

Enhancing Students' Interest in Literature through Literary Tourism

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Abstract

In contemporary society, the decline in reading habits, often attributed to the pervasive influence of technology, is a well-documented phenomenon. At the same time, statistics show a drop in the number of students choosing Literature as their major field of study, which is presumably driven by a perceived lack of practical value in the field, with students increasingly opting for scientific disciplines. Given this context, it becomes imperative for us as educators to find new ways of reigniting students' interest in literary works. This paper aims to investigate strategies for achieving this goal, by suggesting literary tourism and exploring its educational potential which seems to be under-researched despite the growing interest about literary tourism during the last few years. Drawing on the theory of experiential learning, this paper claims that by actively involving pupils in literary experiences beyond the confines of the classroom, such as organizing school trips to literary sites, may not only promote active learning, better understanding, and retention of knowledge, but also cultivate appreciation for and enthusiasm in engaging with literature.

Keywords

Literary tourism · Literature · Travel · Education · Experiential learning

1. Introduction

Most teachers of literature nowadays know what it is like to assign a long reading piece for homework – unhappy faces and sighs are the most likely reactions. For teachers, this is not a rare occurrence. We are all aware of how difficult it has become to reach students and make them read literature in the era of technology; youngsters would rather choose to scroll their phones or watch a Netflix series than spend their free time reading a book. In addition, according to statistics, the number of A-level students choosing a major in English/literature has decreased both in the UK and USA (Robertson, 2024; Bacon, 2023).

Goodwin (2012: 213), analysing the status of teaching English in the UK, shows his concern about the general lack of students' engagement with literature:

The struggle for English teachers is that the rhetorical status of literary study is in tension with the real importance of literary engagement and how current assessment regimes in particular, diminish what is valuable in the engagement of students with literature. [...] the habits of adult consumers of texts clearly demonstrate that 'Literature' [with that capital L] is not to their 'taste'. I am clear that some pupils can 'become enthusiastic and critical' and I am also extremely clear that insisting [which is what we do] that pupils encounter literature in school is a perfectly reasonable requirement. ... I am arguing very strongly for a mode of literary reading that includes words such as 'engagement', 'immersion' and 'reflection' [...]

Violaine Houdart-Merot (2012) also points out the difficulty of teaching literature in France and the need for new practices:

Literature teaching in France is rooted in a longstanding humanist tradition and meets a range of utilitarian, humanist and to a lesser extent rhetorical aims, which makes such lessons particularly complex to deliver. The body of works studied has shifted from a Greco-Roman heritage to national literature, and is now beginning to open up to global cultural and to youth literature. Exercises try to strike a difficult balance between the culture of the literary commentary and the rhetorical culture. Literature teaching faces a range of social, economic and cultural difficulties today, but could be rejuvenated by new literary practices.

In such circumstances, the question arising is: Shall we change how and what we teach in our literature courses? What can we do to promote students' interest in literature? One possible answer is literary tourism, which may help integrate theory and practice in a unique way, opening up new avenues for students to encounter writers and stories.

Literary tourism, the practice of visiting places associated with writers or settings from literary works, or following the footsteps of characters (Squire, 1996; Herbert, 2001; Busby, 2022), has gained prominence in the tourism industry during the last few years. However, despite a growing interest, there is a scarcity of research focusing on the educational aspects of literary tourism (Kotciuba *et al.*, 2020; Falk *et al.*, 2012; Rossetti & Quinn, 2019). One major research gap is the lack of comprehensive studies analysing the benefits of incorporating literary tourism into educational curricula. While some works touch upon the concept of educational literary tourism (Bataller Catalá 2022; Kotciuba *et al.*, 2020; Rossetti *et al.*, 2023; Sánchez, 2016), there is a notable absence of in-depth investigations into how literary tourism can enhance learning outcomes, foster creativity, and promote a deeper appreciation for literature among students. While this paper is far from being exhaustive in providing answers to such questions, which requires deep fieldwork research, it limits itself to highlighting the importance of understanding the impact of literary tourism on educational experiences, which is crucial for educators aiming to create engaging and immersive learning environments. The main objective of this paper is to explore the potential of literary tourism in education, with a focus on experiential learning. Through literature review, it tries to find out how literary tourism can help diversify the ways we teach literature and the impact that travel associated with literature has on students' engagement, motivation, and learning outcomes, and investigate the effectiveness of incorporating literary tourism into educational curricula to enhance students' learning experiences. Exploring such potential may have implications for educators as well as policy makers. It can provide insights into how literary education outside the classroom shapes young learners' cultural awareness and appreciation for literature. Furthermore, it could lead to the development of sustainable literary tourism practices within educational settings.

