

# *Teaching Literary Text To EFL Learners In The Congolese Context: Pedagogical Implications*

## *[Enseigner Le Texte Littéraire Aux Apprenants d'Anglais Comme Langue Etrangère dans le Contexte Congolais : Implications Pédagogiques]*

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**Abstract:** This paper is almost an attempt to highlight the importance of literature teaching, particularly, different genres to our EFL learners, in a Congolese context (DRC).

The purpose is to argue the effectiveness of instruction, in hope to assist teachers to develop their learners' strategic knowledge to enhance their language skills and thus, assess their learners' attitude, in terms of how our EFL students may have distorted views about English in general, and literature in particular.

**Key words:** Literature, teaching, language skills, EFL, learners.

**Resumé :** Ce travail est un essai qui donne la lumière dans l'enseignement de la littérature, particulièrement aux différents genres littéraires aux apprenants d'anglais comme une langue étrangère, dans le contexte purement congolais (RDC).

L'objectif est d'alimenter l'effectivité de l'instruction, dans l'espoir d'assister les enseignants à développer les connaissances stratégiques pour avancer leurs habiletés linguistiques et ainsi assurer les attitudes des apprenants pour connaître comment nos apprenants d'anglais comme langue étrangère peuvent comprendre l'anglais en général et la littérature en particulier.

**Mots clés :** Littérature, enseignement, habiletés linguistiques, ALE, apprenants de l'anglais

### **1. Introduction**

Literature has long been subject of study and discussions at many levels of analysis, but until recently, it has not been given much emphasis in the EFL/ESL classroom only since 1980. This area has attracted more interest among EFL teachers and educationalists. In recent years, the role of literature as a basic component and source of authentic texts of the language curriculum, rather than an ultimate aim of English instruction, has been gaining more interest as well.

Among language educators, there has been an interesting debate about how, when, where, and why literature should be incorporated in ESL/EFL curriculum. Vigorous discussion of how literature and ESL/EFL instruction can work together and interact for the benefit of students and teachers has led to the flourishing of interesting ideas.

In this line of thought, examining literature's role sounds to reveal the growing tendency of introducing literature to facilitate language teaching since the later part of the century. Research has since suggested that this is no longer a drift but has become the norm. Although much research has identified how best utilize literature in the EFL classroom, little research exists on how learners react in classroom literature teaching practices.

Instead, the majority of research has focused on how much a learner's language skills have improved from a test-driven, i.e., quantitative perspective, and has largely ignored a more qualitative perspective on student perceptions of classroom activities. Nonetheless, it is always quite interesting to be aware of how best to structure this support, taking into account the influence students may have in determining the methodology their teachers use in classroom.

This study finds its central focus on analyzing how students react to various forms of literature instructions. It examines the reaction of learners to different approaches to integrating literature into a syllabus, i.e., used as a control, where neither scaffolding nor schema activating activities are used, and students are asked to explore a text with no support from the teachers, i.e., a stylistics approach; and an approach that combines stylistics with reader response theory that is prefaced by a teacher-centered lecture on literary theory designed to promote metacognitive awareness.

## **2. Research Questions**

Thus, the research question guiding this research includes the following: what might be the importance of teaching literary texts to our first-year EFL students? In order to get a reliable answer to this question, the following research questions are raised:

1. Does teaching literature in our department aim at teaching the underlying English language structure?
2. In what ways may literature teaching improve and enhance our EFL learners' language awareness?
3. How might be an appropriate incorporation of literature teaching into the English language classroom?

The hypotheses that can be drawn from the aforementioned questions are:

1. It may help to identify the aims of activities and tasks which can be used to explore the target language structure.
2. Literature teaching seems to gradually improve and enhance our EFL learners' language awareness.
3. The inclusion of literature in the language classroom is supposed to provide valuable authentic material, develop better personal involvement and may be contribute to the readers' competence enrichment.

Accordingly, this study examines the answers to these questions and helps close the gap between learner and teacher perspectives on classroom methodology. This includes suggestions for EFL teachers and for further research in this area; even though, this work does much to outline the chasm that exist between the study of literature and language studies. In this sense, the EFL group seems to begin forging closer ties with literature studies and more frequent occurrences of their integration abound.

Focus was mainly on foreign language learner beliefs about learning in general and its relationship to foreign language acquisition, arguing that learner beliefs cannot be reduced to a single theory. This study has used an exploratory factor analysis on a belief questionnaire administered to language students.

To support these hypotheses, an exploratory study was undertaken with our EFL first-year students at the Teacher Training college of Kinshasa (ISP Gombe 2022- 2023). The sample comprised a group of first-year EFL learners. A triangulation of approaches was adopted in data collection instrumentation and analysis. The research tools opted for were: Background questionnaire, semi-structured interview and classroom observation; using qualitative and quantitative analyses.

