

## A COMMUNICATIVE VIEW TO TEACHING ENGLISH LITERATURE AT THE ALGERIAN UNIVERSITY

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### ملخص:

من خلال تحليل استبيان و نتائج مقابلات مع الأساتذة والطلاب من عدة جامعات جزائرية، تم استنتاج أن معظم أساتذة اللغة الانجليزية إما لا ترغب إما تهمل تدريس الأدب، بحجة أن هذا المقياس صعب. كما تبين أيضا أن عددا كبيرا من الطلاب غير راضين مما تعلموه خلال سنوات دراسة الأدب الانجليزي. وبعد التحقيق، وجدنا أن المشكلة تكمن في الأساليب وطرق التدريس المستخدمة من قبل الأساتذة وليس مضمون هذا الموضوع في حد ذاته. يتناول هذا المقال أبرز أساليب تدريس الأدب الانجليزي على أساس مقارنة التواصل و بما يتماشى مع الاحتياجات الوطنية للطلبة الجزائريين، على أمل مساعدة أساتذة الأدب الانجليزي تحسين أدائهم في تدريس المقياس للوصول إلى فهم عميق للنص الأدبي والاستفادة من محتوياته اللغوية و الثقافية وكذا استعمالها في مجالات الكتابة و المحادثة .

### Abstract :

From the findings of a questionnaire administered in two Algerian universities, and interviews with teachers and students from several Algerian universities, it has been deduced that most of teachers either do not like or discard teaching literature, arguing that the subject is too difficult. Also, students claim a lot and are unsatisfied with what they have learnt throughout years studying literature. Eventually, after close investigation, we found out that the problem resides in the methods and modals of teaching used by teachers and not the content of the subject per se. This article explores the most prominent literature teaching approaches and methods and suggests a literature teaching modal based on a communicative perspective in consistent with the national needs of the Algerian students, hoping to help literature teachers adjust and improve their teaching performance.

**Key words:** teacher-centered, learner-centered, approach, literature, CLT, EFL

### 1. Introduction:

Teaching literature at university has always been controversial and questionable. For most reasons, the problem seems to reside first, in the continual evolution of the teaching approaches and methods themselves, and second to the wide gap between the substantial contents of literature syllabi and the methods or techniques used to attain a successful teaching /learning process (Spark 1999). Regarding this state of affairs, adapting a consistent methodology and modal(s) in teaching literature at the Algerian university seems to be a very demanding matter.

### 2. English Literature in Foreign Language Classes (EFL)

English literature at university is coupled with teaching English language itself. Years ago, incorporating English literature the language syllabi was controversial as long as many linguists and educationists saw that the language of literature was deviant, ornamental and metaphoric the matter which makes it far away from the language that helps foreign language students learn the target language. In the late 1980, within Arab context, Obeidat (1979) raises the issue and asked the following questions:

Are Arab students actually interested in learning language or literature? And how much literature should be included in the curriculum? What literature is appropriate poetry or prose, modern or non modern? Do we teach its history and cultural background, or do we simply teach the text itself? Do we need to focus on the text as language or go beyond the text? (30)

At present time, after including literature in EFL syllabi, the debate takes another aspect. It is whether to teach literature focusing on the text as language to promote the learners' language proficiency through acquiring more vocabulary, structures and writing styles; or to go beyond the text, i.e., to enhance the learners' analytical, critical, and interpretive skills the matter which would make them respond and appreciate the cultural and artistic components of literary works. Within the Magrebi context, it would be insistent particularly after the adoption of the LMD system, to question and review the role of literature in EFL LMD classes; this urges us to raise the following questions:

- 1- What objectives should be advanced for the inclusion of literature within the LMD system?
- 2-What pertinent teaching approaches and methods should be adopted?
- 3 -Will the focus be on the literary text as a model of L2 language or will it go beyond the text?
- 4-What literary genres and materials are appropriate for our case?
- 5-What pedagogical techniques and strategies are fitting to conduct those objectives?
- 6-Are our students interested in learning English language or English literature?

These questions have been raised first to respond to our wish to improve the sate of teaching literature in EFL classes (and this is a part of our Doctorate study), and second to endeavour to assemble the efforts of the Maghrebi attempts to improve teaching English language and literature.

It seems quite important to draw clear objectives for teaching literature in E F L classes before probing into methods and approaches to teaching the subject. These objectives, once set, should go in accordance with the requirements of the learners and should also fit the contemporary methods in order to respond to the changes and innovations that are taking place in the field of language teaching and therefore of literature teaching (Widdowson, 1983).