2. Travel as Educational Activity

People have travelled in order to learn since ancient times (Stone and Petrick, 2013: 1). On a more organised level, travel as an activity used for educational purposes is mainly associated with the Grand Tour of the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries. The Grand Tour was deemed to be the best way to complete a young gentleman's (and later, also a woman's) education: "to be travelled was to be educated" (Towner, 2002: 227). Young elites (mainly English, but also French and Northern Europeans) often spent two to four years travelling around Europe to broaden their horizons and learn about language, architecture, geography, and culture (Black, 2018: 309). They typically visited places they knew from reading classical literature and artworks: France, Italy, or Spain. Towner (2002) describes travel as "the process through which many of the most critical aspects of their thought, education and taste were transmitted" which may explain why the Grand Tour is often credited for a remarkable improvement in British architecture and culture ("The Grand Tour").

The relationship between the Grand Tour and literature was two-sided: in some cases, it was literature that fuelled the Grand Tour and in others it was the other way around. Joseph Addison is known to have said "The greatest pleasure I took from my journey from Rome to Naples was in seeing the fields, towns, and rivers that have been described by so many classic authors" (qtd. in Robinson & Andersen, 2002: 105). On the other hand, literature produced from the Grand Tour has also incited other people to start a journey. Thus, Byron and Dickens made use of the memories of European places visited and incorporated them into their works, respectively *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* and *Little Dorrit* (Krauth, 2019: 3) which have motivated many readers to turn into travellers following the writers' footsteps.

While in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries travel was mainly reserved for the privileged ones who could afford it, the industrial revolution provided opportunities in Western societies for the middle classes to participate in travel in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries but with a change: it was leisure rather than educational travel as tourism was seen as a way for escaping from work and relaxing; this turn led to the development of European and United

Kingdom seaside resorts, amusement parks and later theme parks in the United Kingdom and North America. After tourism with mainly a hedonistic focus, the end of the twentieth century witnessed another change of travel patterns with tourists increasingly seeking experiences that were intellectually stimulating. Increase in leisure time and income along with decrease in the cost of travel gave many more people an opportunity to engage in intellectual improvement through vacation travel (Bodger, 1998 qtd. in Falk *et al.*, 2012: 909). Additionally, developments in media, internet, communications, and technologies have also widened individual interest in and appreciation of cultures, contributing to the return of travel as a way of learning.

2.1 The positive effects of travel on learning

The benefits of travel on learning have been researched by a number of scholars as early as the 1930s and 1940s highlighting the impact of student field trips on acquisition and retention of knowledge (Atyeo, 1939), and student motivation (Clark, 1942). A more recent scholar like Mouton (2002) sees travel as linked with discovery, which, when followed by a reflection on the experience, creates learning. Werry (2008) believes that travel should be an essential component of our education system so that students see learning as an enjoyable experience, not just as something they have to do.

