

**Short story: a literary text for EFL teaching
Algerian English Textbook (Year one of Secondary Education)**

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réception: 03/11/2020

acceptation: 30/11/2020

publication:10/12/2020

Abstract:

As far as English as a Foreign Language teaching is concerned, a huge bark of methods have been emerged to meet the ultimate concern to reach successful teaching. In fact, practitioners in the field of education in general and foreign languages in particular pleaded for the use of literature to teach foreign languages. However, literary texts may not satisfy the educational and pedagogical requirements because of time constraint. Short stories can be an appropriate literary text in teaching EFL in Algeria. This study is an attempt to show the pedagogical advantages of short stories in teaching EFL. A look at the first year English textbook of Algerian Secondary Education.

Key words: Short stories- teaching- advantages- textbook

1- Introduction:

Practitioners in the scope of education in general and language teachers in particular have never ceased to think of the most relevant and successful method to apply in the classroom. Yet, literature is recently regarded as an alternative to method; accordingly, it can be a vital resource in the classroom, and can, then, guarantee successful language teaching and learning. This call for the use of literary texts, no longer as a subject of study, as a pedagogical tool is accounted for by linguistic, motivational and pedagogical reasons. The shortcomings of the traditional language approaches and methods had pushed language practitioners, applied

linguists and teachers to think of their alternative. After the emergence of the communicative approaches as a response to the new vision to language nature and function, which stress mainly on communication function of languages. This methodological, psychoanalytic and linguistic atmosphere paved the way to literature to stand as a successful pedagogical tool that would assert teaching/learning success.

A short story is regarded as a vital authentic resource to language teaching merely because it is characterised by joy, interest and aesthetic language. This is a good reason that would justify the choice of short stories to be used in foreign languages courses in Algeria. Does Algerian English language syllabus give an account to the use of poetry in language teaching? Do language teachers use it as a resource for authentic English? What are the advantages of using short stories to teach EFL?

2- Short story advantages in EFL teaching:

A short story is a literary genre like other literary genres as novel, poem, play...etc. However, a short story has many characteristics that other genres, forms and texts do not share. In fact, there are several benefits of short stories when used as a resource in the teaching and learning process of languages in general and foreign languages in particular. Short stories can be beneficial since literature has the quality of being universal and short stories will allow teachers to deal with human problem (p. 54)

Angel (2001) listed the pedagogical advantages of short story use in language classroom over other literary texts:

- 1- Short stories make the students reading task easier because it is simple. They give learners a better view of other people and other cultures.
- 2- It requires more attention and analysis helps students to be more creative and raise the critical thinking skills.
- 3- It raises cultural awareness
- 4- Reduces students' anxiety and helps them feel more relax
- 5- It is good for multicultural contexts because of its universal language.
- 6- Offers a fictional and interesting world.

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In short, short stories have motivational, cultural and higher-order thinking benefits. Like other literary texts, short stories share the advantages mentioned earlier.

Young (1996) discussed two major advantages of using short stories for raising critical thinking in students : “ because they are entertaining, students’ pervasive apprehension is reduces, and they learn from the beginning that critical thinking is natural, familiar, and sometimes even fun. Second, the stories put issues of critical thinking, in an easily remembered context” (Cited in p. 155)

Murdoch (2002) says that “ short stories can, if selected and exploited appropriately, provide quality text content wich will greatly enhance EFL courses for learners at intermediate levels of profecieny” (Cited in p. 155)

Eakaya goes further in indicating that short stories motivate students to continue reading so that they can solve the problem. Because it is interesting, students woukd not easily get frustrated.

Collie and Slater (1991) listed four advantages of using short stories in language classes : “ Short stories are often an ideal way of introducing students to literature in the foreign language classroom. For the teacher, they offer many immediate and striking advantages (p. 167) :

- 1- Their practical length means that they can usually be read entirely within one or two class lessons.
- 2- They are less douting for a foreign reader to tackle or to reread on his or her own, and are more suitable when set as home tasks. Students get that feeling of achievement at having come to the end of a whole work much sooner.
- 3- They offer greater variety than longer texts. A teacher can choose very different short stories, so that is a greater chance of finding something to appeal to each individual’s tastes and interests.
- 4- Short stories are especially valuable for sessional courses, summer courses or the like, or for teachers with shifting classes: evening courses, for example, or continuous-initial classes.

