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BENEFITS OF STUDYING CHILDREN'S LITERATURE IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE COURSES AT UNDERGRADUATE LEVEL

Abstract

Children's literature has been undeservedly neglected by universities which offer undergraduate foreign language courses in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Knowledge of children's literature is particularly relevant to the prospective teachers of a foreign language (L2) who will work with learners ranging from pre-school to high school. As future teachers and instructors of L2, they might use texts from children's literature in the classroom. They can thus assist learners to approach learning of L2 in a way similar to learning their L1 – through reading or listening to various literary texts - and foster students' reading habits in general. Knowledge of children's literature texts in L2 can also assist teachers to develop critical insights about the learners' language learning process, which can enhance their language teaching competencies. Using transactional activities for communicative purposes is one way of teaching a foreign language. However, the teacher's familiarity with children's literature texts appropriate for the learners' level can be viewed as a significant asset in assisting learners to attain competences in second language acquisition. As learners have access to different writing styles, texts, or vocabulary in L2, it can also boost their imagination as well as contribute to the development of their critical reading, listening and writing skills through sharing their feelings and ideas and through involvement in other communicative activities based on the texts they read. Moreover, many books from this genre have been adapted for the film, theatre or musical productions, which could also be used to explore more works by other authors for children. This paper presents arguments exemplified by evidence from teaching students at the English Language Department at the International University of Sarajevo to reaffirm the importance of inclusion of children's literature in undergraduate courses of foreign languages in Bosnia and Herzegovina and elsewhere where it is not offered in the curricula.

Keywords: *children's literature, undergraduate courses, foreign languages, teaching*

Introduction

Recently published results of the 2018 PISA testing demonstrate the importance of reading in education. The OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) measures what students know and what they can do with their reading, mathematics and science knowledge and skills to meet real-life challenges. Testing programme includes 15-year-old students from 79 countries. "Results from PISA indicate the quality and equity of learning outcomes attained around the world, and allow educators and policymakers to learn from the policies and practices applied in other countries"¹. In 2018, 6,480 students from 213 primary and secondary schools from Bosnia and Herzegovina were tested. Their results put Bosnia and Herzegovina in the 62nd place out of 79 countries. According to the PISA Executive Summary (Volume II), one in four students across the range within the participating countries showed "difficulty with basic aspects of reading, such as identifying the main idea in a text of moderate

¹ oecd.org/pisa/publications/PISA2018_CN_BiH

length or connecting pieces of information provided by different sources“ (p.19)². Teachers' attitudes and practices in reading activities are considered crucial, as outlined in the same document which indicates that „on average across OECD countries and in 43 education systems, students who perceived greater support from teachers scored higher in reading, after accounting for the socio-economic profile of students and schools“. Furthermore, “teacher enthusiasm and teachers' stimulation of reading engagement were the teaching practices most strongly (and positively) associated with students' enjoyment of reading“ (Volume III, p. 15)³.

The aim of this paper is to emphasise that studying children's literature can contribute to the training of teachers of foreign languages. Knowledge of children's literature texts can equip teachers with skills and techniques which they can utilize in the classroom activities and also use to promote reading amongst their future students of that particular foreign language. Through reading students can develop their general language competences, vocabulary range, critical thinking abilities, imagination, problem-solving skills, or they can gain other skills necessary for their transition into mature, responsible adults. The goal of this paper is to draw attention to the field of children's literature which has been unfairly excluded from the majority of curricula of undergraduate courses of foreign languages in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the neighbouring countries. This article focuses on undergraduate studies of the English language and literature in particular.

Is children's literature serious enough?

“Science can take you from A to B.
Imagination can take you anywhere.”