Astalin & Cauchan (2023: 1) note that one of the main benefits of using excursions as a method of teaching is that children can experience real life from outside the classroom. Through observation, children can understand more easily than when they just listen to a teacher inside a classroom. Such first-hand experiences can help them develop their language and literacy level, gaining new vocabulary and problem-solving skills. The authors believe that excursions encourage children to ask questions more than they would normally do in a classroom. Another benefit is that children learn different social rules in different settings, such as being quiet in a museum or library. Further advantages of using excursions as a method of teaching include: providing a direct source of knowledge and acquainting the student with first-hand information, an opportunity for students

to develop their aesthetic sense, developing qualities of resourcefulness, self-confidence, initiative, and leadership, collaboration, proper utilization of leisure, and motivating students for self-study and self-activity.

3. Literary tourism as experiential learning: benefits

Honey and Mumford (1992) argue that people learn in two ways: through teaching and through experience. For Kolb (1984: 41), experiential learning is “the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. Knowledge results from the combination of grasping and transforming experience.” Dewey (1938), a pioneer of the idea of learning through experience, proposed that the knowledge and skills that a person learns in one situation can help them to understand and react to subsequent experiences (qtd. in Stone & Petrick, 2013: 19). One of the main advantages of using experiential learning (which is also referred to as learning through action, learning by doing, and learning through discovery and exploration) as a methodology is that it enables educators to “purposefully engage with students in direct experience and focused reflection in order to increase knowledge, develop skills, and clarify values.” (“What is Experiential Learning?”)

Based on the above explanation, literary tourism is a form of experiential learning that can be used as complementary to traditional teaching. It can offer a unique and engaging form of education by promoting active participation as contrasted to mainstream passive learning in classrooms. Through literary tourism, students are not passive recipients of information but active participants in the exploration of literary landscapes. They learn by doing. By visiting literary landmarks, students gain a deeper understanding of literature. Weiss (2021: 276) points out that through literary tourism, students can enter the psychology of characters by experiencing firsthand the settings that shape narratives, which further affects comprehension.

Experiencing the physical settings of stories makes literature more tangible by contextualizing the theory learnt in class:

Of what use is all this fine knowledge of men's own imaginations, to a man that inquires after the reality of

things? It matters not what men's fancies are, it is the knowledge of things that is only to be prized: it is this alone gives a value to our reasonings, and preference to one man's knowledge over another's, that it is of things as they really are, and not of dreams and fancies. (Locke, 2018: 96)

By serving as a bridge between imagination and reality, literary tourism offers students a unique perspective on the interplay between literature and the physical world by enabling “active engagement between the inner world of the person and the outer world of the environment” (Beard & Wilson, 2010: 19). This form of tourism not only allows individuals to explore the spaces that inspired literary works, but also provides insights into the socio-cultural contexts in which these works were created. For example, by visiting Shakespeare's house in Stratford-upon-Avon, one can also get an understanding about the historical period associated with the writer and his work. In addition, by immersing themselves in the environments that inspired literary creations, students can develop a more profound connection to the works they study. This experiential approach to learning may also deepen students' appreciation for literature and inspire them to engage more deeply with the texts they study (MacLeod, 2020: 1219).

Through a combination of educational practices on the one hand, and cultural heritage and tourism on the other, such literary tours may also serve to encourage a deeper appreciation for literary heritage as “a vehicle of education for citizenship and sustainability” (Carreira, 2022: 23-4). By engaging with literary sites and landmarks, students become actively aware of the importance of conserving the literary legacy, ensuring that this cultural treasure is passed down to future generations.

Finally, places can evoke emotions and memories from the text as well as create new emotions and memories through sensory engagement in the physical environment that brings those stories to life. Such affective dimensions of literary tourism have been explored by Anderson & Smith (2019) through their project “Literary Atlas.” By examining emotional states evoked during literary walking tours based on novels set in specific places, the researchers highlight the immersive and transformative impact of literary journeys on participants. As Mark Twain

said in his book *The Innocents Abroad*, “Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry, and narrow-mindedness, and many of our people need it solely on these accounts.”

3.1 Integrating literary tourism in educational strategies: a few suggestions and examples

How can we as educators integrate literary tourism? Let's start by identifying some types of educational literary tourism which include a variety of forms from visiting authors' homes and settings from novels, to following the itineraries walked by characters and attending literary festivals, among others.

