

A Study of Students' Difficulties in Learning Selected Literature Subjects

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Abstract

This article is intended to find, to know and to find out what difficulties that are most often faced by students of the English literature study program in literature courses, especially literary genres and the factors that cause these difficulties in the English Literature study program, Faculty of Languages and Arts, University HKBP Nommensen Medan. In this study a qualitative descriptive research method was applied by describing the findings from the results of the analysis of the data obtained. The subjects of this study were the students of the fifth semester, Academic Year 2020 consisting of 20 students who were selected by using the cluster sampling technique. Data were collected from the results of filling out questionnaires and interviewing each student. The researcher distributed questionnaires to all class members. After that, the researcher selected ten students to be interviewed. The results of this study indicate that the difficulties experienced by students in literature courses can be classified into four sub-learnings namely prose, poetry, drama and folklore based on the semester lecture designs obtained. Apart from that, the factors that cause many students to experience difficulties in literature courses are because they often depend on other people, are not confident in delivering questions to the lecturers about the material, often have experience emotional disturbances when lectures take place, lecturers who teach the course explain the material too much fast, lack of respect and reinforcement for students and some of the students are not focused in lectures for various reasons.

Keywords: *difficulties, literature, prose, poetry*

Introduction

Teaching English in educational institutions involves many components that must be involved by a teacher in teaching. According to Kitao (1997) several lists of important components in the implementation of language learning are students, teachers, materials, teaching methods, and evaluation. Instructional materials are one of the important components of EFL and include a variety of educational materials that teachers use in the classroom to support specific learning objectives as defined in the curriculum. This includes textbooks, literature, newspapers, magazines, videos, audiotapes, computer software, visual aids and so on.

Some linguists still debate the importance of teaching literature in language learning in educational institutions. Edmondson (1997) revived the debate about the value of literature in language teaching and learning by asking two questions namely whether literature has anything special to offer language learners as well as language teachers, and whether there is anything justifying the inclusion of a literary component in language teaching programs.

According to Sage (1987:2) suggests that many teachers consider the use of literature in language teaching as an interesting concern and worthy of inclusion in learning materials. Several previous researchers have also conducted research on the use of literature in language classes saying that they have found role playing, improvisation, creative writing, discussions, questionnaires, visuals, and many other activities that have been successfully applied to be varied in language classes and also achieve the same goals. when teaching literature. In the research process it is necessary to explore teachers' attitudes towards literary material as teaching materials because according to Borg (1991:1) teachers are not robots who only apply various methods without thinking, curricula designed by other people; instead, teachers exercise agency in the classroom – they make decisions, both before and during teaching, and these decisions are becoming a new focus for educational researchers. Literature learning is often associated with theories that only contain information and information without authentic and unattractive evidence, so that many students do not pay full attention when learning literature is in progress. So in this case the writer tries to explore students' difficulties in studying literature subjects and uncovers the factors that influence difficulties in studying literature courses.

This article is limited by case studies that occurred in students of the English Literature study program, HKBP Nommensen University for the 2020/2021 academic year. The purpose of this paper is to find out the difficulties experienced by students in learning Literature and to reveal what factors influence these difficulties. With the disclosure of these two problems, it is hoped that positive results will be obtained for the development of a literature teaching curriculum in educational institutions, especially in gaining access to and learning literary values.

Rollin (1989:17-18) argues that literature must be recoverable as a permanent written text, utterances conveyed orally. Other literary experts also argue that most literature is defined as definitional criteria based on a list of criteria that must be met by a literary work. Based on prototypical characteristics, literary works are composed of written text, characterized by the use of specific language including features such as creative metaphors, phrases, syntax, rhyme, alliteration and meter, are in literary genres such as poetry, prose fiction, or drama, are read literally. aesthetically, contains many implicatures to produce various interpretations.

It has been stated that literature is an ideal vehicle for teaching language in educational institutions, because the purpose of teaching language is rooted in material and methodology. According to Kennedy (1986) states that changes in ELT materials and methods require changes and beliefs of the instructor. Communicative language teaching since the 1980s has resulted in major changes in teaching materials for pedagogical purposes. Literature instructors have been equipped with the representational use of the target language, so that students are faced with the native use of certain languages through complex themes. According to Duff and Maley (1990) that the originality of literary texts offers genuine samples of a very wide range of styles, registers, and types of texts that can be responded to by learners personally based on their own experience. Teaching literature in cultural forms or models allows students to understand more easily and appreciate the different cultures and ideologies around them. On the other hand, literature functions as a medium to convey images and cultural conditions of people who speak the language they write (Valdes, 1986). Literature can also provide access to the culture of the particular society whose language is being studied. Discussions about culture and literature can be

seen from various social backgrounds which show the characteristics of the customs, feelings and everyday life of the people.

