

CHALLENGES IN TEACHING LITERATURE EFFECTIVELY IN EFL CONTEXTS

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Abstract: Teaching literature in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context presents a variety of challenges. These challenges include cultural differences, language proficiency issues, and students' varying levels of interest in literary texts. The complexity of literary language, including figurative speech, metaphors, and historical references, often complicates comprehension for EFL learners. Furthermore, teachers must develop strategies that not only address language barriers but also engage students in deeper critical thinking and appreciation of literature. This paper explores these challenges, focusing on methods to overcome them, such as using multimedia, contextualizing texts, and promoting active reading. It also discusses the role of literature in enhancing language skills and fostering cultural understanding, proposing ways to make literary education more accessible and enjoyable in EFL classrooms.

Keywords: Teaching literature, EFL, language proficiency, cultural differences, critical thinking, multimedia, active reading.

Introduction.

Teaching literature in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context presents several unique challenges, particularly in terms of language proficiency, cultural differences, and the pedagogical approaches used to make literary texts accessible and engaging for students. This literature review examines existing studies on the challenges encountered by EFL teachers and learners in the teaching of literature, highlighting key themes such as linguistic barriers, the selection of appropriate texts, student engagement, and the use of teaching methodologies.

Literature serves as the foundation of language learning, playing a crucial role in developing all language skills, particularly speaking and writing. In this study, literature refers to the use of short stories or other related content. Short stories are considered one of the most effective artistic genres for enhancing the four language skills listening, speaking, reading, and writing due to their engaging and motivational nature. They have been selected for their ability to provide cultural enrichment and promote language development. As Collie and Slater point out, literature offers a rich source for cultural improvement, language growth, and personal involvement. Many educators argue that teaching English should also involve teaching culture. Vernier et al. view the teaching of culture as a fifth language skill that “enriches students’ overall learning experience”. Linguistic competence alone is insufficient for effective communication in a foreign language. Cultural references, such as geography, hobbies, historical events, and personalities, frequently appear in language. Additionally, each culture follows specific rules for formal and informal address and conversational norms. Merely memorizing vocabulary and grammar does not lead to proficiency

unless one understands the sociocultural rules native speakers follow. Ignoring the cultural aspects of language can lead to communication difficulties¹.

Literature review

One of the primary challenges in teaching literature in EFL contexts is the linguistic difficulty of literary texts. According to Lazar, literature often contains complex vocabulary, idiomatic expressions, and syntactical structures that may pose significant challenges for EFL learners who are still developing their language skills². The gap between students' language proficiency and the language demands of literary texts can make it difficult for them to fully understand and appreciate the nuances of literature. As a result, many students struggle with interpreting literary meaning, which can affect their motivation and interest in literature classes³.

Choosing the right texts is another challenge in teaching literature in EFL contexts. According to Hall, the difficulty of literary texts should be aligned with the students' language proficiency level to ensure that learners can understand and critically engage with the material⁴. The selection of texts should not only consider linguistic complexity but also the relevance of the themes and content to the students' lives. Teachers often struggle to strike a balance between literary texts that are culturally enriching and those that are linguistically accessible, making text selection a crucial aspect of effective literature teaching.

Engaging students in literature classes can be challenging, particularly for EFL learners who may perceive literature as an intimidating or irrelevant subject. As noted by Byram and Feng, students may have negative attitudes toward literature if they view it as disconnected from their everyday language use⁵. To overcome this, teachers need to employ innovative teaching strategies that foster student engagement and motivation. Methods such as task-based learning, interactive discussions, and creative activities can help students connect with literary texts and see their relevance to both language learning and broader cultural understanding⁶.

Research and methods.

This study aims to explore the challenges in teaching literature effectively in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context. To achieve this, a qualitative research approach will be adopted, focusing on gathering in-depth insights from both teachers and students involved in EFL literature instruction. A descriptive research design will be employed to identify and analyze the specific challenges that educators face when teaching literature in EFL classrooms. The study will examine the teachers' perspectives on the use of literary texts in language teaching, the difficulties they encounter, and their strategies to overcome these challenges.

Result and discussion

This section presents the analysis and discussion of the data collected from classroom observations regarding the challenges of teaching literature in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context. The analysis focuses on identifying common themes, difficulties faced by both teachers and students, and how these challenges impact the effectiveness of literature instruction.