Within the communicative perspective, literature should fulfill the following objectives:

- 1- To increase and enhance the manipulation of the target language.
- 2- To familiarize learners with various linguistic and artistic forms and functions
- 3- To develop the learners' creativity and evaluative faculties.
- 4- To develop and foster communication through discussing and debating the thoughts and cultural elements introduced in literary texts.
- 5- To develop the learners' receptive as well as productive skills then responding freely to literary texts through oral and written production.
- 6- To appreciate and tolerate different cultures, attitudes, and beliefs notably those related to the target language.

These objectives should be carried out through devising and adopting also a reliable teaching method in order to make teaching literature purposeful and methodological. In classical approaches of teaching literature, theorists maintain that literature mirrors social, economic, cultural, historical, and philosophical elements of the text's writer. Thus, its study does not go beyond these limits. Widdowson (1983: 34) points out that:

At advanced levels, reading literature exposes the learners to language being used in unconventional ways. It informs them about the culture of places where the target language is used. Extensive reading promotes the continuing expansion of lexical

knowledge and develops reading fluency. It also helps to develop the learners' interpretive skills.

Widdowson states the major aims of literature in EFL classes in a very general way. Clearly literature aims at exposing the learners to the cultural components of the target language; it enlarges their lexical knowledge and develops their reading skills by allowing them read long passages and then provide personal interpretation and judgments.

All in all, literature exposes learners to more authentic materials and involves them in text reading and interpreting processes, the matter which would increase their personal responses to literary texts. Within the Algerian context, Arab (1993: 132) claims that, "As a subject of study, it (literature) is perceived as knowledge to be learnt about writers lives, great works and so called authoritative sources, a sort of tradition (or sauna) to be handed down from master to disciple". Here, Arab refers to literature as it is taught for decades in our universities; it is that classical teacher-centered approach, in which learners receive knowledge from a knowing-all teacher without being involved in extracting meanings from the text, thus restricting their personal interpretation and responses. This method focuses on biographical and historical backgrounds to explain and interpret literary texts.

Most of the Algerian teachers do not favour this method since it does not go with the modern calls of teaching languages and any other related subjects mainly literature. Arab (ibid:32) confirms this, "Before coming to the point, let me simply single out two of the main causes of the frustrations experienced by both staff and students in the literary pedagogical transaction".

It is clear enough then that the situation of literature teaching in our universities proved to be a failure in the last decades on both sides, the learners and teachers, and the experience of teaching literature is a frustration. This might be attributed to two major factors; one to the way literature is approached and the other to the way literature is taught at our universities.

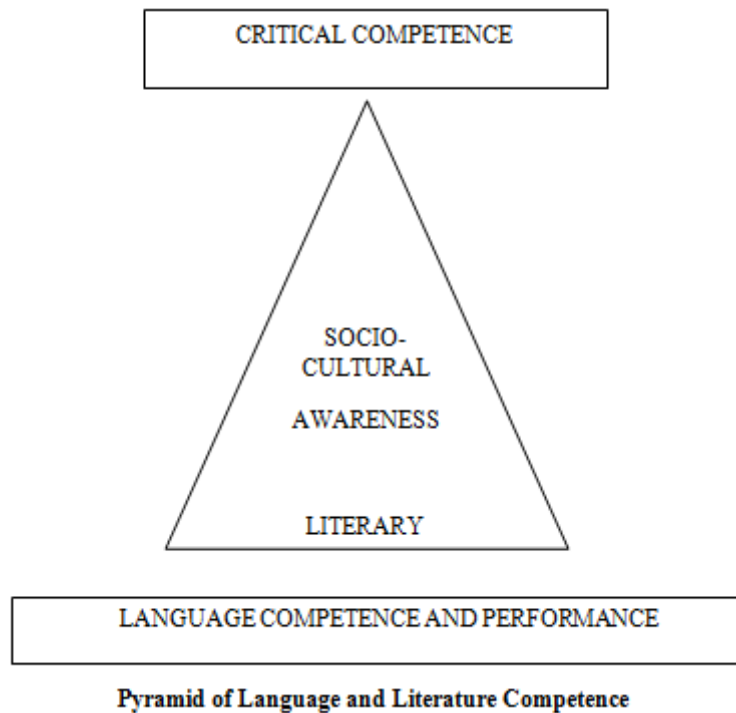
after surveying literature teaching programmes, we come to note that literature is still considered as a subject that reflects no more than some writers lives, their social and philosophical views and interpretations of their long works passed from teacher to learner and then considered as standards, accepted unquestionably to be given back to teachers in text analysis and exams. This process would inevitably lead to passive learning which is not sought among most contemporary theorists and educationists (Rosenblatt 1995). In the Algerian situation, English language has become a very necessary tool for communication in gas and petroleum companies among workers of different nationalities; it is also used in writing administrative and work reports. In this context, teaching literature in EFL classes should aim at promoting the learner's linguistic and cultural potentialities in accordance with the actual situation. Scalene (1999:3) affirms that "The study of literature must be a social experience in which students are given numerous opportunities to share their written and spoken responses with the teacher and with each other".

