

Teaching Literature to Algerian Undergraduate EFL Students: The Issue of Culture

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Abstract

Teaching literature to Algerian undergraduate EFL students, despite its merits and benefits, is a challenging task. In fact, literature appears strange to many students because it is culturally charged. Therefore, it would be difficult for them to grasp the conceptual notions embedded in many canonical texts. Yet, in dealing with this intricate issue and in an attempt to bring the students closer to the social, moral and cultural values portrayed in the text, some teachers, as evidenced through classroom observation, dare to go to the extreme in emphasizing the foreign cultural aspects of the text, sometimes at the expense of their students' own culture. In order to bridge this gap and in an endeavour to reinforce an intercultural stance to teaching literature, this research argues first for incorporating English literature by Muslim /Arab writers alongside Western literature. Secondly, it recommends encouraging students' personal responses to enhance their independency in interpreting and appreciating literature.

Key words: Arab/Muslim writers, Culture, Literature, Literary appreciation, Personal response, Western literature.

1. Introduction

Though the integration of literature in foreign language education is sometimes questioned and even opposed (Littlewood, 1986), in recent decades literature has enjoyed a prestigious place in EFL curricula worldwide and its contribution towards language learning has remarkably been re-considered (Duff & Maley, 1991). It is also enlightening to point to the fact that this upsurge of interest in literature has resulted in a multitude of scholarly works and publications outlining and theorizing formal teaching approaches and methods to better cope with literary texts, particularly in the EFL context (Khatib, Rezaei & Derakhshan, 2011).

Undeniably, teaching literature in a non-native context is a complex enterprise that entails both specialization and flexibility. Within this course of thought, the focus of this research is to unveil the specificities of teaching literature by drawing special attention to the sensitiveness of handling the literary component of the English language. Recurrently, literature teachers encounter the huge challenge to persuade students embrace literature

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despite the benefit and the joy that this latter is likely to offer to them. At least two major reasons constitute this attitude of resistance and apprehension among students. The linguistic aspect is the most common one; it mainly stems from the claim that literature is overloaded with alien vocabulary and complex syntactic structure (Lazar, 1993). The second aspect is directly related to and strongly associated with the cultural load of literary texts, which might sometimes pose immense hindrances to students in achieving aesthetic appreciation owing to complex cultural connotations and foreign references (Collie & Slater, 2000). On this basis, this empirical study was basically undergone to investigate this intricate issue in the Algerian EFL literature classroom and strived to come up with some practical suggestions that would hopefully surmount the existing inadequacies.

Objectives of the Study

The major objectives of the study were:

- ✓ Promote teachers' awareness of the sensitiveness of handling the cultural loads of literary texts particularly in an EFL context.
- ✓ Increase students' involvement in building up and defending their own literary judgments.
- ✓ Enhance an intercultural stance to teaching literature in the foreign language classroom.

Research Questions

The research was set to explore and respond to a number of issues surrounding the teaching of literature in the Algerian EFL context. More specifically, it intended to answer the following questions:

- ✓ How is literature being presented to Algerian undergraduate EFL students?
- ✓ How do teachers handle the cultural loads of literary texts?
- ✓ To what extent is the applied literature teaching methodology conducive to promoting students' literary appreciation?

Research Hypotheses

The hypotheses of the research were as follows:

- ✓ Literature teaching is, to a larger extent, teacher-centred, and consequently, the process is characteristically informative.
- ✓ Teachers heavily stress the foreign cultural assumptions embedded in texts without evoking those of their students.
- ✓ The implemented methodology does little in assisting students achieve a personal appropriation of literature.

2. Literature Review

In line with the above research questions and objectives, an attempt was made to provide a relevant literature review to delimit the scope of the study. To this end, the theoretical framework was focused on the significance of literature as a source for culture teaching; this is an area of research that necessitated examining the tenets of the cultural approach to teaching literature and the benefit that would be gained from its implementation on pedagogical grounds. Subsequently, an account was made on the notion of literary appreciation with particular emphasis on the vital role of students' personal and active responses to literature.