Creativity is another advantage of short stories, according to Collie and Slater, because of its shortness that can be invested on by teachers. However, because of the shortness, foreign readers may be less involving. Its comprehension also can make it difficult for foreign readers to appreciate the quality of the work. Therefore, teachers should be very careful and well-prepared when introducing short stories particularly for foreign language learners. Teachers' role is of crucial importance to make short stories- advantages true in the classroom. For young learners, stories offer a valuable way of contextualising and introducing new language, making it comprehensible and memorable (Wasik and Bond, 2001, Wright, 2000).

Glazer and Buke (1994), Jennings (1991), Koisarula (2005) argue that, from a linguistic point of view, stories present grammar, vocabulary and formulaic speech within a meaningful and structural context that supports comprehension of the narrative world and the content the story is related to. Reading or listening to a story offers a joyful experience in feeling the sound and viewing the form of a new language. Stories are often about interesting topos which may serve to present, practice, consolidate or extend children's knowledge on a particular thematic area related to any school subject.

Being one of the major narratives (texts that tell a story in time, including everyday oral anecdotes or stories, as well as written autobiographical or fictional narratives-short stories or novels) (...), it serves as simulations of everyday life in manner that provides some understanding of the complexities of life (Man and Datley, cited in Richard at al p. 138).

Literary fiction provides simulations of social complexes as they unfold, as characters interact with each other and react to the repercussions of plans and the intrusions of accidents. These intricate interpersonal situations, such as a person being tempted to retaliate in complicated ways against someone he or she loves, is the kind of material that constitutes narrative fiction of the sort that we find fascinating (Cited in Richard at al p. 138).

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Yet, despite the various advantages of using a long novel in helping the students to cultivate a good and consistent habit of reading, long novels may not be suitable for some reluctant readers who usually cannot sustain their patience and interest in reading. Therefore, short stories can be motivational to readers who lack interest in reading. (Auth, 2007)

Ellis and Breuster (1991) confirm that ‘ ‘ as stories are motivating and fun, they can help students develop positive attitudes towards the foreign language and enrich their learning experiences’ ’ (Cited in p. 111)

The relevance of short stories as the most appropriate source for language teaching and learning process is argued by King (2001) who lists different ways in which stories help students to learn.

- 1- Firstly, stories enhance the memory.
- 2- Secondly, is modeled and reinforced since stories offer rich grammatical mix.
- 3- Thirdly, stories encourage participation and learner-centered learning.
- 4- Finally, stories’ flexibility appeal to the different types and levels of students.

Khatib listed in his paper (2001) ‘ ‘A girol’s view of the advantages of using short stories in ELT’ ’. He believes that short stories can have pedagogical outcomes, he summarises the in the following elements, short stories help in

- a- Making the students’ reading task easier because they are simple and short ;
- b- Giving learners a better view of other cultures ;
- c- Requiring more attention and analysis ;
- d- Presenting a fictional and interesting world ;
- e- Helping students to be more creative and raising the critical thinking skill ;
- f- Raising cultural awareness ;
- g- Reducing students anxiety and helping them feel more relax, and ;
- h- Providing multicultural contexts because of its universal language (p 156).

He goes further to declare the short story based teaching (SSBLT) as being most advantageous in language classroom because of its characteristics (pp 156-157)

- 1- The primary function of language is interaction and communication
- 2- SSBLT is based on humanism and cooperative learning
- 3- Personal, cultural and linguistic awareness should be developed
- 4- Short stories are used as learning and teaching materials
- 5- Linguistics, sociolinguistics and communicative competence are emphasised
- 6- All four language skills receive attention and are practiced integratively
- 7- The student's native language should be avoided in the classroom but can be used to talk about the procedure and culture points.
- 8- All of the class activities should be done in a stress-free friendly environment
- 9- Vocabulary is taught in the context of the short story
- 10- Grammar is taught based on focus on form
- 11- All types of interaction: teacher-student, student teacher and student-student exist.

