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BENEFITS OF USING LITERARY TEXTS IN IMPROVING READING SKILLS

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Abstract

The use of literary texts in language education provides significant benefits for improving learners' reading skills. Literary works expose students to a wide range of vocabulary, grammatical structures, writing styles, and cultural contexts, helping them develop both linguistic and interpretive abilities. Through reading short stories, novels, poems, and other literary genres, learners can improve reading comprehension, expand their vocabulary, develop critical thinking, and increase their ability to infer meaning from context. Literary texts also encourage students to engage emotionally and intellectually with what they read, which can increase motivation and interest in reading. Furthermore, literature provides opportunities for learners to analyze characters, themes, and events, thereby strengthening their analytical and interpretive skills. This abstract highlights the pedagogical value of literary texts and argues that their systematic integration into language classrooms can contribute to the development of effective, confident, and independent readers.

Key words: authentic materials, Classroom environment, methods, communicate, technique, integrating, developmental, evaluate, stories

Recent trend in EFL teaching indicates the necessity of integrating literature because its rich potential to provide an authentic model of language use. Among literary genres, short stories seem to be the most suitable choice for this due to its potential to help students enhance the four skills—listening, speaking, reading and writing—more effectively because of the motivational benefit embedded in the stories. The purpose of this article is to familiarize EFL instructors with the effectiveness of using short stories in EFL instruction. After presenting criteria for selecting a short story, discussions are focused on how to exploit a short story for enhancing students' language skills.

However, since the 1980s the situation changed quite radically and literature is undergoing an extensive reconsideration within the language teaching profession. The inclusion of literary works in ESL/EFL classes has attracted more interest among teachers, and more and more studies on how to use literature in EFL/ESL classes are conducted. This interest in using literature in language teaching lies in three interrelated elements: authenticity, culture and personal growth. First of all, literary texts can be more beneficial than informational materials in stimulating the acquisition process as they provide authentic contexts for processing new language. Since literary texts contain language intended for native speakers, literature stands as a model for language learners to become familiar with different forms and conventions (Collie and Slater, 1991, 4; Ur, 1996, 201). Containing real examples of grammatical structures and vocabulary items, the literary texts raise learners' awareness of the range of the target language and advance their competence in all language skills. (Carter and Long, 1991, 2-4) Second, using literature in language teaching has the advantage of providing cultural information about the target language. Literary texts increase foreign language learners' insight into the country and the people whose language is being learnt,

which fosters learners' ability to interpret discourse in different social and cultural target language contexts (Savvidou, 2004). Finally, since literature enables students to understand and appreciate other cultures, societies and ideologies different from their own, it encourages personal growth and intellectual development.[1]

In line with these ideas, Littlewood (2000: 179) emphasizes the importance of the use of literature in EFL classes by showing the fact that a major problem of language teaching in the classroom is the creation of an authentic situation for language. All language classrooms, especially those outside the community of native speakers, are isolated from the context of events and situations which produce natural language. Literature can overcome this problem because, in literary works, language creates its own context. The actual situation of the reader becomes immaterial as he or she looks on the events created by language. These events create, in turn, a context of situation for the language of the book and enable it to transcend the artificial classroom situation. In short, literary works undoubtedly enable students to understand the language better by providing the students with real world experiences, relationships between society and people where the target language is spoken, even if they are fictions.

Why Short Stories?

Despite its benefits for students, some objections are always raised against the use of literature in public schools due to overcrowded classes, overloaded syllabus and limited time—some problems commonly met in elementary to high public schools in almost all developing countries. First, the deviated and figurative language of poetry necessitates very long time to grasp. Second, the length of novel will make it difficult for such classes to finish. Finally, drama can be used in classes, but it will be difficult to act out a play in crowded classes within limited course hours. Considering these objections, it is obvious that among literary forms, short-story which is defined by Poe (in Abrams, 1970: 158) "as a narrative that can be read at one sitting of from one-half hour to two hours, and that is limited to 'a certain unique or single effect,' to which every detail is subordinate" seems to be the most suitable one to use in public schools. Since it is short, and aims at giving a 'single effect', there is usually one plot, a few characters; there is no detailed description of setting. So, it is easy for the students to follow the story line of the work.

This reason, that short stories are the most suitable literary genre to use in English teaching due to its shortness, is supported by Collie and Slater (1991: 196) when they list four advantages of using short stories for language teachers. First, short stories are practical as their length is long enough to cover entirely in one or two class sessions. Second, short stories are not complicated for students to work with on their own. Third, short stories have a variety of choice for different interests and tastes. Finally, short stories can be used with all levels (beginner to advance), all ages (young learners to adults) and all classes.

Choosing the Text

The use of short-story in English teaching should be aimed to encourage the students to use what they have previously learnt. By doing this, the learning process will be student-centered. However, the teacher plays a great role. She/he must choose a suitable text to use in class, and should help her/his students understand the story with various activities.

In using short stories to teach English, story selection is indeed one of the most important roles of the teacher. Since the lengths of short-stories quite vary, choose a story short enough to handle within course hours. The shortness of the text is important for the students because they will see that they can read, understand and finish something in English, and it will give the

[1] Salikhova N., Sherbayev D. (2025). *THE ROLE OF MOTIVATION IN TEACHING SPEAKING THROUGH AUTHENTIC MATERIALS*. Multidisciplinary and Multidimensional Journal., 2025/2/3.

students a feeling of achievement and self-confidence. Besides the length of the text, Hill (1994: 15) points out three other basic criteria of choosing the text: (1) the needs and abilities of the students; (2) the linguistic and stylistic level of the text; (3) the amount of background information required for a true appreciation of the material.[2]

The importance of considering these criteria could be perceived by realizing that the vocabulary and sentence structure of the short-story to be studied must be suitable to the level of the students. The short-stories with archaic, slang, foreign words, and allusions, having sentences imitating the speech of a particular locality or ignorant people or foreigners should be avoided if the text is intended for students below intermediate level.

Similarly, very long sentences are difficult for students to understand. As students will not understand these sentences and words, they will get bored and not read the work. Therefore, before giving the short-story, the teacher should decide the readability of the text. In order to meet that readability criterion, using graded or simplified stories is possibly the most practical way. According to Ur (1996: 150), "… the use of 'authentic' text with less proficient learners is often frustrating and counter-productive". Therefore, the use of simplified text with less proficient readers is highly suggested for the sake of suiting the texts with the level of students.

In addition to the previous criteria, Spack (1985) suggests the aspect of interest to be considered. According to him, it is important for the teacher to choose stories that would interest students.

that he/she most likes to read and teach, and that have been made into film to provide visual interpretation. McKay (2001: 322) and Rivers (1968: 230) point out that students read and enjoy a text if the subject-matter of the text is relevant to their life experience and interests.

However, the selection of short stories should be done in reference to the course objective, the learners' profile, and the story content in order to make the best of it. Since every teaching situation is unique, the use of one single piece of literature varies from classroom to classroom and from teacher to teacher. Like what the discussion in this paper shows, short stories can be used to provide different activities for reading, listening, writing and speaking classes. Short story creates a meaningful context to teach different language focuses and to improve the students' interpretative strategies. Last but not least, the same story may also serve for some other language focuses or skills such as vocabulary development.

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