2.1. Literature as a Source for Teaching the Target Culture

It is axiomatic that learning a foreign language cannot be divorced from learning its culture. The two entities are tightly intertwined and inseparable. Brown (1987) accordingly posits that language and culture “are intricately interwoven such that one cannot separate the two without losing the significance of either language or culture” (p.123).

Yet, with regard to the foreign language context, learning about the foreign culture and approaching its multiple dimensions is rather a complex issue, in the sense that the students have quite limited or, sometimes, no direct contact with the target community. This in turn is meant to be a strong argument and a valid justification for the integration of literature, as a source for culture teaching, in foreign language programmes. From another angle and in an overt disagreement with the claim that (written) literature today might appear to us problematic or even obsolete because of the unprecedented proliferation of electronic media that are significantly praised for being more representative of the target culture, Hall (2005) points out to the indisputable fact that literature as writing is originally a form of verbal art, and therefore, it cannot, by no means, be excluded from the wider cultural context in which it was first produced. Indeed, despite its fictitious aspect, literature is a powerful means to spot the social, historical and political frameworks of the target community (Lazar, 1993).

In her extensive defense on the vital role of culture in successful foreign language learning, Kramsch (1993) praises the value of literature in enabling the students to overcome cultural barriers, and hence, developing a sense of cross-cultural understanding. She considers literature a gateway to “a world of attitudes and values, collective imaginings and historical frames of reference that constitute the memory of a people or a speech community” (p.175). Being an artifact, the literary text is culture in action. It helps the students acquire practical communicative skills. More to this point, Collie & Slater (2000) assert that literature can offer vivid contexts within which characters from different social backgrounds could be genuinely depicted and adequately represented. Therefore, through reading literature, the students can take immense advantage of the exceptional authenticity of the literary discourse to gain deeper insights into the system of thought of the target society; they come to meet its people’s beliefs, their customs and even the way they speak and converse.

2.2. Teaching Literature within the Cultural Approach

In elaborating their methodological framework for teaching literature, Carter & Long (1991) have suggested three major approaches: the language based approach, the personal growth approach and the cultural approach. Both the language-based approach and the personal growth approach are rather student-centred and much more driven by linguistic purposes, though the personal growth model stresses an extra motivational dimension relating to the necessity of connecting students with the themes exposed in the texts, and thus, using literature for personal development (Savvidou, 2004).

The cultural approach, on the other hand, is often regarded as being the most traditional approach to teaching literature. The essence of its implementation requires the teacher to provide the students with useful factual information about literary texts, including political, historical and social contexts, in addition to biographies of writers and synopses of works. It equally underlies surveying the developmental stages of the different literary genres and movements, seeking to bring the students closer to the study of literature and criticism.

However, being transmissive in its very nature, this approach is sometimes criticized for being more teacher-fronted. It considers the text as an artifact whose value basically lies in introducing the students to and familiarizing them with the cultural norms and mores of the target community. Stated differently, the practice of teaching within this approach is oriented towards highlighting and discussing the philosophical and the moral values embedded in literary texts. Carter & Long (1991) argue that such pedagogy places the students in a better position to “understand and appreciate cultures and ideologies different from their own” (p.2). Raising the students’ cultural awareness and allowing them to discover and appreciate different universal thoughts through literature is indeed another way of inculcating in them a reflective attitude towards their own culture and identity.

2.3. Literary Appreciation

An efficient literature teaching should ideally be centered on developing in the students the necessary competencies of evaluating and tasting literature (Showalter, 2003). The practice of reading literature itself becomes a rewarding activity when the students are prompted to raise critical questions about the text to ultimately reach convincing and evidenced answers to them. Nilson & Donelson (2001) opine that good readers “begin developing this critical sense in literature...they move away from a simple interest in what happened in a story. They want logical development and are no longer satisfied with stereotypes” (p.14). Seen from this very specific perspective, teaching literature requires the instructor to assist the students in constructing meaning by drawing on their own thinking skills and experiences. Delving deeply in the text and striving to fill in potential gaps in it serves a genuine intellectual exercise conducive to widening their sense of imagination as well as opening their horizons.

