

## **The Pedagogical Benefits and Challenges of Incorporating Literary Texts into Language Teaching**

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**Article Received:** 01/03/2025

**Article Accepted:** 02/04/2025

**Published Online:** 03/04/2025

**DOI:**10.47311/IJOES.2025.7.04.15

### **Abstract:**

This paper analyzes the role of literature in English Language Teaching (ELT) in order to assess its educational advantages as well as its problematic aspects. Teaching literature, which encompasses poetry, prose, and drama, has the potential to improve language proficiency, foster cultural appreciation, and enhance cognitive skills, which is why integrating it into a curriculum provides unique teaching opportunities. On the other hand, teachers encounter serious challenges such as the comprehension level of the various texts, the heterogeneity of learners, and the integration of literature's language objectives with communicative language teaching objectives. The scope of this manuscript rests on both benefits and difficulties of including literary works in the English class, which are supported with relevant research and classroom practice.

**Keywords:**English Language Teaching (ELT),Literary Texts, Pedagogical Benefits, Language Acquisition, Cultural Literacy, Critical Thinking

### **Introduction**

From as early as I can remember, the integration of literary texts in teaching English has always been a subject in debates concerning language pedagogy. In the past, literature was viewed as one of the major characteristics within the context of language teaching because of its unrivalled nature in providing rich language input and enabling the learners to use language in the authentic complex form. Although people agree that literature can improve students' language skills, the problem is: how can it be effectively utilized in literature in the context of language teaching which focuses on communication and practical uses of language? There have been moments of mutual understanding and empathy (Carter, 2007; Cook,1994; Lazar, 1993), as might be the case of the early 1900s, marked by the dominance of the grammar translation method, which used literary texts as "illustrations of the grammatical rules" (Duff & Maley, 1990, p. 3).

The role of literature in language teaching certainly extends to the enhancement of vocabulary and grammar. Literary texts afford learners the chance to see the language as it is used in rich and genuine contexts, often preparing them to deal with various registers, nuances, and forms of the language. Literature helps learners understand a variety of dialects, colloquial and stylistic deviations which aid in the understanding of the language. Moreover, literature opens the door to different cultures, historical times and social realities which is why is so important for increase cultural literacy and develop sympathy.

While the didactic advantages of literary texts are generally accepted, integrating them into actual teaching practice poses a number of problems. Some educators may regard the inclusion of literary texts as an indulgence rather than a requirement in a modern ELT setting where the focus is often on the communicative skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. Additionally, many language learners, particularly those with low proficiency skills, are likely to consider literary texts daunting, too difficult, or unrelated to their communicative expectations.

With globalization and the advent of new digital technologies, language learning has also shifted to practical use of the language, intercultural communication, and digital skills, which receive more attention nowadays. Such transformations incite fundamental queries in regard to the role of literature in a such heterogeneous and mobile learning context. Is literature merely an optional pedagogic tool, an adjunct to the process of language acquisition, or is it a primary element of the curriculum? Where do teachers draw the line between artistic, aesthetic, and culturocentric characteristics of literature and the utilitarian, practical requirements set by contemporary language learners?

This paper attempts to tackle these problems by analyzing the pedagogical advantages and obstacles of the integration of literary texts into English language teaching. It seeks to analyze the literature-in-ELT pedagogy's theoretical underpinnings, as well as give relevant examples and methods of coping with the barriers that most teachers face. This research will analyze the consequences of using literature in language classrooms, both the productive and restrictive, and provide insight into the roles that literature can play in language development within the 21st century.

### **Pedagogical Benefits of Using Literary Texts in ELT**

#### **1. Enrichment of Linguistics**

Literary texts play a significant role in the field of language teaching. They are important at three levels: linguistic, methodological and motivational (Dymešová, 2006). In explaining the benefits of integrating literature in the language class-room, scholars make an appeal to different values of the literary text. While Lazar(1993) claims that literature sharpens linguistic and cognitive skills and enhances students' understanding of the human condition, The most prominent benefit of using literature in teaching languages rests with the enrichment of vocabulary, grammar, and syntax of learners. Learners texts contain practically every form of language including idioms, colloquial, and even complex sentences which are lacking in basic language activities or books.

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**Refined Lexis:** Literary works integrate learners with per excellence and broad lexis which helps them supplement their average conversational vocabulary.

**Stipulation of Complex Structures:** Literary texts normally have complicated and sophisticated sentences which demand higher skill of understanding and reproducing more advanced language.

**Stylistic Sensibility:** Students become sensitive towards different ways of authors and genres which gives them more freedom to appreciate more and analyze various possibilities of expression in language through different language registers.

For instance, Shakespeare in his *Macbeth* gives complex sentence structure and variety of vocabulary at the same time. Moreso, learners are prompted to not just understand the definitions of words but the context of the word's encompassing meaning in history and culture.

## 2. Social and Cultural Circumstances

Literature offers the chances for the learners to interact with the sociocultural and historical milieu in which the given texts were created. This expose help promote intercultural understanding and a deeper appreciation of different societies, values, and perspectives.

- **Global and Historical Awareness:** Literature often reflects the socio-political issues of its time, offering valuable insights into different eras and cultures.
- **Cultural Sensitivity:** Exploring literature from different parts of the world helps develop intercultural competence, allowing students to better navigate social interactions in an increasingly globalized world.

The cultural model views literature, the product of social and historical circumstances, as one of the most palpable and precious means of achieving cultural insights (Scott, 1964). Literary texts can be used in order to engage and induce learners by providing them with deeper associations with target cultures (Lazar, 1993). Learners are prone to being familiar with traditions, ideologies, views and feelings within the genres of literature. Teaching literature provides learners with a truly cultural competence (Sell, 2005),

For instance, reading Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* provides students with a nuanced understanding of African colonial history and indigenous cultures, enriching their cultural knowledge.