— Albert Einstein

Literary critics, theorists, teachers-practitioners as well as authors of fiction and non-fiction have emphasised that literature not only provides us with the opportunity to be transported into other lives, events and places we might otherwise never encounter in our habitual, mundane way of living, but that it also fulfils the basic human yearning to learn and understand the world around us. Moreover, literature creates a world of its own, a world in which the real and unreal intercept. While the world of fiction cannot and should not be a substitute for real life, it is through stories and fictional characters that human conflicts can be conceptualised and interpreted, which furthermore can assist us in acquiring deeper insights into human behaviour in general. Reading fairytales and fantastic stories is the way for children to see how protagonists cope with disturbing situations and resolve conflicts arising from them by generating ideas for solutions and turning problems to their advantage (Bradford, 2001; Cullingford, 1998; Gilead, 1991; James, 2009). Giorgis and Johnson support the idea that readers who embark on such a journey can make progress and come out with new insights about themselves and the world around us. “Readers can experience the drama of everyday life through literature that echoes familiar situations or introduces events or circumstances far from their experiences“ (“Children's Books: Celebrating Literature“, 841). Stories aimed at children audiences are full of these real-life-fantastic elements which have enthralled these audiences for centuries. All of the above support my claim that children's literature should be included in

² oecd.org/pisa/Combined_Executive_Summary_PISA

³ Ibid.

the curricula of undergraduate studies of English and a Foreign Language so that students gain solid foundations of children's literature to build on their professional educational practices as future educators, teachers and also as parents.

Children's literature vs. mainstream literature

It is difficult to identify children's literature on its own, as a separate genre. It is commonly referred to as literature aimed at youth audiences and opposed to adult literature in regards to two basic differences: firstly, based on its readability, namely how difficult the book is in terms of its grammar, vocabulary and structure; and secondly, based on its conceptual difficulty, or how complex ideas are and how they are presented. Children's books are viewed as different from adult literature because they allegedly lack in-depth, characterization and development of more complex ideas, or that they are overly didactic and focusing on delivering a moral lesson. However, throughout their formative years, students read not only children's literature, but also the mainstream literature, or significant classics, primarily aimed at adult readership. To some extent such texts contribute in a didactic as well as artistic and aesthetic manner to the development of the child and it is impossible to draw a defining line where the influence of children's literature stops and that of the adults begins. However, neither all adult books are complex, nor all children's books are simple.

Not only have the boundaries between the so-called high literature (for adult audiences) and low or simple literature (for child audiences) existed, but the same could apply for boundaries between high culture (art) and low culture (comics or illustrations of picture books). To this end, not only children's literature, but also other art forms associated with children's literature such as picture book illustrations, which have an important role in both verbal and non-verbal communication with the reader, deemed to be "beneath consideration" by most major institutions of "serious" art such as museums or galleries. (Nel, 26) This attitude has changed since 1970s and children's literature has been given more scholarly attention in academic studies. This change of tide occurred concomitantly with the emergence and development of women's studies, cultural studies and a new, interdisciplinary approach to literature which looked at art or history and issues such as gender, race, or class from altered perspectives. These different approaches were influenced by feminist scholars who pointed out the importance of studying children's literature as the society's perception of the role of the child was changing. Children were perceived more like individuals than as a collective entity, similarly to the perception of a woman as an individual entity opposed to women in general. The new perspective was that each child is different, unique. However, this process has been progressing at a pedestrian speed. Deborah Cogan Thacker acknowledges that "there is a sense in which the power and relevance of children's literature is beginning to be recognized (although it must be admitted that the subject does remain marginalized to a large extent)" (45).

Children's literature represents an important part of the world literature. Children's books are published in exponential numbers and millions of copies are sold each year, many of which are translated into the world languages. The world readership of children's literature is growing, not only in the category of the target audiences, but adolescent and adult readers are also becoming more and more interested in this type of literature. The category of adult readers of children's literature is represented by students of education or literature, educators, librarians, parents, literary critics, psychologists and many others. Children's literature is

subdivided into educational fiction and non-fiction, including picture books, literature for young readers, and crossover literature for children and adolescents. Stories for children are adapted for the cinema, stage productions, musicals, or video and computer games.