Much literature exists on the significance of promoting literary appreciation in students (Madaus & Stufflebeam 1989, Lazar 1993, Nilson & Donelson, 2001). However, before probing the extent to which students can develop literary appreciation particularly in an EFL context, it seems wiser to wonder what this term refers to. Nilson & Donelson (2001) associate literary appreciation with the process within which readers come to gauge their interpretive responses to a given work of art. As such, it refers to the ability to invest in the sophistication and complexity of literature so as to determine its value and taste its artistic delight. Based on this idea, Nilson & Donelson (2001) opine that successful literature teaching seems to rest upon two major parameters. The former is the appropriateness and the suitability of the text through which students can improve their language, character, and thinking skills. The latter is the sufficient amount of independency and autonomy granted to them in establishing a genuine, spontaneous and personal connection with the content of the text. This particular aspect has been accentuated by Madaus & Stufflebeam (1989) saying that:

In literary appreciation it is common to present situations which give pupils an opportunity to indicate the facts they know about good literature rather their liking of good literature. In the field of drama it is not uncommon to use situations which test the pupils’ recall of the teacher’s opinion of the quality of certain dramatic productions rather than their own critical evaluation of these dramatic productions (p.81).

The above assertion seems, to a larger extent, representative of and relevant to many EFL literature teaching contexts wherein the students’ interaction with the text is all too often

minimal due to the typical informative and unidirectional approach to teaching literature that reduces their roles to reiterating and duplicating the teacher's views and interpretations mainly for exam-oriented purposes (Kheladi, 2017).

3. Research Method

Because of the nature of the issue raised in this research, and in an attempt to locate its sources and implications, the researcher opted for a case study approach. Being an empirical enquiry, a case study "is a method of collecting and organizing data so as to maximize our understanding of the unitary character of the social being or object studied." (Dornyei, 2007, p.152). The studied object within this research was the teaching of literature to undergraduate EFL students whose level of literary sophistication is intermediate.

The data were collected through a three-month long observation of the practice of teaching literature (British&American) at the English Department, Tlemcen University, Algeria. On this basis, the process involved the observation of three (03) teachers whose experience in teaching literature varied from six to ten years. Thus, those teachers have been in a close relationship with literature, and their familiarity with the field and its pedagogical specificities is likely to assist them in creating and sustaining a supporting learning environment that allows the students to appreciate literature and achieve a solid engagement with it.

In conformity with the conventional ethical standards of academic research, the researcher requested the permission of attending and observing the lectures from the participant teachers whom, without hesitation, accepted to collaborate. Commenting on the significance of classroom observation, Cohen, Lawrence, & Keith (2007) write that this research tool "offers an investigator the opportunity to gather 'live' data from naturally occurring social situations. In this way, the researcher can look directly at what is taking place in situ rather than relying on second-hand account"(p.396).

The longitudinal observation process was undergone to obtain a clear idea on the way literature courses are run with a particular emphasis on the issue of handling the cultural loads of literary texts as well as students' reactions towards teachers' presentations of foreign cultural assumptions carried in the studied texts. This, in turn, is meant to lead the researcher to draw important conclusions on the efficacy of the applied teaching methodology in promoting literary appreciation among students.

The findings of the study were qualitatively analyzed and interpreted with reference to the claims, views and assumptions of authorities on the teaching of literature. Dornyei (2007) accordingly argues that the value of a qualitative analysis lies basically in its practicality in achieving an understanding of the situation under investigation from the researcher's own interpretation of data.

