

From Stories to Skills: How a Short Fiction Analysis Course Shapes Learning and Academic Readiness

ABSTRACT

This qualitative case study explores how an analysis of short fiction course (ASFC) supports learning and academic readiness among first-year English language and literature (ELL) students in Türkiye. The researchers gathered data over a semester through teacher observations, weekly student journals ($n = 30$), and semi-structured interviews with a diverse subset ($n = 10$). Analysis employed open and axial coding, with researchers' reflexivity and an independent coder improving trustworthiness. Readiness is defined by various scholars as academic and social integration, self-regulated learning, and scaffolding. Results show a shift from basic learning-style preferences to strategic, metacognitive engagement; ongoing yet decreasing linguistic and affective barriers (e.g., vocabulary, symbolism, writing) addressed through scaffolded tasks; increased motivation and sense of belonging within a supportive classroom environment; and improvements in analytical vocabulary, critical reading, and academic confidence. The study demonstrates that genre-specific pedagogy—specifically, the analysis of short fiction—can facilitate first-year students' transition into disciplinary study, integrating the cognitive, affective, and social aspects of readiness. Limitations include a single-institution context and a small qualitative sample. Recommendations include applying ASFC-like, scaffolded approaches across literature curricula and related humanities courses, as well as conducting comparative and longitudinal research on genre-based interventions.

KEYWORDS

analysis of short fiction course (ASFC), English language and literature (ELL), student readiness, self-regulated learning, scaffolding

INTRODUCTION

Classrooms are filled with diverse students, entering higher education with varying levels of preparedness. Educators have long regarded student readiness as a crucial factor in academic success; however, it remains a complex concept that necessitates a nuanced theoretical understanding. Readiness is generally defined as the learner's ability to acquire knowledge and engage in behaviours that lead to successful learning outcomes (Chorrojprasert 2020). Beyond this broad definition, research indicates that readiness includes cognitive, linguistic, metacognitive, and psychosocial dimensions that interact to influence students' engagement and achievement (Blair and Raver 2014; Harman and Çelikler 2012).

To strengthen this conceptual framework, the current study positions readiness within three complementary theoretical perspectives. Tinto's Integration Theory (1993) considers readiness as the extent to which students can integrate academically and socially into their new environment, emphasising the importance of building the confidence to participate in academic discourse. Zimmerman's Self-Regulated Learning Theory (2000) highlights metacognition, motivation, and

strategic behaviour, suggesting that readiness involves the capacity to plan, monitor, and adjust one's learning. Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (1978) emphasises the importance of scaffolding, where educators support learners as they progress from a surface-level understanding to a more profound analytical engagement. Collectively, these perspectives view readiness not merely as a personal trait but as a dynamic process fostered through integration, self-regulation, and scaffolded learning opportunities.

Previous research has examined readiness at various educational levels, including preschool (Yorgun and Sak 2021), primary school (Korkmaz 2022), and high school (McCormick, Hafner, and Germain 2013; Ramazanoğlu, Güler, and Çetin 2022). While these studies emphasise the significance of readiness for academic transitions, their contexts differ considerably from those of university students engaged in disciplinary study in a second or foreign language. In higher education, research on readiness has often focused on general preparedness (Gordon et al. 2009; Tobolowsky and Cox 2007) or online learning environments (Tomak and Ataş 2023). Although useful, these approaches may overlook how discipline-specific pedagogies, such as literature-based instruction, can promote readiness.

In language and literature programmes, readiness requires not only linguistic proficiency but also the ability to engage critically with literary texts. As Collie and Slater (1987) argue, literature provides “valuable authentic material,” offering students exposure to complex language and cultural perspectives. The use of short stories in English teaching may promote language learning and critical thinking (Turan and Çolak 2018). March-Russell (2009) similarly emphasises that short fiction, as an accessible yet intellectually rich genre, enables students to develop analytical skills and encounter diverse cultural contexts. These studies suggest that short fiction offers a unique medium through which readiness can be cultivated, particularly for first-year students who may lack confidence or prior exposure to literary analysis.

However, the relationship between genre-specific pedagogy and student readiness in higher education remains insufficiently explored. Most readiness frameworks remain general, concentrating on broad skills or technological competencies (Aliu and Kaçaniku 2023; Beblavý, Baiocco, Kilhoffer, Akgüç, and Jacquot 2019). Few studies examine how structured engagement with short fiction might narrow the gap between secondary school learning and the demands of university-level literary analysis. This gap is particularly relevant in contexts such as Türkiye, where English is taught as a foreign language and students often report limited exposure to genres beyond the novel before entering university (Berman and Cheng 2001).