Language is a literary media in which learners can learn and develop and enrich their linguistic knowledge because literature can encourage a very wide range of interactions. Literature is made of language and students enrich their language knowledge through literature. Literary texts generally consist of multiple layers of meaning and can be explored effectively for discussion so as to produce many opinions. Therefore, it can be said that language material is one of the benefits that is often discussed in discussions. Literature is also a useful material that can encourage the personal involvement of learners. Literature not only provides original context but also gives pleasure because it involves emotion. If a reader of a literary work wants to know what happens next in a text, he will continue reading even if he encounters various kinds of grammatical difficulties. The main value in literature is the culture contained in it because in culture there are universal ideas, feelings and expressions. According to Carter and Long 1991: 2) that literature expresses the most significant ideas and human feelings and the teaching of literature is a means where learners can deal directly with various expressions that are considered universal and valid for a certain period.

The language teaching model focuses on teaching literature for language development because there are some teachers of the view that EFL language classes only focus on textbooks so that language models help expose students to more creative use of language. This type of model is set in, and its purpose is to motivate students to read and relate the themes described in literary texts to their personal experiences. It is intended as a bridge to cultural models and language models with a focus on the use of a particular language in a text that relates it to a particular culture. In this case students are not only invited to express their responses in spoken and written form, but also through movement, art drama, and through multimedia.

In language learning, students need to consider all the rules, especially in the writing process because some students lack confidence and are not motivated after knowing a number of requirements including language structure, text function, theme or topic, creative expression, content, genre and so on. Besides that, many students also have difficulty in determining the right theory, combining ideas in writing. This happened because the students' English proficiency was relatively low. It was found that studying literature is a difficult and tedious task for college students where learning language and literature is very different from spoken language so that many of them face serious problems in studying literature. The difficulties faced by these students can be described as follows, namely first, the lack of clear learning goals and objectives. Students who do not know the purpose of studying literature are likely to be immersed in the problems of deep understanding of literature. Even some of the peacocks think that there is no point in studying literature because it is considered not important in everyday life. Second, the use of inappropriate language and literature teaching methods. It will be difficult to understand and appreciate literary works if the teacher does not pay attention to the proper methods of teaching literature. Often teachers do not prepare questions for discussion or give students the opportunity to respond to material but instead give assignments that are considered difficult to complete. Third, random selection of text. The choice of varied material is very important to improve the process of learning literature. Texts that are not appropriate and in line with age, interests, and so on will make students feel bored and unable to clearly appreciate

literary works. Fourth, the lack of understanding of the prevailing social climate. Information about the author's life background and the prevailing social climate should be one of the concerns of the teachers where it is one of the evidences of fact to pave the way for students' personal involvement in literary works. However, because some literature students only focus on content without regard to the life background and characteristics of the author, they face difficulties in analyzing which results in misinterpretation. Fifth, the lack of student self-motivation. Students will feel bored if they are encouraged to write on topics that are considered foreign. Students should be encouraged and excited to discuss interesting and familiar things to increase their motivation to study literature. Sixth, Inadequate time. In the process of creating literary works, the most important part is adequate time to prepare the topics to be discussed. Experience proves that students don't have enough time to compile ideas, compile drafts, and re-read their writings. Seventh, lack of direct practice. Like other subjects, learning language and literature also requires hands-on practice. It requires effort and practice in order to master the skill. Eighth, teacher feedback. Some teachers give brief or unclear feedback so that students are confused, ineffective and there is no praise, so they worry about the form and content of their own writing.