The research instruments and procedures that the researcher opted for the investigation as well as exposes the results of both a questionnaire, interview and classroom observation which reveal our teachers and our students' attitudes towards literature.

### 3. Objectives of the study

As mentioned previously, the present research serves to illustrate the impact of literature teaching in the Congolese EFL context. In other words, this is to investigate and reflect the responses of our EFL learners towards literary texts. Accordingly, this part provides a thorough account of the research instruments and procedures.

At the beginning, a questionnaire was administered to collect some information concerning the informants, followed by interviews as verbal report methods and classroom observation.

In fact, several broad aims can be drawn to justify the implementation of literature in any curriculum. As a result, the major objectives to teaching literature in our department can be summarized in our learners' ability to:

- read literary masterpieces in the original
- get better knowledge of the target language
- develop their reading skills
- share with other the emotional moments created by and the 'imaginative vitality
- get acquainted with another culture

### 4. Research methods and procedures

Data gathering instruments which were used in this study are a questionnaire for students, semi-structured interview with both teachers and students and classroom observation. For the sake of collecting the necessary data for this research work, a variety of qualitative and quantitative data collection methods were opted for during the field research to facilitate the validation of research questions and hypotheses and obtain triangulation of data sources. Research design is governed by the notion of 'fitness for purpose'. The purposes of this research determine the methodology and design of it.

Case study research excels at bringing us to an understanding of a complex issue or object and can extend experience or add strength to what is already known through previous research.

Moreover, "It provides a unique example of real people in real situations, enabling readers to understand ideas more clearly than simply by presenting them with abstract theory or principles." Cohen et al (2000:181).

### 5. Findings and data analysis

As far as the main results reported from our EFL learners from different sources concerning, it may be summarized in the following points:

- 19 % of the students stated that it was inappropriate for their needs in EFL literature class.
- 36 % of the students thought that the text chosen was interesting.
- 21% of the students indicated that it was very encouraging for them to contribute to the class discussion.
- 24.16% of the students stated that during their classes they kept note taking during the lecture.
- 31.66% of students have learned to support their intuitions.
- 35.27% of students enjoyed approaching literature from a different perspective.
- 19.44% of students found group work good and useful.
- 20.27% of the students had enough opportunity to express themselves and appreciated the way words are used.

Analysis of the participants' responses to a questionnaire and semi-structured interview showed that most of them held positive attitudes toward literary texts.

One may conclude that what is significantly related to their attitudes is explicitly the preferred learning styles, such as being given opportunities to express their personal opinions, to look for the underlying meaning of the text, and to read about people and experiences different from their own. In other words, learners' attitude toward literature may be influenced not only by their own reading habits but also by the teachers' instructional methods.

## 6. The analysis of the teacher's semi-structured interview

From the results obtained to this interview, one would say that the teachers themselves appear to be unaware of the set of strategies that might be applied and useful to teach literary texts, and thus, process comprehension. All of them seem to entirely focus on only while-reading strategies neglecting completely those used for activating background and strategic knowledge. Almost all of the interviewed teachers at the research setting complained about:

- Teacher-centred class;
- Students' lack of reading abilities;

Varies motivation and tendency towards relying on the teacher's interpretation of the literary text being studied.

## 7. The interpretation of the data

To sum up, the results reveal literature teaching in EFL contexts is a fertile area worth exploring. Since the present study has exemplified only one possibility of how literature can be introduced to EFL students and has reported on the feedbacks of only a small population, more studies, involving different literary texts, instructional methods, or student populations, are encouraged. *It is hoped that as many teachers introduce literature to EFL classes, more EFL students will develop interests in literature and will further learn the English language through literature.*

Teachers in the classroom as practitioners, indicate that they use Literature in their English teaching practices to broaden students' horizons by giving them a knowledge of the classics of literature; to improve their general cultural awareness; to stimulate their creativity and literary imagination and develop their appreciation of literature; as well as to introduce students to masterpieces in British and American literature as an educative experience, and to add to students' knowledge of the world at large.

## 8. Conclusion

Literary texts offer a rich source of linguistic input and can help learners to practice the four skills: speaking, listening, reading and writing, in addition to exemplifying grammatical structures and presenting new vocabulary.

In other words, literature and culture classes introduce students to close reading of a variety of texts, help them develop intercultural skills such as empathy, contextualization, differentiation, as well as linguistic competence in the target language which supports engagement with the study of literature and culture.

Integrating literature into the EFL syllabus is beneficial to the learners' linguistic development, teachers need to select an approach which best serves the needs of EFL learners under an appropriate contextual syllabus.

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