The current study addresses this gap by examining how an analysis of short fiction course (ASFC) enhances readiness among first-year English language and literature (ELL) students. By analysing student reflections, challenges, and developmental pathways, the study positions readiness not just as a set of skills but as a process shaped by integration into academic discourse (Tinto 1993), the development of self-regulated learning strategies (Zimmerman 2000), and scaffolding support to overcome linguistic and analytical hurdles (Vygotsky 1978). In doing so, it contributes to research on teaching and learning by demonstrating how genre-centred pedagogy can boost students' motivation, metacognitive awareness, and academic confidence—key aspects of readiness that prepare them for more advanced literary studies.

ANALYSIS OF SHORT FICTION COURSE

Short fiction refers to the modern form of fiction that is primarily written in a more concise format than novels. For March-Russell (2009), “the making of the short story acts as an index to the invention of modern fiction and its relationship to changing social, economic and cultural contexts”

(1). In the ELL department, the four-year programme includes various courses dedicated to specific genres, such as fiction, poetry, and drama. In contrast, other courses cover the basics of literary history, terminology, and related cultural studies. Because literature is a complex field of study, with foundational traditions dating back centuries, students must be prepared to understand, interpret, analyse, and ultimately appreciate literary texts. ASFCs are designed as courses where students are introduced not only to the history of storytelling and specific terms related to short fiction (usually learned in their first year), but also to how to read and analyse a piece of fiction, its characteristics, forms, and elements. Using texts that are shorter than novellas and novels helps students become familiar with reading fiction and prepares them to write analysis essays on it. The length of the primary literary texts discussed in class is an important factor in engaging students, as they can read the texts in one sitting (Duke 1974, 62).

The ASFC, which this study uses to assess the level of learning and readiness among students in the ELL department, schedules a different short story analysis each week. The lecturer requires that students read the assigned material prior to class sessions. In the first week of the semester, the lecturer provides background knowledge that students are expected to acquire, along with the basic elements of short fiction that students should be able to identify in subsequent weeks. The selected short stories are from renowned literary figures worldwide who have contributed to the short fiction genre. The lecturer analyses the stories, initially by reading selected sections and then presenting those sections as topics for class discussion. Both the lecturer and students participate in analysing the stories and identifying their elements. The lecturer chooses stories based on students' levels, and the course is organised chronologically according to the publication dates of the stories. As a result, the semester begins with early short stories and progresses to contemporary works. The course assessment includes a midterm and a final examination, during which all students are required to write an essay elaborating on the characteristics of the stories discussed. The exam questions are based on classroom analyses and are therefore limited to the short stories covered during the semester.

The study aimed to examine the ELL students' views on the impact of the ASFC on their learning and readiness for further studies in the department, and the relevant research questions of the current study include:

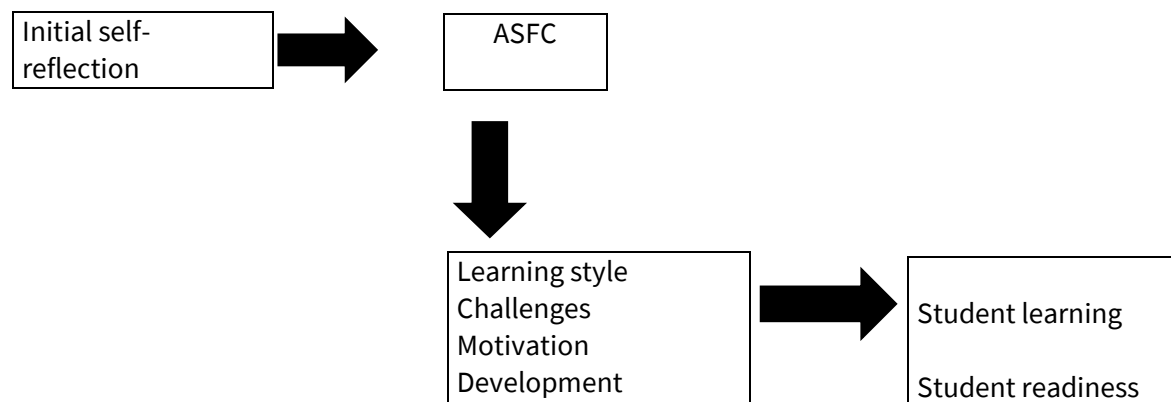
- 1) How do the ELL students evaluate themselves in terms of readiness for the course (via an initial self-reflection)?
- 2) How do the ELL students assess the impact of attending an ASFC on their learning and readiness for further studies in the department?

METHOD

This study utilised a conceptual framework that examined student learning and readiness for future research within their department, based on four interconnected variables: (1) learning style, (2) challenges, (3) motivation, and (4) development. Figure 1 illustrates this framework, showing how these factors influence ELL students' learning and their preparation for further studies through ASFC. Each theme includes subcategories or measures, and the arrows in Figure 1 indicate the directions of influence. This research aimed to assess how these themes and variables, within this framework, affect student learning and preparedness. It employed a qualitative case study approach to explore the developmental pathways of first-year ELL students enrolled in an ASFC. The researchers selected this case study method because it allowed an in-depth examination of processes and outcomes within a specific system (Creswell 2007). Rather than aiming for generalisability, the researchers aimed to provide a detailed, contextual account of how the ASFC supported student readiness through literary

pedagogy. The research team collected data on processes and outcomes using qualitative research methods, including teacher observations and notes, students' journals, and in-depth interviews with students. This study complied with the ethical standards outlined for pedagogical research. All participants received detailed information about the purpose and content of the study and provided consent for the use of data recorded in student journals and obtained through interviews via a participant consent form.

