

## The Use of the Project-based Learning to Bridge the Gap between Teaching Literature and English Language Instruction

استخدام التعلم المعتمد على المشاريع لسد الفجوة بين تدريس الأدب وتعليم اللغة الإنجليزية

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### Abstract:

Literature has gained a plethora of attention in EFL classes for the last decades. Teachers find themselves swinging between the pans of teaching literature for the sake of literature and using it as a means to teach the language. Consequently, a gap between language and literature emerges and calls for adequate teaching methodologies. This paper intends to explore the loopholes of teaching English through literary texts in the department of English at Abbess Laghrour University and proposes a project-based approach to teach literary texts. Data have been gathered by the means of a questionnaire administered to teachers of the English Department. The obtained results show that teachers encounter difficulties in teaching literary texts to reach language goals and they find that project-based learning can help them in enabling learners to make well-informed decisions, construct their personal identities, and helps them in better communication.

**Keywords:** literary texts, Project-based Learning



لقد اكتسب الأدب اهتمامًا كبيرًا في فصول اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية على مدار العقود الماضية. يجد المعلمون أنفسهم يتأرجحون بين تدريس الأدب من أجل الأدب واستخدامه كوسيلة لتعليم اللغة. وبالتالي، تظهر فجوة بين اللغة والأدب وتستدعي منهجيات تدريس مناسبة. تهدف هذه الورقة إلى استكشاف ثغرات تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية من خلال النصوص الأدبية في قسم اللغة الإنجليزية في جامعة عباس لغرور وتقتح النهج القائم على المشروع لتدريس النصوص الأدبية. تم جمع البيانات عن طريق استبيان موجه لمعلمي قسم اللغة الإنجليزية حيث تظهر النتائج التي تم الحصول عليها أن المعلمين يواجهون صعوبات في تدريس النصوص الأدبية للوصول إلى

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الأهداف اللغوية وأنهم يجدون أن التعلم القائم على المشاريع يمكنهم من تمكين المتعلمين في اتخاذ قرارات مستنيرة ،  
وبناء هوياتهم الشخصية ، ومساعدتهم في تواصل أفضل  
الكلمات المفتاحية: نصوص أدبية ، التعلم القائم على المشاريع



## 1. Introduction

Language teaching is a process that has different goals varying from one country to another. However, what is commonly shared is eagerness for developing authentic materials to promote language learners' motivation. The use of literature to serve English language teaching purposes has gained a great deal of interest among practitioners all over the world. The controversy between studying literature as an independent field of study that calls for imagination and critical thinking and using it as a resource for English language teaching has emerged to call for adequate teaching methodologies that would help practitioners in their work. For McKay, (1982) Literature can be viewed as the language in use and can, therefore, be exploited for EFL learning purposes.

In the last decade, there has been an upsurge of interest in how literary texts can be used by language learners because their use in the EFL class would contribute in turning it into a vivid, motivating, and fruitful learning environment.

*Literature may have a wider educational function in the classroom in that it can help to stimulate the imagination of our students, to develop their critical abilities and to increase their emotional awareness. If we ask our students to respond personally to the texts we give them, they will become increasingly confident about expressing their own ideas and emotions in English. They will feel empowered by their ability to grapple with the text and its language, and to relate it to the values and traditions of their own society (Lazar, 1993p. 19).*

The Project-based method is one of the important methods of instruction that helps teachers teach languages through literary texts. Thomas (2010) refers to PBL as a teaching model that is organized through projects which involve complex and challenging questions or problems that indulge learners in different learning tasks such as; designing, problem-solving, decision-making, and/or investigative activities. Hence, PBL gives learners more opportunities for acquiring knowledge and doing tasks.

Literature has been introduced as a subject of study in the Algerian EFL classes many years ago. At the university level, literature was considered as an independent module, the aim of which is to shed light on the target literature and culture. Meanwhile, with the reforms that higher education has implemented, many questions seem to flow into the horizon about teaching literature. Literature teachers in the Department of English at Abbes Laghrour University find it arduous to teach literature to fulfill language purposes and hence face several challenges.