Until fairly recently, children's literature used to be identified with fairy tales and magical creatures and as such literary works aimed at child audiences were not regarded serious enough for serious consideration in academic circles. However, in his essay "On Fairy-Stories", J.R.R. Tolkien lucidly observes that "if there is any satire present in the tale, one thing must not be made fun of, [and that is] the magic itself. That must in that story be taken seriously, neither laughed at nor explained away" (*Tales from the Perilous Realm*, 323). Tolkien suggests that fairy tales are not for children only because the children "neither like fairy-stories more, nor understand them better than adults do; and no more than they like many other things" (348). Like authors for children, writers for adult audiences, such as Jorge Luis Borges, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, or Jules Verne, also use fantasy to contradict the prevailing ideas about reality. Concepts and representations of events may seem improbable, impossible, or even supernatural in their historical contexts. Nevertheless, these authors have been highly acclaimed for their artistry in the realm of fantasy. Borges was nominated for the Nobel Prize several times, and Marquez was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1982 "for his novels and short stories, in which fantastic and the realistic are combined in a richly composed world of imagination"⁴. Yet, authors of literature for child audiences have not been included in the list of winners of this prestigious prize yet. One of the rare exceptions of the prize nominees is the Croatian-born author Ivana Brlić-Mažuranić who was nominated for the Nobel Prize in Literature four times – in 1931, 1935, 1937 and 1938 for some of the exceptional and praised works in children's literature.⁵

A survey of children's literature studies

Considering the importance of reading, and in particular during the child's formative years, it would seem natural that children's literature had been studied at least since its first "golden age" in the late nineteenth century. Unfortunately, it was not the case. Due to general assumptions that children's literature is too simple or childish to be studied seriously, it was not regarded as important as other genres of literature until 1970s; however, the study of children's literature was part of the curricula in the general training of classroom teachers and librarians (not as foreign language teachers) in the 1960s. (Kaston, 1996; Nodelman, 2008).

Children's literature studies were introduced as academic subjects at university courses only in the 1990s. In 1996, Peter Hunt became the first Professor of Children's Literature in the United Kingdom, at the University of Wales, Cardiff. In 1994, Hunt edited the first comprehensive study of children's literature, *An Introduction to Children's Literature*, followed by *International Companion Encyclopedia of Children's Literature* in 1996, which was further elaborated in the second edition published in 2004. The start of the twenty-first century brought more interest in the children's literature, so *Cambridge Guide to Children's Books in English* edited by Victor Watson appeared in 2001, followed by a widely respected

⁴ www.nobelprize.org

⁵ Čudnovate zgode šegrta Hlapića (1913) translated as *The Strange Adventures of Hlapich the Apprentice* and also appeared under the titles *The Brave Adventures of Shoemaker's Boy* (1971) and *The Brave Adventures of Lapitch* (1972) and *Priče iz davnine* (1916) translated as *Croatian Tales of Long Ago* (1924).

four-volume *Oxford Encyclopedia of Children's Literature* in 2006, edited by Jack Zipes. There has been a growing interest in comparative aspects of children's literature in the last decades. However, this process has been quite slow. Critical studies have been peer-reviewed and published in journals. Papers have been presented at conferences and workshops. Literary critics have been taking an interdisciplinary approach to explore the differences between children's literature and other genres, the differences in both literary and pedagogical areas, and historical, social or ideological factors influencing such differences. Still, out of 247 entries on the University of Oxford Podcasts covering the period of seven years from March 2007 to June 2014, for instance, only two lectures were dedicated to children's literature⁶ and one on fairy tales as part of the 700th anniversary celebration for Exeter College.⁷

Benefits of studying children's literature

This section will focus on the study of children's literature and its benefits for undergraduate or postgraduate students. In his essay "The Fall and Rise of Children's Literature" (2008), Philip Nel claims that children's literature "is arguably the literary form most worthy of serious attention" (23). Children's books convey not only the power of knowing but also provide the pleasure of creating imaginary characters, places or events, and these functions of literature – to inform, teach and entertain – are satisfying for both the readers and the authors. Despite the child readers "may be short in stature," Nel further states, that "does not make children's literature a lesser art form" (p.23).

