



## DIFFICULTIES AND SUGGESTED SOLUTIONS TOWARDS STUDYING ENGLISH - AMERICAN LITERARY WORKS<sup>i</sup>

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### Abstract:

This study examined the challenges of learning English-American literature for English majors at Can Tho University (CTU), Vietnam. The study aimed to answer the two questions, which are the difficulties encountered by English majors and their suggested solutions to improve their learning of British-American literature/literary. The target audience was 100 English majors who have studied English-American literary works at CTU, Vietnam. A questionnaire and an interview were used to collect data for this study. A questionnaire was used to support quantitative data while an interview was used for the qualitative method. This study hoped to find out the students' difficulties, thereby proposing solutions to overcome and improve the quality of students' literary studies.

**Keywords:** Anglo-American literary works, difficulties, solutions, students' attitudes

### 1. Introduction

“Foreign literature” in the general program is not only as the “literary quintessence” of the world but also as a bridge between the local culture and the world culture, or in other words, a door to the world. for integration. Anglo-American (British-American) literary works are included in the curriculum for English students because it plays an extremely

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important role in helping students build good language skills, understand the culture, and communicate. by the natives. On the other hand, the process of literary acquisition is the process by which readers participate, students' aesthetic perception ability is revealed and nurtured in their thoughts, feelings, perceptions and personal experiences about people and life. life. With specific expressions such as love and sympathy for unfortunate and pitiful characters; at the same time condemn and criticize the bad habits and vices. Students perceive objective reality according to the law of beauty (Chu. T. T. Duong, 2019).

Studying a literary work is not only about understanding the content, but also about contemplating valuable lessons and feeling the literary beauty in each work. Studying and receiving foreign cultures and literature is necessary, and becomes more and more necessary in the current period of increasing exchange and integration. From the knowledge transferred, students will be equipped with a huge amount of knowledge about communication skills, language ability, and situation handling. Besides studying English - American literary works, it also helps learners to study and cultivate knowledge about people, society and culture from that country's literature, thereby applying the knowledge they have learned to students for their future jobs.

Can Tho University (CTU) is a key state-owned undergraduate and graduate training institution in the Mekong Delta, which, School of Foreign Languages (SFL) is a training unit under CTU, established on March 31, 2015 under Decision No. 714/QĐ - ĐCCT. The School has the function of training and teaching at undergraduate and postgraduate levels in foreign languages. In order to expand and improve the quality of teaching and learning of the School, in 2018, CTU expanded the major in English with the High-Quality Program (HQP). The innovative curriculum offers more opportunities for students after graduation. In particular, the teaching of Anglo-American literature has received more attention. The School has organized activities to promote the effectiveness in studying and learning about literature such as: on April 19, 2021, Literary Gala activity at the Learning Resource Center and Speaker Ho Phuong Thuy, English lecturer from the School together with more than 30 students of Can Tho University had interesting exchanges about the work "*A letter from Thomas Jefferson to his daughter*" by Thomas Jefferson, 1783. The organization of such activities also showed that the School was focusing on promoting the development of this subject.

However, studies on the difficulties that students and teachers face in the process of teaching and learning English-American literary works have not been done much at Can Tho University in particular and Vietnam in general. Meanwhile, studying English-American literary works has an important role in improving language knowledge and developing thinking for students majoring in English. In general, fostering knowledge and soul is something that needs to be done in parallel with training quality labor resources for the country. The difficulties that lead to that process are something that we have to take care of.

"Literature" was identified by Tran Dinh Su (2009) as discussing and learning knowledge not only to write correctly with grammar, practice fluency in expression, and

understand deeply about culture, but also as perfecting personality to live better, more beautiful, more humane. Understanding the importance of literature, research into internal and external motivation and understanding the responsibility for effective literary learning in English as a foreign language -EFL classrooms have been done a lot. However, in our country, this topic is still very few, most of which are usually just introductory, prompting English learners to come to literature.

Along with the desire to raise students' awareness of literature, especially English-American literary works, in the training program of SFL, Can Tho University (extracted from <https://www.ctu.edu.vn/dao-tao/ctdt-dai-hoc.html>), from the 3rd year, 2 subjects on literature including Introduction to Literature with Course Code XH 478 (CT General) – FL 205H (HQP) and Literary Criticism (Literary Criticism) with Course Code XH 540 (General English-GE) – FL 206H (HQP) have been added to teach students. By teaching methods such as presentations, discussions, etc., students will develop presentation skills, and critical thinking, familiarize themselves with many different authors' writing styles and improve their understanding of literature in literary works. The purpose of including subjects with literary elements in the program is to guide the output standards in order to train students of the English language major with deep and broad professional knowledge in the field of language and socio-culture aspects after their graduation.

### **1.1. Introduction to Literature Course**

Introduction to Literature is an introductory course in the field of literature. Through 45 lessons, students at SFL, CTU, will become familiar with world literature and master the basic knowledge of works through four chapters including: (I) artistic methods, (II) fiction, (III) non-fiction and (IV) poetry. Here, students will be guided on how to perceive the work by analyzing the sequence of events, the narrator, identifying the type of character, feeling the author's attitudes and point of view, and sharing their own feelings, understanding the symbolic images and messages from the work. Also, students will practice hard skills such as reading and writing, analyzing English-American literary works with critical thinking, assessing how to use language, and identifying literary elements used in the work, both recognising the author's style, and understanding the culture through the works.

