

Innovative Approaches and Inventive Technologies to Teaching Literature

ARABI Melouka

Hassiba Benbouali University

Introduction

Most EFL students consider literature the module of tedium if not burden; chiefly when they are asked to read a book and produce a report or an essay about its literary features. Traditional approaches used in performing literature course tend more or less to neglect the student's like or dislike of the subject. This paper tries to investigate the newly adopted approaches in teaching literature and draws the attention to how rewarding is the blending of both traditional and innovatory approaches in literature classroom. Furthermore, it throws light on the importance of media technologies in stimulating the students' creativity and appreciation of literature.

1. Pedagogical Benefits of Literature Course to EFL Students

As a matter of fact, integrating literature in the EFL settings has been highly praised for its pedagogical benefits. Academically speaking, studying literature is one of the key strategies to improve the reading and foreign language acquisition skills, "*Intensive reading and reading for pleasure can even provide an avenue for efficient second language acquisition and reading proficiency.*"¹ Subsequently, students can develop the writing skills as the two go hand in hand, "the best writers are avid readers". Students enrich their vocabulary due to the wide range of thoughts, world views, emotional insights, and ideas they come across in the literary work, "*The use of literature can enlarge learners' vocabulary*"². In addition, building and developing logical thinking, critical thinking, argumentation, comparison, analysis of texts -in terms of theme, figurative language, tone or mood- and interpretation skills and competencies are the natural upshots of the study of literature. Furthermore, learning literature helps students develop and acquire the skill of discourse analysis. They become able to interpret various discourses in their socio-political and cultural contexts. In other words, they acquire the communicative competence which fosters the linguistic development process.

Through reading literature students expand their imagination as they experience and react to the characters' various situations vicariously. Moreover, they can cope with and find solutions to their own personal cases in the story they read where the characters may have had the same problems. "*Many are relieved to find that others have had the same disorder or problem and have coped successfully with it or recovered from it.*"³ Thus, reading literature has been a successful method in bibliotherapy, "*Books are great levellers, and great healers. Sometimes it's easier to talk about a character's problems than your own, but you are really talking about yours.*"⁴ Furthermore, at times, literary works can reach deep into the students' souls and hearts and change their perception of life for good.

The study of foreign literature, whether novels, short stories, plays, or poems, has proved to be very crucial in helping students see the world through different viewpoints. Through literature students can learn different cultures, customs, and way of life of different people from different places, "*Literature cannot only be used to enrich their vision, fostering critical thinking), and stimulating their creativity, but also to promote their greater cultural tolerance*

and sensitivity.”⁵ Students can make acquaintances and communicate with different people from various places via the historical, cultural, and geographical information and background literature can provide them with. Accordingly, students manage to broaden their horizon and converse to the other more empathetically and knowledgeably.

To tell the truth, most Literature teachers believe that the study of literature is an amazing tool to learn foreign language and culture. However, EFL learners are not conscientious of this powerful means. On the contrary, literature class seems to be the most boring for the majority as many setbacks get in the way of the learning process. When exposed to a literary work, most EFL students suffer a difficulty to grasp the basic mechanics of English language, let alone the lexical and semantic weaknesses. “*It follows that intrinsic hindrances lie ahead for ESL students, let alone EFL students, to read literary works, such as linguistic intricacies of the target language, especially lexical and semantic barriers, unfamiliarity with or remoteness of the cultural background.*”⁶ According to a research conducted by Akyel and Yalcin, “*The desire to broaden learners’ horizon through exposure to classic literature usually has disappointing results.*”⁷ For instance, EFL students consider poetry ambiguous mainly when the usual norms and rules which govern Standard English are broken for orthographic and phonological merits. Hence, the study of literature seems to be effort-consuming as students are required to infer, anticipate, and negotiate meaning in its context.

In addition, for most EFL students, generating correct interpretation of a rhetorical, literary text seems like going through continuous bottlenecks as they suffer poor level of English competence. Accordingly, Or stated, “*literature can be detrimental to the process of language learning.*”⁸ For Hill, “*The language of literature is linguistically unsuitable, thus, irrelevant to learners’ needs.*”⁹ The aesthetic beauty of literature faded in the presence of all the above mentioned hurdles and became merely a source of anxiety and frustration to the majority of EFL students. Consequently, teachers, course designers, and examiners are more reluctant to perform this course afraid of their students’ poor feedback

How can instructors cope with all these hindrances and transform the literature class from boring to exciting? What methods and approaches can be used to transform literature course from tedious to exciting? How can we make our students see the aesthetic beauty and gorgeous pouring of those well-crafted sentences and well-chosen words used by Twain, Dickens, Melville, Shakespeare, and Salinger is a real concern. How to make students aware of all this is the question. In practice, the right teaching approaches, the course design and the designer him/herself can answer the question.