## 3. Promoting Critical Thinking and Interpretation

The idea of using literature as a tool for developing critical thinking skills is best represented by the *critical literacy approach*. The development of *critical literacy skills* enables students to interpret different types of texts using critical lens. Students are particularly encouraged to explore social phenomena and their effect on human relations in order to acquire tools that enable them to explore critically traditional norms and values. *Critical literacy* takes its roots in the socio-cultural view of language, critical philosophy, pedagogy, educational sociology, feminist concerns and posts tructualist theory (Gee, 1996; Janks, 2010; Van, 2009). Literary texts help students to think critically and interpret beyond the surface. Literature is more stimulating than textbooks because it has symbols, metaphors,

and ambiguity, therefore requires critical thinking in contrast to a straightforward answer from a textbook.

**Skilled Interpretation:** With the use of imagery, symbols, and themes, learners skillfully extract meaning fostering enhanced interpretation and analysis skills.

**Creativity:** As students dive into discussions over characters, plots, and themes, literature becomes an avenue that fosters creative expression and the imagination.

When reading George Orwell's 1984, students on top of discussing the text's literal meaning are likely to analyze and associate the book's concepts of power, surveillance, and freedom with modern-day societal matters.

#### **4. Enhancing Reading and Writing Skills**

“Literature can be helpful in the language learning process because of the personal involvement it fosters in readers” (Collie, J., & Slater, S. (1990). The incorporation of literary texts can enhance both reading and writing skills through promoting a more integrative approach toward the language.

**Reading Comprehension:** Literature is one of the most powerful tools that can help to improve students' reading comprehension, as its varying levels of difficulty require analysis of narrative, character, and theme.

**Writing Practice:** Literature also helps students develop writing skills through the creation of essays, summaries, and other responses. These tasks foster coherence, structure, style, and, thus, good writing.

#### **Challenges of Incorporating Literary Texts in ELT**

##### **1. The Complexity of Language and Its Accessibility**

Although literature can be beneficial language-wise, for students with lower levels of proficiency, it may be difficult due to its complexity. The vocabulary, grammar, and even the language itself in many literature pieces is overwhelming and can hinder understanding and comprehension.

**The Difficulty of Language:** Literary texts do include some form of language such as metaphors and even cultural symbols that happen to be challenging for the non-native speakers and readers. **Cognitive Load:** The effort needed to break down and understand literature with the language in question can be tedious, especially for learners with no adequate knowledge of the language. As an example, a text like *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen can be said to use very complicated language that might be very hard for English Language Learners who do not have any background knowledge of British literature or the cultural aspects of the time period.

##### **2. Syllabus Restrictions and Time Limitations**

In numerous language teaching situations, particularly those with a focus on tests, educators can have the challenge of trying to integrate the use of literature in the classroom with preparing students for an incursive examination. Attempts to teach a literary text require a qualitative analysis of literature which does not go hand in hand with the desire to deal with a large quantity of topics.

**Time Management:** Literary texts often demand more class time for reading, discussion, and analysis than other materials, such as textbooks or worksheets.

**Curriculum Pressure:** In curricula focused on specific language skills (e.g., speaking, listening, writing), integrating literature may be seen as an extra, non-essential activity.

In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms in certain contexts, teachers may feel pressured to prioritize functional language use over literary exploration, leading to a limited focus on literature.

### **3. Learner's Preferences And Motivation**

Not every learner is interested in literature and some of them may even find it more difficult than other components of language. Sometimes, when a student does not have an immediate need for studying literature, its texts can be termed as “difficult” or its study as “irrelevant”. Lack of motivation: It is well-known that students whose interest in literature is low do not wish to actively participate in the class and may not show much interest even when the teacher is engaging with them. Cultural relevance: Some literary pieces may have been written with certain culture in mind and this might be at odds with the even wider variety of cultures the learners come from, making a number of learners feel alienated.

As an illustration, the cultural nuances and the historical setting of non-English works like *The Great Gatsby* can alienate students from English speaking backgrounds and as a result, they lose interest in the work.

### **4. Classroom Management and Diverse Learning Needs**

Literary texts often provoke vivid arguments which is an interesting side of learning a language as a whole. However, it seems to be much harder to organize a class of students with different skills to discuss and converse on more advanced and even controversial aspects of literature.

- **Differentiated Instruction:** Teachers need to employ strategies that cater to varying language proficiency levels within the classroom, which may require significant preparation and modification of the texts.
- **Sensitive Topics:** Some literary works tackle sensitive social, political, or cultural issues that may require careful handling, particularly in diverse classrooms where students may have differing opinions or experiences.

### **Conclusion**

The use of literary texts in teaching English as a language can be advantageous from many perspectives, including language development, critical thinking, and cultural sensitivity. Nevertheless, issues such as language difficulty, time availability, learner motivation, and heterogeneity of the class simply cannot be overlooked and managed at the same time.

Successful use of literature in English Language Teaching ELT, demands careful consideration, flexibility, and consideration of the pupils' objectives in learning the target language. Teachers can lessen the problems by choosing texts which match the learners' level of understanding and which can be comprehended with assistance, and by relating the topics of the literature with the subjects taught in other lessons. In other words, when appropriately used, literature serves to develop not only language skills but also cognitive

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skills and cultural awareness.

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**Citation:**

**Moaz Omer Mohammed Omer & Elaish Ali Musa Ali** "The Pedagogical Benefits and Challenges of Incorporating Literary Texts into Language Teaching" *International Journal of English and Studies (IJOES)*, vol. 7, no. 4, 2025, pp. 10-15. DOI: 10.47311/IJOES.2025.7.04.15.