In addition, students will also achieve some soft skills through group reports, presentations, or role plays proposed by lecturers. Since then, the module has trained students with active diligence, critical thinking, friendly cooperation through teamwork, a sense of responsibility and professional ethics to always preserve and appreciate the values of the students and the value of literature. Besides, this module creates an important theoretical foundation in helping students to fully equip themselves with knowledge and skills to have a deeper approach to English-American literary works.

## 1.2. Introduction to Literary Criticism Course

After acquiring the basic knowledge, in the fourth year of the training program, students will receive more intensive training in the skills of evaluating works through the module Introduction to Literary Criticism. Similar to Introduction to Literature, this course lasts 45 hours. Through which, students will be provided with knowledge of literary criticism theory. There are 6 basic critical approaches introduced Formalism - New Criticism, Reader-Response Criticism, Marxist Criticism, Feminist Criticism, Psychological Criticism, and Cultural Studies with a focus on New Historicism. Students will expand their knowledge of American and British literature and thereby make an assessment of information, messages and unique cultural symbols of these works.

English students will be trained in hard skills such as reading and analyzing works based on selective literary criticism methods; knowing how to compare and contrast themes with characters; mastering the plots to avoid misreading; ability to write feedback on Anglo-American literary works. Besides, soft skills such as presentation, independent thinking ability, and communication ability in group activities are also enhanced. This module aims to help students improve their cognitive level in perceiving literary works more deeply as well. From this respect, students are able to grasp the structure of a work from many cognitive angles, present the value of that work under many theoretical lenses, and give a multi-dimensional view of the messages that the author has conveyed.

## 2. Literature

Subjects on Anglo-American/British-American literary works were mostly introduced into EFL classrooms early on because of the benefits it brings to language learning. However, learning literary works from a completely different country from the learner's home country causes many obstacles, especially for English learners of Asian descent. There have been many articles and studies dealing with this issue. One of the common difficulties raised by Padurean (2015) in his research is that the language used in literary works is too complex. Literary language is often not helpful to the reader in absorbing grammatical and lexical structures that may be used in everyday life. On the other hand, Alhamdi (2014), and Alharbi (2015), found that motivation in EFL learners also has a certain role in reading literature. It can be seen that the literary learning of English students is hindered due to many different reasons, in which, include external factors, the lack of self-motivation of students is also a big obstacle.

In Vietnam, when talking about the important factors that make studying English-American literature difficult, Van (2009) has a research paper *The Relevance of Literary Analysis to Teaching Literature in the EFL Classroom. Literature Analysis for the Teaching of Literature in the EFL classroom*. This paper presents basic assessments of six approaches to teaching literature, including a discussion based on the author's own experience and feedback from colleagues familiar with the approaches. difference. According to the author, one of the external driving forces that make it difficult to read literary texts is the cultural barrier. Factors such as historical, social and political, ethical and religious issues

have added to the complexity of the text, having a powerful impact on the learning process with people from different cultures, where English is not their mother tongue. Students' cultural alienation from texts makes them dependent on the interpretation of the lecturer.

Sharing the same view, Al-Mahrooqi (2012) has researched *Reading Literature in English: Challenges Facing Omani College Students*, which provides convincing evidence that culture has a great influence on learners' perceptions. The participants reported that the farther the content of the work was from their culture, the harder it was for them to understand and the longer it took to read. Novianti (2016) has the article *English literature teaching: An Indonesian context* has devoted much effort to analyze this topic. Research has found that many English language teachers think that English literature is a subject that supports an academic environment, where all literary disciplines are dominated by white male authors. These are factors that, if not carefully studied, will affect the reading comprehension process. The fact is that individual consciousness and literary expressions are tied to the political environment (Blaiha, 2019).

Tevdovska (2016) and Rahman (2018) argue that understanding a literary work may fail because of cultural differences, they may not understand the cultural context and also do not understand the foreign context. However, Anglo-American literary works are important in exposing students to a new culture and providing opportunities for richer cross-cultural experiences.

Not only that, difficulties may arise from the work itself that students have access to. A literary work is often bound by factors such as genre, style, and artistic measures. Symbolism, simile, and irony along with syntax and vocabulary require learners to learn literature scientifically (Van, 2009; Rahma, 2018). That is, sometimes a literary text is quite complicated to understand, it contains too many factors that affect the semantics of a literary work. Difficulties coming from the text itself can come from linguistic factors such as vocabulary, idioms, proverbs, slang and so on (Al-Mahrooqi, 2012). Therefore, the selection of an appropriate text plays a very important role in approaching the process of learning and teaching literature (Hussein & Al-Emami, 2016). Depending on different literary genres, the factors affecting reading comprehension results may be different, the process of analyzing literary works depends greatly on the type of text.

Tevdovska (2016) has researched *Literature in ELT setting: Students attitudes and preferences towards literary texts*, which poses teaching short stories in the EFL classroom gives learners many linguistic advantages. Specifically, the author asserts that short stories and novels are similar in many ways. Both include components such as a chronology, events, a narrator, and a set of characters. However, reading a novel requires the reader to dig deeper to understand as well as spend more time thinking. Moreover, the novel is not the only kind of literature that makes it inaccessible to students, poetry, as observed by Tevdovska (2016), is one of the most sophisticated literary and expressive forms. Therefore, the way learners or teachers choose texts plays a key role in improving language competence.

In addition, the individual level of the reader greatly determines how they perceive a literary work. Gubair & Eltahir (2019) *Challenges to Teaching English Literature in Sudan from a Teacher's Perspective: A Case Study of Khartoum University Khartoum University case study* says students' low language proficiency is one of the major challenges. Students' lack of basic knowledge of literary terms and tools, as well as their lack of critical thinking, are the main reasons for their loss of motivation. The lack of exposure to the language also leads to poor vocabulary and creates a reluctance and lack of enthusiasm when studying literature.