Daniela Caselli asserts that children's literature has only "recently attained status of academic discipline; for a long time, children's literature criticism was regarded at best a pleasant, rather than a serious critical activity because it focuses on what has been regarded as simple, easy, or not very valuable texts." ("Reading Intertextuality. The Natural and the Legitimate: Intertextuality in *Harry Potter*". p.171) In her essay „Criticism and the critical mainstream“ (2004), Debora Cogan Thacker also claims that "the contemporary theorist, from whatever school of thought, rarely acknowledges the validity or significance of texts written and published for children, or of theories about them" (45). Speaking of literary history, Thacker posits that most literary critics when analysing texts and their relationships between individuals and society, generally exclude or marginalize the importance of texts pertaining to the children's literature, except for several selected fantasies such as Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*, or Kenneth Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows*, which achieve the status of a classic. For that reason, it is justified to include such texts in literature courses as they are considered "to be of sufficient complexity and ambiguity to cross the boundary and provide fodder for the mainstream theorist or critic" (46). Thacker reiterates that the absence of literary criticism of children's literature in the past shows the critics' ignorance of the significance of this literature in the mainstream literary studies of modernity.

As much as knowing another language can assist teachers to perceive unique characteristics of that language and share the relatedness of these characteristics with other languages, the teacher who is equipped with the content knowledge of literature in the language

⁶ 1) *Wolves and Winter: Old Norse Myths and Children's Literature* by Carolyne Larrington, on October 23, 2013, and 2) *One and Future Arthurs – Arthurian Literature for Children* by Anna Caughey, on June 6, 2013, in which she examines a spectrum of literature about King Arthur written for children. Source: podcasts.ox.ac.uk

⁷ *Grimm Tale Lecture* by Philip Pullman on February 13, 2013. Source: podcasts.ox.ac.uk

taught can assist learners to approach learning of the second language in a way similar to the approach they have when they were learning their first language – through reading (or listening to) various text types. The content knowledge of literature can assist teachers to develop critical insights and knowledge about the learners' language learning process, which can contribute to teacher's language teaching competencies. The content of children's books is not limited solely to childhood experiences; other topics are also included, not all of which are related to childhood, but which are of interest to children. Children's literature includes both fantasy and realistic fiction, and common topics are those regarding family life, peer issues, survival and adventure, sports stories, mysteries, animal stories, and more recently, other cultural or social issues such as multiculturalism and cultural diversity, people with disabilities, drugs or other issues crossing the child-adult boundaries. Hourigan asserts that "contemporary readers, especially young readers, will construct meanings related to their own lives and to the society they live in" (*Deconstructing the Hero*, 5). Therefore, knowledge of children's literature is particularly relevant to the prospective teachers of English as a foreign language who will work with young learners – from pre-school to high school students. They can precipitate their students' enjoyment in reading fiction for the same reasons they enjoy doing it in their first language.

Another reason for the inclusion of children's literature in courses of foreign languages at universities is that learning transactional activities for communicative purposes is one way of teaching a second language to learners. As the language is also used in relation to other areas of knowledge, for educational, aesthetic, or other purposes, therefore the teacher's content knowledge of a specific literary genre appropriate for the learners' level can be viewed as a significant asset in assisting learners attain competences in the second language acquisition. As young learners have access to different writing styles, text types, or vocabulary in the second language, they also become aware of different cultural beliefs and assumptions, linguistic particularities or socio-political aspects of that language.

Children's literature is ambivalent and subversive to a certain extent because on one hand, it is traditional, didactic, it values and supports traditional educational norms and such texts tend to teach children to be better and adhere to an adult version of a model child. On the other hand, it is subversive and liberating as it mocks, ridicules, attacks, or at least criticizes such norms and values (Zipes, „The Potential of Liberating Fairy Tales for Children“, 1982). As subversive wish-fulfilment fantasies, these texts encourage children to stay as they are – irrational, spontaneous, innocent – an eternal Peter Pan in the condition of arrested childhood.

