

## Incorporating Literary Texts in EFL Classrooms: Theory and Practice

**Dr. GHEDEIR BRAHIM Mohammed**

University of El-Oued, *ghedeir-mohamed@univ-eloued.dz*

**Dr. NAOUA Mohammed**

University of El-Oued, *mohamed-naoua@gmail.com*

**Received: 31/07/2021**

**Accepted: 26/10/2021**

### **Abstract**

*This study provides a review of ideas and research focusing on the role of literature in the EFL classrooms. It investigates whether or not literature has the capacity to enrich and enhance English as a foreign language teaching and learning practices. It focuses on the theoretical assumptions and pedagogical implications of using different literary texts in the context of teaching and learning English as a foreign language. In order to achieve the study's aims, a questionnaire targeting forty-five (45) second year English students from the University of El-Oued, Algeria was used as a data gathering tool. The survey investigates students' attitudes towards incorporating literary texts as a medium to enhance the mastery of the language.*

**Key words:** Attitudes; EFL learners; Literary texts; Literary theory; Literature.

### **ملخص**

تقدم هذه الدراسة مراجعة للأفكار والأبحاث التي تركز على دور الأدب في فصول اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية. في جانب آخر، تتحقق هذه الدراسة فيما إذا كان الأدب لديه القدرة على إثراء وتعزيز اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في التدريس وممارسات التعلم. وتركز هذه الدراسة على الافتراضات النظرية والآثار التربوية لاستخدام النصوص الأدبية المختلفة في سياق تعليم وتعلم اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية. ولتحقيق أهداف الدراسة، تم استخدام استبيان استهدف خمسة وأربعين (45) طالباً، السنة الثانية تخصص لغة إنجليزية من جامعة الوادي بالجزائر كأداة لجمع البيانات. يبحث الاستطلاع في اتجاهات الطلبة اتجاه دمج النصوص الأدبية كوسيلة لتعزيز إتقان اللغة. كما يفحص الاستطلاع تصورات الطلبة نحو معايير اختيار أنواع النصوص الأدبية. كشفت نتائج الدراسة أن موضوعات ومقاييس مثل مقدمة للأدب، و النقد الأدبي، والنظرية الأدبية ضرورية لمتعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية لأنها تزودهم بالمعرفة اللازمة لتحليل النصوص الأدبية المختلفة وتعزيز إتقانهم للغة.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** المواقف، متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، النصوص الأدبية، النظرية الأدبية، الأدب

\* Corresponding Author: Dr. GHEDEIR BRAHIM Mohammed

## 1. Introduction

From the eighteenth to the nineteenth century, literature was designated a much broader scope as an independent educational subject, including not exclusively poetry and fiction, but also history, biography, scientific, didactic and expository writings. However, the last two decades have been clearly marked by a special focus of work in literary and cultural theory, providing a strong basis for further research on the relationship between literature, language and education.

Recently, there has been a shift towards the study of literature and its incorporation in second and foreign language teaching. In the context of English Language teaching, literature is central in engaging learners' minds and feelings in genuine communication in English (Sage, 1987 in Rabb Khan and Alasmari, 2018). Hence, researchers claim the need to include literary texts into foreign languages curriculum (Cook, 1994; Shanahan, 1997; Hanauer, 2001; Carroli, 2008), or alternatively, advocate a content-based curriculum that would include literature components (Kramersch, 2013 in Bobkina and Dominguez, 2014). What is more, EFL teachers assert the potentiality of literary texts in terms of development of different aspects of English Language. It is argued that literature promotes EFL students vocabulary knowledge, knowledge of lexical phrases and fixed expressions, grammatical knowledge, language awareness, and sociolinguistic and pragmatic competences (Bobkina and Dominguez, 2014). Additionally, the focus on reading, mainly the reading of culturally authentic texts, has become one of the central claims for curriculum reform in EFL instruction (Swaffar, 1999; Arens and Swaffar, 2000; Dupuy, 2000).