The present study attempts to answer the following questions:

1. What are the attitudes of the teachers towards the importance of literature in language teaching?
2. What are the challenges teachers meet while teaching literature?

The hypothesis set in this paper is that:

Developing a theoretical framework about project-based instruction can be useful in teaching language through literary texts.

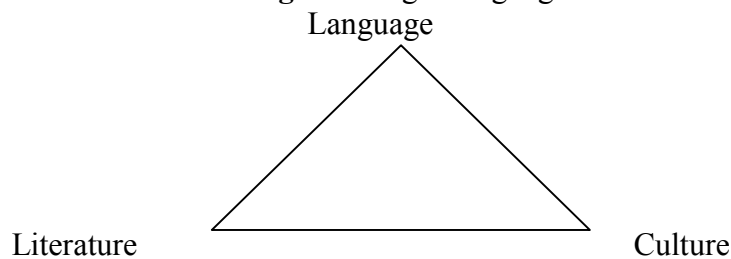
## 2. Review of Literature

### 2.1. The Place of Literature in the EFL Curriculum

Literature has always been considered as a fertile source of authentic texts in the language teaching curriculum (Sage, 1987). Literature should be used and incorporated in the language curriculum because it serves as a valuable authentic material a source of linguistic, cultural enrichment and a tool for personal involvement. (Collie & Slater,1990)

Carmen Chaves Tesser (1995) has suggested a foreign language curriculum model which contains three major pillars: Language, Literature, and Culture as shown in figure 1:

**Fig.1.** Foreign Language Curriculum



**Source:** Carmen Chaves Tesser (1959)

This triangle is headed by language which stands as a system as Kramsch (1998,p.3) describes it. Then lay literature and culture. Literature can be viewed as the written, filmed or performed record of a specific group. Culture is the social code that stands as an umbrella term for a group's

ideology, beliefs, and values. According to Chaves Tesser, language curricula should encompass the aforesaid components since they affect each other in a cyclic manner. "Language affects culture, which affects literature, which affects language". (Chaves Tesser, 1995)

Maley (1989) suggests some reasons for giving literature the potent place in the language classroom; namely, universality and diversified characteristics of literature, non-triviality of the inputs, and personal relevance that encloses the reader's experience with the author's imagination. Furthermore, it is very useful to expose learners to literature as a source of the unmodified language in the classroom because the skills learners acquire in dealing with difficult or unknown language can be used outside the class. Using literature in EFL classes also encourages interaction since literary texts are often rich multiple layers of meaning, and can be effectively mined for discussions and sharing feelings or opinions. Besides, literature expands language awareness for instance; asking learners to examine sophisticated or non-standard examples of language would make them more aware of the norms of language use (Widdowson, 1975). It is worth mentioning that Literature is motivating and educating through examining values in literary texts. It holds a high status in many cultures and countries. For this reason, students can feel a real sense of achievement at understanding a piece of literature.

## 2.2. Literature and Language Skills

Literature plays an undeniable role in teaching the four language skills: reading, writing, listening and speaking. These skills should not be taught apart, but they should be interwoven and interconnected. It helps learners to improve their reading skills by tackling the selected literary text from three main levels; literal, inferential, and personal. The first level intends to make learners answer questions about the text in general regarding the setting, the characters, and the plot. In the second level learners are asked to make speculations and interpretation of the material under study. The third level calls for the use of imagination and problem-solving abilities. The subsequent result of the activities given to developing reading skills can be set as a foundation for writing or speaking tasks. (Stern, 1991)

Learners can develop their writing skills through either modeling, which makes students write a text that is close to the original work, or exhibit originality and uniqueness of thinking, interpretation, and analysis. (Spack, 1985) There are two major types of writing based on literary texts: writing "on" literature, and writing "out" of literature. In the first type, learners

produce written paragraphs, in-class essays, and out-class essays. These writings are generally done before diving into the literary work. The second kind comes after reading the authentic literary material, in which learners can be assigned to add something to the original work or change it, write an inspired work based on the input, or even address a letter to the characters.

