

Exploring the Significance of Using Literary Texts in Developing EFL Learners' Language Development

Ahmed Abdalla Saeed Adam

College of Arts and Science, Albaha University

Almikhwa, Saudi Arabia

ahmad_saeed604@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

This endeavour is to trace the usage and importance of English literature within the context of English language as a foreign or second language. Condensed vocabulary usage in literary works is likely to be central to the learning, understanding, usage and practice of English language. Literary texts are, in many forms that are composed of everyday ordinary language that is literary regarding word choice and its expression of daily used language. The use of symbols, similes, metaphors and other forms of figurative language encountered in literary work help language learners to be competent in their word choices while involved in the act of writing and speaking. In this attempt, the author adopted a descriptive analytic approach in analysing different methods and approaches in teaching literature within the context of English language as a foreign or second language. The usage of literary texts in language classroom has a profound impact on EFL learners in language development. Through condensed analysis, there is a general over agreed belief that literature is the best tool that can be used in developing different English language skills. Literary texts are considered to be the best source in bringing improvement in the language syllabus, as it is written by the leading and well-known literary scholars. Literature based studies help and encourages the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students in the development of four skills, which are writing, speaking, listening, and reading. Students can improve their linguistic knowledge, as they come across rich and widespread vocabulary usage that will be beneficial for them in the long run. Usage of literary texts in teaching language provides cultural knowledge to the students. With the findings of this study, it can be firmly said that literary text serves a useful tool in the development of language skills among EFL learners. Literature can be used as a good source of material in practicing language skills. EFL students belong to different cultural and social backgrounds; therefore, it becomes tough for them even to take that class, as they are almost weak in all language skills i.e. listening, reading, writing and speaking. Loud reading of poems and other literary texts helps EFL learners in improving their pronunciation.

Keywords: teaching literature, literary texts, language skills, EFL

1. INTRODUCTION

Literature is of great importance in language teaching, and in many cases teaching language means teaching the literature of that language. Language skills can be effectively developed through the proper usage of literary texts within EFL course. Lee & Schallert (2015) have proclaimed that the usage of literary texts does not only help the students in grasping their imagination but can also assist in understanding the context of language more efficiently that improves their language skills. They believed that literature would promote the students' imagination through reading imaginative and symbolic literary works.

Literature also helps develop the use of language in context, through its transmission of the culture of the target language. Through exposing the students to the dialogues of the text, the students become involved in communicating with the native speakers more efficiently and fluently. There is also a suggestion by Al-Rabadi & Bataineh, which urges language educators to provide classroom student with more opportunities to acquaint them with more potential of language and examine the limits of these possibilities by writing complete and correct discourse (Al-Rabadi & Bataineh, 2015). These options include imitation of the language of literary and imaginative works which will supposedly help students to write stories and develop creativity.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The study of literature was prestigious during the romantic era. The leading romantic poets Coleridge and Wordsworth believed that the imaginative truths expressed in literary works are superior to those discovered by experts in other fields, such as scholars, and historians, etc. Lowell (1889) as cited in Lauri Ramey (2001:1) have pointed out within their literary work:

"Language study should lead to something better. And that something better is Literature. The blossoms of language have certainly as much value as its roots, for if the roots secrete food and thereby transmit life to the plant, yet the happy consummation of that life is in the blossoms, which alone bear the seeds that distribute and renew it in other growths".

In a similar way, Abdul (2014) also pointed out an important fact that since the beginning of 18th century till the mid-19th century, English literature was considered as the most important educational subject that covers not just fiction and poetry but also biography,

expository, scientific and history writing. Written and oral discourse ability in the English language studies was enhanced during the 18th century. The skills of communication and discovery by the learners were improved through the classical rhetoric teaching of literature.

2.1 Methods in Literature Teaching

There are several differentiated views found in literature teaching. Some scholars advocate that the reader response approach should be encouraged within the classrooms, as it helps the learners towards personal development. There are also educational scholars, who give more importance to structural approach because it focuses more efficiently on literary texts analysis. Since the past several decades, several approaches have been used in literature study that has helped in the collection of abundant research content (Bloemert et.al, 2017). However, all of these approaches might not be competent enough to be referred in improving the learning outcomes of learners. The reader response approach stresses more on the integrated experience of students with the text, while structural approach generates the concepts and terms that are helpful for learners in discussion and interpretation of literature.

Various approaches and methods are used by teachers in accomplishing goals for literature teaching. These approaches and methods might differ from literature as a content or resource and as a subject matter. The language model, the cultural model, and the personal growth model are the popular models of literature teaching presented by Lee & Schallert (2015).