Based on the background stated before, this research study demonstrates the significance of literary texts in English Language teaching and learning. The study aims at investigating the current beliefs and practices regarding the integration of literature and literary texts in EFL instruction. It attempts to explore the impact of the use of literary texts on ELT and EFL learners' mastery of the language. The study also sheds light on how literature can be incorporated as a language teaching material from the viewpoints of EFL learners at the University of El-Oued, Algeria.

This study tries to answer the following key questions:

- (1) What are EFL students' current beliefs and practices in integrating literature and literary texts in EFL practices ?
- (2) What is the significance of using literature in EFL instruction from the viewpoints of EFL learners?
- (3) What impact has the use of literary texts on EFL teaching and learning and on EFL learners' mastery of the language?
- (4) How can literature be incorporated in English language teaching and learning?

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. The Significance of Using Literature in EFL Classrooms

Brumfit and Carter (1986) claimed "Literature is an ally of language", and McKay (1982) said that "Literature presents language in discourse". Literary language is helpful for teaching and learning a language since its important purpose is the revelation of creativity,

of the knowledge of the self and of others manifested by that language used in literary context.

In mastering and developing different aspects and skills of English language, the role of literature is multi-facet as it promotes knowledge of vocabulary, phrases and specified expressions, knowledge of grammar, awareness of language, pragmatic and sociolinguistic proficiencies, educational, linguistic and psychological competencies and emphasis culturally authentic literary texts into EFL curriculum (Alasmari and Rabb Khan, 2018). In EFL classes, literary texts and literature in general are significant for both learning language and accomplishing educational goals as literature is viewed as the highest form of expression of the target language (Alasmari and Rabb Khan, 2018).

Khatib, Razaeei, and Derakhshan (2011) summarized the main justifications for the use of literature in EFL instruction in the following points:

- Authenticity: literature is an authentic input.
- Motivation: literature and literary texts are motivational due to their interesting subject matter and authenticity.
- Cultural and intercultural awareness: literature promotes intercultural awareness via addressing universal concepts.
- Intensive and extensive reading: literature is good for intensive and extensive reading texts.
- Sociolinguistic and pragmatic knowledge: literature, due to its authenticity, raises awareness of `appropriateness` through contextualized knowledge.
- Grammar and vocabulary knowledge: literature provides a wide range of grammatical and lexical input in authentic contexts.
- Language basic skills: literature provides excellent contexts for both input and practice in the four language skills, listening, speaking, reading and writing.
- Emotional intelligence: literature is a good source for activating emotional intelligence through relating to fictional characters.
- Critical thinking: literature motivates students to reflect, criticize, analyze, interpret, and connect (Whitener, 2019).

In brief, literature fosters learners` reading skills, promotes tolerance, and helps learners become creative. Literary texts are an ideal tool that develop creative comprehension and enhance the communicative competence of learners. The reasons of incorporating literature in English Language teaching include: expanding EFL students` language awareness, encouraging language acquisition, developing students' interpretative abilities, and educating the whole person (Alasmari and Rabb Khan, 2018). Literature enhances listening, simulates speaking, promotes reading, and inspires writing.

## **2.2. Challenges in Integrating Literary Texts in English Language Teaching**

Despite the fact that integrating literature in EFL classrooms offers various useful benefits, EFL teachers encounter several challenges in incorporating literary texts in EFL instruction. One of the most common problems encountered by EFL teachers is the language of literature. Many EFL teachers as well as students view literature as a hindrance since the

literary language is seen as sophisticated and incomprehensible. Additionally, the size and length of the literary text is also considered as one of the major challenges. For some EFL teachers and students long texts may seem more difficult while others assert that short literary texts incorporate more difficulties because they do not offer extended contextual support and repetition that longer texts do (Duff and Maley, 1990). Finally, literature and literary texts can bring problems if they are seen as carrying an undesirable freight of cultural connotations (Flora, 2004: 4).