Selecting the right approach to instruct literature is tapping the core of the issue at heart. Moody points out the paramount importance of an approach in providing “*a framework, or sequence of operations to be used when we come to actualities*”¹⁰ Whitehead went further to mention that, “*one factor that goes a long way in determining students’ lifelong learning towards reading is how the teacher approaches the teaching of literature.*”¹¹ In fact, literature can be instructed via diverse traditional approaches namely the language-core approach, literature-core approach, and personal growth approach, and innovative approaches: performance approach, and integrated approach.

2. An Overview of the Traditional Approaches to Instructing Literature

This paper does not pretend an exhausted and precise full description for the literary approaches, yet it is an attempt to introduce two newly adopted approaches along with the traditional ones.

2.1. Language-core Approach

Also known as the language approach or the language-based approach, this approach is the mostly used approach in EFL literature classroom. This approach uses literature as a tool to arrange EFL activities such as prediction exercises, jumbled sentences, summary writing, creative writing, and role play. Literary texts are used to serve particular linguistic goals. According to Carter and McRae, *“literature is used in a rather purposeless and mechanistic way in order to provide for a series of language activities orchestrated by the teacher.”*¹² It aims at fostering the learners’ linguistic skills and use of English through introducing them to various literary genres. Lazar claims that *“the learners are encouraged to draw their knowledge of familiar grammatically, lexical or discourse categories to make their aesthetic judgements.”*¹³ In short, literary texts are used to instruct English. A. Maley and Duff (1990) insist, *“The primary aim of our approach is quite simply to use literary texts as a resource (and it will not be the only resource) for stimulating language activities.”*¹⁴

2.2. Literature-core Approach

The commonly used approach in EFL literature classrooms is the literary-core approach. It focuses on the socio-political and historical background of the literary text, characteristics of the literary movement, the literary genres, and rhetorical devices along with others. Unlike the language-based approach, the language learning process is dependent on the course more willingly than the language itself. Literature as a content approach relies on the fact that students have already acquired the literary competence in their own language. It simply helps students transfer these skills from their language to English.

2.3. Personal Growth Approach

This approach stimulates the learners’ emotional, psychological, and cultural experience. It exposes them to different themes about which they are supposed to express their opinions and feelings. Thus, it is known as the thematic approach. Based on this approach, literature course revolves around many texts dealing with the same theme and encourages learners to compare them, express their view points about them, and make connections between their own personal experience and those in the text. Moreover, learners develop knowledge of ideas and language due to various texts they read. Influenced by their own personal experience, they manage to infer the meaning of the text. As Cadorath and Harris point out, *“text itself has no meaning; it only provides direction for the reader to construct meaning from the reader's own experience.”*¹⁵

3. Innovatory Approaches to teaching Literature

This paper is, in some measure, a shot to introduce the two approaches as an efficient didactic means for a better comprehension of literature as a whole as well as for the review of specific topics.

3.1. Performance Approach

Performing literature is by far the best method to teach and transform the module from boring to exciting. This approach encourages learners to read, analyze, cast, and understand the characters, plots and the theme through rehearsing and performing. The learners perform the above activities whilst having fun. This innovative approach does not make students love literature but transforms them into lifelong readers. They manage to draw the storyline of the literary work easily and understand the psychology of the characters as they try to imitate them when performing their roles. This passionate approach helps learners connect with the language

and literature all at once avoiding the common mistake that most teachers make when instructing literature i.e. teaching about the literary work instead of teaching the work itself. To tell the truth, repeating some parts of the literary work loudly will bring the work into life like it never happened before when teachers focus just on explaining the plots, themes, and aesthetic features.

3.2. Integrated Approach

Every approach mentioned above has its specific target and aim. Instructing literature using one approach would frequently hinder the learning process and lead to sterile upshots. The multi-facet nature of literature necessitates an integrated interdisciplinary perspective that blends together the above listed approaches.

The integration of these approaches is linguistically, methodologically, and motivationally rewarding. Language-core approach fosters the learners' linguistic skills and use of English through introducing them to various literary texts. It encourages learners to actively participate in the process of understanding the meaning of text via various language assignments. Literature-core approach helps learners to read beyond the surface meaning of the text stopping through the socio-political and historical background of the literary text, characteristics of the literary movement, the literary genres, and stylistic merits. Personal growth approach: heartens students to relate the themes in the literary text to their own personal experiences; and subsequently express feelings towards the issues raised in the text. Performance approach is the magical method to transform literature from a mind-numbing to an attractive module while reading, comprehending, comparing, and imitating. All in all, the integration of all these approaches transforms literature classroom from passive, sterile, data-delivering into active, fruitful, and thought-provoking.

For more fruitful results, the teacher can make use of the new technologies to enhance and facilitate both literature learning and instructing process.