2.1.1. The cultural model

The cultural model is known for its traditional importance in teaching literature. It encourages the language learners to discover and interpret the political, historical, literary and social contexts of the particular text. With the help of this model, the literature teachers can motivate the learners to appreciate and get familiar with different ideologies and cultures about the culture and ideologies they practice. According to Bobkina & Dominguez (2014) research, Carter & Long (1991) have also argued that:

“Teaching literature within a cultural model enables students to understand and appreciate and ideologies different from their own in time and space and to come to perceive tradition of thought, feeling, and artistic form within the heritage the literature of such cultures endows.” (2014, p.254).

The cultural model provides benefits to EFL learners in comprehension and understanding of different school of thoughts and cultures, which are portrayed very often in the literary text. Teachers are using this model in an efficient way throughout the world, as it helps them in gauging the artistic form, feelings and tradition of thoughts practiced by the learners in the literature class (Bobkina & Dominguez, 2014). The learners can understand the body of literary texts, which belongs to a background of a particular ideological, social and historical contexts.

2.1.2. The language Model

The language model is one of the most commonly used approaches in EFL teaching, as it helps the learners in understanding the literary texts by the generation of various examples with differentiated linguistic features. According to the views of language teachers, the language model helps the students in creative usage of the language in a more effective way. The model also encourages the learners to comprehend and appreciate the literary texts in a more effective way contingent to personal qualities (Iida, 2013). Since literature is based on the language it is, therefore, expected that the language model will provide a suitable approach to literature teaching; for it focuses on the ways that language is used. Consequently, it provides opportunities for the learners to interpret any possible relation that may exist between the linguistic forms and literary meanings.

Language is considered as a primary literary medium within the language model. This model is well equipped with the procedures and techniques that are linked to the literary text itself, which helps the students in equipping themselves with tools that are beneficial in an interpretation of the text and it also helps them to become competent enough to judge and criticise it (Abdul, 2014). The model explicitly treats the literary texts as the primary sources to practice language as per the sequence of language based activities rather than focusing on literature to gather general information or to gain facts. The literary texts are beneficial for the students in enriching, developing, and enhancing their skills and practice. Reading literary texts will also contribute to developing language proficiency. The importance of this method is based on stimulating the students' response to the text. The feelings and opinions of students about the literary texts matter a lot, as it helps them in getting better know-how of the context on which the text was written (Leckie, 2016). The language model also helps in seeking better amalgamation among literature and language.

The scope of the language model is to encourage and motivate the students to rationalise and link the themes portrayed within the text with their personal experiences and life. Activities like poetry recital, debate and discussions, role play, prediction, and ranking tasks are often used by the literature teachers within the classrooms to improve their level of understanding and capacity to digest the literary texts (Su & Wu, 2016).

2.1.3 The personal growth model

The personal growth model is a combination of the language and cultural models. The model concentrates on the text language and utilises it in a particular cultural context, which are the two primary functions played by cultural and language models. Learners are encouraged to express their opinions and relate the personal background knowledge and their cultural experiences to those which are expressed in the literary texts. They held that this model helps the learners to become engaged in literary text reading. Adoption of this model in teaching literature will encourage and stimulate the students to enjoy and like literature outside the classroom (Mahmoud & Mahmoud, 2014). The personal growth method believed to help the English language learners to appreciate and understand other societies, communities, and cultures as well as their personal and social relations with other institutions and affiliations.

The positive reception and assessment of the intricate cultural artefacts may also contribute to the personal growth of the individual learner. A personal growth approach is a student-centered approach where the literary texts are assessed and selected in a way that it may stimulate the learners to respond and participate imaginatively (Al-Jabry, Salahuddin & Al-Shazly, 2014). The themes and topics that are used to portray personal experience are believed to motivate the learners to read and write and help them to distinguish and evaluate quality literature from inadequate literature texts. In Bobkina & Dominguez (2014) research Carter & Long (1991) have also argued that:

“..One of the main goals for teachers who are primarily committed to a personal growth model of literature teaching is to try to help students to achieve an engagement with the reading of literary texts. This engagement cannot be measured regarding passing examinations in literature studies. The test of the teacher’s success in teaching literature is the extent to which students can utilise the language skills learned outside the classroom with enjoyment and love for literature throughout their lives” (2014, p.255).