All in all, these challenging factors in incorporating literature in ELT should be well counted by EFL teachers to enhance EFL teaching and learning. Understanding these challenges will enable English instructors to identify the areas that need improvement so as to best use literature in English language teaching.

### **2.3. How to Use Literature and Literary Texts in EFL Instruction?**

Most scholars admit the various advantages of literature in the field of language teaching, but agreement on the incorporation of literary texts in teaching English language is still far from being reached. It would be hard to think of a universal way to introduce literary texts in the EFL classroom that would fit every EFL teacher's needs and interests. For instance, some teachers give priority to grammar and vocabulary while others focus on the stylistic features of the literary text (Bobkina and Dominguez, 2014).

McKay (1982) argued that literature when used in EFL teaching, should be highly selected. It must be linguistically appropriate to the learners' level. Out of this, it would be unauthentic relationship to literature. Hence, deliberate selection of literary texts can greatly aid to overcome the obstacles of linguistic difficulties and lack of cultural knowledge

After selecting the appropriate literary text to the learners' needs, implementing sound pedagogical practices would be of paramount importance. A literary text can be integrated in EFL classrooms in several ways. These methods of incorporating literature in English language teaching are crucial for EFL instructors to determine the best approach to use the resources provided by literary texts with the purpose of improving EFL students' mastery of the language (Bobkina and Dominguez, 2014).

The current study selects to present Van (2009) six approaches of integrating literature in languages instruction. These approaches are:

- (1) The Stylistic Approach.
- (2) The Reader-Response Approach.
- (3) The Language-Based Approach.
- (4) The Critical Literary Approach.
- (5) New Criticism.
- (6) Structuralism (Alasmari and Rabb Khan, 2018).

This study recommends the use of the three (3) first ways of integrating literature in ELT. The stylistic approach considers literature as a discourse and studies it from a linguistic perspective. That is, how literary texts exemplify the system of language. The aim of stylistic analysis is to identify how the resources of a language code are put in the production of actual messages. While the Reader-Response Approach considers literature as an interaction between the text and the reader, or what changes occur in the reader's mind

in going through a text, not as lingual objects printed on a page. Essentially and most importantly, the Language-Based Approach considers literature as an excellent vehicle for Communicative Language Teaching methods that result in the four-language skills development via interaction, collaboration, peer teaching and student independence. In the framework of this approach in the integration of literature in ELT, EFL teachers can use role-play, poetry, short stories, debate, cloze, prediction and ranking tasks in language learning. This method is more practical and effective when compared with the others.

### 3. Research Method

#### 3.1. Description of the Research Method

The current study is qualitative where the findings are more descriptive and the inferences can be drawn quite easily from the data that is obtained. It is also exploratory in terms of attempting to explore the current English language teaching tradition and the methods of integrating literature in teaching and learning English language from the viewpoint of EFL learners and their impact on students' mastery of the language.

#### 3.2. Sampling

The sample of the study includes forty-five (45) second year English students from the University of El-Oued, Algeria. It comprises ten (10) male and thirty-five (35) female students. The participants in the study were selected randomly to ascertain the validity and reliability of the study's results. The table below provides details about the participants in the study:

**Table. 1:** Sample of the Study.

Sampling	Male	Female
L2 EFL Students	10	35
<b>Total Number</b>	45	

#### 3.3. Instrumentation

A structured questionnaire targeting forty-five(45) second year EFL students at the University of El-Oued, Algeria was used as a data gathering tool. The questionnaire survey investigates EFL learners' attitudes towards the incorporation of literary texts in EFL instruction and how this way of teaching affects their mastery of language. It is divided into three (3) axes: (1) the significance of integrating literature in EFL instruction, (2) EFL learners' preferences regarding ways of integrating literature in ELT, and (3) the impact of incorporating literature on EFL learners' mastery of the language. Each axis includes four (4) statements where the respondents were asked to express their agreement, disagreement, or neutrality with each.