However, it is not possible to completely blame students when the results of studying Anglo-American literature are not effective. Some of the reasons may stem from inappropriate teaching methods. Some lecturers are well aware of learners' problems with literary elements but have the tools to deal with them effectively (Alkhodimi & H. Al-Ahdal, 2019). The fact that students have different language proficiency levels also hinders teachers in the process of choosing teaching methods and designing learning programs (Novianti, 2016). Inappropriate literary approaches can make students less interested or less valuable in the work, worse, can cause negative attitudes towards literature. To avoid this situation, teachers need to have an understanding of literary devices to guide students. Interpretations should not be imposed, but rather introduce and clarify technical terms, prepare and provide appropriate classroom procedures, and intervene when necessary to provide prompts (Tran, 2009).

Also, in Vietnam, foreign literature is increasingly interesting due to the globalization trend that requires more study of foreign cultures. From the school year 2006 - 2007 up to now, foreign literature has been interspersed with Vietnamese literary works in the high school curriculum. Accordingly, the number of studies in this field has also increased significantly. Pham Thi Lien (2020) *Orientation on how to receive foreign literary works in high schools in Vietnam* believes that at the high school level, both teachers and students consider the work to be a sideline, redundant, learn to know, not to feel. Besides, program distribution and scarce reference materials also affect the learning process. In another study by Nguyen Hoan Anh and Tran Huu Phong (2018), *Cultural integration in teaching foreign literature in high schools* was also carried out. The article focuses on presenting the problem of cultural integration in teaching in order to improve the large gap in space, time and aesthetic perspective of classical literature in modern times - the factors that contribute to the indifference, no interest in student literary works. It can be seen that the researches on teaching foreign literature at the high school level usually target the difficulties that learners face when learning literary works.

Meanwhile, for the higher education level, studies on the importance and proposed methods of applying literature to foreign language teaching account for the majority of this field. Tran Thi Nga and Le Thi Hoan (2012) *Understanding the value of literature in English teaching materials* has shown that literature has a great influence on the teaching of foreign languages in general and the teaching of spoken English. private. Nguyen Thi Binh (2017) *Gustave Lanson and interpretation of the literary text* based on the Lanson method once again confirms the role of understanding the writer and factors

outside the text (civilization, social environment, history in which the text was written) to examine illuminating social and cultural values.

In another study, Nguyen Thi Bach Duong (2012) *Some effective measures in teaching English - American literature to English majors* aimed at proposing teaching strategies. The study offers strategies to help teachers take on the role of facilitators. At the same time, these strategies will support them to overcome challenges and suggest the right way to learn, helping students limit the automatic input of knowledge.

Currently, in the country, there are many studies on the topic of teaching and learning Anglo-American literary works at the university level, but there are very few articles that only focus on the challenges of English students. Tran Van Phuong (1999) *Discussing the relationship between literature and language teaching* reveals in the article that partly mentions the difficulties that students majoring in English face when learning English-American literary works. Literary language is said to be too foreign to everyday language, so practical values through contact with literary texts are also very limited. Another study by Truong Thi My Van (2009) *The Relevance of Literary Analysis to Teaching Literature in the EFL Classroom*, which is very difficult for students to feel the intention of the work. Choosing the right works can be a problem because the difficulty of language and cultural differences can prevent students from making accurate interpretations.

In summary, English literature has received more attention in recent years but there has not really been much research related to the challenges of this subject. Most of the specific studies on this topic often target high school students. However, the research done with English students on the challenges of learning Anglo-American literary works is very limited.

In general, studies on the difficulty of learning Anglo-American literary works have a certain volume in the field of languages in many countries. Research on intrinsic and extrinsic motivation as well as understanding the responsibility for poor literacy in EFL classrooms has been extensively conducted. However, in our country, this topic is still very few, most of them are usually just introductory, prompting English learners to come to literature even though it is a source of teaching and learning materials. Language is very valuable. Furthermore, the bulk of the research found relating to the subject of literature has mostly come from high school studies. In our country today, it is difficult to find specific studies targeting the difficulties that English students face when using English-American literary works as teaching materials. However, the benefits that literature brings are immense, learning a language today is not only about learning language skills but also training the ability to think critically, imagine, and feel especially understanding the culture of the target language.

### **3. Research Methodology**

#### **3.1. Main Objective**

The overall objective of the thesis is to study and analyze the difficulties in studying English-American literary works of students majoring in English Language, Can Tho

University in the current period. The above analysis will help the research team see the difficulties of students when learning English - American literary works. The research results will make suggestions that contribute to creating favorable conditions for students to study literature more effectively.

### **3.2. Specific Objective**

Specific goals include:

- Finding out the difficulties of fourth-year English language students when studying English-American literary works in the training program of Can Tho University.
- Making suggestions to overcome these challenges.

### **3.3. Research Questions**

- 1) What are the difficulties faced by fourth-year English language major students when studying English-American literary works in the training program of Can Tho University?
- 2) What are solutions suggested to improve the study of English-American works in the training program of Can Tho University?

### **3.4. Participants**

The target audience was 100 English majors who have studied English-American literary works at Can Tho University, Vietnam to fill in the questionnaire and three lecturers of English to sit for an interview.

### **3.5. Methods**

This study used two main research methods, including: the theoretical research method and the investigation method. Theoretical research is the first method used to collect scientific information on the basis of studying existing documents. Regarding the survey method, two tools were used to collect data during the research, namely questionnaires and semi-structured interviews.