Although one might think that literature is only associated with reading and writing, it can play an equally vital role in developing listening and speaking skills. Teachers can present the literary text as an audio, or an audio-visual material to enhance learners' motivation and imagination. Learners do different tasks during and post-listening activities to check up their comprehension of the input. Out loud reading can also target the listening and the speaking abilities of the learners. Moreover, literature-based activities can be helpful for EFL learners who can dramatize, role play, and make group discussions.

Carter and Long (1991) suggest three models for reading literature in EFL classes:

**a) Language Model:** This model considers literature as a rich stock of linguistic features and draws students' attention to the grammatical, lexical and semantic aspects of a literary text.

**b) Cultural Model:** This approach views literature as a source of information about the culture of the society presented in the literary work. Since having knowledge of the target culture is necessary for learning the target language, this approach can be helpful for learners to develop an understanding of the language.

**c) Personal Growth Model:** Reading literature makes its readers think, imagine and reflect. This psychological and intellectual involvement with the reading of literary texts in the EFL language class develops students' ability for critical thinking, widens their stock of knowledge, and helps them be more actively involved in learning English through the literary texts.

It is worth mentioning that teaching English through literature has become a fashionable phenomenon. However, the teaching is to feed student heavy, repetitive and somewhat redundant literature, which has little or no relevance to his immediate problems (Turker, 1991). This affords little opportunity for creativity. The student is told of literary terms and the meanings of words and is finally asked to analyze the subject of a literary piece, which is often too abstract task for the non-native speaker. The process of the analysis, therefore, takes the form of repeating the material understanding mostly by memorization and at best, partly by rephrasing. Consequently, students may become frustrated by being able partially to understand but unable to respond. (Santhi, 2012, p.6)

### 2.3. Project-based Approach and Literature

Nowadays there is an increasing demand to improve the teaching practices at all levels of education especially higher education so as to improve the quality of teaching. Social skills and openness on the other are critical elements in language teaching and learning especially EFL. Gresham & Elliot (1990) defined social skills as “socially acceptable learned behaviors that enable a person to interact with others in ways that elicit positive responses”(p.1009).

The Project-based method is one of the most commonly used methods in advancing and activating the aforesaid skills. Project-based learning is defined as “a teaching method in which students gains knowledge and skills by working for an extended period of time to investigate and respond to a complex question, problem, or challenge” (BIE, 2003). It offers enormous advantages to the learners:

- a) Enhancing higher self-esteem and better communication skills through mixed ability groups. (Overby, 2011).
- b) Solving problems cooperatively and individually through critical thinking. (Tretten & Zachariou, 1995, p. 8).
- c) Arranging activities around a series of complex tasks that require interaction, team working and transferring knowledge into skills (Savin-Baden, 2007,p.13).

The Project-based method requires that teachers select a literary text that matches the learners’ interest; teachers are also required to allow for the learners’ choice and voice. The “authentic material” should make students use their critical thinking to study the text in hands.

In the EFL context, 21st- century students need not only good English language skills, but rather other skills to cope with the challenges represented by the rapid technological changes. The old school model that is based on the de-contextual reciting of facts is no longer effective to prepare students to overcome barriers in today’s world. On the contrary, students should be equipped with fundamental skills (Reading and writing) and 21st-century skills such as; teamwork, problem-solving, research gathering, and time management, information synthesizing, and utilizing high technological tools. (Edutopia, 2014)

**Table1. A Comparison Between The project-based Learning and the Traditional Learning**

| Project-based Learning  | Traditional Learning  |
|---|---|
| Student-centered approach in which students work cooperativ with the teacher to facilitate learning | Teacher-centered in which the teacher is the only authority |
| Constructing an individual’s  | Learners receive knowledge fro                              |

|                                   |                             |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| knowledge(learn by doing)         | the teacher                 |
| Focusing on the understanding     | Focusing on memorization    |
| Deep learning                     | Surface ( general) learning |
| Contextualized authentic learning | De-contextualized learning  |
| Working in groups                 | Working individually        |
| Performance-based assessment      | Traditional assessment      |