4. New Technologies for a Revolutionized EFL Literature Classroom

Technologies play a crucial role in learners' lives and can exert a positive influence on their learning process as well as feedback. Everyday we hear about new web 2.0 resources emerging. How can teachers of literature make use of these technologies to create innovative instructional strategies for their EFL classroom? To tell the truth, most techniques being used in literature classrooms tend to be traditional in the constantly transforming society of globalization. In fact, these technologies can serve the EFL literature classroom in diverse ways, not to mention the motivation and joy they bring to learners.

Lately, it has been argued among some literature teachers that language acquisition and knowledge of the target culture through foreign language classes can be enhanced by implementing teaching aids such as media. Movies can be used as a teaching material in foreign language classes as they are a medium which can convey informational content and insightful learning experiences of the target culture and language. In addition, movies are an economical substitute for field trips and other real visits to a country in which the target language is used. According to Kramsch,¹⁶ Films are a multimedia technology being implemented in language education as an authentic or real-life material that replicates alternative ways of acquiring knowledge that are different from printed media. Films offer an

exploratory and motivating type of learning. Movies can serve as real cultural texts in EFL literature classroom where students are required to express themselves and communicate in

activities such as asking questions, giving answers, or discussing what happened in the movie and perform key scenes as well.

Smart mobiles and tablets technologies are very practical in sharing classroom activities, searching and collecting data, and even recording the course itself, while saving time. They have proved to be very useful in promoting the learners' creativity, connectivity, and collaboration.

Almost all presentations rely on the PowerPoint in our time. This digital presentation saves time and makes the presentations easy to follow via focusing on the main ideas discussed. Most EFL students like PowerPoint's presentations as they help them take notes and better understand the content of the course. EFL teachers should make use of this device to revolutionize their traditional overhead slides. *"Tools are emerging that allow instructors to craft presentations that more closely reflect new approaches to teaching and learning. Presentation tools based on new models of representing information also encourage instructors to rethink learning activities in ways that can improve learning. These tools might also bring about a more thorough merging of in-person and remote classroom audiences."*¹⁷

Conclusion

This paper tried to cast light on the pedagogical benefits of literature course in the EFL classroom as well as the linguistic development process. It introduced the performance approach as an effective tool and suggested the integration of both traditional and innovatory methods of instructing literature. Additionally, it called attention to the advantages of the new technologies in amusing the EFL learner and transforming the literature classroom from a boring to an exciting task.

Bibliography

-
- ¹ Constantino, R, *Pleasure Reading Helps, Even if Readers Don't Believe it*, Journal of Reading, 1994, 37(6), 504-505.
- ² Povey, J. *Literature in TESL Program: The Language and the Culture*, (New York, 1972).
- ³ <http://www.best-childrens-books.com/bibliotherapy.html>
- ⁴ <http://www.enotes.com/bibliotherapy-reference/bibliotherapy>
- ⁵ McKay, S, *Literature in the ESL Classroom*, TESOL Quarterly, 1982, 529- 36.
- ⁶ Lazar, G. *literature and Language Teaching*, (Cambridge University Press, 1993)
- ⁷ Akyel, A. & Yalcin, E., "Literature in the EFL Class: a Study of Goal-achievement Incongruence", *ELT Journal*, 44/3, (1990), 74-180.
- ⁸ Or, Winnie Wing-fung. "Reinstating literature in the EFL syllabus". In Thinking language : issues in the study of language and language curriculum renewal. Editors : Kitty P. Y. Wong and Christopher F. Green. Hong Kong: Language Centre, Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, c1995 <http://repository.ust.hk/retrieve/1190/thinklang12.pdf>
- ⁹ Hill, J, *Teaching Literature in the Language Classroom*, London: Macmillan Publishers Ltd, 1986.
- ¹⁰ Moody, H. L. B, Approaches to the study of literature: A practitioner's view. In Brumfit, C. J. (ed.). *Teaching literature overseas: Language-based approaches*. *ELT Documents*, 115, 17–36. Oxford: Pergamon Press, (1983).
- ¹¹ Whitehead, R., *Children's literature: Strategies of teaching*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall Inc, (1968).
- ¹² Carter, R. & McRae, J. (eds) (1996). *Language, Literature and the Learner*. Harlow: Addison Wesley Longman.
- ¹³ Lazar, G. *Literature and Language Teaching*. Cambridge: CUP, (1991)
- ¹⁴ Duff, A. & Maley, A., *Literature*. Oxford: OUP, (1990)
- ¹⁵ Cadorath, J. & Harris, S. (1998). "Unplanned Classroom Language and Teacher Training," *ELT Journal*, 52/3: 188.
- ¹⁶ Kramsch, C.. *Context and Culture in Language Teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, (1993).
- ¹⁷ *7Things You Should Know About Next Generation Presentation Tools: Educause Learning Initiative*, 2010
<http://www.educause.edu/Resources/7ThingsYouShouldKnowAboutNextG/194558>