3- Findings :

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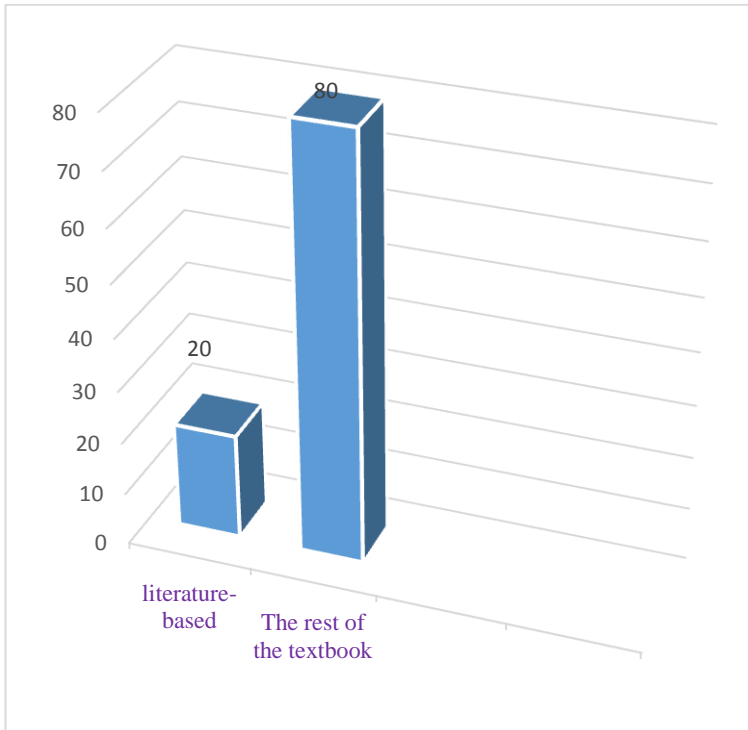


Figure 01: It shows Literature-based content in the textbook.

As shown in the graph, literature account is represented by only 20% of the whole syllabus. The latter is composed of five (05) units. One unit is reserved to the presentation of literary texts of different genres. This means that language-teaching approach does not focus on literature as a resource for English teaching and learning.

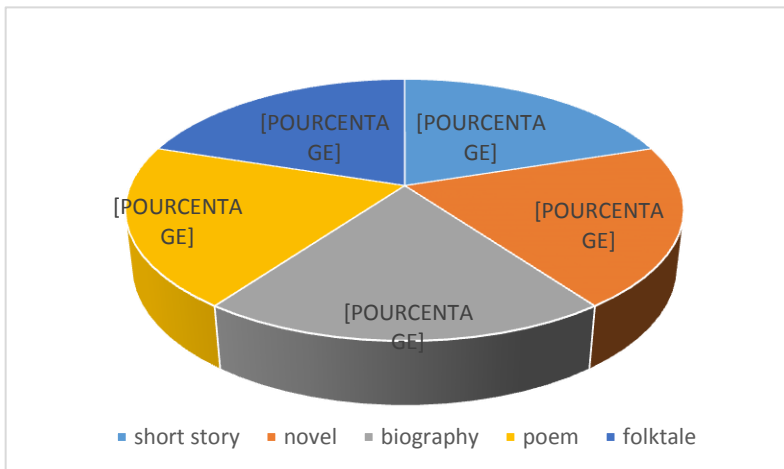


Figure 02: It shows short stories credit

in the textbook.

The graph shows that short story use is represented by only 20% of the unit. The unit as mentioned earlier is the sole one where literature is given stress as a tool for language (English) teaching. The rest is the presentation of the other literary genres like poetry, novel, biography, and folktale each of which is equal to 20% of the whole unit. Poetry, then, represents only 05% of the whole English syllabus which is not sufficient nor is it valued as an authentic tool for English as a foreign language teaching and learning.

4- Conclusion:

A short story is agreed upon to be an interesting, motivating and aesthetic literary text the use of which for languages teaching in general and English as a foreign language in particular, may lead to successful learning process especially for intermediate and advanced learners.

The Algerian syllabus designers have not yet recognised and utilize short stories in teaching foreign languages. They have not revalued this literary genre in language syllabi mainly English being one of the outstanding foreign language in Algeria after French. Even though Algerian policy and decisions-makers had decided to launch a deep reform in Algerian educative system particularly teaching approaches, much work is waiting to restore in the field of foreign languages' teaching approaches and methods, thus, the use of literature, mainly short stories, is of crucial importance. It is urgent, I think, to revise the reformist program to restore the status of short stories in the Foreign languages' syllabi.

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