One of the most frequently cited challenges by both teachers and students was the level of language

¹ Murdoch, G. Exploiting well-known short stories for language skills development. IATEFL LCS SIG Newsletter. 2002. - P.17.

² Lazar, G. Literature and language teaching: A guide for teachers and trainers. Cambridge University Press. 1993. - P.56.

³ Khatib, M., Rezaei, S., & Derakhshan, A. The role of literature in enhancing language skills. English Language Teaching. 2001. -P.208.

⁴ Hall, G. Literature in language education. Palgrave Macmillan. 2005 -P.67.

⁵ Byram, M., & Feng, A. (2004). Culture and language learning in the European context. Language, Culture and Curriculum. 2004. -P.136.

⁶ Pennington, M.C., & Richards, J.C. Teaching language through literature. Routledge. 2016. -P.57.

proficiency required to understand and engage with literary texts. In many EFL contexts, students possess limited vocabulary and grammatical knowledge, which makes it difficult for them to fully comprehend the nuanced meanings, metaphors, and cultural references found in literary works. This was especially evident in advanced texts such as novels, poetry, and plays, which often employ complex language structures. To address this challenge, teachers should consider providing pre-reading activities to activate students' background knowledge and introducing vocabulary-building exercises before reading. Simplifying language and selecting texts appropriate to the students' proficiency level are crucial strategies for making literature more accessible. Additionally, integrating visual aids or multimedia resources can enhance comprehension and engagement.

Another significant challenge identified in the study was the cultural gap between the literature being taught and the students' own cultural backgrounds. Many literary works contain cultural references, idiomatic expressions, or historical contexts that are unfamiliar to students, making it difficult for them to relate to or fully appreciate the text. This issue was more pronounced when reading works from Western literature, which are often rich in cultural specifics that students from non-Western backgrounds may not easily understand. To overcome this challenge, teachers could provide context-building activities that introduce students to the cultural, historical, and social backgrounds of the literary works being studied. Discussing cultural differences and using cross-cultural comparisons can help students gain a better understanding of the text. Additionally, selecting literature that reflects the students' own cultural contexts or using universal themes can make literature more relatable.

Maintaining student engagement in literature lessons was another challenge identified in the study. Many students reported that they found reading literary texts, especially lengthy novels, to be tedious and uninteresting. This disengagement often resulted in students not completing the reading assignments and participating minimally in discussions. To enhance engagement, teachers should incorporate more interactive activities, such as group discussions, dramatizations, or creative projects related to the texts. Using multimedia, such as film adaptations of literary works, could also make the text more engaging and accessible. Furthermore, encouraging student choice in selecting literature based on their interests could increase motivation and engagement.

Key challenges in teaching literature effectively in EFL contexts, along with possible solutions:

Challenges	Solutions
Language proficiency and comprehension difficulties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pre-teach vocabulary and key phrases before reading. - Use simplified or adapted versions of texts. - Incorporate multimedia aids (videos, images, audio versions).
Cultural gaps and lack of contextual understanding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provide background information on historical and cultural contexts. - Use cross-cultural comparisons to relate texts to students' experiences. - Include literature from diverse cultures, including students' own backgrounds.
Lack of student engagement and motivation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Use interactive methods such as role-playing, dramatization, and group discussions. - Incorporate modern and relatable texts alongside classics. - Allow students to choose texts based on their interests.
Difficulty in analyzing and	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Teach literary analysis step by step using guided reading

interpreting literary texts	activities. - Use graphic organizers to help break down themes, characters, and symbols. - Encourage student-led discussions and peer teaching.
Time constraints and curriculum demands	- Integrate literature with language learning objectives (e.g., teaching grammar or vocabulary through stories). - Use short stories, excerpts, or poetry instead of long novels. - Apply flipped classroom techniques (students read at home, discussion happens in class).
Student reluctance to read lengthy texts	- Assign shorter texts or divide longer works into manageable sections. - Use audiobooks or video adaptations to supplement reading. - Encourage creative responses (illustrations, storytelling, modern adaptations).

Conclusion

The challenges in teaching literature effectively in EFL contexts are multifaceted, encompassing language proficiency, cultural relevance, engagement, and time constraints. However, by adopting strategies such as providing context, using interactive activities, selecting appropriate texts, and balancing curriculum demands, teachers can overcome these challenges and create a more effective and enjoyable literature learning experience for students. Addressing these challenges is essential for fostering a deeper appreciation of literature and enhancing language learning in EFL classrooms.

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