

The Efficacy of Literature Teaching Methods Currently Adopted in Promoting Sudanese Secondary Level Students' Performance

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ABSTRACT

The present study dealt with the efficacy of literature teaching methods currently adopted in promoting Sudanese secondary level students' performance. The paper mainly strove to assess the contribution of the methods and techniques currently used to fostering EFL schools students' language level. The descriptive analytical method has been adopted as it relevantly fits the nature of the study. The study was based on qualitative data retrieved from the semi-structured interviews which carried out with twenty (20) experts in ELT field. Data collected were analyzed qualitatively using the thematic analysis method. The findings obtained from the study indicated that the model of teaching literature followed in Sudanese secondary schools hinders the linguistic progress of students since it does not motivate them to get benefits from the literary content taught. Based on that, the study came out with a number of recommendations, most notably: it is a necessity to develop a method to integrate efficient reading skills and strategies into literature since reading remains the only means to foster the students' capacities in coping with the bulk of literary works.

Keywords: efficacy, methods, English literature, performance, secondary level

المستخلص

تناولت هذه الدراسة مدى فاعلية الطرق المعتمدة حاليا في تدريس الادب الانجليزي في تعزيز اداء طلاب المرحلة الثانوية السودانيين . سعت هذه الورقة بشكل اساسي الي تقييم مساهمة هذه الوسائل والتقنيات في تعزيز المستوى اللغوي لدى طلاب المرحلة الثانوية دارسي اللغة الانجليزية لغة اجنبية . بناءً علي طبيعة الدراسة فقد أعتد المنهج الوصفي التحليلي . استندت الدراسة الي البيانات النوعية التي تم استرجاعها من المقابلات شبه المنظمة التي اجريت مع (20) خبيراً في مجال تدريس اللغة الانجليزية , من ثم تم تحليل البيانات التي تم جمعها باستخدام طريقة التحليل الموضوعي. اشارت النتائج التي تم الحصول عليها من الدراسة الي ان الطريقة المتبعة لتدريس الادب في المدارس الثانوية السودانية تعوق التقدم اللغوي للطلاب حيث انها لاتحفزهم علي الاستفادة من المحتوى الادبي الذي يتم تدريسه. وتأسيسا علي ذلك خرجت الدراسة بعدد من التوصيات ابرزها : من الضروري تطوير طريقة لدمج مهارات واستراتيجيات القراءة الفعالة في الادب لان القراءة تظل الوسيلة الوحيدة لتعزيز قدرات الطلاب علي التأقلم مع معظم الاعمال الادبية .

الكلمات المفتاحية: فاعلية ، وسيلة ، الادب الانجليزي ، اداء ، المرحلة الثانوية

INTRODUCTION

In fact, Teaching of literature (TEL) at schools alongside the core English language curriculum has become a common pedagogic trend and a strategy adopted by educational authorities in

most countries where English is taught as a foreign or a second language for the reason that literature is too much concerned with EFL/SEL students' linguistic competence development.

Besides upgrading the four skills of language, literature provides knowledge about the cultural and the socio-political backgrounds of the target language community which undeniably enables EFL learners to comprehend how communication occurs in such community. A considerable amount of literature claims that literary texts serve to develop linguistic and literary skills as well as improving language acquisition by focusing students on tasks that allow them to work autonomously, encourage them to express their opinions, and what is more, teaching of literature supplies EFL learners with genuine, authentic samples of language use, widely ranging in text type, register and style (Straja, 2015; Lazar, 1993; Gjuzeleva, 2015). Showalter (2003) goes far to argue that "teaching of literature in the past as well as in the present is regarded as a way of making people better human beings." To put it in a nutshell it can be said that literature fosters language acquisition, cultivates linguistic consciousness, develops interpretation skills and educates the students.

Unquestionably, if literature taught in a functional way, it contributes to upgrading EFL students' communicative capability to the level that makes them more fluent and expressive. Widdowson, H. G. (1975) in his book *stylistics and the Teaching of Literature* has pointed out to the point by saying "literature has its principle aim in development of the capacity for individual response to language use. Hence, students who are supposed to have already developed awareness to literary discourse can convey unique personal messages."