Figure 1. Conceptual framework: Impact of ASFC on student learning style, challenges, motivation, development, learning and readiness



Participants

The research group consisted of 30 first-year students (out of 120) at a university in southeastern Türkiye. Participants' ages ranged from 17 to 20; seven identified as male and 23 as female, with three holding non-Turkish nationalities. All participants were enrolled in the ASFC as part of their programme curriculum. The researchers conducted sampling as a purposive case study, aiming to focus on a single cohort in order to capture their shared experiences of the course (Ekiz 2013). Of the 30 participants, the researchers selected 10 for in-depth semi-structured interviews. The selection aimed to maximise variation in terms of gender, prior exposure to literature, language proficiency, and self-reported motivation. This approach ensured a range of perspectives while allowing for an in-depth exploration of individual learning journeys.

Table 1. Participants' demographics

Category	Details	Selection criteria
Total students	30 first-year ELL students (out of 120)	All are enrolled in ASFC
Age range	17–20 years old	First-year undergraduates
Gender	Seven male, 23 female	Female students made up the majority of the class
Nationality	Three non-Turkish, 27 Turkish	Reflects some cultural diversity
Interview subset	10 students	Selected for variation in gender, literary background, proficiency, and motivation

Data collection

The study employed several qualitative data collection methods, including teacher observations, student journals from 30 participants, and semi-structured in-depth interviews with 10 participants. The teacher also maintained a reflective journal throughout the semester, documenting classroom practices, student reactions, and overall course dynamics. The 30 participating students kept journals, writing weekly entries based on guided prompts that allowed them to reflect on their learning experiences. Additionally, the researchers selected 10 of the participants for two rounds of in-depth interviews—one at the beginning and one at the end of the course. These interviews provided insights into the students' evolving perceptions of the course.

Data analysis

The data analysis employed a structured qualitative approach. One researcher, who also served as the course instructor, used a teacher's journal to support the findings and contextualise classroom interactions. A team of two authors working with an independent coder conducted this study. One author, the course instructor, held a dual role as both teacher and researcher. This position offered valuable opportunities to closely observe classroom dynamics and document emerging patterns in a reflective journal.

The lead author, not directly involved in teaching the course, primarily managed the study's design, analysis, and reporting. This division of roles helped to minimise potential bias by ensuring data interpretation was not solely influenced by the instructor's insider perspective. While the course instructor offered contextual insights, the lead author oversaw the analytical process and integrated findings into the broader scholarly conversation.

To address concerns about power asymmetries, students could volunteer to participate, the research team used pseudonyms for participants, and the instructor assured students that their grades would not be affected by their involvement in the study. The researchers emphasised confidentiality during interviews and analysed responses independently of the course assessment. Both authors engaged in reflexive practices, documenting their assumptions and reflections to increase transparency and critical self-awareness throughout the research.

To further strengthen the trustworthiness of the analysis, an independent coder with expertise in qualitative methods reviewed the open and axial codes. This external review confirmed the consistency of themes and provided an additional perspective, balancing the instructor's insider insights with the outsider perspectives of the lead author and the external coder.

This multi-layered approach—combining insider observation, external interpretation, and independent validation—ensured that the instructor-researcher's dual role enriched the data while maintaining the integrity and credibility of the study.

Table 2. Roles and contributions

Researcher	Role	Contributions
Lead author	Primary researcher (not course instructor)	Study design, data analysis, integration of findings, and manuscript preparation
Course instructor (co-author)	Teacher-researcher	Classroom teaching, reflective journal, contextual insights
Independent coder	External analyst	Reviewed codes, checked reliability, ensured credibility

The researchers systematically analysed interview transcriptions and the student journals using open coding to identify key themes and concepts, followed by axial coding to establish connections between these themes (Creswell 2007). This process helped identify broader categories that reflected the participants' experiences. Any excerpts from student journals and interviews in this paper are quoted verbatim, without grammatical or linguistic changes, to preserve the integrity of the participants' voices.

As mentioned earlier, data analysis employed a multi-step qualitative approach. First, the researchers performed open coding on student journals and interview transcripts to identify recurring concepts related to learning styles, challenges, motivation, and development. For instance, codes such as "using visual aids," "lack of vocabulary," "increased confidence," and "scaffolded comprehension" emerged. In the second phase, axial coding grouped these codes into broader categories, such as "metacognitive growth" and "affective barriers." The sample coding table below illustrates the process.