According to Lynch-Brown and Tomlinson (*Essentials of Children's Literature*, 1999), children's cognitive and language development must be taken into account when considering the conceptual difficulty of the text for the implied child-audience. For instance, children aged 4 to 7 like picture books, humorous poems with strong rhythm and rhyme, and they like when others read aloud to them, so the accordance of the sound, picture, and the meaning is crucial. Older children, aged 7 to 9, read books with simple, straightforward plots. They are ready to read slightly longer picture books or books without too many illustrations, but which consist of shorter chapters. They are interested in animal stories, where an animal is on its own, or accompanying the child protagonist. Furthermore, children in this age group can grasp and conceptualize first struggles for acceptance by peers in a group situation, for instance in school settings.

Based on his analysis of grammar and the use of conjunctions in the text, Piaget concluded that the child in the 7 to 8 age group can only reason about isolated or specific cases, and that the child's judgment lacks in logical necessity (*Judgement and Reasoning in the Child*, 2002). From their ego-centric point of view, children do not perceive absurdity or unjustified argumentation. Only when children can detach themselves from their personal beliefs and start viewing things from another person's perspective can they start hypothesizing. Piaget asserts that "the decisive factor in causing a child to become conscious of himself was contact and above all contrast with the thought of others" (24).

Children aged 9 to 12 develop critical thinking ability, imagination, different perceptions and perspectives. They base their reasoning upon beliefs they adopted themselves, or which are based on their concepts of reality. Preadolescents are interested in stories and novels which have more complicated plots and which present the world in a new way. They are interested in issues of the nuclear family, extended family, the alternative or surrogate family. On the road to maturity, children aged 10 and older are interested in issues of self-discovery and independence, frequently presented in adventure stories where the protagonist has the freedom of action when faced with fears and doubts similar to the implied-reader's ones.

Social rules are important and influence children's attitudes and behaviour. Preadolescents start understanding and appreciating historical events and people, both ordinary and extraordinary. They develop empathy and concern for others and at the same time start to formulate their personal goals. Around the age of twelve, children can see and understand relations between people and objects and can objectively make deductions about causality between them.

Authors who write for the child audiences may intentionally have certain age groups and their cognitive abilities in mind when they construct the stories. They may draw on personal childhood memories, or may observe children in their environment. In a BBC Radio interview, Roald Dahl, a popular British writer from the second half of the 20th century, explained how he used to test his stories on his children first, and only later did he start writing them, when he felt that children listeners had been excited about the story. In September 2013, Michael Rosen, one of Dahl's biographers and a writer of children's books himself, hosted a Puffin Virtually Live event to celebrate Dahl's birthday and commemorate his work for children, in which Dahl's daughter Lucy confirmed her father's children's stories writing practice.

While researching the popularity of children's books, particularly their impact on young adult readers ("Cross-Culturalism of Harry Potter", 2013), I noticed that children's literature has been largely underrepresented in the curricula of undergraduate studies of English Language and Literature (especially where English is studied as a foreign language) in the Balkans region. For instance, out of nine institutions of higher education which offer an undergraduate course in English Language and Literature in Croatia, Serbia or Bosnia and Herzegovina⁸, only three of them⁹ include children's literature in their curricula. Other

⁸ Faculties of Philosophy or Philology in Universities of Zagreb, Zadar, Rijeka, Split, Belgrade, Novi Sad, Sarajevo, Tuzla and Mostar

⁹ Faculty of Philosophy Novi Sad (Serbia); Faculty of Philosophy Mostar, and Faculty of Social Sciences at International University of Sarajevo (Bosnia and Herzegovina)

institutions of higher education in the Balkans region, both public and private ones, offer courses with more or less similar curricula within their English Language and Literature Departments, focusing on the historical development of literature in the English language, from the Mediaeval to the contemporary writers, while almost exclusively neglecting the corpus of literature aimed at children.

It does not, however, mean that children's literature is completely omitted in undergraduate studies. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, as in many other countries, children's literature courses do get included in departments enrolling future primary and secondary school teachers. Only recently have some universities in the region started offering multidisciplinary courses in an endeavour to fill this gap; nevertheless, most of these courses are still targeting only undergraduate students of education – prospective primary or secondary school teachers in their official national languages. It seems accurate, therefore, to describe children's literature as more absent than present in other fields of humanities in the Balkans and the neighbouring countries.