Method

Phenomenological design is a qualitative approach, namely with the intention of identifying experiences about various phenomena that occur. From a phenomenological point of view, the aim of this research is to describe the phenomenon as accurately as possible. Creswell (1994) shows that in phenomenological design there is no need for presuppositions, expectations or frameworks. In this case the writer does not need theory, only relies on participant investigations with the intention of exploring their attitudes towards the phenomenon. So, in this case it involves student as participants who had taken Literature courses. Conducting interviews with participants about their experiences in taking Literature courses. Assist participants in reflecting on their experiences during Literature courses. Finding out what they get from this experience and asking what its own meaning for them. The process of data collection was used to describe the setting, activities, people, and the meaning of what is observed from the participant's point of view. Data was collected based on the phenomena they studied and the data was qualified to be analysed, and the interpretation which had already been processed. The data also were obtained from the results of interviews, observations, events, and questionnaires which were produced in the form of interview transcripts, audio recordings, notes and documents. Interviews were conducted to find out what was inside and according to the wishes of the participants and to get direct answers. During the conversation, the writer preferred interactional dialogue, face-to-face conversations rather than a formal question-and-answer format. Important statements and phrases that was directly related to experiences were identified and extracted, then the researcher tries to describe the meaning of each of these important statements. Important statements had been collected and arranged into groups of themes, these themes were used to produce a complete picture of an experience, then the writer read the description accurately to strengthen the data being analysed. After all the data were analysed, then the writer gets an overview to make a conclusion.

Results

Data are raw facts, observations, or events in the form of special numbers or symbols. So that the data can be in the form of numbers and can also be in the form of symbols obtained from direct observations in the field. The data obtained from interviews, observations, events, and questionnaires is presented in the form of information or values for an object. The data that has been examined is related to students' difficulties in learning literary material, namely prose, poetry, drama and folklore. To find out the results of students' difficulties in the lesson, the researcher uses the following table which contains students' answers to these questions.

Table 1. Students' difficulties related to the prose lesson

No	Questions	Answer	
		Yes	No
1	The prose lesson with many unfamiliar words are clearly understood	60%	40%
2	It has complex grammatical structures	70%	30%
3	Always find difficult to understand every single word of creating a prose	20%	80%
4	It interferes understanding in reading text too long	50%	50%
5	Always find difficult to interpret the meaning of a prose text	70%	30%
6	Feeling fatigue and distracted when writing and reading a prose text	70%	30%
7	Always find difficult to understand writing prose text when the topic is unfamiliar	70%	30%
8	Always find difficult to understand fictional prose	80%	20%
9	Always find difficult to understand nonfictional prose	50%	50%
10	Using own personal experience and background knowledge to understand a prose text	30%	70%

Based on table 1, most of the students found some difficulties related to prose lessons. The first difficulty is a complex grammatical structure. Most students do not master grammar because they think it is very difficult to do. As in literature, students find it difficult because each lesson has a complex grammatical structure and they don't understand it. The second difficulty is difficult to understand every word of the text. That is, they do not master vocabulary. So when they learn every word from the text, they find it difficult because not all the words they know mean. When they come across an unfamiliar word, they cannot stop and think about it because if they do they will lose needing extra time. The third difficulty is the difficulty of interpreting the meaning of the text. Almost all students find it difficult to interpret the meaning of the text. Maybe because they do not master vocabulary. So that when they read a long script they will be lazy to hear it. The fourth difficulty is an unfamiliar topic. Many students find it difficult to understand what is being taught because the topic is foreign to them. They find it difficult in topics that are foreign because they consist of words they don't know the meaning of. So it is very important for students to read a lot in order to have extensive knowledge.

Student difficulties related to the learning process when students were asked about the difficulties they faced in poetry lessons related to themselves as readers.

Table 2. Students' difficulties related to the poetry lesson

No	Questions	Answer	
		Yes	No
1	Getting fear of not understand what to write	80%	20%
2	Feeling worry if not understand the meaning of a poetry	80%	20%
3	The topic is familiar but cannot recognize the word	60%	40%
4	Paying attention with intonation of poetry reading	70%	30%
5	Finding difficulties to recognize the unfamiliar utterances in the poetry	90%	10%
6	Do you lose focus when got practice?	70%	30%
7	Trying to stop to write when encountering an unknown word	30%	70%
8	It is difficult to infer the meaning unknown word in writing a poetry	60%	40%
9	Losing concentration when thinking of the meaning of new words	60%	40%
10	Getting difficult to quickly remember a new word or phrase to write	70%	30%

On table 2, it can be seen that students find some difficulties related to themselves as poetry readers. The first difficulty is anxiety. Most students have anxiety before they practice the script. When they experience anxiety, they will lose focus and cannot train properly. Therefore, lecturers must create a pleasant classroom atmosphere and make students feel relaxed and comfortable. The second difficulty is that it is difficult to deduce the meaning of unknown words. Most students cannot deduce the meaning of an unknown word because when they find an unknown word they just keep on reading and never think about its meaning. It is very important for students to deduce the meaning of unknown words, because the instructions are not clear. The third difficulty is not being able to concentrate. Most of the students answered that they couldn't concentrate in writing the text. This problem might occur because there are noises around. The noise can come from outside or inside the classroom. If students do not concentrate on learning, it can affect their efforts to write and understand poetry.