4. Findings and Discussion

The observation process displayed the fact that the informative approach is predominant in the Algerian EFL literature classroom. Seemingly, teachers are still attached to the traditional assumption that "first rate" teaching is primarily a matter of imparting to the students a massive amount of knowledge about the text and the context surrounding its production. Although this practice, on the surface of it, appears to some extent understandable as students didn't have a sufficient literary background, and therefore, compensating for this

gap was deemed necessary, one has to question and put under scrutiny the relevance of literature within a teaching context that generates passivity among students instead of increasing their involvement with it. Indeed, throughout the observed lectures, students' participation was at minimum except when they felt familiarity with the themes of texts. This was, for instance, the case when teachers introduced them to the literary era of "Romanticism". It was in fact a teaching setting within which the student exhibited a remarkable interest in responding to the romantic texts; they showed a higher level of motivation and enthusiasm in deciphering the messages conveyed in the poems of William Wordsworth and the novels of Mary Shelly. Arguably, the students invested in their theoretical knowledge of the main characteristic features of romantic literature to achieve a certain empathy with the studied texts. Some of them even relied on their previous experiences with film adaptations to render the major events of plots. This was particularly the case when they dealt with Mary Shelly's gothic novel *Frankenstein*.

The observation process also revealed that the study of literary text tended to be centered on enlightening the cultural dimensions of the target community (British/American) without evoking the corresponding ones in the local culture. The mere transposition of the conceptual notions of culturally charged texts sometimes put the students in embarrassing situations to embrace such notions as they considered them threatening to their own culture and identity. As a matter of fact, the researcher witnessed teaching situations wherein the observed teachers referred to John Donne's "metaphysical poetry", which is highly intellectualized, carrying a lot of ambiguities and paradoxes relating to sensitive religious and philosophical issues, such as questioning the existence of God and the implications of predestination. The interpretation of many students' facial expressions proved a clear feeling of discomfort and uneasiness in negotiating such notions.

This is, however, not to devaluate the significance of illuminating the cultural dimensions portrayed in the literary text, that are undoubtedly conducive to attaining the fullest understanding of its message; it is rather a point of caution that teachers need to consider in presenting the cultural freight of the text to EFL students. In this respect, authorities on literature teaching such as Carter & Long (1991), Lazar (1993) Parkinson & Thomas (2004), to name only a few, consider the cultural background of students a *sine qua non* for ensuring a genuine engagement with literature. Lazar (1993) claims that "the students' cultural background and their social and political expectations will help or hinder their understanding of a text" (p.53). Her view is an overt implication that teachers have to opt for texts that are culturally familiar to the students otherwise they would not empathize with them. She further argues that familiarity with the references that are close to the students' own culture may considerably help them activate their existing prior knowledge (schemata), and this, in turn, would boost their understanding. This is another way of saying that engaging students with literature cannot be attained when the selection of texts falls on narratives that are distant in time and place as they may perplex the students. This state of affairs would deliberately lead us to make a brief reference to the content of EFL literature syllabi in the Algerian context. The literature syllabus currently in use at graduate studies is primarily designed for the study of classical texts, and as such, it tends to exclude other forms of contemporary writings. What is more, the predominant chronological classification of literary texts has urged teachers to approach literary studies with vague and typically informative

objectives that contribute little to enabling students penetrate underlying meanings and gain control over textual processes (Showalter, 2003).

It was also clearly noticed, throughout the observation process, that the students' cultural unfamiliarity with some texts unavoidably resulted in an overall dependence on the teacher's interpretations. Consequently and inevitably, the students turned to study literature by listening to the teachers' own translations and judgments instead of assuming active roles in constructing meaning. Within such a quasi unilateral model of handling literature, the observed teachers over emphasized the cultural notions of many canonical texts with no explicit reference to those in the home culture. This was clearly noticed when they introduced their students to the Transcendentalist Movement in American literature. In dealing with the writings of the famous American Transcendentalists, such as Emerson and Thoreau, teachers made no reference to the Oriental literature and more specifically to the "Sufi" literature in the Muslim World, despite the fact that Transcendentalism, as claimed by Jahanbour (2007), found many of its teachings in foreign literature. Quite similar to Transcendentalism, the "Sufi" poetry has praised the significance of the spiritual aspect of religion, making it an equal source for piety and purity besides holy texts. Both movements believed in the goodness of man and his ability to reach perfectibility (Jahanbour, 2007). Unfortunately, the observed teachers did not invest in initiating a comparative stance between Emerson's poetry and the Sufi poetry of El Emir Abd El Kader -an outstanding Algerian military, religious and literary figure who led for a long period of time the revolutionary struggle against the French colonialism- though self-reliance, individualism and the love of God are found in the poetry of both figures despite their different religious backgrounds (Ghenim, 2013).