For that reason, calling for a communicative approach comes to be a very convenient instructional framework to teaching literature in the current EFL classes, mainly within the LMD system. Researchers, pedagogues, educationists and teachers are required to review seriously the methods literature is taught in our universities in order to promote a pedagogy that would suit the substantial change in the world and respond to the voices of reform in the EFL field.

### 3. Literary Competences in EFL Classes

It is very important whenever literature teaching is discussed to distinguish between literature as a creative art through which people are intended to produce and evaluate literary works, this case is highly professional, and the case in which literature is conceived as a subject in EFL classes to help learners acquire linguistic and cultural insights about the language they are studying (Widdowson 1984, Lethbridge 2003). So, any confusion in these two dimensions of literature teaching will inevitably lead to negative effects on both teachers and learners.

This actually advanced four major purposes for including literature in EFL classes. They concisely concretize the four competences that most of linguists, applied linguists are calling for, as shown in the figure below (Lazar 2000, Lethbridge 2003, Spark 1999, Rosenblatt 1995):



Considering the figure above, linguistic competence implies a great awareness of the language system and how it functions in order to get a good understanding and therefore a good manipulation of the language under study (Widdowson 1983). The second is the literary competence through which the learners are equipped with the necessary literary devices, techniques, and forms to enable them read and process literary text systematically within its set of rules and techniques, since literary texts are deviant from the norms of non-literary text (functional text) and then require students not to tackle them as to tackle any other kind of text (Sawidou 2004, Han 2005). This stage is very important in literature teaching as long as learners come to university without having studied English literature before, thus they consider and study literary texts as the other text; providing them with literary competence will actually bridge this gap.

Socio-cultural awareness is an essential support since it helps learners to relate what is being studied to its real environment and make projection and comparison to their own reality. It is through socio-cultural awareness that the learners will be able to benefit from the views and philosophies of the writers and learn more about the communities and societies where these works are carried out.

Literary texts in EFL classes should help learners develop their critical and evaluative faculties. To this respect, most of applied linguists and pedagogues stress the importance of involving the learners in text evaluation and enhance their personal responses to literary works. Arab (op cit) stresses that "The study of literature must not be regarded as an end in itself; it must be seen in the broader context of university education, i.e., one that ensures the formation of the student's intellectual and critical faculties (135).

All in all, literary knowledge should gradually lead learners to become intellectually independent and to allow them make consistent as well as personal responses to literary text. This would, in return, offer them immense opportunities to become confident and self-reliant in reading and judging literary texts. Also, it makes them active learners and reduces the interventions of the teacher who is in traditional teaching views the master who transmits ready made interpretation and judgment about the text in hand. Arab (ibid: 143) claims that, "The aim of literature is not to cram the stud ends

heads with knowledge, but essentially to form their intellectual and critical faculties; which is what university education is ultimately about.

#### 4. The Need for a Method

All educationists and applied linguists advocate the necessity of an appropriate method for the teaching of any subject at university or anywhere else. The assigned methodology must go in harmony with the developing of a planned syllabus identifying plainly the objectives of the course. Also, activities and strategies should be clearly integrated in the form of lesson plans to carry out the content of the subject in accordance with a stated method and objectives (Ghosen 2002).

#### 5. Survey of Approaches and Methods to Literature Teaching in EFL Classes

The purposes of learning foreign languages change constantly according to the demands of the age and the socio-cultural and political economic situations. This change actually has an immense effect on how the foreign language should be taught and also the needs of the learners. This reality has to be considered in literature teaching/learning, since the subject is handled in E F L context, i.e., the manipulation of the target language is the end after all. Literature takes a special place in language learning, and literary texts are considered a very important source of moral, cultural and aesthetic values, as well as a good model of authentic language practice and usage (Rosenblatt 1995).

In this context, teaching literature in EFL classes should aim at promoting the learner's linguistic and cultural potentialities. Scalene (1999:3) notes that "The study of literature must be a social experience in which students are given numerous opportunities to share their written and spoken responses with the teacher and with each other". Therefore, calling for a communicative approach to teaching literature comes to be a very convenient instructional method to teaching literature in 21st. century EFL classes.