In the last section, students were asked about the difficulties students faced in learning drama. The results can be seen in the following table

Table 3. Students' difficulties related to the drama lesson

No	Questions	Answer	
		Yes	No
1	Loosing concentration if reading drama script	20%	80%
2	Finding difficulties to understand the practice of the script	80%	20%
3	Finding difficulties to understand the meaning of the script	60%	40%
4	Finding difficulties to understand the script instruction	50%	50%
5	Finding difficulties to understand when creating a new script	70%	30%
6	Feel bored to watch drama performance	60%	40%
7	Finding difficulties if unable to get understood	40%	60%
8	Finding difficulties to concentrate if noises around	70%	30%
9	Interfering understanding when unclear resulting from a poor performance	80%	20%
10	Having difficulties of creating and practicing a new drama script	100%	0%

As it shown in table 3, students found some difficulties in drama lessons. The first difficulty is the lack of concentration on the drama script. This is due to poor teaching and explanation so that students will not understand because they cannot hear clearly. The second difficulty is the lack of vocabulary to create new drama scripts. The third difficulty is

feeling bored watching the show because it runs monotonously. Lack of upgrades and entertainment. Most students could not deduce the meaning of the words displayed because the speaker spoke with less pauses. The players kept talking without pause and the students couldn't understand the meaning. The fourth difficulty is the inability to repeat. Students should do more practice, so they can understand how to start writing new scripts. The fifth difficulty is noise. Noise is very disturbing students in learning drama.

Students' difficulties are related to the learning process when students are asked about the difficulties they face in folklore lessons related to themselves as readers.

Table 4. Students' difficulties related to the folktale lesson

No	Questions	Answer	
		Yes	No
1	Loosing concentration if reading folktale	70%	30%
2	Finding difficulties to understand the practice of the script	80%	20%
3	Finding difficulties to understand the meaning of the script	80%	20%
4	Finding difficulties to understand the script instruction	60%	40%
5	Finding difficulties to understand when creating a new script	90%	10%
6	Finding difficulties to understand watching a folktale performance	70%	30%
7	Finding difficulties if unable to get understand	80%	20%
8	Finding difficulties to concentrate if noises around	70%	30%
9	Interfering understanding when unclear resulting from a poor performance	70%	30%
10	Having difficulties of practicing a new folktale	90%	10%

From table 4 it can be concluded that students experience difficulties in learning folklore due to several factors. The first factor is depending on other people. Depending on other people here means students always depend on other students. When they find material that they don't understand while studying, they always ask their friends. They never try to find the answer on their own. Because they always depend on others, they will never understand the material and they never learn from their mistakes. The second factor is the embarrassment of asking the lecturer about the material. Most students prefer to ask about material they don't understand to their friends rather than to the lecturer. That's because they are embarrassed to ask the lecturer, maybe they are afraid of being scolded by the lecturer. When they ask their friends, they will get sober answers because their friends don't master the material like lecturers. The third factor is experiencing emotional disturbances. Emotional disturbances such as moody, irritable, angry, or unhappy affect students in learning folklore. When students experience emotional disturbances, students will find it difficult to concentrate when following folklore lessons. Therefore, lecturers must be able to arouse students' enthusiasm in learning so that they feel happy and comfortable.