Table 3. Sample coding

Raw excerpt	Open code	Axial category
"I watch YouTube videos before reading to help me"	Use of external aids	Learning strategies (metacognitive growth)
"I cannot write about the story after reading it"	Difficulty transferring comprehension to writing	Affective barriers (low self-efficacy)
"I felt confident because I could analyse the story with my peers"	Confidence through collaboration	Social integration/motivation

This structured approach enabled the systematic synthesis of student voices, linking themes to the theoretical framework of integration, self-regulation, and scaffolding.

FINDINGS

Analysis of data from teacher observations and notes, students' journals, and in-depth semi-structured interviews revealed that ASFC influenced the ELL students' learning and readiness in different areas, illustrated in Figure 1.

Readiness for ASFC: Initial self-reflection

The researchers collected data through in-depth interviews conducted during the first week of the semester, teacher observations and notes, and the students' journals written each week in accordance with the weekly prompts highlighted three themes: a) learning style, b) self-efficacy, and c) expectations from the course.

Learning style

Participants generally identified their learning styles as writing/reading and visual before starting ASFC. Student expressions that reveal these preferences are as follows:

- E. 1. I mostly learn something by writing down notes or just by rehearsing the subject. Sometimes I also remember something by just my visual learning. (Emine)
- E. 2. Reading literary works and watching movies help me to comprehend and imitate written literary works. (Leyla)

E. 3. My learning style is reading. Since I am a person who always reads books, I think that I can easily understand everything by reading. (İlayda)

Students generally preferred these types of learning, which can be positively evaluated based on the course they attended. ASFC's content emphasises compelling reading and writing skills, and it is reasonable to assume that understanding the course was improved through the use and development of these skills. Furthermore, it can be argued that this interaction between learning preferences, skill application, and course proficiency occurred synchronously and offered various supportive effects.

Self-efficacy

Students assessed themselves based on three categories. These are individual evaluations of their self-efficacy as a writer, reader, and student. Many students reported feeling ineffective or incompetent as writers. Regarding the act of writing, some described their emotions as follows:

E. 4. . . . My writing skills are not developed. After reading the story I cannot write the information I remember about the story. (Ali)

E. 5. . . . I have some worry because sometimes I think I will not be able to analyse fiction wherefore I haven't got enough writing skills. (Ahmet)

However, a small number of students mentioned that they enjoyed writing about their experiences, interests, and aspirations as writers. The following student statements serve as examples of these expressions.

E. 6. . . . Especially, in analyses of short fiction lessons, I need to write to apply because we are writing our analyses and ideas about short stories. After that, I read my paragraphs and try to find my mistakes (It can be grammar mistakes, miswriting, or mistakes in my analyses etc.). So, firstly I need to write to see my mistakes and level. Writing is the most important thing for me in the analysis of short fiction lessons. (Hülya)

E. 7. . . . I was writing some short stories in high school and I never liked them so I would just tear and throw them away. . . . I want to be an academician and write some short stories vocationally in the future. (Ayşegül)

E. 8. . . . I want to learn more about literature and I believe that by doing this I gain experience so I can reach my dream of becoming a writer. (Selcan)

Apart from these expressions related to their writing skills, the researchers observed that the students' self-efficacy assessments as readers were very similar and close to their self-efficacy assessments as writers. That is, most students stated that they did not have a regular reading habit. At the same time, many of them emphasised that their literary reading before joining the literature department focused on the novel genre, and they had no or limited experience reading in the short fiction genre. Some examples of these expressions are as follows.

E. 9. I like reading novels but to be honest, I don't have a reading habit regularly. (Halil)

E. 10. Until now, I was not someone who read a lot and was not inclined to learn and analyse. (Leyla)

Conversely, a small number of students also reported frequently reading literary genres other than short fiction. These are expressed as follows:

E. 11. I like reading books, especially of some authors whose thoughts or writing genres I prefer. There isn't any topic that I like and dislike, I read every book that I think will improve myself. (Merve)

E. 12. As someone who always likes to read books, I am a student who wants to add more to myself and progress on that path. (Pınar)

Another issue related to self-perception that students expressed was their assessment of their self-efficacy as learners. Many of the participants emphasised that, as ELL students, they did not feel competent in various areas. Students expressed these feelings and thoughts due to concerns over not achieving academic success, experiencing stress over their inability to understand reading passages or course content, feeling inadequate and insecure about the English language (grammar, vocabulary, structure, language skills: especially speaking and writing, etc.), and talking about the limited roles they have assigned themselves as students. Sample expressions that illustrate this theme:

E. 13. I think this lesson requires concentration, analysis and ability of comprehension from me as a student. I need to be determined and focused on the stories to complete the lesson. (Kübra)

E. 14. We need to know advanced grammar and vocabulary and we need the ability to analyse, the ability to understand what we read and the ability to write. (Ayşegül)

E. 15. I think, I need to have reading comprehension skills, be able to see details in a story, and be able to comment and analyse. Furthermore, I need to have good writing skills because we write our analyses and opinions. (Cemil)

Based on the data from weekly prompts and interviews, the researchers grouped participants' self-assessments and analysed them under three themes: as a writer, as a reader, and as a student. Most students had concerns about each category and saw themselves as inadequate or deficient. These evaluations, completed by the students before meeting with ASFC at the start of the semester, reflected their initial perceptions of self-efficacy and connected to the theme of course expectations.