As has been mentioned above, these three models are interrelated. The language and personal growth models are often closely linked, and the cultural model can also contain elements from the others. It would be true to say that overlapping occurs, all the more as a result of the actual selection of the particular class activities (Johnston, Partridge & Hughes, 2014). Each one of these three approaches has its own merits and demerits, and each one can be used in such a way that to help attain improvement in the course of action of the language learning enhancement.

It can be said that the didactics of literature as an area of reflection has been formed in the last decades, especially since the late sixties. During those years it began to become evident that the model of literary education developed in the nineteenth century was inadequate for the new mass society set up in post-industrial western countries. This finding provoked a crisis to which the educative reflection has tried to find solutions from the advances produced in the different disciplines of reference during this period and, little by little, have been traced new educational coordinates (Abdul, 2014).

The teaching of literature is very sensitive to the changes produced by the mechanisms of cultural production and social cohesion of the different historical moments. This is because literature is situated in the field of social representation, reflects and shapes values and ideology, and participates in the way of institutionalizing culture through the construction of collective imagination. The educational model adopted thus responds, first, to the role each society attributes to literature (Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2016). This function corresponds to the determination of a teaching content, a selection of texts and teaching practices in the classroom.

Whatever method that may be used by the teacher, literary texts, however, contributes the learners' appreciation of literary works and help develop and enhance the learners' self-confidence in the process of the language learning and encourage them to enjoy reading and writing. Since literary texts provide a significant amount of resources, the act of teaching becomes more interesting and helps the teacher to avoid sticking on a certain model of teaching.

3. LITERATURE IN LANGUAGE LEARNING

Since the past few decades, the teachers who teach EFL course have realised the importance of literary texts and have disclosed them as an important source of authentic texts within the course syllabus of EFL course. The energetic discussions are made among the leading literary scholars at the global level on how linguistics and literature in EFL/ESL instruction could interact and work together to enhance language skills development and confidence among the international students. Since the beginning, there were several English language teachers, who believed that literary texts are essential in literature teaching. Therefore, teaching and reading literature will make language learning more productive, stimulating and the learning process more enjoyable (Al-Jabry, Salahuddin & Al-Shazly, 2014).

Concerning the effectiveness of literary texts in language teaching, Su & Wu (2016) stated that literary texts help increase different English language skills since literary texts enhance and develop linguistic knowledge by through providing verification of pervasive and rich vocabulary usage and multifarious and precise syntactic structures. They believe that using literature in language teaching develops the four language skills. Further, they stressed that the development of language skills could best be achieved through exposing students to rich vocabulary and the use of words in their profound meanings and exact syntax.

By observing literature classroom teaching, Johnston, Partridge & Hughes came up with conclusion that through the study of literature, linguistic knowledge can be developed. This, in turn, will help students read literary texts with a kind of enjoyment and involve them into interacting and make them more motivated (Johnston, Partridge & Hughes, 2014). Consequently, the learners will be able to develop their writing speaking and reading skills and can positively achieve success, in both academically and occupationally.

According to several leading literary scholars, the literary texts are essential and valuable in the development of language skills, as it helps the learners in getting know-how of grammar and kind of language used in the texts. The language teachers use literary texts in their classes: to enhance the general cultural awareness of students; to encourage literary and creative imagination; to expand the horizons of students by giving them knowledge about basics of literature; and, to make the students familiar with the English literature masterpieces to enhance their educative exposure (Mahmoud & Mahmoud, 2014).

As concluded by the two, literature provides the students with necessary background knowledge about the works of famous writers by introducing them to the classics of English Literature. They also believed that literature studies would increase the students' cultural knowledge and help develop creativity and enhance literary imagination. Finally, they argued that teaching literature would introduce the students to the masterpieces of English and American literature and would help them understand the world as a whole. Hence, develops tolerance and avoids cultural misinterpretations in the use of English in different contexts.

To achieve the set goals of teaching literature, the experts have proposed many methods and models. The evolution of literary education towards the promotion of the activity and the expression of students has also recently led to the revitalisation of oral interpretation activities, whether dramatization, recitation of poems or simple out loud reading. These literary activities were weakened due to low emotional attachment is shown by the society at large (Tatsuki, 2015). The stage activities also got declined to a great extent, which was on in high demand in old times. In the recent times, the educationists have realised the importance of literary texts and have included them in EFL course.

Since the past few decades, the essentiality of reading habits has been considered as one of the most critical areas over all the levels of an education system. For this reason teachers, linguists and sociologists have carried out several research studies to answers to the obstacles that are faced by the EFL learners in their language development process.