Far away from the ways of traditional methods of language and literature teaching, contemporary methods should focus on communicative skills that stress the importance of spoken as well as written language. Adapting a communicative Approach to teaching literature does not come at random; it is to respond to the demands of the actual time in which international communication has taken a high place among people from different countries. Delanoy (1997: 58) asserts that:

It (literature) was taught as a body of knowledge rather than an integral component of language learning. Taken to extremes, such an approach could have devastating effects on the communication skills of language learners. In other words the learners may have been able to quote Shakespeare, Milton and Wordsworth at the end of their studies, but they could not speak the language in real life situation.

Dalanoy (ibid) is inquiring the utility of literature methods and programmes that do not take into account the learners real and actual needs. He reacted against literature instruction which does not enable learners to benefit from the bulk of literature to foster their language skills mainly the spoken ones.

#### 6. Communicative Approach to Literature Instruction

The fact that English language has become an international communication tool "Lingua Franca" and widely used in a number of situations by different people, more and more emphasis should be place on communication in all its aspects.

The communicative Approach is said to be the result of educators and linguists who had grown dissatisfied with the grammar-Translation and Audio-lingual methods. They noticed that learners were not taking enough realistic language. Thus, they cannot, in most of the cases, communicate appropriately with the language studied.

Communicative (language) Approach is considered as a broad approach to teaching rather than as a teaching method with a clearly defined set of classroom practices. Thus, broadly speaking, the

Communicative Approach sets a list of general principles that are adaptable to any class which opts for this trend.

The communicative Approach has resulted in different teaching methods taken under a variety of names including Notional-Functional, Teaching for Proficiency, Proficiency-Based Instruction, and Communicative Language Teaching.

Nunan (1996: 62) states the following principles for the Communicative Approach:

- 1- An Emphasis on learning to communicate through interaction in the target language.
- 2- The introduction of authentic texts into the learning situation.
- 3- The provision of opportunities for learners to focus, not only on language but also on the learning process itself.
- 4- An enhancement of the learner's own personal experiences as important contributing elements to classroom learning.
- 5- An attempt to link classroom language learning with language activities outside the classroom.

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) method which derives from the Communicative Approach, seeks to promote communicative competence of the learners through interaction which requires discussion, negotiations, group work and personal responses to what they learn. Also, CLT stresses the importance of authentic materials into the learning situation this includes real natural speakers speech, Newspapers, magazines, audiovisual documents, and literary texts which constitute a great part of authentic material since it is the easiest and the most available instructional source in all educational institutions (Richards and Rogers 1992).

Moreover, CLT takes into consideration learning itself as an end, not the language. This emphasizes the fact that language rules and structures are useless unless they help students learn the language and then allow them to use it correctly and appropriately to communicate as opposed to learning a set of rules. Furthermore, CLT seeks to foster the learners' own personal experiences through relating to what they are taking to their real lives and then respond to them individually depending on their personal views and outlooks which have been already formed in them within their social, cultural and religious reality. This factor actually reinforces the extensive use of literary products, for they provide the most opportunities to learners to express themselves and to respond emotionally, thus, in return, they develop their critical and evaluative faculties (Brown 2000).

Finally, the last principle of C L T comes as an attempt to authenticating learning within foreign/second languages teaching situations. This implies linking what is learnt in class with what the learners may encounter outside the class. These two situations must fit each other. It would enable the learner to use acquired knowledge appropriately and adequately to behave in non-class environment. If this does not happen, learning will be non-sense and unable to provide learners with the necessary requirements to cope with their daily and living situation (Canale 1983).

## 7. Conclusion

All in all, the five elements advanced by CLT proponents come as a call to reconsider the teaching of literature in E F L classes in order to adapt the process with the most urgent necessities and demands of the actual time, in which the integration of literature in foreign languages is not conceived only to transfer socio-cultural knowledge from one language to another, but also to allow learners interact with each other and communicate real-life situations. Accordingly, an integral approach-which combines most of contemporary approaches and methods to teaching literature in EFL context is sought by most of the contemporary applied linguists to meet this end. Regarding the principles of the integrated approach to teaching literature at the Algerian university, the following recommendations are suggested:

Literature should be integrated in EFL/ LMD classes:



- To help learners use language appropriately in social and work situations in which interaction among people requires also the manipulation of figurative and rhetorical language.
- To enhance the learners personal responses and socio-cultural interaction.
- To develop the learners' critical and evaluative skills in learning situations and in life after university.
- To invest language varieties and uses introduced by the three main literary genres prose, poetry and drama.
- To encourage creativity and autonomy thinking and responding.
- To comprehend, appreciate, and tolerate the culture of the otherness, esp., that of the target language.
- To educate the whole person: linguistically, socially, culturally, and aesthetically.

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