können, die anderen können nicht mitsingen, weil sie zu schwierig sind." |
| | | Language-related issues | 9 | "Manchmal ist das Vokabular etwas schwierig, wo man dann wieder differenzieren muss" |
| | | Legal issues | 1 | "Eigentlich dürfte man gar kein Netflix oder so was herzeigen." |
| | | Financial issues | 7 | "Weil das kostet alles ein Geld für die Schule." |
| | | System constraints | 10 | "(...) dass der Lehrer vielleicht wieder mehr Entscheidungsfreiheit hat in einer Klasse" |

Endnotes

- i Well, I prefer working with my own texts for that.
- ii *Oliver Twist* is just a classic, like *Robin Hood*, and often there are those new graded readers, for example, I think, *Ricky* and *The American Girl*.
- iii *This Story of the Stones* - people can think what they want of it – but the students love it; they actually want to watch a video after every unit.
- iv Video games– I think I'm too old for that.
- v I also have very little experience with graphic novels. ... These English graphic novels are very popular, but personally I have less access to them, I have to say.
- vi ... due to their textual characteristics, they [the poems] are, in my opinion, actually quite well suited for practicing pronunciation.
- vii ... yes, writing skills improve as a result.
- viii When we teach the Present Progressive in first grade, we always do it with "Lemon Tree."
- ix I've simply noticed that in lower secondary school, the joy of reading – or being able to read – a book that is entirely in English is extremely high, and the motivation is very strong.
- x ... for me, the most important thing is student motivation, because it moves away from textbook-focused or even grammar-oriented learning.
- xi And that they can get to know the different facets of literature, plus different facets of the language itself.
- xii I think it can help many students if they simply immerse themselves more – in other words, that you open up new worlds for them.
- xiii "Zombie" by the Cranberries, because it includes a lot of historical references to the Easter Rebellion and the Easter Rising.
- xiv Many are hip-hop fans, and when completely different expressions appear – ones that don't really occur in standard English – then of course that leads to cultural discussions.
- xv We don't want to prescribe exactly what they have to read, because we say they should enjoy reading and simply give it a try.
- xvi I just choose the songs that fit, that are suitable, and that you can, of course, also use for the text ... as a gap-filling activity.
- xvii Almost a bit cross-curricular with art, where we drew Paddington Bear.
- xviii During these self-study phases, they have now worked with comics.
- xix For students who are simply weak readers (...) having an audiobook to go with it.
- xx We sometimes have two or three children who are even faster despite differentiation, and I like to use such books to offer them something more.
- xxi We also have, for example, a fifteen-minute reading period at school.
- xxii It's just a filler, often used in class when you think: There's still fifteen minutes left and they're already tired.
- xxiii When I use the songs I choose, they serve as an introduction to the lesson.
- xxiv ... they summarize the book in a PowerPoint, and those who want to improve their grade also present it, and that worked very well.
- xxv We are usually running behind the curriculum, trying to fit everything in, and this special time for reading is then almost impossible for us to include.
- xxvi And team teaching – where you take advantage of collaborative work, but shouldn't block one another.
- xxvii There's a song ... but to be honest, I can't really do anything with it – not much, anyway.
- xxviii Singing along is not that easy, because first, rhythmically they are quite demanding, and second, the melody lines are not very singable.