This practice of neglecting aspects of the source culture is in itself paradoxical with the ideal objectives of teaching literature. Teachers need to be aware that the intercultural approach to foreign language education is largely based on bringing into the classroom both the target culture and the mainstream culture. Hence, if literature is to matter, students are to be given space to let out their own interpretations of texts without excluding or dismissing their own cultural identity. Detecting cultural assumptions underlying the target literature is ideally a process that ought to be exploited in making students well aware of their own culture and identity. Thus, drawing comparison between the target culture and the mainstream culture is rather seen as a reinforcing drive in promoting cross-cultural understanding and tolerance through literature. In a cogent comment on this tendency in teaching literature, Schwarz (2008) writes that "the borders that separate the study of national literatures and cultures will continue to break down and our interest in previously neglected cultures and literatures will grow. Such changes will continue to transform the structure of literary departments-which have already undergone considerable changes"(pp.173-147). On this basis, teachers, being educators and professional practitioners, have to reflect soundly on the responses and prejudices that might come out from discarding or playing down their students' native culture and literature.

5. Redressing the Imbalance: Suggested Strategies

On the basis of the obtained findings and in an attempt to cope with the issue raised in the present study, two main recommendations have been accordingly put forward. The first one underlies the introduction of English literature by Arab/Muslim writers. This, however, does

not necessarily mean that this kind of literature is typically religious; it is rather a literature which depicts and portrays many aspects of the Islamic/ Arab culture in relation to the target culture. Secondly, the researcher will argue, with illustration, for the necessity of encouraging a reader response stance to reading literature as it helps liberate the students' thoughts and feelings to conceive literature as a means for self-expression. In what follows is a detailed account on the two recommendations.

5.1. Incorporating English Literature by Muslim /Arab writers

Indisputably, implementing literature by writers from different cultures and backgrounds in the EFL classroom is conducive to enriching and extending the students' knowledge about other cultures, particularly through exposing them to the differences and similarities between their own culture and those of other communities (Collie&Slater, 2000). Therefore, incorporating English literature by Muslim/Arab writers alongside Western literatures is of capital importance to increase the students' cultural awareness and dispel forms of negative stereotypes and radical prejudices. The literary education within this compromising paradigm is likely to pave the way for teachers to consolidate a stance of openness towards otherness by encouraging their students' willingness to encounter divergent cultural affiliations.

What is more, involving the students in reading different texts including those produced in their ethnic and /or cultural circle can help them understand better their own cultural heritage and those of others as well. Indeed, besides reading the literature of other groups, dealing with the literature that represents one's own ethnic and cultural background is indispensable for developing a healthy self-concept. This hybrid approach to teaching literature, so to speak, helps create a sense of belonging while its most salient accomplishment is to overcome both undesirable side-effects of acculturation and biased ethnocentrism. It is in this sense that this approach is likely to facilitate the task of perceiving otherness with the lenses of tolerance and understanding (Stern, 1987).

Exposing the students to literary works that represent the culture of people who fall outside the target culture (often British and American) will serve a powerful medium for understanding a melting world in a globalized era. To illustrate this state of affairs, one might suggest the incorporation of literary works produced by Muslim/Arab writers in the target language community. Chambers (2015) comments on the proliferation of the literature produced by Muslim/Arab authors in the UK since the 1950s. She writes that "the 1950s was a richly productive decade for literature by authors of Muslim heritage writing in and about the UK. This should not surprise us given the huge population displacement during and after the Second World War" (p.144).Indeed, many works by this category of writers can be brought into the present discussion. Yet, suffice it, one might suggest, for illustrative purposes, the incorporation of two outstanding pieces of writing:

