

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF USING LITERARY TEXTS IN EFL
CLASSROOMS
Dr. DAIRA Salah

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أهمية استخدام النصوص الأدبية في فصل الدرس اللغوي لدى
متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية باعتبارها لغةً أجنبيةً

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Abstract:

Literature plays a critical role in the English Language classroom as it offers learners a space to justify, comment and mirror their language learning. Numerous studies have indicated that the use of literary texts within the EFL classrooms has potential advantages which include enhancing language skills and extending linguistic knowledge. This paper extensively explores the importance of literary texts within the English language classroom at university. It concludes that literary texts provide students with a rich and varying linguistic input that helps students to effectively express themselves. It also discusses the relevance of including English literature as a language teaching tool in the EFL university classroom. More specifically, it focuses on showing how research enriches the learning experience of EFL learners.

key words: Literary Texts, English Language Skills, EFL,

Classroom, University, Language Teaching tools.

ملخص باللغة العربية:

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للأدب دور حاسم في فصل اللغة الإنجليزية؛ حيث يوفر للمتعلمين مساحة لتبرير تعلمهم اللغوي والتعليق عليه؛ وهذا بفضل استخدام النصوص الأدبية. وفي هذا السياق، أكدت العديد من الدراسات أن لاستخدام النصوص الأدبية داخل فصول اللغة الإنجليزية، باعتبارها لغةً أجنبيةً، مزايا عديدة تشمل تعزيز المهارات اللغوية وتوسيع نطاق المعرفة اللغوية. تستكشف هذه الورقة البحثية أهمية النصوص الأدبية داخل الفصل الدراسي للغة الإنجليزية، لتخلص الى أن استخدام هذا النوع من الشواهد يوفر للطلاب مدخلات لغوية غنية ومتنوعة تساعدهم على التعبير بشكل فعال ومتميز. يناقش هذا المقال أهمية إدراج شواهد من الأدب الإنجليزي كوسيلة تعليمية في فصول اللغة الإنجليزية باعتبارها لغةً أجنبيةً. وبشكل أكثر تحديداً يشرح المقال كيفية تعزيز المهارات اللغوية مع التركيز-أيضاً- على إظهار كيفية إثراء البحث للتجربة التعليمية لمتعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية باعتبارها لغةً أجنبيةً.

الكلمات المفتاحية: النصوص الأدبية؛ مهارات اللغة الإنجليزية؛ اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية؛ الفصل الدراسي؛ الجامعة؛ أدوات تدريس اللغة .

1.0 Introduction

Every teacher requires due diligence and advanced teaching techniques to meet the objectives set to be achieved by the students at the end of the course. A teacher is supposed to use excellent teaching skills and tools in the performance of this vital activity of teaching to remain relevant and drive points home¹. Consequently, there are different teaching tools used in various classes based on the type and the level of the course undertaken by the students. For instance, some courses need practical demonstrations while others may require experimental performance, research work, attachment involvement, and field visits, among many other teaching tools based on different classes.

Literature, as a course, is no different. As a body of artistic writing, it requires tools to ensure that it is well taught in class. However, scholars like Widdowson argued that literature should regain its place in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom². Consequently, the use of literary texts as a teaching tool in the English classroom should play a vital role in ensuring that the language is well learned and absorbed by students. In EFL English courses, where literary texts are used, many benefits are derived from the process, which assures the growth of students' diverse knowledge

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from different dimensions and in various fields³. The present research paper discusses the relevance of including English Literary texts as a language teaching tool in the EFL university classroom.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 A Brief History of Teaching Literature

Hall (2005) argues that the University College of London was the first institution of higher education to introduce the Department of English Literature in 1828⁴. Other Departments were founded in 1849 and 1878 by Oxford and Cambridge universities, respectively. In the twentieth century, literature have played an enormous role in the study of language. With its popularity, it was used as a vocational and moral uplift and for ideational content in the 1950s.

The 1960s and 80s saw no substantial research undertaken on the effectiveness of literature. Meanwhile, scholars like Topping (1968) wanted to exclude the use of research as it failed to enhance linguistic proficiency amongst Foreign English learners⁵. The beginning of the twentieth century witnessed a considerable interest in highlighting the relation between language and literature. In the 1980s scholars, like Brumfit, C.J., & Carter, R.A.⁶ decided to focus on teaching English language skills through literary texts. Literature was then redefined with the introduction of the communicative language teaching approach as literary texts offer learners with cultural, real, and pleasurable materials to use⁷.