Teaching of literature requires dynamic methodologies to fulfill the desired linguistic purpose of its learning. In the

field of ELT there are four main models commonly used to teach literature in EFL/ESL classrooms which can be stated as follows:

1]: Cultural model which is a very innovative method of teaching literature as it can help EFL students to gain linguistic knowledge along with insights to cultural aspects of the target language in other words this model enables learners to learn about other cultures and ideologies other than their own. However, what is wrong with this approach is that, the text interpretation focus is a teacher-centered and not a student-centered task. .

2]: Language model which aims at providing learners with the tools and techniques they need to interpret a literary text and to make competent critical judgments of it i.e. by this model students learn to use language, vocabulary and etc. Carter & Long (1991) have reserved their opinions on the effectiveness of this approach by commenting that "research has unfortunately shown that this is the most popular approach in the EFL/ESL classrooms."

3]: Personal growth model by which learners learn to engage with the text to enjoy reading. Another aspect of this model is that it develops learners ideas and leads their personal growth hence; its very name.

4]: Integrated model which is proposed to give a true environment to learners to develop listening, speaking, reading and writing (LSRW) skills in a meaningful context. This model is precisely described by Divsar & Tahriri (2009) as "a linguistic approach which utilizes some of the strategies used in stylistic analysis, exploring texts, literary and non-literary, from the perspective of style and its relationship to content and form."

Based on the above-mentioned approaches characteristics, we can conclude that the first three listed approaches differ in terms of their focus on the text: Firstly, the text is seen as a cultural artifact; secondly, the text is used as a focus for grammatical and structural analysis; thirdly the text is stimulus for personal growth activities. What is needed is an approach which attempts to integrate all these characteristics of the three approaches in a way that makes literature content more beneficial and this suggested model can be represented in the above fourth approach.

In Sudan, together with the basic curriculum of the English known as SPINE, the ministry of education has approved a set of supplementary English literature books to be implemented in both basic and secondary levels in order to enhance students' proficiency in English language through studying these literary works which retold in a simplified language. Some Sudanese scholars in the field have addressed the significance of literature teaching in enhancing students' foreign language acquisition. For instance, Albusairi (2008) sees that "the purpose of language learning is widening students' knowledge of the world, broadening their cultural horizons and critical thinking without ribbing them of their culture and this can only be achieved by literary texts". From another perspective, Abdelrahman (2004) believes that, "the negligence of teaching English literature causes the deterioration of English language at the Sudanese schools". Despite the literature part in developing students' language skills, regrettably not much attention has been given to the methods and techniques that functionally

can help in teaching literature in Sudanese secondary schools.

From his observations and follow-up as an English language teacher for nearly two decades, the researcher has noticed that, the literary content taught is not greatly reflected in the students' oral and written production despite the reasonable amount of linguistic content included in the curriculum. Indeed these observations motivated the researcher to conduct this study especially this problem has not sufficiently researched in ELT field in Sudan. Based on the; problem stated, the study has set two main objectives in the hoping of : **(1)** developing an assessment that provides valid information about the efficacy of the teaching literature method currently used in EFL classrooms; and **(2)** recommending practical models for literature teaching that can contribute to advancing the students' linguistic competence.

In the line with these goals a specific question has been put forward for the purpose of being tested, which is: To what extent does the method currently used to teach literature in EFL classrooms contribute to enhancing students' performance? ,

Although domestically there are many studies conducted in this area, the main topic of the present study up to this time remains limited because there are key notions still not discussed broadly or have not been dealt with in depth in the previous work; specifically the efficacy of literature teaching methods currently adopted in EFL secondary classrooms. However, all the previous studies reviewed can support this study in one way or another, especially as they represent a solid ground on which the current study is based.

In a study conducted by Abdallah, S. & Gadallah, B. (2017), the authors investigated the impact of teaching English literature (TEL) on EFL Sudanese secondary schools students. That study offered an excellent historical account of TEL at the secondary level in Sudan, and the findings obtained through the questionnaire adopted indicating that TEL enhances students' linguistic skills. In contrast that study has not come up with any findings being relevant to the improvement of ways (methods & techniques) used in TEL, although it was one of its objectives seeking to achieve. Hassan, S. (2013) from his side investigated the significant role of literature teaching on secondary school students who study English as a foreign language and based on the findings of that study the researcher recommended that teachers of English should adopt a type of teaching methods, approaches, strategies and materials that effectively must contribute to promoting the students' acquisition of a foreign language. In a third study by Ahmed, H. & Salih, H. (2019) the researchers came up with a finding that nearly half of the English teachers who participated in the study knew nothing about the updated methodologies of literature teaching and they only used impractical method that based on the teachers' role in reading and interpreting the texts and with no doubt this model of teaching does not enable the learners to take a remarkable role in the learning process therefore no tangible linguistic benefits can be reaped.

2- METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research Method:

This study is conducted through the descriptive analytical method as an appropriate way of assessing the efficacy

of literature teaching methods currently adopted in upgrading linguistic performance of Sudanese secondary level students

2.2 Data Gathering Tool

The main instrument developed to collect data needed was a semi-structured interview. The aim behind adopting these interviews is to provide feedback about the method and techniques commonly adopted in literature teaching in EFL secondary level classrooms besides providing some remedy tips that effectively can help EFL students get much linguistic benefit from the literary texts handled. The feedback comes in the form of impressions and judgments provided by EFL secondary teachers. Moreover, the assessment of the data acquired from these participants may yield insights which probably support or refute the assumption upon which the present study based. The participants were only asked some open-ended questions being consistent with the study problem to discuss and raise issues that may not have been considered in literature teaching.

2.3 Participants

The participants of this study included twenty (20) EFL secondary school teachers who were selected by employing the linear snow-ball sampling technique which known as chain-referral. This sampling method is often used because the characteristics to be possessed by the target samples are rare and difficult to find, however; the researcher used this method to be fully convinced that the selected participants were cooperative, available and more qualified to achieve the aim in the way that the study was looking forward to

3- DATA ANALYSIS PROCESS

The method chosen for data analysis was a qualitative approach of thematic analysis which used to generate themes from interviews data. The audio recordings of the twenty (20) respondents were listened to several times for more accurate transcription and then all interviews were verbatim transcribed and the main themes relevant to the purpose of the study were extracted, paraphrased and then presented as the final findings.

4- FINDINGS

When the participants expressed their views on the extent of students linguistically benefiting from the supplementary books of literature, the majority of them considered that the methods and techniques used in teaching literature is the biggest obstacle in not achieving the desired benefit from literature books taught. However, there were a number of interviewees attributed the reason to other issues such as students' low level in language, modesty of the literary content presented in addition to the lack of qualified staff fully familiar with the goals behind teaching literature. The following findings were derived from the thematic analysis of the interviews carried out on the participants. The focus would be on the points raised by the interviewees which directly revolving around the study problem.

It is interesting to note that, most, if not all, of the interviewees indicated unanimously that EFL students are not able to take advantage of the literature books they study to upgrade their linguistic performance. One of the experts interviewed initiated the interview by saying "if we teachers encourage students to relate the themes to personal experiences to enable us to elicit students' response to a text or encouraging them to express their

feelings towards the issues of the text, indeed it will make them benefit without hesitation. He also added that "another reason may obstruct our efforts is the lack of teachers' capabilities and qualifications because as he sees teaching is the nerve-ranking job to be done, not all English teachers are eligible in teaching during the great changes that ran after the big adjustments to Sudanese Secondary Schools curricular thirty years ago. During this period, the interviewee continued, unfortunately English has become merely a duty performance to pass an exam to be admitted to any college that is why he must say that secondary level students have never-ever benefited of literature lessons at all in four English skills linguistically unto now and finally he called for changing the basic level system of primary teachers, training, and curricula because as he saw we cannot understand and meet the major challenges of English learning in Sudan unless we follow the right path."

Two other participants whom were interviewed thought that a number of teachers do not really use a proper technique to handle the literary texts and that is the main reason why not benefiting from teaching literature. Perfect English teachers, as the participants believed are those who use effective methods that help their students and guide them to mark any linguistic features from the texts that are significant to their reading, writing speaking and even listening. When the literature lesson looks at the language of the text, certainly that encourages language awareness and motivates students to discuss beyond the surface meaning of the texts and with no any doubt that is regarded as a great linguistic contribution to promoting EFL students' performance.

Also one of the teachers interviewed criticized the way how literature is taught by saying that, the form of examination often makes language teachers work out a method or a way of teaching literature that mainly prepares their students for an exam that itself does not meet the requirements for improving EFL students' language skills. The interviewee continued saying that, teaching of literature in our classrooms is dealt with as a subject and not as a discipline. This opinion is consistent with a study by Gumaa, A. (2010) through which the researcher conducted that, the Sudanese Secondary Certificate (SSC) English Examinations in their recent forms are incomprehensive and lack content validity. They are proficiency tests rather than scholastic standardized achievement examinations. Therefore, they have negative backwash in language education development in our country. That interviewee suggested that the best way to the teaching of literature in EFL classroom is to combine it with structuralism and new criticism since they both deal with the function of language in literature interpretation and analysis as they enhance students' critical thinking.