- ✓ Leila AbouLela's *The Translator* (1999): It is a story of a young Sudanese widow "Sammar" who used to work as an Arabic translator at a British University. After the death of her husband "Trig", she got estranged from her young son, nudging herself into deep grief. Yet, things radically changed in her life when she met a Scottish academic named "Rae". Working together, they loved each other though to her, Rae comes from another alien culture, but they ultimately succeeded to reach compromise and harmony. Sammar's

outstanding skills in translating Arabic and more particularly the Quran into English put her into a better discursual position to explain the true teachings of Islam to Rae who will, later in the novel, convert to Islam.

- ✓ Ahdaf Soueif's *The Map of Love* (1999): Often categorized as a piece of postcolonial writing, this novel depicts Egypt and its beautiful landscape through the eyes of an English widow lady named Anna Winterbourne, who falls in love not only with an Egyptian man -“Sharif”- but with the country and its people. Throughout her stay in Egypt, and because of her love relationship with Sharif, Ann Winterbourne succeeded to overcome political struggles to embrace wholeheartedly many aspects of the Egyptian culture. Indeed, despite the fact that the novel has much to convey on the issue of colonialism and imperialism practiced by the British over Egypt, it expressively denotes and exemplifies the power of love in overcoming cultural barriers and surmounting ideological differences.

5.2. Significance of Students' Personal Responses

The second suggestion in dealing with the cultural dilemmas that would result from culturally charged texts is to give the students the full opportunity to voice and defend their own interpretations of texts. This, in turn, runs parallel with the tenets of the reader-oriented theories (Kheladi, 2020). Emphasizing the role of the participating reader, the reader response approach acknowledges the validity of meaning produced by the reader through the transaction with the text. On this transaction, Rosenblatt (1960) writes that “Out of the particular sensations, images, feelings, and ideas which have become linked for him [the reader] with the verbal symbols, he creates a new organization..... only through a recasting of his own experiences can he share the writer's mood, his vision of man or society or nature” (p.305).

If literary appreciation in the EFL classroom is sought, it becomes crucial to encourage the aesthetics of reception as it endows the students with the prospect of reaching autonomy in making meaning. This solid engagement with literature allows them to grow as individual active readers. In other terms, the advocacy of a student –centred reading of literature is a plea to re-consider the role of students in building meaning within a discursive environment away from the authoritative judgments all too often dictated and legitimized by instructors (Showalter,2003).

Regarding the influence of the teacher's own interpretation of the literary text and its direct relation with clouding the issue of cultural allusions the text may carry, the example below is but an illustrative instance of the dilemma the students are likely to experience when dealing with a text which, though at the linguistic level seems to be simple, its conceptual dimensions are bit complex (Benmoussat,2003).The lines below are taken from William Blake's famous poem “*The Chimney Sweeper*”(Songs of Innocence1789) .It will be evidenced that the possible interpretations supplied by the teacher will in one way or another bring into play typical biblical references that are beyond many EFL students' backgrounds, and some of them might well resist them.

*There's little Tom Dacre, who cried when his head
That curled like a lamb's back, was shaved, so I said,
"Hush, Tom! Never mind it, for when your head's bare,*

You know that the soot cannot spoil your white hair. (Lines 5-8)

In analyzing the quatrain above, many students would argue, in line with the theme of the poem, that the word “lamb” symbolizes innocence of the little chimney sweep Tom Dacre. This is indeed relevant for the general message of the poem as the poet compares the white hair of Tom, after being cut, to the lamb’s back. Yet, it would be perplexing for them if the teacher intervenes and uses the word in a biblical connotation, which implies the innocence and the purity of Jesus Christ (Afrin, 2012). This is because in the Christian faith, Jesus is referred to as the “Lamb of God”. He sacrificed his life for the sake of obtaining salvation for all people. Therefore, the young sweeps were indeed sacrificing their lives; they were victims of industrialized Britain.