2.2 Literary Texts

Literary texts are imaginative texts, which are constructed to reflect the experiences of humans to entertain and arouse emotions, thoughts, and feelings of readers. In this perspective, the teacher is the first initiator of their use and, thus, responsible for making them meaningful to their students. According to Sugianto et al. (2016), there are three types of literary texts, which include narratives, poetry, and drama⁸. Narrative texts provide lessons, they also engage readers and their feelings in the story. Furthermore, fictional texts assume a generic structure that has a beginning, middle, and end. The initial section introduces the story's setting and the characters. The middle section of the narrative causes a chain of events. As for the ending section, a resolution is explained in which the characters find closure to unsolved problems.

Poetic texts are the second type of literary texts. Poetry uses the English language for its aesthetic qualities. Poets write poems to express life's impressions and feelings towards people, events, and experiences⁹. The poet creates the poem by arranging words beautifully and rhythmically in a way where images are drawn on the reader's or listener's minds.

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Through poems, sensual and emotional responses are evoked. Poetry makes use of devices such as rhythm, assonance, and alliteration.

Dramatic texts are the third kind of literary texts. They are pieces of a written or spoken language which are constructed to be played in a theatrical performance of a stage. A Dramatic text makes use of visual elements such as body language, facial expressions, sets, and costumes. The next section tackles the question of which approaches can be employed to teach literary texts in the EFL language classroom

2.3 Approaches to Teaching English Literary Texts in EFL Classroom

There are various approaches used to teach a language through **literary texts**. In this section, we will highlight the relevance of the main approaches used to teach language through literature in the EFL context. According to Duppenthaler (1987), the teaching activity should ensure increasing the motivation of students in the participation of the learning process, and enhance interaction between the learners¹⁰. Teachers must be acquainted with various approaches and techniques to ensure success in teaching literature. Among many, below are the most commonly used methods in teaching literary texts;

2.3.1 Three Models of Carter and Long

Carter and Long (1991) suggested three models of teaching literature that include the cultural model, the language model, and the personal growth model¹¹. The cultural model targets to provide information regarding authors, history, and cultural trends. The language model, on the other hand, targets the growth of the skills of writing, listening, speaking, and reading¹². The personal growth model aims at motivating the students to develop their creativity, imagination, and critical thinking at the individual level.

2.3.2 The Integrated Approach by Savvidou

Savvidou (2004) illustrates a six-stage model applied to teach texts in EFL classrooms¹³;

- First stage: Instilling students with the literary knowledge of the content and the theme of the book.
- Second stage: Students familiarize themselves with the text through reading and listening in class.
- Third stage: Engaging the students with their responses to literature by speaking or writing.
- Fourth stage: Intensive reading helps boost student's comprehension

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- Fifth stage: Learners are motivated to do further exploration of the literary texts.
- Sixth stage: This takes the learner to individually understand the text by analyzing the literary devices.

Writers often use literary texts as a tool to captivate the mind of the reader professionally. Simultaneously, the EFL student can receive the information meant by the writer and understand the piece of writing to a deeper extent. Mostly, the literary devices enhance clarity and enable emphasis in literature. When students are taken through the books with different literary texts, their mind connects deeply with the writers' writing and characters in the story which leads to the student's improvement of understanding the use of English language¹⁴.

3.0 Discussion

3.1 The Benefits of Using Literature in Teaching English Language in EFL Classrooms

The use of literary texts has been encouraged and recommended because of the advantages it possesses in assisting foreign language students to learn English language skills¹⁵. It also helps in improving their language acquisition and awareness. Furthermore, many scholars have recommended the application of literature as a vehicle to motivate learners to learn English.

3.1.1 Literary Texts Help Learners to Listen

The use of literary texts enhances listening as it offers a perfect setting in which learners can familiarize themselves with the different varieties of voice qualities and dialects. Literary texts give learners listening opportunities where they can become engaged emotionally and intellectually. According to Jacobs (1990), in an EFL classroom, reading out books to learners assists and stimulates them to create visual images in their minds¹⁶. Hence, using literary texts helps the students to develop some awareness regarding the language sound and the rhythm's beauty. It helps the students visualize moods, settings, characters, and situations as they listen. Listening to read-aloud texts can assist students in incorporating a heightened involvement in the literary texts.

3.1.2 Literary Texts Help Learners to Speak

According to Khamkhein (2010), speaking is a language skill in which individuals actively produce and use spoken words used during communication¹⁷. In EFL language learning, speaking is a crucial skill in

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the mastery of language. In an English literature class, activities such as question and answer debates, as well as role-play, help the students nurture their speaking skills. Such events also help bring inclusivity in the classroom as learners get motivated to take part in the classroom proceedings that include sharing ideas, questions, and presentations¹⁸. Since literary texts depend on the language in the creation of a particular effect, the use of literary texts assists learners in attaining specific communication goals.