The questionnaire was designed to find out the difficulties that students were facing when studying English - American literary works in the training program of School of Foreign Languages, CTU, Vietnam. After collecting questions, the research team would conduct interviews with three lecturers to learn more deeply about students' difficulties as well as propose solutions to improve the learning quality of students majoring in the English language.

## **4. Research Results**

In this section, the research team will present the results of a survey of students' opinions and interviews with teachers about difficulties in learning Anglo-American literary works. Data were obtained from a survey of 100 high-quality (HQP) and general English



(GE) students at SFL, CTU, Vietnam. The research team conducted interviews with 3 lecturers. Data were entered and stored using Excel software and analyzed using the SPSS program. Descriptive statistics show the following results:

#### 4.1 Personal Information of Students Participating in the Survey (n=100)

**Table 1:** Statistics of student information participating in the study (n=100)

Genders		Ages		Cohorts	Majors	
Males	Females	21-22	>22	45	High-quality English majored students (HQES)	General English majored students (GES)
26	74	100	0	100	50	50

As mentioned, the study participants were 100 students majoring in HQES and GES including 26 males and 74 females aged 21-22 of Cohort 45 (2018-2022). During this research survey, 150 questionnaires were distributed to students who studied through literature courses including Introduction to Literature, and Introduction to Literary Criticism. They have completed the course of Introduction to Language, so they all have general knowledge about the structure of language, understand the meaning of words and have background knowledge about analyzing literary elements in a work. The group conducted a review of 50 invalid questionnaires and obtained 100 ones (50 from HQES and 50 GES). All participating students were from the 45th Cohort and were between the ages of 21 and 22.

#### 4.2 Results from Students' Questionnaire

The questions of the survey included the content of finding out the students' perceptions of Anglo-American literary works and their difficulties in learning these works, as well as collecting opinions of the participants, experts on English and American literary works were included in the training program of School of Foreign Languages, Can Tho University.

##### 4.2.1. From English-American Literary Works

**Table 2.1:** Works that students have studied

Literary works	Percentages of students who have studied	Percentages of students who have not studied
The Lady, or the Tiger? – Frank R Stockton (1882)	98%	2%
Roman Fever – Edith Wharton (1934)	10%	90%
A Clean, Well-Lighted Place – Ernest Hemingway (1933)	6%	94%
The Gift of Magi – O. Henry (1905)	82%	18%
Letter To Mrs. Bixby –	30%	70%

Abraham Lincoln (1864)		
A Letter from Thomas Jefferson to His Daughter - Thomas Jefferson (1783)	64%	36%
The Road not Taken – Robert Frost (1915)	42%	58%
Rose for Emily – William Faulkner (1930)	20%	80%
Trifles – Susan Glaspell (1916)	3%	97%
The Awakening – Kate Chopin (1899)	8%	92%
Wuthering Heights – Emily Bronte (1847)	34%	66%
A Case of Suspicion – Ed Wallace (1943)	30%	70%

Table 2.1 describes the percentage of works that students have studied in the training program, in which, most students have learned through the works *The Lady, or a Tiger?* (98%). Followed by *The Gift of Magi* (82%) and *A Letter from Thomas Jefferson to His Daughter* (64%). In addition, the survey showed that students had never studied *Trifles* (97%) and *A Clean, Well-Lighted Place* (94%). Due to differences in training programs, the data obtained show differences in the works students have studied.

#### 4.2.2. Survey Results on Students' Difficulties

The questions of the survey include the content of finding out the students' perceptions of Anglo-American literary works and their difficulties in learning these works, as well as collecting the opinions of the participants. An expert on English and American literary works is included in the training program of School of Foreign Languages, Can Tho University.

#### 4.2.3. Difficulties from Culture

**Table 2.2.1:** Difficulties from culture

Questions	Efficiency level										M	SD
	SD		D		Neutral		A		SA			
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%		
Q1	5	5%	24	24%	48	48%	17	17%	6	6%	2.95	0.725
Q2	4	4%	23	23%	18	18%	48	48%	7	7%	3.31	0.632
Q3	10	10%	31	31%	30	30%	23	23%	6	6%	2.84	0.680
Q4	5	5%	19	19%	23	23%	39	39%	14	14%	3.38	0.699

Table 2.2.1 shows that students do not face many difficulties for the four cultural difficulties. Specifically, the difficulty of the Anglo-American political and historical context is completely foreign to Q2 students (M = 3.31, SD = 1,632), accounting for 27.1% male and 72.9% female. The group of survey participants who gave similar feedback on

the issue of difficulty to grasp the character's faith situation for religious differences Q4 (M = 3.38, SD = 1,699) all had high mean (Mean) values than level 3, in which the Q2 difficulty is agreed by the students to occur in all works in the curriculum except for the works No. 9.

Meanwhile, a few students have difficulties in Q1 (the problem of disagreeing with the character and handling of situations of the characters in the work) and Q3 (difficulty in learning about the author's biography). Specifically, Q1 has an average value of M = 2.95; SD = 0.725 with 100% female and 0% male; Q3 has a mean value M = 2.84, SD = 0.680 with 21.7% male and 78.3% female. In general, according to the data in Table 2.2.1, difficulties in historical, political and religious contexts (British-American) have caused many obstacles for students in learning English literary works.