Source: Ziengenfuss, 2006

The Buck Institute for Education suggests the following points to consider creating an effective PBL programme:

1. Identify a challenging problem or a question which must be researched (not just Googled!) in order to expand knowledge and understanding of the area.
2. Feature real-world contexts which are both stimulating and interesting, and which will ultimately have an impact on the lives of the learners.
3. Engage the learners in associated cognitive processing as they sustain a level of inquiry.
4. Collaborate and communicate within the classroom community and beyond in order to help learners set themselves tasks, delegate, and carry out research.
5. Develop appropriate language awareness and language skills.
6. Evaluate, question, and self-reflect what has been achieved and how it could move forward and finally.
7. Produce a public product to present, display or exhibit to interested parties beyond the classroom.

(Buck Institute for Education, 2018).

This research tries to shed the light on the usefulness of implementing the project-based learning to teach English using Literature for university learners through exploring the difficulties teachers encounter in practice.

### 3. The Study

Our sample consists of 5 teachers in charge of teaching literature/literary texts in the Department of English at Abbess Laghour University, Khenchela.

In order to investigate the attitudes of the teachers of literature in the Department of English at Abbess Laghour University, Khenchela, and the challenges they come across while doing so, we opted for a descriptive study. We used a qualitative questionnaire, which is made of two main parts; the first part concerns the teachers' background information, and the

second is a three-point Likert scale comprising 10 statements aiming at exploring the teachers' attitudes towards teaching literature and PBL.

#### 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This questionnaire yielded two major types of data about the subjects under study:

a / Factual information about teachers in charge of teaching literature and literary texts in the Department of English.

b/ Attitudinal section to find out teachers' views and opinions regarding teaching literature for language purposes and towards implementing PBL to serve as a bridge between language and literature. This section is made up of ten (10) closed end questions to collect data in a relatively short period of time. (Dornyei, 2003)

##### Section One: Teachers' Factual Information

**Table1.** Background Information about the Respondents

**Source:** The Researcher's Field Work

| Characteristics of the Respondents  |           | Number | Percentage |
|---|-----------|--------|------------|
| Academic Degree   | MA        | 1      | 20%        |
|   | Magister  | 4      | 80%        |
|   | Doctorate | 00     | 00%        |
|   | Professor | 00     | 00%        |
| Teaching Experience   | 1-3       | 2      | 40%        |
|   | 3-6       | 1      | 20%        |
|   | 6-9       | 1      | 20%        |
|   | More      | 1      | 20%        |
| Teaching experience regarding teaching of literature/literary texts as a module | 1-3       | 1      | 20%        |
|   | 3-6       | 2      | 40%        |
|   | 6-9       | 2      | 40%        |
|   | More      | 00     | 00%        |

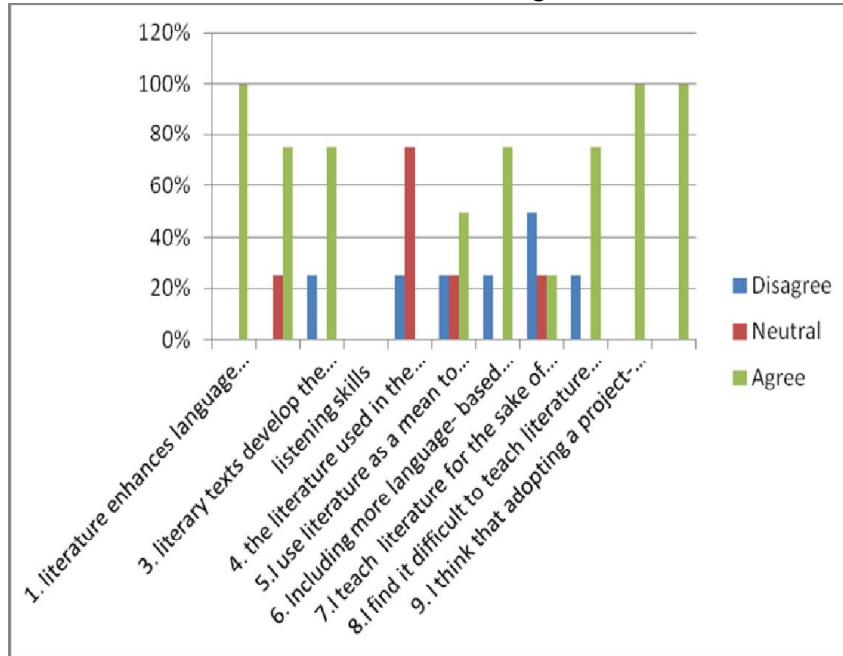
According to the results shown in table 1, we can notice that the majority of the respondents (80%) are permanent teachers holding the Magister degree. 40% of those teachers are comparatively novices holding an experience ranging from 1 to 3 years. On the other side, 80% have taught literature as a module for no less than three years as part-timers and permanent teachers.