Three other respondents also shared the opinion of the former interviewee that the current style of literature examination adopted in Sudanese secondary schools enforces some teachers to adopt a specific teaching of literature techniques assisting and qualifying their students to deal with exam in terms of anecdotal information and not from a linguistic aspect. These interviewees urged EFL teachers to foster their students writing skill by asking them to write short essays about

certain literary quotes applying the rules they have learnt in grammar and writing also they can contribute to upgrading their students writing performance by regularly making them summarize and paraphrase the literary texts they learn for the purpose of mastering the written discourse.

Referring to their implicit criticism of the traditional method currently used in EFL classrooms, three of the interviewees suggested adopting more effective techniques in teaching English literature by incorporating values in literature lessons when we ask their students to emerge and reemerge the values they have learnt from the texts by comparing their own values with foreign ones and what is the difference between both , after getting the students to search moral values from the text then we raise students' awareness of values derived from the text itself to analyze the core , reasons, beliefs and traditions through deep meditations to check whether such customs are possible or allowed to be familiar in Muslim world or not . This way linguistically helps in developing EFL students' communication skills.

Two of the experts interviewed despite reserving their opinions on the way how literature is taught in our classrooms and the extent of its effectiveness, they called for adopting another more influential method that can play a tangible role in improving the students' English skills by suggesting that "sometimes we as EFL teachers we need to re-tell the text to students to help them understand the contexts using simple terms to explain what the story is about, and discuss what the authors say in the texts

then get them to tell the storyline of the text again and again to facilitate for them to launch in reading and speaking process. This way of handling a literature lesson makes the students master some phonological features appearing throughout retelling and that in turn enables them later to produce proper discourse.

Three of the participants mentioned that, literature teaching model currently used in our EFL classrooms is a teacher-centered method that does not effectively contribute to learners' linguistic development as it gives little opportunity for extended language work and one of them added that "we need to adopt a literature teaching model which best serves the needs of EFL students and supports the linguistic content of the secondary schools English curriculum".

Two others of those whose opinions were polled in addition to their claim that the grammar translation method commonly being followed in handling literature lessons is ineffective, they confirmed that the supplementary literature books content has been retold in a simplified language lacking authentic expressions and that in turn does not greatly contribute to developing the communication and writing skills of EFL students as these participants believed.

The main reason why it is not worthwhile to take advantage of literature books approved at the secondary level according to three other participants is that, most of English language instructors teach the literature content through indoctrination, repetition and simplification which the latter makes the texts lose the feature of authenticity. These participants considered that, such way of teaching as they believed causes a lack of interest and

enjoyment and as a result the learners may lose motivation in learning literature.

5- CONCLUSIONS

With Reference to the findings obtained, the study comes up with a concluding remark that, the methods, approaches and strategies currently adopted in teaching literature in our EFL classrooms are at the top of all other problems hindering the linguistic benefits that must be reaped from the literature books set approved at the secondary schools. Thus, it is highly advisable to develop an adequate and practical literature teaching methods and techniques and to train EFL teachers to implement them in order to lead their students to create their own sense and impressions towards the literary work they learn in addition to fostering their language skills and cultural awareness about the English.

In light of the current study outputs, the paper offers some recommendations concerning some point which effectively help in dealing with literature content teaching.

1]: As reading remains the most efficient and only means to foster the students' capacities in coping with the bulk of literature, it is a necessity to develop methods to integrate efficient reading skills and strategies in literature work since that is considered as a very urgent requirement.

2]: Pedagogical experts in the field of ELT are requested to develop an approach or a model to teaching literature in the EFL/SEL classrooms which attempts to integrate all elements included in the different other approaches in a way that makes literature lessons interesting and advantageous for learners' linguistic enhancement.

3]: EFL teachers should be highly trained in using innovative models of teaching literature that help in catering the students' interests and the consequence of which will be reflected positively and effectively on their linguistic performance.

4]: EFL teachers requested to make the literature lessons intellectual exercises to help their students discover meanings and interpret literary images by themselves and not only by receiving teachers' sense, impressions and feelings towards the literary content presented and that can only be done by adopting effective strategies and techniques by those concerned with teaching literature.

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