3.1.1 Following the itinerary of characters, visiting the setting of a story or places associated with the writer (birthplace, home, grave)

Here is one example from Albanian literature:

It was a strange city and seemed to have been cast up into the valley one winter's night like some prehistoric creature that was now clawing its way up the mountainside. Everything in the city was old and made of stone. From the street and fountains to the roofs of the sprawling age-old houses covered with great slates like gigantic scales. It was hard to believe that under this powerful carapace the tender flesh of life survived and

reproduced. The traveller seeing it for the first time was tempted to compare it to something, but soon found that impossible, for the city rejected all comparisons. In fact, it looked like nothing else. [...] It was a slanted city, set at a sharper angle than perhaps any other city on earth, and it defied the laws of architecture and city planning. The top of one house might graze the foundation of another, and it was surely the only place in the world where if you slipped and fell in the street, you might well land on the roof of a house – a peculiarity known most intimately to drunks. Yes, a very strange city indeed. In some places you could walk down the street, stretch out your arm and hang your hat on a minaret. Many things in it were simply bizarre and others seemed to belong in a dream ... (Kadare, 1971/2011: 1)

This passage is a classic in Albanian literature, traditionally taught by reading it, commenting on it, mentioning a few themes of the novel and how they align with the social context in which the novel is set, which, let's admit it, can be quite boring for most students who are just passive recipients of the information provided by the teacher. What could be an alternative? How about taking the students to see in real life what the city described looks like, while walking through its cobble streets following the footsteps of the characters in the narrow alleys and reading passages from the book? Then, we could stop at the writer's house, sit on the wide window sill where he would spend most of his day writing, and look through the window where he watched life pass by.



Figure1. Gjirokaster, Albania. Source: Google Images



Figure 2. Kadare's house and the street where it is situated. Source: photos taken by the author of this paper

By following the footsteps of the writer and his characters, students can gain insights into the inspirations behind the literary text, which would not only reinforce what was learnt at school, but also enhance understanding thanks to contextualisation, and most probably retention of knowledge, in addition to being an enjoyable and memorable trip. In addition, this experiential learning approach can stimulate their creativity and curiosity, encouraging them to explore additional literary works and their intersections with place.

Sánchez (2016: 12) did a similar experiment and found out that literary tourism can also positively affect students' language skills. The case study included a group of students learning Spanish as a foreign language through literature. Cervantes's *Don Quixote* was chosen as a didactic tool. After reading a few passages in class that illustrate the movement of don Quixote from his native Castilla-La Mancha to the modern and cosmopolitan Barcelona, the teachers asked students to create an itinerary through Barcelona's Ciutat Vella, the very area where *Don Quixote* wandered. As such, students had a chance to take on the role of guides and simulate a guided tour of the city of Barcelona while speaking in Spanish. The tour ended with a stroll along the present-day Cervantes Street and enjoying a "café con leche" while engaging in Spanish conversation with the staff at a local café. Sánchez points out that thanks to this tour, students had a chance to "enhance their already beneficial immersion in the country with an additional layer of information" (15). Another benefit highlighted in this paper is moving "beyond classic, somewhat isolated learning, adding a socio-cultural and personal dimension" (14) which serves as "reinforcement and expansion of ELE learning"

(14) through blending "theoretical classroom learning with real-world experiences" (15), all of which further support the argument on the benefits associated with experiential learning.

3.1.2 Literary Festivals

Literary festivals are another form of how literature can be encountered outside the classroom. These festivals provide a unique opportunity for students to interact with texts in a multifaceted manner, complementing their overall educational journey. While not specifically focusing on students, Robertson and Yeoman (2014: 321) consider literary festivals as examples of serious leisure activities which help create experience and develop knowledge, activities where learning might be both fun and educational. Similarly, Rossetti *et al.* (2023) have researched the correlation between festivals and "edutainment" and highlighted the benefits of edutainment activities such as enhanced audience learning, engagement, and festival satisfaction. Sadeghi Shahdani *et al.* (2023:1) also point out the importance of literary festivals especially for children as a way of arousing interest about reading.