3.1.3 Literary Texts Help Learners to Read

A wide range of studies has shown that literary texts help in promoting reading achievement and development¹⁹. Studies indicate that literature helps nurture reading skills. Reading literary texts helps students to appreciate and understand the various multiple levels of language that include metaphors, phonological patterns, and multiple meaning.

3.1.4 Literary Texts Help Learners to Write

Literary texts offer students a huge inspiration to write, as many would like to model their writing according to such written works. Literature students acquire the motivation to imitate the original written content as well as its style and themes. Besides, learners get a chance to review innovative thinking as they interpret and analyze the texts²⁰. Other classroom activities such as exercises and discussion questions also enhance the learners to analyze, criticize, and explain the literary works through writing²¹. The learners will then acquire professional styles, themes, organizations, and contents that will assist them in generating original thinking.

Literary texts are also filled with idiomatic expressions, beautiful sentences, figurative language, proverbs, and vocabulary. Moreover, by means of literary texts, students could grip grammatical structures, writing styles, and a range of vocabulary that is interwoven. They also acquire the motivation to criticize, explore, and write essays about various issues²².

3.1.5 Dramatic Literary Texts Assist English Language Learners

Learners who are exposed to dramatic literary texts become active participants since they experience some similarity in the use of language. Drama books help learners in developing speaking skills since real-life dialogues can get recreated²³. Communication skills are also used in the texts. Accordingly, Learners can use dramatic texts to comprehend their lives through an analysis of specific situations.

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3.1.6 Using Poetry for English Language Learning

Language learners can make use of poetry as a useful resource. According to Bagherkazemi and Alemi (2010), poetry's main objective is finding a means of involving the language skills of learners creatively and actively²⁴. Poetry engages the readers in generating coherent discourse meanings and the interpretation of texts. Bagherkazemi and Alemi (2010) highlighted poetry's five benefits, which include education and learning, linguistics, emotional, esthetic, and cultural²⁵.

3.1.7 Enhances Student's Cultural Awareness

Literary texts used in EFL English classes can also enhance the learner's cultural awareness as the students will have an opportunity to understand and develop insights regarding the culture of individuals across the world. The students get to develop their visualization and imagery abilities while acquiring new perspectives regarding the ideas found in literary devices. The learners also learn the target language more wholly other than the memorization of rules and words. Besides, the students learn different cultural values, which help them develop cultural understanding and communication.

3.2 Significance of Literary Devices in Teaching English in EFL Classroom

The EFL student needs to identify where different literature tools have been used by the writer and with what motive they were used. For instance, when a symbol is used in a literary text, the student learns and understands the view of the author about a specific character or occurrence in the story. As students learn English, through the use of literature, learning becomes exciting and enjoyable, making the text clear to students²⁶. Below are different literary devices used in literature and their relevance in teaching English in the EFL university classroom.

Allegory

This literary device is used as a symbolic representation of characters and events in conveying specific ideas. The parable is a historical story used to send a message to the reader about a real-life situation. When they are used in English classrooms, the students can acquire a better way of obtaining good moral character as meant by the writer²⁷. Works of fictions contain characters used to convey the writers' ideas. In Allegorical novels, like George Orwell's *Animal Farm*, the characters are animals representing individuals or groups. Animals in *Animal Farm* are pigs, dogs, horses and donkeys. Writers often use such allegorical stories to mean the reader's exposure to economic, political and moral values in society. When

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allegories are used, English learners are equipped with excellent morals in the EFL course, as they may try to express themselves imitating the language of the characters.

Alliteration

Alliteration is a chain of words with similar soundings of the constant therein. The starting constant sound of the phrase is comparative to each other. Writers use this tool in literature to captivate the mind of the reader²⁸. When a writer gives a title like *Sense and Sensibility*, he can draw the attention of the reader and makes him or her want to know more about the story. In poetry, alliteration is commonly used and plays a significant role in sharpening the EFL English learners based on understanding and creating interest to the student²⁹.

Allusion

An allusion is an indirect phrase or figure of speech used to refer to a specific person or event which is outside the text in question. For instance, a writer may apply to a person as acting smart like Einstein. This is an allusion to the famous real-life person called Albert Einstein, who was well known as a theoretical physicist³⁰. In English classes, references help the students understand more about the world outside the context. By wanting to know why the writer referred to an event, situation, or character outside the story, the EFL students search and get a better view of the real-life historical field.