A literary text represents the regional, stylistic, cultural, dialectical and thematic variations and trends that constitute an input of quality. Children at an early educational stage are offered with a variety of literary texts in the form of poems, short stories etc., which are solely meant to enhance their language skills (writing, reading, speaking and listening) (Leckie, 2016).

The literature taught to children at elementary educational level is of great importance even at a university level for EFL students, as they are still not able to get well versed with it at this educational level. It clearly shows the weakness of their educational system. Special learning activities should be developed by the language teachers such as speech, debate, stage activity, essay competitions, listening compositions, etc. to make students well versed with the literary texts and to encourage language development. The role of literary text has gained

momentum in the current years as a primary source and component of authentic texts in language development of EFL/ESL students (Al-Jabry, Salahuddin & Al-Shazly, 2014).

Even though, the language educators are still on a debate as to when, how, why and where it should be applied within EFL/ESL curriculum to reap better results in the form of improved language learning. Four main reasons have lead EFL course teachers to include literature in the classroom. Those reasons are cultural enrichment, personal involvement, language enrichment and valuable authentic material. Additional to these four primary reasons non-triviality, variety, economy, universality, ambiguity and suggestive power are some other aspects that encouraged the usage of literary texts as a powerful resource within EFL course (Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2016).

Literature is known for its authenticity since its inception. Several literature works are not solely developed to provide assistance in language teaching. The learners at EFL classrooms are exposed to real life language samples, which could serve as a valuable authentic material that could be referred in case of any confusion. Literary texts also offer cultural enrichment, as it offers a huge combination of characters that belong to diverse regional or social backgrounds. The literary works, such as short stories, plays, and novels, etc. help the learners understand the way communication takes place in any country across the globe (Tatsuki, 2015).

The usage of literary texts within EFL/ESL course provides the learners a huge range of individual syntactic or lexical items. The learners become acquainted with several characteristics of a written text through literature, learn more about the discourse and syntax functions used within sentences, self-enhancement of their writing skills and also identify ways to connect diverse ideas. If the education provider is doing his/her job with full dedication and commitment, then the students will experience a greater level of productivity regarding language learning. Literary texts help the students in improving their cultural and communicative competence (Leckie, 2016). Reading a literary text enhances personal involvement, as once the students read the literature, they start inhabiting that text. Interest development and personal involvement among EFL students are of critical importance, and for this, the language teachers should encourage the usage of literary texts, as it develops emotional attachment among the learners towards the characters being discussed within the texts (Tso, 2014).

All these models share the fact of describing language, in many cases, within the context of its practical use and not as a process of learning or teaching. For other disciplines, language, culture, communication and their interrelationships are objects of scientific analysis in themselves, whereas for the teaching of languages, these are constituted, or must be constituted, in centres of scientific study to be converted into knowledge and, therefore, in teaching contents (Iida, 2013). For most of the disciplines and sciences mentioned above, the subject communicating through a language is the object of study in itself. The ideal role of language teaching is to focus on the learner as a subject who lives a process to learn to communicate and coexist within a language-culture.

4. CONCLUSION

To conclude, the study results have clearly signified literature as a powerful and important element within the process of teaching English as a foreign language. It can also be stated that the literary texts provide excellent level of support in enhancing the language skills, which are the main objectives of EFL course. Teaching literature is to be considered as the source of authentic texts and cultural store of the target language. It provides the ideal model for developing the four language skills, and is, therefore considered a cornerstone in the development of creative writing skills. Literature help enhances students' reading, writing and speaking skills. Students' reading and pronunciation skills can be developed through reading aloud skill and reciting poetry. Reading and analysing literary texts, on the other hand, can help enhance reading comprehension skills. Different acts and practices of discussions can also develop students speaking skills and as well develop critical thinking skills among language learners.

The development of the consumer society and the presence of the audio-visual media radically altered the mechanisms of creation of the collective imagination and the possession of common literary references. The multiplication of works, the internationalisation of culture and even the evolution of cultural tendencies towards the emphasis on intertextuality exploded the idea of a few references, ordered, valued and common to all citizens. Literature became part of the concept of a cultural asset of free access, diversified and autonomous and accentuated its value of immediate pleasure. The libraries offered an image that was more in tune with the new vision of reading in general, and of literature in particular, than what school reading could provide in its mediated, formative form and directed to the possession of a single corpus.