3.1.3 Using technology

In a world which is becoming rapidly digitalised, Kotciuba *et al.* (2020: 1) suggest to move away from traditional methodologies towards more interactive and engaging approaches, with the help of technology. The scholars explain that by integrating literary tourism with information technologies, educational

goals can be effectively achieved, catering to the needs of users and contributing to optimizing the learning experience during literary excursions.

3.2 Challenges and future considerations

Of course, educators may face a number of challenges from cost issues (Sánchez, 2016: 4) to balancing education with entertainment, and ensuring accessibility (Rossetti & Quinn, 2019: 102), but still the benefits outdo the shortcomings.

First and foremost, a deeper examination of the status of literature education in our institutions is needed. Analysing the curriculum offerings and contents of literary courses can shed light on how educational programs can be tailored to incorporate literary tourism elements, enriching students' understanding of cultural heritage and literary traditions.

Literary routes can be tailored to impart specific skills and knowledge, making them a versatile tool for educational purposes. They can be part of a broader spectrum of didactic itineraries aimed at enhancing learning experiences (Sederberg, 2013: 251). Such educational itineraries can play an essential role in providing young people with the knowledge and skills "to build stronger and healthier interactions in tourism contexts" (Marquez & Oliveira (2023: 2). For example, through literary itineraries, students can also appreciate the urban or rural landscapes as well as cultural and natural resources. Additionally, such routes might also contribute to shaping spaces and identities, as was the case with Victoria Hislop's novel *The Island* (see Weiss, 2021). They can offer a holistic learning environment that combines cultural exploration with environmental appreciation.

All things considered, literary tourism presents a valuable opportunity to transform traditional classroom settings into dynamic learning environments. By integrating literary excursions into educational curricula, educators can offer students a multi-sensory learning experience that transcends the boundaries of textbooks. This hands-on approach to learning has been shown to enhance students' retention of literary concepts and themes, making education more engaging and memorable. Furthermore, by immersing students in the physical spaces associated with literary works, educators can lead to a deeper

emotional connection to literature, inspiring a life-long love for reading.

4. Conclusion

This paper showed that even though, traditionally, education is associated with a classroom, people can learn in a variety of ways, including travelling. After highlighting the benefits of travel on learning, by drawing on the theory of experiential learning, this paper suggested literary tourism as an alternative educational tool to enhance classroom teaching of literature. Literary excursions can take the form of visits to author's houses, the settings of their stories, following the itinerary of literary characters, or going to literary festivals, which aim at connecting readers with the physical landscapes, making literature more tangible.

To conclude, literary tourism presents a valuable pedagogical approach thanks to its unique opportunity to blend education with experiential learning, offering students a deeper understanding of literary works, authors, and the cultural contexts in which they were situated, immersive and emotionally engaging encounters with literature and a deeper appreciation for literature. By integrating literary tours into educational curricula, educators can create experiential learning opportunities catering to diverse learning styles and interests. As John Sutherland put it "Literature always seems richer when you visit the place that inspired it." Additionally, the study found that literary tourism can also raise awareness among students and contribute to the preservation and promotion of cultural heritage in sustainable ways.

5. Limitations and recommendations for further research

Literary tourism transcends traditional classroom settings, offering students a dynamic and immersive approach to interact with literature; yet, there is limited exploration of its implementation in educational settings. While this paper covered a few aspects related to the benefits of travel on learning on a conceptual level, there is a need for primary research that considers the specific effect of literary excursions on students' attitudes and learning outcomes, creativity and critical skills. By bridging

the gap between theoretical discussions on literary tourism and its implementation in educational contexts, researchers can offer valuable guidance to educators seeking to incorporate literary tourism into their teaching practices to enrich students' learning experiences and promote a deeper appreciation for literature and cultural heritage.

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