As children's literature is most frequently studied in courses of education in national languages, or other general or comparative literature courses, the result is that only mainstream primary or secondary school teachers or teachers of national languages and literature come into contact with literature for children and adolescents. However, the range of literary texts studied in such courses is quite limited, covering only the most prominent national authors and a small selection of traditionally acclaimed children's writers from other language backgrounds and cultures. These texts appear in translations approved by national literature councils decades ago. Examples of literary texts translated from English usually include canonical classics such as Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*, Mark Twain's *Tom Sawyer*, or, most recently, J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter*.

Given that many undergraduates of English as a foreign language and English literature start their employment as English language teachers in either primary or secondary schools, it is striking that most of them, apart from their reading for pleasure, will therefore never have been introduced to the wealth of children's literature written in the English language. My aim is to propose that children's literature should be included in the curricula of undergraduate studies of students of English as a foreign language and English literature, and also in other undergraduate courses in humanities for those preparing to work after graduation as psychologists, pedagogues, librarians, or social workers, to name only several professionals groups that deal with children and adolescents.

It is important to remember that undergraduate students have barely crossed the threshold of adulthood, so texts pertaining to children's literature genre could also be interesting reading material for them since such texts often contain the subtle irony, dark themes and motifs that explore cruelty and suffering, social critique and other features that are likely to appeal to older readers. Adolescents and young adults might become more interested in exploring gender or family issues, consumerism or the media manipulations, or they may be attracted by funny and witty poetry written by numerous authors for children. Inclusion of the children's literature in the curricula of English as a foreign language can enhance the students' capacity for critical analysis of any literature texts and further develop their future teaching, counselling or parenting skills.

Interpretations based on the analysis of the narrative style and character development may be used in the future teacher training sessions on the theme of learning experiences and how different challenges in gaining such experiences lead to forming individuals. The analyses can also provide arguments how children's literature can be used in ELS classrooms to engage children, nurture their reading interests and enrich their cognitive abilities – to understand the world around them, develop their critical thinking abilities and psycho-social skills, to learn about problems others may have and develop their empathy as well as introspection and problem-solving abilities.

Literary fiction for children provides a range of opportunities for undergraduate students to study the child's development, both physical and cognitive, and to equip them with a better psychological understanding of the children and adolescents with whom they will be working. Access to a good selection of children's literature could also encourage undergraduate students and their prospective students to read more widely; furthermore, teachers of English as a foreign language could use excerpts from, or complete works written specifically for children and adolescents, to motivate their young students to learn the foreign language with more pleasure, expand their vocabulary, and gain insight into the culture and customs of countries from which the authors of such books come or which they write about. Maria Nikolajeva posits that "the notion that there is a 'common' children's literature in all countries of the world is a misunderstanding. With very few exceptions, children's literature in different countries has little in common" (1996:43). It is also worth noting that many such books have been made into films or adapted for theatrical productions, which can further entice undergraduate students of English as a foreign language and their prospective students to enjoy the visual or other forms of artistic presentations of the written works. They could also make students of English language interested and wanting to read more works by other authors of children as well as mainstream literature in the future.

Students' perceptions of children's literature

In the Spring semester of 2018/2019, I ran a Course in Children's Literature at English Language and Literature (ELIT) Department at the Faculty of Social Sciences (FASS) at the International University of Sarajevo. It was an elective course and students from different faculties and faculty departments enrolled – most of them from ELIT, but also students from Visual Arts and Creative Design (VACD), Psychology, Engineering, Bioengineering, even from Political Sciences. In the introductory session, I asked the students why they chose that course. Most of them thought because it was "children's literature" it must be easy, something they would pass with good grades and improve their overall ECTS.