Expectations from ASFC

Students viewed the themes of self-efficacy and course expectations as interconnected, and most students stated that the content of this course could help them address their self-efficacy deficiencies. Students' expectations for this course and its content were expressed as believing the class would be an enjoyable experience, that it would enhance their reading and comprehension skills, or that it would boost their abilities in creative and critical thinking, even if managing these aspects seemed challenging for them. Some student expressions included:

E. 16. As I don't see myself as a creative person besides not having good imagination skills, the course going to be a chance for me to develop these skills. (Sıla)

E. 17. I just focused on my analysis writings. It is a training for me and I am trying to develop myself with this training. I expect to write better analysis writings when I complete the lesson. (Ali)

The researchers evaluated student expectations from ASFC through themes that emerged based on students' assessment of how prepared they felt for this course and its content and their perception of readiness, which they considered inadequate.

Impact on student learning and readiness

The themes identified through examining and evaluating students' 15-week ASFC experiences are a) learning styles, b) challenges, c) motivation, and d) development. All these themes contributed to student learning and readiness.

Learning style

At the start of the semester, most students identified their learning styles as either writing/reading or visual. Students generally made brief statements on these topics that lacked detail. However, as time went on and they participated in the course, the students' comments about their learning styles became more detailed and insightful. During this process, they not only discussed their learning styles but also how they developed these styles, how they utilised them in appropriate contexts, how and on what basis they preferred them, and the various strategies they employed. Examples include:

E. 18. . . . for the reading the story part, I am going to be honest, I first look it up on YouTube, if there are any plays or cartoons of it, I will watch it over reading it, if there are not . . . I listen to an audiobook and read it at the same time, then I start analysing it in my mind without writing down what I think of. When the class starts, and after the teacher reads the whole story, I start writing down the important things about the story. (Ahmet)

E. 19. Usually there are words that I don't recognize and I'm using my dictionary for that reason. I'm not reading the stories that we going to discuss in next week's lesson so that the excitement does not go away. Other than that, I try to read a lot of stories to be familiar with different story styles. (Hülya)

In summary, students improved in how and in what ways they understand their learning, including the course content, which increased their awareness of student learning.

Challenges

Students also frequently discussed that they encountered difficulties during the ASFC course. Some of these challenges related to the course content and materials, while others stemmed from their self-efficacy levels or personal issues. Examples:

E. 20. Every story has some formulas like recipes for desserts. They have a plot, a storyline, characters (that change or develop), a phraseology etc. and we need to be able to analyse all of these and we need to have an opinion about the stories after we read them. In addition, we need to be able to write our analyses and

opinions as grammatically correct writings. I think the lesson requires these from us and sometimes applying them can be challenging. (Başak)

E. 21. Sometimes, it is difficult to understand the depth of the stories. For example, there are symbols in stories and the author wants to say something different from what I think. For me, this is the only compelling thing. (Elif)

As can be understood from the students' statements, the difficulties faced by students were rooted in specific issues. The ASFC course offered several positive effects, such as helping students overcome challenges, succeed in their learning, and prepare for future courses.

Motivation

Most students said that the stories they read and the way the instructor taught the course made them feel happy and secure, and they generally enjoyed the course. One factor that helped create a positive and secure environment is that students received clear information and experience regarding course requirements, responsibilities, and expected skills from the start of the semester. For example, students often mentioned that this course involved a lot of reading, required the development of various skills, and demanded high interest and focus. Some of the expressions used to describe these students' feelings and thoughts are:

E. 22. I have learnt that one can express his/her ideas, thoughts, complaints against society and many other feelings with short pages and short lines. A lesson does not have to be learnt through long and thick books. (Buse)

E. 23. Lesson requirements made me feel confident because this lesson has contributed a lot to me and increased my self-confidence. Hence, I feel so happy. (Seda)

Thanks to the judgments students experienced and reinforced over time, their goals and objectives were clear. With the help of these clarified concepts, students had the opportunity to realise their self-organisation and learning. The environment of trust provided in these ways also offered emotional relief for the students. All these elements of the trust environment and emotional comfort (affective factors) had parallel positive effects on student motivation.