#### 4.2.4. Difficulties from the Text

**Table 2.2.2: Difficulties from the text**

Questions	Efficiency level										Mean	SD
	SD		D		N		A		SA			
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%		
Q6	1	1%	14	14%	22	22%	56	56%	7	7%	3.54	0.858
Q7	4	4%	23	23%	18	18%	48	48%	7	7%	2.84	0.770
Q8	10	10%	31	31%	30	30%	23	23%	6	6%	2.73	0.672
Q9	5	5%	19	19%	23	23%	39	39%	14	14%	3.55	0.514
Q10	13	13%	27	27%	35	35%	18	18%	7	7%	2.79	0.604
Q11	3	3%	15	15%	27	27%	44	44%	11	11%	3.45	0.778
Q12	2	2%	7	7%	25	25%	48	48%	18	18%	3.73	0.808
Q13	2	2%	10	10%	30	30%	39	39%	19	19%	3.63	0.671
Q14	1	1%	20	20%	25	25%	43	43%	11	11%	3.43	0.767
Q15	1	1%	5	5%	24	24%	49	49%	21	21%	3.84	0.849
Q16	1	1%	6	6%	14	14%	45	45%	34	34%	4.05	0.503
Q17	2	2%	4	4%	15	15%	55	55%	24	24%	3.95	0.857

Table 2.2.2 shows that students have many difficulties coming from the text. Specifically, it is difficult to understand Old English words Q16 (M = 4.05; SD = 0.503) with the rate of 24.4% male and 75.6% female (GE = 50.0%; HQE = 50.0%). Students feel it takes a long time to analyze works with too long content Q17 (GE = 3.95; HQE = 0.857) accounting for 21.8% of men and 78.2% of women (of which GE = 66.7%; HQE = 33.3%). Sentences with a special structure that interfere with Q15 students (GE = 3.84; HQE = 0.849) accounted for 20.4% of men and 79.6% of women (in which GE = 50.0%; HQE = 50.0%). On the other hand, students feel that their knowledge about the field of work is still limited. Q9 (GE = 3.55; HQE = 0.514) accounted for 22.7% male and 77.3% female (in which GE = 55.2%; HQE=44.8%). All of the above results have a mean higher than level 3.

In addition, the survey said that students disagreed with the ideas about preferring to read poetry over reading stories and vice versa in Q7 (M = 2.84; SD = 770) accounted for 17.9% of males and 82.1% of females. They do not feel that the topic, the

plot does not match the trend of today's students Q8 (M = 2.73; SD = 0.672), accounting for 26.3% male and 73.7% female. The survey responses also showed similar results about the fact that students did not feel interested in the works because they did not understand the plot of Q10 (M = 2.79; SD = 0.672), accounting for 22.2% of men and 77.8% of women. In general, the data in Table 2.2.2 shows that students have difficulties coming from texts such as vocabulary, text length, and sentence structure, in the process of learning British-American literary works.

#### 4.2.5. Difficulties from Students

**Table 2.2.3: Difficulties from students**

Questions	Efficiency level										Mean	SD
	SD		D		Neutral		A		SA			
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%		
Q19	3	3%	12	12%	41	41%	35	35%	9	9%	3.35	0.614
Q20	5	5%	12	12%	27	27%	43	43%	13	13%	3.47	0.729
Q21	8	8%	23	23%	29	29%	31	31%	9	6%	3.10	0.606
Q22	5	5%	19	19%	23	23%	39	39%	14	14%	3.21	0.757
Q23	6	6%	25	25%	26	26%	28	28%	15	15%	3.54	0.705
Q24	2	2%	19	19%	25	25%	31	31%	23	23%	3.54	0.639

Difficulties coming from students are shown in Table 2.2.3. Most students agree that the difficulty comes from the fact that they rarely read British-American literature outside of class time in Q23 (M=3.54, SD=0.705), in which, in terms of gender, male accounted for 22.6% and female accounted for 77.4% (GE=52.0% and HQE=48.0%). Similarly, on the issue of Q24 (*I prefer to read translations of British-American literary works rather than the English originals*), the survey results (M=3.54, SD=0.639) with the ratio of male to female times. are 20.6% and 79.4%, respectively (GE=57.6% and HQE=42.4%). All of the above results have a mean higher than level 3.

On the other hand, the results also show that students disagree with the idea that *I have not seen the application of this subject in the future* in Q21 (M=3.10, SD=0.606) with 37.5% male and 62.5% female (GE=87.5%, HQE=12.5%). The survey responses also obtained similar results about students' lack of passion for Anglo-American literary works Q22 (M=3.21, SD=0.757), in which male accounted for 16.7% and female accounted for 83.3% (GE=66.7%, HQE=33.3%). It can be seen that students often do not have time to read British-American literary works and tend to read their mother tongue translation to understand the content of the works.

#### 4.2.6. Difficulties from Lecturers

**Table 2.2.4:** Difficulties from lecturers

Questions	Efficiency level										Mean	SD
	SD		D		Neutral		A		SA			
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%		
Q26	4	4%	16	16%	41	41%	29	29%	10	10%	3.26	0.701
Q27	6	6%	35	35%	25	25%	26	26%	8	8%	2.95	0.686
Q28	10	10%	24	24%	36	36%	25	25%	5	5%	2.91	0.545
Q29	5	5%	29	29%	33	33%	25	25%	8	8%	3.02	0.635

Table 2.2.4 shows that not many students have many difficulties for 4 difficulties coming from lecturers. Specifically, in difficulty Q26 (M=3.26, SD=0.701), the results show that 29% of students agree that they are facing some difficulties when lecturers tend to simplify English literary works due to the uneven level of students, in which, males accounted for 34.5%, females accounted for 19% and only 4% of students did not face this problem. Similar difficulty in Q29 with mean value M= 3.02 with SD= 0.635, 25% of students are finding it difficult when lecturers use inappropriate teaching methods.