To clarify such perplexing biblical allusions further, let us examine the next quatrain:

*And by came an Angel, who had a bright key,
And he opened the coffins and set them all free;
Then down a green plain, leaping, laughing they run,
And wash in a river and shine in the Sun.* (Lines 13-16)

Very likely, the students would interpret the word “Angel” as a messenger coming from God (Allah in the Islamic faith) to set the chimney sweeps free after being locked in coffins, and this again seems relevant given the miserable situation endured by the little children. The teacher, on the other hand, might well refer to the “biblical” connotation of the words “Angel” and “bright key” by asserting, for instance, that this scene is equated with the one in which Jesus gives the keys of the kingdom of heaven to Peter (An apostle of Christ): “ I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” (Matthew 16:19)

The last two lines of the poem are also worth being dealt with as they carry another connotation that is not easy for EFL students to grasp. Let us consider and read the lines closely and critically.

*Though the morning was cold, Tom was happy & warm;
So if all do their duty, they need not fear harm.* (Lines 27-28)

A very possible interpretation that could be suggested by students is that despite the slog the sweeps were immersed in and the coldness of weather, Tom (a sweep) was rather happy and warm. This ironic scene is worth tackling in the analysis of the theme of the poem as well as in highlighting its stylistic tactics. Yet, the last line in particular might well confuse students. Indeed, what does it mean that if children, who were involved in toil, do their duty, they need fear no harm? This is in fact purely religious and tightly related to Puritanism. In the puritanical faith, people, including children, have to suffer in this life before being rewarded in the hereafter. Therefore, inculcating in young children rigour to face hardships has noble religious and spiritual ends (Benmoussat, 2003).

To recall, this is not to entirely undermine or devalue the religious and philosophical interpretations offered by teachers as they are all often useful and relevant for the study of

literature. It is neither an assertion to divorce completely the moral philosophical approach to teaching literature. The intention is rather to sensitize teachers that the cultural foreignness and the conceptual notions of many culturally dense texts may impede students' comprehension. On this basis, endorsing a reader response approach to reading, and therefore, acknowledging and recognizing the students' own interpretations is likely to boost their interaction and transaction with the text. Therefore, to reduce the undesirable effect of the potential anxiety and uneasiness among students to establish connection with the literary discourse at this intermediate level, teachers need first and foremost to instill in their students the desire for and the interest in reading. Such enthusiasm is ideally founded on the premise that the literary text, being an artistic and educating material, is characteristically open to interpretation.

6. Limitations

In spite of the significance of the issue tackled in this study and the researcher's effort to locate its sources and implications on the pedagogical ground, it is quite important to consider the obtained findings and the suggested recommendations in the light of two main limitations. First, the context of research was limited to literature teaching at the English Department at Tlemcen University, Algeria. Therefore, further empirical research would be carried out on a larger scale with increased size of population. Second, the data was collected through one research instrument. It is rather preferable in such investigative studies to make use of multiple research instruments to cross-check data and capture other influential dimensions of the studied phenomenon.

7. Conclusion

The study evoked a sensitive issue in teaching literature in the Algerian EFL context; an issue that relates to the cultural load of texts and its impact on the students' responses to literature. Undeniably, many canonical texts are culturally dense that students would find it difficult to extract meaning and decipher messages. This issue, however, is further clouded by the practice of some teachers who would go to the extreme in emphasizing the conceptual notions embedded in the text on the one hand and imposing the meaning they consider relevant and valid on the other hand. In so doing, they tend to prevent student from achieving independency in interpreting and appreciating literature. This fact was evidenced through the process of classroom observation, and in response to it, the paper recommended the introduction of English literature by Muslim /Arab writers; a literature with which the students can feel a great deal of cultural familiarity, and hence, developing empathy with it. Introducing this kind of literature is not only meant to reinforce an intercultural stance to literary studies, but rather to EFL education in general. The second recommendation was mainly centered on encouraging the students' personal responses to literature. To this end, the significance of the reader response stance in fostering their literary appreciation was accordingly accentuated.

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