The diverse, narrow, ambiguous and complex relationships between language, communication, and culture have become objects of interest in many human sciences and linguistic and social disciplines. In the case of scientific contributions made from linguistics, we find that language has been considered and divided into research categories from perspectives from phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax, lexicology and semantics. Contributions of utmost importance have been made in turn by the linguistics of the text, discourse analysis, and pragmatics. On the other hand, language has also become an object of inquiry of the social sciences from anthropology, cultural anthropology, sociolinguistics, sociology of language and psycholinguistics, among others. All these theoretical approaches give as a typical result the indisputable fact that there are diverse, complex and changing relationships between language and culture.

5. REFERENCES

Al-Jabry, H., Salahuddin, M., & Al-Shazly, A. L. (2014). Developing and piloting a literature course learnable via Blackboard for EFL literature instruction. *Studies in Literature and Language*, 8(1), 85. Available at: <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/sll/article/download/j.sll.1923156320140801.4234/5592>

Al-Rabadi, R., & Bataineh, R. F. (2015). Learning Strategies in Literature-Based Instruction: A Qualitative Study of Jordanian University Students. *Journal of Teaching and Teacher Education (University of Bahrain)*, 3(1), 101-11. Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Ruba_Bataineh/publication/290428232_Learning_Strategies_in_Literature-Based_Instruction_A_Qualitative_Study_of_Jordanian_University_Students/links/56975cff08aec79ee32a7096.pdf

Bloemert, J., Paran, A., Jansen, E., & van de Grift, W. (2017). Students' perspective on the benefits of EFL literature education. *The Language Learning Journal*, 1-14. Available at: <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09571736.2017.1298149>

Bobkina, J., & Dominguez, E. (2014). The Use of Literature and Literary Texts in the EFL Classroom; Between Consensus and Controversy. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics and English Literature*, 3(2), 248-260. Available at: <http://journals.aiac.org.au/index.php/IJALEL/article/download/1108/1038>

Gilakjani, A. P., & Sabouri, N. B. (2016). Learners' Listening Comprehension Difficulties in English Language Learning: A Literature Review. *English Language Teaching*, 9(6), 123. Available at: <http://www.ccsenet.org/journal/index.php/elt/article/viewFile/59636/31953>

Iida, A. (2013). Critical review of literary reading and writing in a second language. *The Journal of Literature in Language Teaching*, 2, 5-11. Available at: http://www.academia.edu/download/31449651/LiLT_Issue_2.pdf#page=5

Johnston, N., Partridge, H., & Hughes, H. (2014). Understanding the information literacy experiences of EFL (English as a foreign language) students. *Reference Services Review*, 42(4), 552-568. Available at: http://eprints.qut.edu.au/71386/3/Nicole_Johnston_Thesis.pdf

Leckie, F. (2016). Students' Perspectives on Extensive Literature: Using Literature to Enhance Communicative Competence and Cultural Understanding in the EFL-Classroom. Available at: <http://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:905879/FULLTEXT01.pdf>

Lee, J., & Schallert, D. L. (2015). Exploring the Reading–Writing Connection: A Yearlong Classroom-Based Experimental Study of Middle School Students Developing Literacy in a New Language. *Reading Research Quarterly*. Available at: <https://www.infona.pl/resource/bwmeta1.element.wiley-rrq-v-51-i-2-rrq132>

Mahmoud, M. M. A., & Mahmoud, A. (2014). The effectiveness of using the cooperative language learning approach to enhance EFL writing skills among Saudi University students. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, 5(3), 616-625. Available at: <http://www.academypublication.com/issues/past/jltr/vol05/03/18.pdf>

Musthafa, B., & Abdul-Hamied, F. (2014). Literature Teaching in EFL Context: Some Issues and Dilemmas. *Asian Journal of Literature, Culture and Society*, 8(1). Available at: <http://www.assumptionjournal.au.edu/index.php/AsianJournal/article/viewFile/370/325>

Su, Y. C., & Wu, K. H. (2016). How Literature Circles Support EFL College Students' Literary and Literacy Learning in a Children's and Adolescent Literature Course. Available at: <http://infonomics-society.org/wp-content/uploads/licej/published-papers/volume-7-2016/How-Literature-Circles-Support-EFL-College-Students%20%99-Literary-and-Literacy-Learning-in-a-Children%20%99s-and-Adolescent-Literature-Course.pdf>

Tatsuki, D. H. (2015). Repositioning Literary Texts in Language Teaching: The State of the Art. *Kobe City University of Foreign Studies*, 90. Available at: http://www.academia.edu/download/40994559/afs90_01.pdf

Tso, A. W. B. (2014). Teaching Short Stories to Students of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) at Tertiary Level. *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies*, 10(1), 111-117. Available at: <http://jlls.org/index.php/jlls/article/download/186/168>