Anaphora

Throughout a piece of writing, a particular phrase or word may be appearing severally in sentences. This is called anaphora. It technically hits the mind of the reader by provoking it due to the repetitive art. In the process of reading the repeated phrase or word, the reader thinks about it and internalizes it, creating a better understanding of the reason behind it. In English classrooms, authors use anaphora in poetry and speeches to captivate the mind of the reader and emphasize on a point to him or her about a specific occurrence or character. With the use of this tool in the English class, the learners better understand the intention of the author in a particular context. For example, Martin Luther King's 1963 speech was full of the repeated phrase "I have a Dream..." at the beginning of every sentence to emphasize what he dreamt about³¹.

Anastrophe

Anastrophe comes in when the writer reverses the correct standard format of arranging words in a sentence. A sentence is organized in the verb, subject, and then adjective form. But the writer, through the use of

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anastrophe, may alter this arrangement to an adjective, verb-subject format. For instance, a sentence like, "Are you there?", may be written as "There, are you?" The tool is used to create interest to the reader and may add flavour to the English language by adjusting the commonly known formats of sentences to the learners. In EFL classrooms, the students are attracted to the tool which interests them while analyzing a piece of writing stylistically.

Chiasmus

A literature figure of speech where a reversed sentence or phrase follows the sentence or phrase in terms of order and arrangement of words³². Chiasmus is used in EFL classrooms to enable the students to get the emphasis set by the writer concerning a particular character, theme, or situation in the story. This tool allows the English learner to pay keen interest in the piece of writing as meant by the author. For instance, "Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country." By John F. Kennedy³³. It is so exciting and draws the attention of the EFL learner, keeping him or her thinking about what the author means.

Flashbacks

The use of flashbacks is also a fascinating tool in teaching English. Flashbacks are the events or activities that happened in the past as compared to the time of narration or the current time in the context. Authors use flashbacks to shed light on the reader concerning past events or occurrences. The EFL learner can obtain a historical background about a particular event, character, or situation, which helps him or her understand why the circumstances stand as they are currently in the story. The English learners are well exposed to the history of the plots in the story through the use of flashbacks. For example, in *Gone Girl*, the flashback is well applied, where every chapter is connected to the previous one³⁴.

Metaphor

This is when the author compares one thing to another with the two sharing an item in stock but are different in other aspects. Through the use of this tool of literature, the author uses two objects, events, situations, or persons, and compares them. For example, in *Romeo and Juliet*, Romeo compares Juliet to the sun. These are two different objects but share a typical character of beauty³⁵. When metaphors are used in the EFL University classrooms, excellent expression skills are instilled in the learners. Therefore, the dynamic treatment of different literary tools enables learners to develop their linguistic skills and encourage their interpretative abilities.

4.0 Conclusion

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The paper discusses how literary texts are used in the EFL classroom and the benefits of literature in developing the students' language skills. The paper has shown how literary texts can be used in designing, motivating, and stimulating learning in classrooms. Different literary devices have been explained in detail on how authors apply them. The importance of using narratives, poetry, and other forms of literature in learning is well elaborated in the paper. In summary, the use of literary texts in the EFL classroom has multiple benefits to learners. First, it assists learners in making use of English for communication purposes. Learners can communicate effectively through the help of different literary devices learned in class. Second, it stimulates the involvement of students emotionally and aesthetically. Consequently, the use of the literary devices involves the participation and involvement of learners in EFL classes which promotes their growth in the literature application. Third, it helps the learners to be competent in writing skills and expressions in the English language. Nevertheless, many poetry and novel authors develop these skills through learning English using literature tools in class. Forth, learners can understand different cultural values of English speaking people and of the characters used in literature books as analyzed in classrooms. Fifth, it encourages the extensive reading and understanding of novels and poetry by learners after an intensive analysis of the authors' themes and characters in classrooms. Lastly, EFL students will get a chance to practice their critical thinking skills in real-life situations. They can apply the learned skills in problem-solving situations as critical thinkers.

Due to many benefits derived from the use of literary devices in EFL classrooms, there is a need to continue applying them as useful tools in teaching English. Therefore, teachers should be encouraged to continue using literary devices, even in places where they are rarely applied. However, more empirical research is required to help in the validation of new approaches in which literature can be integrated into the EFL language classroom. Besides, more research will also assist in understanding how learners respond to literature that is taught in a foreign language. More research will also be required to conduct a systematic evaluation of the literary components applicable to teaching the English language.

5.0 ENDNOTES

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