The course included several converging pathways: history of children's literature; developmental psychology; literary theory and criticism related to children's and the mainstream literature; reading selected children's books according to the different age groups; and one hand-on practical learning experience which involved designing a children's picture book aimed at children 5-7 which students created in small groups consisting of at least one ELIT, one VACD and one student from other departments. Six months after they had finished the course, I conducted a survey and asked them about their experiences from this course. Eight students responded. These are their answers to some of the questions in the survey:

Q1 What did you learn in this course that you were not aware before you started the course?

- *I feel that by the end of the course I was much more aware of the history and timeline of children's literature, as well as the various movements, differences and nuances that exist within the different works and periods. Which is neat.*
- *I primarily learned a lot about the origin/history of children's literature and its significance. I was also able to learn about some stories/fables that I've heard of often but never got to read myself. Additionally, I got to learn about the different elements and levels of story complexity which was taken into consideration when making children's books (age, gender, etc)*
- *I have learned how complex and important children literature actually is. You have to think more when writing for a child than writing for adults, because you need to think like a child.*
- *I have learned that sometimes translations of children's literature were not authentic but rather adapted to the cultural background of a certain country as it was the case with Pippi the Longstocking. I also didn't know much about the theoretical aspect of a field, including Golden Ages of children's literature.*
- *I learned the diversity of choices among the books written for children and young adults; I learned how perception of child and childhood change during the course of history and how children's literature was written to correspond these views; I learned that children's literature does not only relate to the study of "mainstream" literature for children (like fairy tales and nursery rhymes), but more than that and sometimes become intertwined with adult literature.*
- *I learned that there are so many different versions of a single story that are adapted to the age group of the reader and time period they are read in, which is very important because the reader has to be able to comprehend what they are reading.*
- *Since this is my first time profoundly learning and working with children's literature I was actually not fully aware of the most things we talked about, from the impact children's literature has **on us in early childhood to its own history and development.***

Q2 Has your perception of children's literature changed? If 'yes', how? Only one student answered "no". Others provided these answers to explain how this course helped them gain a new perspective on children's literature:

- *It changed in the way that it expanded my knowledge. I feel like I know more and am more comfortable discussing children's literature, knowing what I do thanks to the course.*
- *Yes, because I've learned that the history following children's literature was much more than just simply fables being passed down to kids from unknown/irrelevant sources, but rather it involved many important individuals, such as philosophers like John Locke, for example, giving their insight about children's education/reading and encouraging for it to change, then individuals like Newberry who I remember became known as the father of children's literature because he was among the first to make picture books specifically for kids, and so on.*
- *I take it more seriously now.*

- *I have always appreciated children's literature, but throughout the semester I've learned there's so much to this field that is to admire.*
- *After this course I realized that children's literature is not as simple as it seemed, and it deserves equal position in literature, as any other genre.*
- *As an aspiring graphic designer, I think that having that knowledge will help me in designing things that are appropriate for children's literature. As for my life I think it will be very useful for when I have kids of my own, or nieces and nephews.*
- *To be fair I was a little harsh and I took it for granted. Few assignments later I realized there are a lot of things hidden behind the final product. I also realized that working on projects where your target audience is very young can easily be harder than working on something intended to the target group similar to my age.*

Q3 Do you think that knowledge of children's literature might be useful to you in your future life or career? If 'yes', how? Again, only one respondent answered "no", and others found that better knowledge of children's literature might help them be more skilled and equipped to find work as teachers, illustrators, translators, or, as one of them said, *I think it will be very useful for when I have kids of my own, or nieces and nephews.*

Conclusion

In conclusion, students' responses to the survey conducted months after they had finished the course show that, reflecting on their learning experiences, students find studying children's literature a rewarding, inspiring, useful, even challenging, but above all, an eye-opening experience. Their comments support my introductory thesis that most students are not aware of the wealth of children's literature texts prior to starting the course. Their familiarity with canonical works depends also whether such texts have been translated (so that they could read them in their first language during childhood and adolescence) or adapted for the screen, in which case they may have seen the cinematographic versions (presented through the director's lens). The students have also shown appreciation for having been re-introduced to this genre, despite their initial scepticism and opinion that this genre is "easy". Several students have decided to read other works from particular authors they studied during the course. During the course, they have often stated that their reading experiences have become more enjoyable and that they will be more resourceful and confident to recommend titles suitable for different children's age groups to their cousins or future students (should they become English language teachers).