### 4. Data Analysis and Interpretation

The findings of the study derived from EFL learners' questionnaire stressed the significance and the necessity of incorporating literature and literary texts in the EFL instruction. The respondents with a percentage of (86.66 %) asserted that the integration of literature in EFL classes develops EFL learners' mastery of the language. More than that,

about (77.77 %) of them said that literary texts, if deliberately selected, facilitate(s) vocabulary enrichment and contribute(s) in developing the four language basic skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing on the part of EFL learners.

**Table.2:** The Findings of EFL Students` Questionnaire.

Statements	Agree	Disagree	Neutral
<b>Axis 1: The significance of integrating literature in EFL instruction.</b>			
1.The incorporation of literature in ELT enhances your mastery of the language.	86.66 %	8.88 %	4.44 %
2. Literary texts are very motivating due to their authenticity and meaningful context.	82.22 %	11.11 %	6.66 %
3. Syntactic knowledge and vocabulary enrichment can be accelerated through literary texts.	88.88 %	8.88 %	2.22 %
4. Literature shows (to set?) good ground for the development of reading, writing, listening and speaking skills.	77.77 %	13.33 %	8.88 %
<b>Axis 2: EFL learners' preferences regarding ways of integrating literature in ELT.</b>			
5. Literary texts` selection should be based on learners' educational lacks and needs.	93.33 %	00 %	6.66 %
6. EFL teachers should select texts that best suit the learners' current and potential level of literary knowledge to teach literary concepts and notions together with vocabulary enrichment.	95.55 %	00 %	4.44 %
7. In oral and written expression sessions, EFL learners can benefit from analyzing and discussing a selection of literary texts.	86.66 %	4.44 %	8.88 %
8. Poems, short stories, and drama are among the best literary genres that can be used in the instruction and learning of linguistic content.	97.77 %	2.22 %	00 %
<b>Axis 3: the impact of incorporating literature on EFL learners' mastery of the language.</b>			
9. Literature distracts EFL learning.	4.44 %	91.11 %	4.44 %
10. The incorporation of literature in EFL classes develops EFL students` receptive and productive skills.	84.44 %	6.66 %	8.88 %
11. Literary texts raise(s) EFL learners` intercultural and communicative	86.66 %	4.44 %	8.88 %

competencies.			
12. Literature is the best vehicle to facilitate EFL instruction and enhance(s) autonomous learning.	88.88 %	4.44 %	6.66 %

Additionally, the study's results revealed that not all literary texts can suit EFL learners' needs and fill their learning deficiencies. Thus, EFL teachers are invited to select literary texts that satisfy the learners' wants and level. A great proportion of the participants of the study (97.77 %) suggested using poems, short stories, and drama in the instruction of linguistic content that covers the four language skills.

The targeted EFL students agreed on the fact that the incorporation of literature and literary texts in ELT have a positive impact on the mastery of English language. According to them, literature raises the acquisition of intercultural and communicative competencies, and facilitates EFL teaching and enhances autonomous learning.

### **5. Recommendations and Pedagogical Implications**

The findings of this study revealed that it is important to engage EFL learners with literature and literary texts in order to aid them develop literacy skills. However, the results recommended that EFL teachers should deliberately select the appropriate literary texts to EFL learners' background knowledge in literature, and students' educational level.

The study ends up with the following recommendations: first, EFL course and syllabus designers of the different educational subjects should incorporate literary texts as essential educational materials in ELT. Second, there should be a sort of coordination and collaboration between EFL teachers who are specialized in literature with EFL instructors of other specialties in the selection of literary texts that can be used in EFL instruction. Additionally, EFL learners' lacks, needs, level, and expectations should form the basis of the selection of the adequate literary texts in English language teaching and learning. Finally, a bank of literary texts from different genres: short stories, novels, poems, and drama should be put in the hand of EFL teachers and learners.