Development

Students' self-efficacy focus, which emerged from their self-evaluation at the start of the semester, along with the concerns and anxieties they felt about the subheadings (such as being a writer, a reader, or a student) comprise this theme and generally improved positively over time. Upon examining the data from the current study, it was observed that students provided more detailed comments during lessons and in their responses to weekly prompts. They discussed the course content and what they gained personally (for example, developing new perspectives and ideas, avoiding judgment by others, becoming more imaginative, and applying content in real-life situations) with greater enjoyment. The researchers also observed improvements in their study skills and literary text analysis skills. Examples:

E. 24. I want to talk about this so much before college started. I wasn't into books—I mean, I am still not, but not that much any more. I wasn't interested in books or short/long fiction or whatever, until the last three weeks. I started to get into the

vibe of the class subject. I'm impressed and happy that there is such a class like this. Well, yes! I do see changes. I've started to know some cool stuff and learnt many interesting things like the meaning of antagonist or protagonist, or the meaning of circular, triangular, and linear plots, or the elements of the plots, etc . . . Again, I'm getting into this class. Sounds like I'm rating a restaurant online, but yeah! (Halil)

E. 25. I am always looking for deep or side meanings when I am reading stories and also checking for the use of metaphors in the sentences. (Fadil)

Analysis of teacher observations, student journals, and interview data revealed that the ASFC had a significant impact on students' learning and readiness across four interconnected areas: learning style, challenges, motivation, and development. In each area, students' reflections indicated both progress and ongoing difficulties, highlighting the complex and multifaceted nature of readiness.

These domains did not arise in isolation but as interconnected aspects of students' developing readiness. Student reflections often demonstrated how learning styles intersected with motivational factors or how challenges prompted the adoption of new strategies. To capture this complexity, the researchers organised the findings thematically into four domains: learning styles and strategic awareness, challenges and affective barriers, motivation and engagement, and the development of academic confidence and critical thinking.

Learning styles and strategic awareness

At the start of the semester, most students identified themselves as either reading/writing or visual learners, often describing their preferences in straightforward terms. As time went on, their reflections became more sophisticated, outlining strategic approaches to learning. For example, some students described combining different methods—such as watching dramatisations of short stories on YouTube, listening to audiobooks while reading, or taking structured notes during in-class analysis.

This shift reflected a metacognitive growth trajectory: students not only recognised their preferred styles but also experimented with and adapted strategies that best supported comprehension and analysis. As one student, İbrahim, explained, “At first, I only read silently, but later I began taking notes about characters and keywords. It helped me to see details I missed before.” Such reflections illustrated the gradual development of self-regulated learning strategies consistent with Zimmerman's (2000) model.

Challenges and affective barriers

Although students made progress, they continued to face ongoing challenges. The most common difficulties included limited vocabulary, interpreting symbols, and writing about texts. Several students expressed frustration at their inability to convey ideas in writing, while others struggled to grasp the deeper meanings within stories. These challenges often came with feelings of low self-confidence, especially in writing: “After reading the story, I cannot write the information I remember about it” (Ali).

At the same time, some students began to develop strategies to support their own learning, such as focusing on contextual clues rather than looking up every unknown word or rereading stories multiple times to gain understanding. These adaptive strategies align with Vygotsky's concept of the ZPD, suggesting that with support, students can go beyond their initial limitations.

Motivation and engagement

Students consistently highlighted the ASFC as a motivating and safe learning environment. They appreciated the clarity of course expectations and the supportive classroom atmosphere. Many expressed increased confidence and enjoyment in literary analysis: “I learnt to enjoy and understand a story because at the beginning I wasn’t able to. Now I see that I can find the real meaning” (Tuğçe).

Affective factors, such as trust and a sense of belonging, strengthened this motivational trajectory. Students reported that a combination of structured guidance and opportunities for self-expression promoted both engagement and persistence. One participant reflected, “This lesson helped me to have new ideas and taught me not to judge anyone before listening and understanding carefully” (Bahar). Such comments demonstrate the affective dimensions of readiness, supporting how emotional safety encourages academic risk-taking and development.

Development of academic confidence and critical thinking

By the end of the semester, many students reported noticeable improvements in their analytical, critical, and interpretive skills. While anxiety and self-doubt characterised initial self-assessments, later reflections emphasised growing competence: “Short fiction has become my favourite lesson. I’m progressing every week” (Ayşegül).

Students also reported an increased ability to engage with literary concepts and terminology (e.g., protagonist/antagonist, plot structures, metaphor). This academic vocabulary, alongside improved interpretive strategies, helped foster a greater sense of academic confidence and preparedness for more advanced study. One student, İbrahim, described this change by saying, “At first, I thought it was difficult for me. Now I see that it is not so hard. The more I read, the more I understand and analyse.”

The data showed a positive trend in students’ self-efficacy and engagement with the course theme throughout the term. The initial self-assessment at the start of the semester, reflected concerns and anxieties related to various subheadings such as being a writer, a reader, and a student. This developed into a more optimistic outlook over time. Students not only demonstrated increased enthusiasm and detailed participation in class discussions but also expressed personal growth and development in their comments and responses to weekly prompts.