Throughout the course the students shared their views about their reading experiences from childhood and also through analysis of the studied texts. During their presentations they also shared with their peers the new vocabulary they encountered in the works and explained the meaning of new words or expressions, which contributed further to their general English language competences. Moreover, students from departments and programs other than the English Language and Literature realised that their future careers could be linked with children's literature, either through working as illustrators (students from VACD), or as future policy makers (for example, those coming from the Political Sciences).

Finally, through their work on the picture book project, students from different departments collaborated in small groups and presented their final product several weeks later. Their task was to produce a picture book in English language for children aged 5-7 so they had to take into consideration this particular stage in the child's psychological and social development, including the child's linguistic abilities to understand the story. The students had to pay attention to vocabulary, syntax, as well as to the form, size, colours and other extra-linguistic features of the picture book. The students have shown enthusiasm, creativity and adherence to the theoretical premises they had learnt about during the course, which resulted in very good final products, some of which could be marketable.

Based on these experiences and supported by the experts' theoretical work in the field of children's literature, its benefits and usefulness, it is strongly recommended that children's literature be included in courses of English language and literature (or in other foreign language courses) to improve the future generations' reading and learning competencies which might enhance their overall problem solving capacities and assist them to acquire other important life skills which the 2018 PISA report identified as deficient in the young population of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

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KORISTI OD STUDIRANJA DJEČJE KNJIŽEVNOSTI NA DODIPLOMSKOM STUDIJU STRANIH JEZIKA

Sažetak

Univerziteti u Bosni i Hercegovini koji nude dodiplomske studije stranih jezika su neopravdano zapostavili izučavanje književnosti za djecu. Poznavanje dječje književnosti je naročito relevantno za buduće nastavnike stranog jezika (L2) koji će raditi s učenicima od predškolskog nivoa do srednje škole. Budući nastavnici i predavači L2 bi mogli u učionici koristiti tekstove iz dječje književnosti i time bi mogli pomoći učenicima da učenju stranog jezika pristupe na način koji je sličan učenju maternjeg jezika – kroz čitanje ili slušanje različitih vrsta književnih djela – i da time općenito podstiču učenikove čitalačke navike. Poznavanje djela iz oblasti dječje književnosti na stranom jeziku može takođe pomoći nastavnicima da razviju dublji kritički odnos o procesu učenja stranog jezika, čime se mogu poboljšati njihove nastavničke sposobnosti. Korištenje transakcionih aktivnosti za komunikativne svrhe je jedan od načina nastave stranog jezika. Međutim, ukoliko je nastavnik upoznat s djelima dječje književnosti na stranom jeziku koji predaje i koja su prikladna za određeni uzrast, to se može smatrati jednim značajnim resursom kojim nastavnik može pomoći učenicima da steknu jezičke kompetencije prilikom usvajanja stranog jezika. Pošto će na taj način učenici stranog jezika imati pristup različitim tekstovima, stilovima ili novim riječima, time će se takođe podstaknuti razvoj njihove imaginacije, kao i vještine kritičkog čitanja, slušanja ili pisanja, jer će na osnovu tekstova koje budu čitali razmjenjivati svoja osjećanja i ideje kroz različite komunikativne aktivnosti. Osim toga, mnoga djela iz ovog žanra su adaptirana za filmsku, muzičku ili pozorišnu produkciju, što se takođe može koristiti za istraživanje drugih djela i drugih stvaralaca za djecu. U ovom članku se iznose argumenti potkrijepljeni iskustvima stečenim u nastavi na Odsjeku za engleski jezik i književnost na Internacionalnom univerzitetu u Sarajevu kako bi se potvrdila važnost uvrštavanja dječje književnosti na dodiplomskim studijima stranih jezika u Bosni i Hercegovini, a i drugdje gdje taj predmet nije uvršten u nastavni plan i program.

Ključne riječi: dječja književnost; dodiplomski studiji; strani jezici; nastava