Table 5. Factors that cause students' difficulties in literature learning

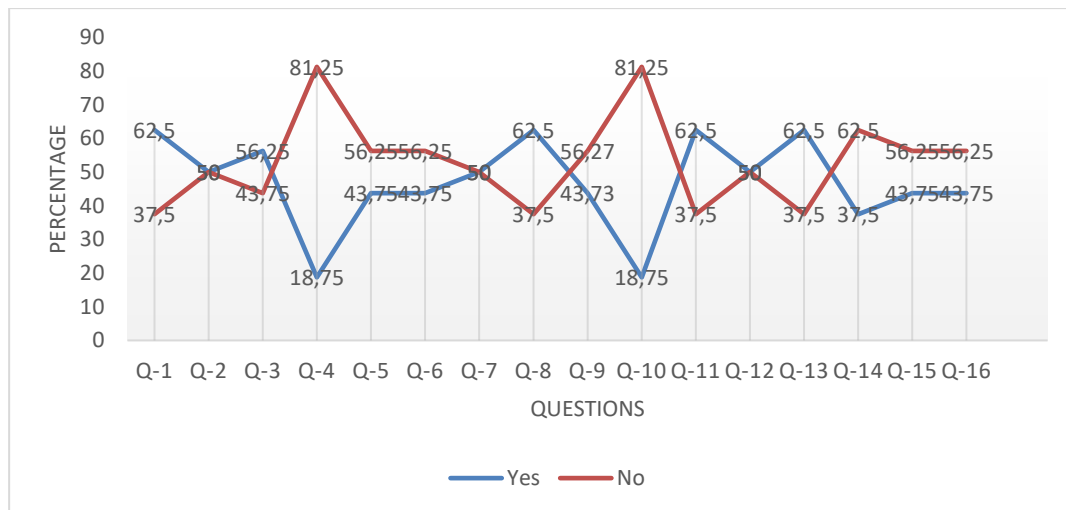
No	Questions	Answer	
		Yes	No
1	Having low intelligence or learning disability in understanding the material	62,5%	37,5%
2	Having low motivation or spirit in studying literature	50%	50%
3	Can concentrate when learning all the lessons	56,25%	43,75%
4	Having wrong habits in study the literature, like cheating or waiting for an answer from friend	18,75%	81,25%

No	Questions	Answer	
		Yes	No
5	Depending on others when you find something you do not understand	43,75%	56,25%
6	Feeling shame to ask if there is material that is unclear	43,75%	56,25%
7	Feeling confident in what to do	50%	50%
8	Have emotional disturbances like moody, irritable, angry, or unhappy in learning literature	62,5%	37,5%
9	The lecturers have used attractive teaching methods and techniques	43,73%	56,27%
10	The media and tools used during learning often have problems	18,75%	81,25%
11	The classroom situations conducive to learn literature	62,5%	37,5%
12	The orders or instructions of the material clearly explained	50%	50%
13	The lecturers explain the learning materials too quickly	62,5%	37,5%
14	The situations or teaching learning processes stimulate you to be active	37,5%	62,5%
15	Having interaction with the lecturer in the learning process	43,75%	56,25%
16	The lecturers often give reward or reinforcement during the learning process	43,75%	56,25%

From table 5, it can be assumed that the difficulties experienced by students in literature are caused by several factors. The first factor is understanding of the lesson. Literary genres consist of prose, poetry, drama, and folklore. All of these genres must be mastered in learning literature. Students also have low learning motivation because lessons and materials are full of theory and explanations, lack of concentration, lack of confidence. In addition, there are also other cases that affect the learning of literature subjects such as; teaching methods, unclear sequences and instructions, media, interactions and classroom conditions. Emotional disturbances are also considered as one of the students' difficulties in studying literature. When students experience emotional disturbances, they will find it difficult to concentrate while attending literature lessons. When they can't concentrate they won't be able to master the sub-subjects well.

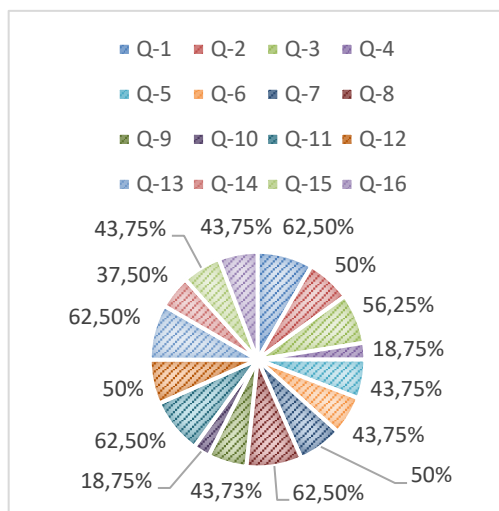
Most students experience difficulties in literary works because the lecturer explains the material too fast. Students find it difficult to understand learning material if the lecturer explains it too quickly. They also feel bored and lazy because they don't understand. Therefore, the lecturer must explain the material clearly and interestingly so that students can easily understand it. The final factor is the lack of rewards and reinforcement. Rewards and reinforcement are needed in the learning process, especially genres in literature subjects. This will increase the interest and enthusiasm of students in learning. Unfortunately, many students say that lecturers rarely provide rewards and reinforcement in the learning process. Therefore, they do not feel enthusiastic in participating in the learning process of literature subjects.