The examples given highlight the transformative effect of the course, with students demonstrating a renewed interest in literature and literary analysis. The researchers observed notable improvements in their understanding of literary devices, including protagonists, antagonists, and plot structures. Additionally, students reported gaining valuable insights and perspectives, demonstrating a greater ability to appreciate and analyse literary works. The positive change in their attitudes towards reading, as evident in statements like “ASFC becoming a favourite lesson,” reflects a tangible impact on their academic experience.

The qualitative data indicated a shift in students’ approach to reading, with a greater emphasis on exploring deeper meanings, searching for metaphors, and a commitment to rereading for enhanced comprehension. The excerpts also indicated an improvement in vocabulary and critical analysis skills, confirming the importance of regular reading in developing these abilities.

Overall, the course had a positive impact on students’ self-efficacy, engagement, and academic skills. The progress documented, as evidenced by students’ changing perspectives, enjoyment of class activities, and the application of learned concepts to real-life situations, indicated a successful teaching approach in promoting both literary appreciation and critical thinking skills among the students.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study's conceptual framework combines learning style, challenges, motivation, and development as key factors affecting ELL students' learning and preparedness through the ASFC. The students' reflections on learning styles highlight a dynamic process of adaptation and growth. While initial self-perceptions expressed simplicity, the later reflections demonstrate a more sophisticated understanding of practical learning methods within the context of ASFC. Understanding students' learning styles is essential for creating effective teaching strategies (Felder and Silverman 1988). The scholarship emphasises the variety of learning preferences among students and stresses the need to tailor teaching approaches to suit different styles. ASFC, with its focus on literary analysis, offers a setting for exploring and adjusting to various learning styles (Coffield, Moseley, Hall, and Ecclestone 2004).

The challenges expressed by students, from the analytical demands of fiction to language-related difficulties, highlight the transformative nature of the ASFC experience. Overcoming these challenges is not just about academic success but also signifies personal and intellectual development. The obstacles faced by ELL students go beyond language barriers and include cultural adjustments as well as academic expectations. ASFC courses are designed as interventions that address these issues, offering targeted support for language improvement and broader academic achievement (Gebhard and Oprandy 1999).

The positive relationship between students' enjoyment of the course and their perceived skill improvement highlights the motivational impact of ASFC. Aligning course requirements with student goals fosters a sense of purpose and boosts self-confidence. Motivation is a vital factor affecting language learning success (Dörnyei 2005). ASFC, by combining literary content with language development aims, has the potential to increase student motivation (Gardner 1985). Investigating how ASFC helps maintain student motivation is an important area for further study.

The development of students' self-efficacy assessments, especially in writing and reading, and their roles as learners emphasises the developmental influence of ASFC. The course functions as a platform for enhancing confidence and skills in key academic areas. Bandura's (1977) social cognitive theory states that self-efficacy is crucial in shaping academic behaviour and achievement. Students' perceptions of their abilities as writers, readers, and learners affect their engagement and success in academic settings (Zimmerman 2000). ASFC courses can be viewed as interventions designed to influence students' self-efficacy in these areas in a positive way.

The findings of this study demonstrate that the ASFC significantly benefited the learning experiences and academic preparedness of ELL students. The course effectively sharpened students' analytical skills, boosted their motivation, and supported the development of self-efficacy in both reading and writing. By concentrating on the short fiction genre, the ASFC enabled students to interact with manageable texts that promoted deeper literary analysis, critical thinking, and self-organisation. This structured method fostered academic confidence and equipped students for more advanced literary studies after the course.

One significant outcome of this study is its focus on the evolving development of student learning styles. As students engaged more deeply with course content, they not only recognised their preferred learning methods but also devised strategies to maximise their effectiveness in understanding and analysing literary texts. This adaptability underscores the potential of the ASFC to act as a framework for other courses that are designed to improve academic preparedness. These developments can be explained through the interaction of scaffolding, self-regulated learning, and academic integration.

The progression from a surface-level understanding to a deeper analysis underscores the importance of scaffolding, as outlined in Vygotsky's theory. Students who initially struggled with vocabulary or symbolism expressed frustration but gradually began to articulate strategies, such as contextual guessing, rereading, or relying on peer discussion. These scaffolded experiences, supported by teacher modelling and structured tasks, enabled students to surpass their initial limitations and engage with texts at a more advanced level. Simultaneously, their reflections on learning styles evolved from simple labels, such as "visual" or "reading/writing," to more thoughtful accounts of strategy use, demonstrating the development of metacognitive awareness in line with Zimmerman's (2000) self-regulated learning framework.

The affective aspect of readiness held equal importance. Students often noted that the course environment fostered trust, a sense of belonging, and clarity of expectations. In accordance with Tinto's theory of integration, their readiness was not only about individual competence but also about successful participation in the intellectual and social life of their academic community. The ASFC, through its structured engagement with literary texts and opportunities for collaborative discussion, offered such a context for integration.