##### Section Two: Teachers' views on teaching literature and PBL



In this section, a three-point Likert scale is used to explore the respondents' attitudes towards the previously mentioned items. The results are shown in the following figure:

**Fig.1.** Teachers' Attitudes towards Literature, Language, and Project-based learning



**Source:** The Researcher's Field Work

The obtained results show that teachers are aware of the importance of literature in enhancing language learning, 50% assert that they teach literature to develop learners' language-related skills; meanwhile, 75% find it difficult to achieve this goal due to the lecture-based method they follow in their teaching. All the respondents (100%) find that adopting an alternative method which is the project-based approach would make it easier and motivating to approach language through the literary texts.

To sum up, based on the results obtained from the analysis of the questionnaire we can answer the research questions of this paper as follows:

**1. What are the attitudes of the teachers at the Department of English, Abbes Laghrour University towards the importance of literature in language teaching?**

Teachers are aware of the vital role of using literature in language teaching so as to facilitate the learning process

**2. What are the challenges teachers meet while teaching literature?**

Teachers admit that they are facing several obstacles when teaching literature for the sake of language which may suggest that they lack experience and appropriate training as the majority of them (80%) are novices as been found in table 1.

### 5. Conclusion

Language teaching is not an easy task due to so many reasons; mainly those related to authentic materials, in this case, literature is the resort because of its richness and its interdisciplinary feature. LMD is a term that stands for the system followed in the Algerian universities in which English is a foreign language for both teachers and learners. Teachers in the Department of English at Abbes Laghrour University according to the results of this study, are aware of the role of literature in improving language learning through exploiting the literary texts. Furthermore, the teaching method represents a real challenge for the teachers. Besides, teachers do also believe that implementing a project-based approach would help them to use literature for the sake of language learning.

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**Appendix**

Dear Teachers,

This questionnaire is a part of a research work entitled “Bridging the Gap between Language and Literature through Project-based Instruction». It is architected to investigate the relationship between language and literature, especially literary texts. You are kindly invited to provide your insights.

Thank  
you for your collaboration  
The researcher

**Part I. Background Information**

Your degree.....

Years of Experience:.....

How long have you been teaching literature?.....

**Part II.** Please respond to these statements by ticking ( ) in the column you find most appropriate.

| Statements  | Disagre | Neutra | Agree |
|---|---------|--------|-------|
| 1. literature enhances language acquisition   |         |        |       |
| 2.literary texts help the accurate use of English   |         |        |       |
| 3. literary texts develop the students' reading, writing, speaking and listening skills   |         |        |       |
| 4. the literature used in the language syllabus is difficult for the learners to understand and use   |         |        |       |
| 5. I use literature as a means to teach language  |         |        |       |
| 6. Including more language-based activities and incentive reading materials of literary texts in class will improve the English standard of the student |         |        |       |
| 7. I teach literature for the sake of literature  |         |        |       |
| 8. I find it difficult to teach literature to serve language goals  |         |        |       |
| 9. I think that adopting a project-based approach would rather help me to teach language through literature.  |         |        |       |
| 10. I think that PBL can Bridge the Gap between Language and Literature   |         |        |       |