The following graphs are pictures of ups and downs of existing situations or data with lines or pictures among students who answering Yes and No. Presentation of data with graphics aims to show comparisons of information quickly and simply, but in detail and detail. The function of the graph is to accurately describe data in the form of simpler numbers and explain the development and comparison of an object or event that are interconnected in a concise and clear manner.

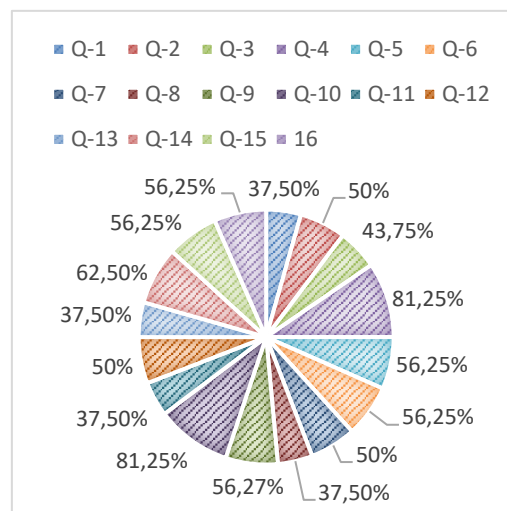


Picture 1. Students Responses

The following pie chart or pie chart is a form of data visualization in a circle which is divided into slices that represent the numerical value of a data to show the separation of how many students answer Yes or No. It is to represent data with a single numeric variable. It is round and can be cut into several parts. according to its name. This diagram is very useful for describing the contribution of something compared to another



Picture 2. YES Responses



Picture 3. NO Responses

Discussion

As many as 20 students have become respondents in this paper. Students are presented with 10 questions each from the 4 sub-materials that have been taught, namely prose, drama, poetry and folklore. One addition consists of 16 questions related to learning literature as a whole which includes material, sub-material and lecture implementation. The questions are presented in the form of statements related to difficulties in learning literature and the factors that cause students to experience difficulties in literature subjects. The first question about students' difficulties related to literary genres, namely: prose, poetry, drama and folklore. Almost all students find it difficult in literature subjects related to genre,

because they lose focus and get sleepy when paying attention to the lesson. They lost their focus because of the noise from outside the class. The second statement about students' difficulty was related to poetry lesson. Almost all students find it difficult in literature related to poetry lessons because they have to find new vocabulary that they don't know the meaning of. Another problem they found was that players spoke too fast and used different accents. The third statement about students' difficulties is related to drama. Coming up with new scripts for drams was very difficult due to lack of vocabulary. Not only composing new scripts, but also practicing drama scripts in front of the class is also a difficult thing to do, because most of the students don't have an acting background. The fourth statement is about the factors that cause students' difficulties in folklore. Most of the students answered that the lack of focus was the main factor causing students' difficulties in literature. The last statement about whether students ever feel bored in the listening process and why. Almost all students have felt bored during the learning process of literature subjects. They feel bored for various reasons. Some say that unknown vocabulary is the reason why they get bored with literature. Several other students said there were several reasons why they felt bored during the learning process, they were that the text was too long and the unfamiliar topics.

Conclusion

The difficulties faced by students in studying literature are grouped into two categories. They are related to lessons (prose, poetry, drama and folklore) and the learning process. Each category has a different difficulty. Students' difficulties in literature subjects related to the material are complex grammatical structures, difficult to understand each word, difficult to interpret the meaning of the text, unfamiliar topics, new vocabulary, difficult to infer the meaning of unfamiliar words, unable to concentrate, unclear instructions, difficult to remembering, loss of focus and drowsiness. In addition, there are 5 factors that cause students to experience difficulties in literature lessons. They depend on other people, experience emotional disturbances, the lecturer explains the material too fast, lacks rewards and reinforcement, and is not focused.

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