One cannot deny the difficulty of reading, analyzing, and interpreting literary texts content due to the complexity nature of literary discourse. Hence, in order to minimize the impact of this challenge on the integration of literature in EFL classrooms, EFL teachers are invited to further their reading on the approaches of incorporating literature in English language teaching. Then, they apply the way of teaching that fits the objectives of each educational session.

### **6. Conclusion**

The current study explained and demonstrated how literature and literary texts can help in enhancing the mastery of language skills. Meanwhile, it provides EFL teachers with a clear guidelines that can aid them in the selection of the right approach to incorporate literature in English language teaching.

On the ground of the study findings, literature enriches English language teaching and fosters EFL students' language learning. With the careful selection of literary texts, literature can be used successfully with all ages and proficiency levels. Teachers should select literary texts within learners' language proficiencies since students may feel

demotivated if they are not linguistically ready. Utilizing literature in EFL classrooms can motivate students to interact with the text, the media used, the teacher, and the other students in the group or the class.

### List of References

- [1] **Alasmari, A.M and Rabb Khan, S. (2018)**. Literary Texts in the EFL Classrooms: Applications, Benefits and Approaches. Australian International Academic Centre. PTY. LTD.
- [2] **Arens, K and Swaffar, J. (2000)**. Reading Goals and the Standard for Foreign Language Learning. *Foreign Language Annals*,(33), 104 – 122.
- [3] **Bobkina, J and 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*. Vol.3, Issue,2. Pp. 248 – 260.
- [4] **Brumfit, C.J and Carter, R. A. (1986)**. *Literature and Language Teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- [5] **Carroli, P. (2008)**. *Literature in Second Language Education*. London and New York: Continuum.
- [6] **Cook, G. (1994)**. *Discourse and Literature: The Interplay of Form and Mind*. Oxford: OUP.
- [7] **Dupuy, B. (2000)**. Content-Based Instruction: Can it Help Ease the Transition from Beginning to Advanced Foreign Language Classes ? *Foreign Language Annals*, (33), 205 – 223.
- [8] **Flora, D. F. (2004)**. The Power of Literature in EFL Classrooms. *KATA*. Vol. 6, issue. 1. Pp. 1 – 12.
- [9] **Hanauer, D. (2001)**. The Task of Poetry Reading and Second Language Learning. *Applied Linguistics*,295 – 323.
- [10] **Khatib, M., Razaee, S and Derakhshan, A. (2011)**. Literature in EFL/ESL Classroom. *English Language teaching*.4 (1),201 – 208.
- [11] **Kramsch, C. (2013)**. Culture in Foreign Language Teaching. *Iranian Journal of Language Teaching Research*. In Bobkina, J and 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*. Vol.3, Issue,2. Pp. 248 – 260.
- [12] **McKay, S. (1982)**. Literature in the ESL Classroom. *TESOL Quarterly*,16 (4), 529 – 536.
- [13] **Sage, H. (1987)**. *Incorporating Literature in ESL Instruction*. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc. In Alasmari, A.M and Rabb Khan, S. (2018). *Literary Texts in the EFL Classrooms: Applications, Benefits and Approaches*. Australian International Academic Centre. PTY. LTD.
- [14] **Shanahan, D. (1997)**. Articulating the Relationship between Language, Literature and Culture. *Toward a New Agenda for Foreign Language Teaching and Research*. *The Modern Language Journal*, 81 (2), 164 – 174.
- [15] **Swaffar, J. (1999)**. The Case for Foreign Languages as a Discipline. *ADFL Bulletin*



(30), 6 – 12.

**[16] Van, T.T.T. M. (2009).** The Relevance of Literary Analysis to Teaching Literature in the EFL classroom. *English Teaching Forum*, (3), 2 – 9.

**[17] Whitener, W. M. (2019).** Teacher Beliefs and Practices Surrounding the Use of Literature in the EFL Classroom: A Case for Explicit Instruction. *Revista Espacios*. Vol. 40 (17). Pp. 13 – 20.