These outcomes build on prior research on readiness, which has often focused on early educational stages (Korkmaz 2022; Yorgun et al. 2021), online learning (Ramazanoğlu et al. 2022; Tomak et al. 2023), or general academic preparation (Gordon et al. 2009; Tobolowsky et al. 2007). Unlike previous studies, the present research demonstrates that genre-specific pedagogy—short fiction analysis—can bridge the gap between secondary education and the demands of university-level literary study. While earlier work has highlighted literature's potential for language development and critical thinking (Collie et al. 1987; Turan et al. 2018), this study adds to the existing scholarship by showing how it can also promote readiness as a multidimensional construct encompassing cognitive, affective, and integrative aspects.

Despite these positive findings, there are several limitations of this study. First, the research involved a small sample size (30 students) from a single university in southeast Türkiye, which may limit the results' generalisability. Furthermore, the study relied on qualitative methods, including interviews and student journals, which may introduce subjectivity into the data collection and analysis processes. Future research could benefit from a mixed-methods approach, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative measures to validate and expand upon the findings.

Furthermore, the course's emphasis on short fiction may not fully prepare students for the difficulties of analysing longer or more intricate literary works. While short fiction offers a practical starting point for literary analysis, future research could explore how similar methods can be used with longer texts, such as novellas and novels, and how this influences student learning and preparedness.

The outcomes of this study highlight several directions for future research. Further investigations could examine the long-term effects of courses like the ASFC on student performance in more advanced literary subjects. Future studies might also explore how disciplines outside literature might utilise similar course structures to improve student preparedness and learning within the broader humanities curriculum. Additionally, exploring the impact of cross-cultural literary analysis in courses like the ASFC could offer insights into how exposure to diverse literary traditions enhances both academic and cultural readiness among students.

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APPENDIX 1

The syllabus for the ASFC

THE DEPARTMENT of ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE 2022- 2023 FALL SEMESTER COURSE SYLLABUS		
Course Code: ELL 123 Course Title: ANALYSIS OF SHORT FICTION Credit/Hours: 3 Assessment: Midterm Exam 40% -- Final Exam 60%		
Week		
1	1 st Week	Introduction to the Course: The Short Story, its History, Definition, Discussions
2	2 nd Week	“The Masque of Red Death” and “The Tell-Tale Heart” by Edgar Allan Poe
3	3 rd Week	“The Necklace” by Guy de Maupassant
4	4 th Week	“Eveline” by James Joyce
5	5 th Week	“Life of Ma Parker” by Kathrine Mansfield
6	6 th Week	“A Hunger Artist” by Franz Kafka
7	7 th Week	“Hills Like White Elephants” by Ernest Hemingway
8	8 th Week	Midterm Exam Week (Tentative)
9	9 th Week	“A Clean, Well-Lighted Place” by Ernest Hemingway
10	10 th Week	“Miriam” by Truman Capote
11	11 th Week	“The Yellow Wallpaper” by Charlotte Perkins
12	12 th Week	“A Short History of Hairdressing” by Julian Barnes
13	13 th Week	“Happy Endings” by Margaret Atwood
14	14 th Week	Conclusion and Revision
		Final Exam Week

APPENDIX 2

Sample lesson plan for the ASFC

Topic: Reading and analysing James Joyce's short story titled "Eveline."

Time: Meeting one: 1x 90

Meeting two: 1x30

Procedures:

A. The life and the works of the writer (time: 90')

Stage 1: Introduction to James Joyce, his style and works (time: 10')

- a) Ask students whether they know who James Joyce is/whether they have read anything by James Joyce.
- b) Discuss Joyce's life and works with students by touching upon his position as a writer in the twentieth century. Elaborate on the significance of Joyce for the literature of his (and our) period.

Stage 2: "Eveline" and its significance (time: 10')

- a) Provide the information about the title of the collection titled *Dubliners*, and briefly compare/contrast the other stories included in the collection. Hence, give them a sense of what they will encounter in the story.
- b) Discuss the title of the story specifically.

Stage 3: Analysis of the story (time: 70')

- a) Start reading the first paragraph of "Eveline" and, after finishing it, ask students questions about what is provided at the very beginning of the story. This may include the character's gender, the setting, the mood, the language used, and the story's theme.
- b) Explain in detail why and how Joyce uses the symbols, diction, depiction, and characterisation in the beginning.
- c) Discuss the middle and the closure of the story with the students.

B. Overall analysis of the story with class participation (time: 30')

- a) State one by one the elements of the story, such as the setting, theme, plot, plot structure, mood, characterisation, characters, social/political and historical background, and so on.
- b) Ask students about their own comments, questions, and interpretations, and make further comments by building upon what they think about the elements of the story.
- c) Finalise the lesson by briefly summarising the significant parts of the story.



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