For difficulties, Q27 reflects low average value equivalent to Q28, respectively, with Q27 (average value M = 2.95, SD = 0.686), Q28 (GE = 2.91, HQE = 0.635). Difficulty in Q27 has the number of students choosing “strongly disagree” and “disagree” a total of 41%, in which, only 26% of students had difficulties in Q27. Similarly, difficulties in Q28 also only 25% of students agree, of which 26.9% male and 24.3% female are recorded in work 1. In general, the average value of difficulties from lecturers ranges from M = 2.91 to M = 3.26, proving that most students do not have too many difficulties with this problem.

#### 4.2.7. Difficulties from the Curriculum

**Table 2.2.5:** Difficulties from the curriculum

Questions	Efficiency level										Mean	SD
	SD		D		Neutral		A		SA			
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%		
Q31	5	5%	26	26%	35	35%	25	25%	9	9%	3.07	0.737
Q32	4	4%	12	12%	31	31%	38	38%	15	15%	3.48	0.620
Q33	7	7%	20	20%	34	34%	30	30%	9	6%	3.14	0.564

According to Table 2.2.5, the difficulties coming from the (curriculum) study program with the fact that students find it difficult to learn British-American literary works because they have never been exposed to literary works in English since high school. Q32 high school (M=3.48, SD=0.620), in which, in terms of gender, male accounted for 24.0% and female accounted for 76.0% (GE = 57.1% and HQE = 42.9%).

On the other hand, the diversity of genres of works in the curriculum and teaching time were assessed by many students as not affecting the learning process of Anglo-

American literary works Q31  $M = 3.07$ ,  $SD = 0.737$ ) with 26.7% male and 73.3% female (GE = 58.1%, HQE = 41.9%). Q33 (GE = 3.14, HQE = 0.564), males accounted for 26.7% and females accounted for 73.3% ( $M = 41.2\%$  and  $SD = 58.8\%$ ). This shows that the program is considered reasonable by students, most students have difficulties because they have been used to studying English-American literary works in Vietnamese since high school.

### 4.3. Results from Interviews

There are 6 questions asked to listen to the feelings of the lecturers and their suggestions to help students in learning British-American literary works.

With the question "What are your goals in teaching British-American literary works?" - the teacher's answer appreciated the role of British-American literary works for students. Studying British-American literary works gives students majoring in linguistics, reflective thinking, and cultural understanding.

*"Help students (1) understand the content of each work. Due to some works with "classical" writing style, students have trouble with: vocabulary and grammar are different from today's. (2) understand the prose: metaphor, comparison, personification in character lines. (3) compare with Vietnamese literary works (if any) and (4) provide inspiration for students who are "interested" in reading the original." (Lecturer A)*

*"To access literary works, facilitate the development of reading skills, and practice critical skills." (Lecturer B)*

*"Helping students access and understand foreign literary works. For English language major, there are 3 inseparable factors: Language, culture, and literature. Literary works always contain linguistic and cultural elements that students need to know." (Lecturer C)*

When asked "What difficulties have you encountered in achieving your teaching goals?", all three lecturers agreed that the difficulty comes from students "not investing time in reading" makes up the majority. Besides, the limited self-study time makes you lack of initiative in reading. There is also an opinion that the difficulty of the students majoring in the English language comes from the fact that they register for courses in no order, studying 2 related subjects in the same semester, creating an overload of data with the amount of knowledge. In addition, students are familiar with studying literary works in Vietnamese, which leads to them not keeping up with the teacher's instructions in class when English accounts for 80% of the content.

*"With the above goal, while participating in teaching for many years, I personally realized (1) because when they were in high school (high school), they studied foreign literary works in English. Vietnamese, and when they went to university and studied these works in English, they had trouble with vocabulary. (2) Anglo-American culture also causes*

*difficulties with “classic” costumes, festivals and conflict resolution in characters, (3) teachers use English 80%, so the children do not understand full of details in the work (4) some children, when participating in role-play, are still afraid in the “acting” stage.”* (Lecturer A)

*“The teacher’s request was not met because there were obstacles on the part of the students. You do not understand the importance of the subject, there are too many things to do, you do not invest in reading a work. Therefore, the analysis of the work only comes from one direction from the teacher’s side without enthusiastic feedback from the students.”* (Lecturer B)

*“Your difficulty comes from the students’ side. The correct order to be able to fully understand the content in the curriculum is Introduction to Literature, Literary Criticism, and finally Anglo-American literature. However, some of you do not arrange the schedule properly, the number of students studying two courses in one semester is very high. Leading to some of you reading the article, some of you not reading, because you lack time or are lazy to read.”* (Lecturer C)

A question related to the difficulties students often face is also listed by the teacher, such as the length of time for self-study, the students' internal motivation, their limited vocabulary, and the difficulty of the language. language, text length, do not grasp the psychological development of characters in literary works.

*“This part is the same as Question 2 above (1) vocabulary, (2) long reading (3) do not fully understand the character’s personality due to different behavioral culture, festivals and activities every day (4) afraid of role-playing.”* (Lecturer A)

*“Limited self-study time, students lack passion for the subject.”* (Lecturer B)

*“Difficulty of language in literary works, students with few vocabulary, lazy to read.”* (Lecturer C)

In the question of *how to choose the right works for students*, the research team also received the general opinion of the lecturers that they wanted to bring the classics in the history of literature to students. That is explained by the teacher, for the purpose of helping students easily find reference materials, and film adaptations, and help them study better. Here they are:

*“The works in the program are selected by the teacher in the subject according to (1) classic works (2) over time in accordance with the development of socio-cultural and political aspects of the UK and the US (3) refer to the curricula of schools throughout the country*

*that teach this course: Ho Chi Minh City Education University, Hue University of Foreign Languages, or Hanoi National University.” (Lecturer A)*

*“Depending on the nature of the subject. For example: Literary commentary will often study short story works. Criticism, on the other hand, requires a deeper understanding of a country’s culture and literary values. The selected works will be traditional, helping you to find more references and self-study.” (Lecturer B)*

*“The selected works are classics, famous throughout the length of literary history. Most of the works have been put on film. Do not select the following works.” (Lecturer C)*

Finally, in the section *proposing solutions to limit difficulties in learning English-American literary works*, teachers often give advice to students to use movies as a tool to help save time. time, creating conditions to understand the work completely. Group study activities, previews of the analysis of the work, and cultural exploration through the Internet are also encouraged by the lecturers.

*“Due to the relatively short teaching time, (1) students should study in groups to read the works before coming to class (2) nowadays there are many articles and movies on the Internet. About these works, so students should take a look and have their own opinions (3) students should also learn more about cultural factors in each work to understand the context and behavior of the characters, and (4) enthusiastically participate in class activities: role play, and individuals or group presentations.” (Lecturer A)*

*“Working in groups after being modeled by the teacher to analyze the work. Watch movies, movies to save time, there are groups that will act out to help you understand the work completely.” (Lecturer B)*

*“Watching the movie will help you understand better after reading the work, so she often encourages you to use this method, avoiding the case that you are lazy to read and do not understand anything about the work.” (Lecturer C)*

The above suggestions will give the research team many ideas to find possible proposed solutions to support students to learn literary works more easily, creating a love of literature for students.

## **5. Discussions**

The results of this study have shown the biggest difficulties that hinder English language students in the process of learning British-American literary works. At the same time, it partly reflects the feelings of students and lecturers towards learning and teaching English-American works. In addition to students who do not find it difficult and



confident when studying 13 British-American literary works in the curriculum, there are also many students who have difficulty in works from many factors, especially difficulties in vocabulary, which of them are the historical, political and religious contexts in the UK and USA are completely unfamiliar to Vietnamese students.

Failure to understand the situation of the work makes it difficult for students to feel, and it is difficult to arouse empathy with the characters in the work. This was also reported by Al-Mahrooqi (2012) in *Reading Literature in English: Challenges Facing Omani College Students*. The author states that “Most students felt that their knowledge of the totality of the human experience in Western cultures was lost to them and thus their knowledge of those cultures was at best rudimentary, confused and fragmented.”

In addition, when studying more deeply about the difficulties in learning Anglo-American literary works, the research team also discovered a general interesting trend: it seems that the majority of students have difficulties in these works with Old English vocabulary, text length, sentence structure, and in Anglo-American literary works itself as well. This is also consistent with a previous study, all participants, without exception, mentioned vocabulary as the biggest obstacle to their understanding and participation (Al-Mahrooqi, 2012). Meanwhile, the selection of an appropriate text plays a very important role in involving the process of learning and teaching literature (Hussein & Al-Emami, 2016).

Learners' initiative also plays a huge role, even the biggest motivation in absorbing Anglo-American literary works. The survey results showed that the students themselves also agreed on this view. They are self-aware that they have not really invested in digging deep to read British-American literary works. Moreover, they also tend to read English-American literary works through translations. This has partly affected the perceived effectiveness of the works. Students' attitudes play a huge role in determining their own academic success. This is an important concept because it plays a key role in language learning and teaching (Derakhshan et al., 2015; Chalak & Kassaian, 2010).

In addition, the study also found out students' attitudes towards the teaching of the lecturers of School of Foreign Languages, Can Tho University, Vietnam. Most students appreciate the quality of the lecturer's teaching, but they also believe that the uneven level of students in a class leads to the teacher's tendency to simplify the lecture sometimes. The fact that students have different language proficiency levels also hinders teachers in the process of choosing teaching methods and designing learning programs (Novianti, 2016). Similarly, the percentage of students who feel that the training program is not satisfactory is very low. This shows that the curriculum being applied to teach students is quite reasonable.

However, there are still shortcomings in the arrangement of subjects related to Anglo-American works in the whole course study plan. This phenomenon often occurs in classes of English language students. The status of registering for two courses related to English and American literary works in one semester makes the amount of knowledge they absorb almost overloaded. In addition, the majority of students expressed that they had difficulties because from high school they were used to reading English-American

literary works in Vietnamese, in contrast, reading literary works in English was still quite difficult and new to them

In general, the causes leading to the above difficulties, which are agreed by both lecturers and students, are largely due to the fact that students' learning is not really active, as well as vocabulary and knowledge and their cultural knowledge are limited.

However, the research team found that not all works students have difficulties in learning. Some of the works that are considered difficult by the majority of students include: *The Lady, or a Tiger?* – Frank R Stockton, *The Gift of Magi* – O. Henry. The common point of the majority of survey participants is that almost all of them think that the text is the most difficult factor for them, followed by cultural difficulties. The work *The Lady, or a Tiger?* deemed inappropriate for the students' situational handling. At the same time, the author's style, the artistic tricks of the work, and the length of the work also bring about many difficulties and impede their interest in this work. The above textual difficulties are echoed in O. Henry's *The Gift of Magi*.

The research team believes that the initiative and interest of students depend a lot on how well they understand and grasp the meaning of literary works. Therefore, difficulties from literary texts and background knowledge play a large part in attracting students' literary passion. In fact, most children face these challenges because they themselves lack basic knowledge of their literary composition (Othman et al., 2015). This is also mentioned in the research results of Alshammari (2020): *“Unfamiliarity, poor proficiency levels, poor prior background knowledge and negative attitudes of EFL learners, poor instruction and inappropriate curricula all share the responsibility about the phenomenon under investigation.”*

However, based on the survey results from the students of School of Foreign Languages of Can Tho University, this responsibility mostly comes from the students themselves.

When talking about solutions, the most common thing between the solutions received through direct interviews is that these methods are all aimed at helping students have a basic knowledge of the work before going to class and receiving feedback. explanation from the teacher. This shows that what students of School of Foreign Languages are most interested in and need in the process of studying English-American literary works is the preparation of knowledge about analysis of works, cultural knowledge, vocabulary in the works before class and receiving guidance from the teacher as soon as they have any questions. In addition, there is a need for close support from the school as well as to see appropriate changes in teaching methods from the lecturers as well.

However, this does not mean that students are not aware of their own responsibility for self-improvement, learning more knowledge as well as finding appropriate learning methods to maximize learning efficiency in the anthology of Anglo-American literary works. This is also the reason that the research team proposes solutions aimed at helping students organize group study to learn about works, encourage students to use reference materials in the learning process, organize activities and role-

plays and join Literature Gala for students to have the opportunity to cultivate, improve their love of literature and share learning methods with each other, receiving an above-average efficiency rating of learning these works.

Although basically achieved the set objectives, the study still has certain limitations as follows:

*Firstly*, because of the fact that the research team wanted to focus more on finding out the difficulties that students of School of Foreign Languages, CTU, Vietnam encountered when learning English and American literary works and proposed possible solutions, it has led to the lack of understanding, develops qualitative questions to analyze and discover the perceptions of the majority of students about the causes of these difficulties, but only at the level of a brief understanding through the survey.

*Secondly*, owing to the time of the study coincided with the time of the COVID-19 pandemic and some of the questionnaires being substandardized, the research team was not able to scale this study to a larger number of people. For this reason, they very much hope that this study will serve as the basis for one or more universal studies, which will help students and lecturers from School of Foreign Languages, CTU, Vietnam have more objective and thorough information in the organization of the study. appropriate curriculum for their students.

## **6. Conclusions and Implications**

### **6.1. Conclusions**

The study carried out the following contents: (1) Find out the difficulties of students when learning British-American literary works in the training program at School of Foreign Languages, Can Tho University, Vietnam, (2) Design a questionnaire and conduct a survey of 100 students majoring in English Language to find out the difficulties and reasons why students have difficulties when learning British-American literary works in the curriculum, (3) Find out in detail the opinions of lecturers who have participated in teaching British-American literary works through interviews and (4) Propose valuable ways to overcome difficulties to promote literary love in students, and help them learn British-American literary works effectively.

### **6.2. Implications**

The following will be suggested implications.

- Making great contributions to lectures at School of Foreign Languages on finding out the difficulties that students majoring in English language encounter when learning British-American literary works. Thereby, proposing solutions to help students overcome difficulties and develop their capacity to become quality human resources. At the same time, this is also a reference to help teachers orient the teaching of British-American literary works more easily and effectively;

- Helping lecturers in School of Foreign Languages see the difficulties that English language students face when learning British-American literary works in the training program; and
- Proposing possible solutions to improve teaching, and minimize difficulties when learning British-American literary works according to the needs and capacity of students in their future jobs.

### **6.3. Suggestions**

From the research results, the research team proposes solutions to solve the difficulties that students at School of Foreign Languages, Can Tho University, Vietnam encounter in the process of studying British-American literary works:

#### **6.3.1. For students**

- Students need to have a positive and cooperative attitude during the learning process and when the teacher assigns assignments, and actively arrange a time for self-study and fully participate in classroom lessons.
- Students should be self-disciplined, and proactively equipped with prior knowledge and skills about literature not only to serve their learning needs but also for future work.

#### **6.3.2. For Classroom Lecturers**

- Strengthen the effectiveness of the test and evaluation in each lesson to improve learners' initiative;
- Create interesting learning activities such as mini-games and debates in classrooms so that students can not only follow the lecturer's lectures but also actively contribute to lesson-building activities and help students focus on the lectures and understand the content of the works right in class;
- Organize competency assessments before the course to classify students from which to develop an appropriate curriculum for each class.
- Organize group study to study the works, encourage students to use reference materials in the learning process and promote awareness of one's own responsibility in self-improvement, learning more knowledge as well as finding appropriate learning methods to maximize the learning efficiency of Anglo-American literary works.
- Need attention and support from leaders from School of Foreign Languages to organize extracurricular activities such as role-plays, Literature Galas and so on so that students have the opportunity to cultivate and improve their love of literature and share methods learning methods for each other, and receiving above-average performance ratings as well.

The authors hope that these suggestions will help English language students achieve better results in the process of studying English-American literary works at School of Foreign Languages, Can Tho University, Vietnam and English lectures will

improve the methods to help students achieve their goals and get high results from the difficulties while learning English-American literary works besides the courses towards their English skills.

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### **Conflict of Interest Statement**

Both authors strongly agreed on the publication of this paper and there was no contention or rivalry during finishing the work. In other words, the authors declare no conflicts of interest in this article. Both authors are fully and equally responsible for the benefits and harms after this article is published. The authors, moreover, declare that the material presented by us in this paper is our original work, and does not contain any materials taken from other copyrighted sources. Wherever such materials have been included, they have been clearly indented or/and identified by quotation marks and due and proper acknowledgements given by citing the source at appropriate places.

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