



Improving EFL Learners' Cultural Background through Teaching Novels

A Case Study of Secondary Schools, greater Madani Locality, Gezira State, Sudan (2025)

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Abstract

This study aims at: investigating the effectiveness of teaching novels in enhancing EFL learners' cultural background and generating their learning motivation. The study adopted the descriptive analytical method. The data for the study were collected by a questionnaire which was distributed among fifty (50) of EFL teachers of the secondary level schools at greater Madani locality. The collected data were analyzed by the (SPSS) programme. The most important results were following: teaching novels positively affected on EFL learners' cultural knowledge as the novels supply the EFL learners with cultural information and increased their learning motivation. The study recommended that: EFL learners should be enabled to improve their cultural knowledge through reading novels,. EFL learners should be motivated through teaching novels and EFL learners should gain global cultural information through novels.

Key Words: EFL learners' cultural background, learning motivation, reading novels.

ملخص الدراسة

تهدف الدراسة الى تنمية الخلفية الثقافية لطلاب اللغة الإنجليزية وزيادة تحفيزهم لتعلم اللغة الانجليزية خلال قراءة الروايات. اتبعت الدراسة المنهج التحليلي الوصفي حيث استخدمت الباحثة نظام الاستبانة لجمع بيانات الدراسة من خمسين (50) معلماً ومعلمة للغة الإنجليزية بمدينة الكبرى ولاية الجزيرة السودان. بعد جمع البيانات تم تحليلها بنظام برنامج الحزم الإحصائية للعلوم الاجتماعية (SPSS) توصلت الدراسة إلى أن تدريس الروايات الأدبية له تأثير إيجابي على تنمية الخلفية الثقافية لطلاب اللغة الانجليزية كلغة أجنبية كما يزيد من تحفيزهم علي تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية، توصي الدراسة بتمكين الطلاب من تنمية الخلفية الثقافية خلال النصوص الأدبية و تحفيز الطلاب على تعلم اللغة الانجليزية من خلال الروايات الأدبية، واقتناء معلومات عن الثقافات العالمية.

211 Sara Madani Mohammed Rahma , Al haj Ali Adam Ismail, Improving EFL Learners' Cultural Background through Teaching Novels

، مجلة البطانة للعلوم التربوية العدد التاسع عشر ، 2025 ، ص(225-211)



1.0 Introduction

One of the best ways to teach L2 culture is through using L2 literature. In fact, using literary texts can be a magic in teaching L2 culture and language. (Price, 2001) According to Baynham (1997), literary texts have long been part of the repertoire of the language teachers, and many simplified reading series recount stories. The themes of the stories often have a universal appeal and are frequently very widely distributed across cultures, so they make ideal reading in the early stages of the language-learning process. Through novels, students are able to "understand and appreciate cultures and ideologies that are different from their own in time and space, as well as to appreciate the traditions of thought and feeling and artistic form of those cultures" (Carter, 1991). For all of these learners, more deceptive approaches to this type of understanding must be used so they can learn about the culture of the nation: radio programs, movies or videos, newspapers, and last but not least, literary works (Collie and Slater 1987). the use of literary text as stated by (Palardy,1997), the use of literary texts in language learning fosters students' cultural awareness because they "will have the opportunity of understanding and developing insights into the cultures and peoples of the world; developing imagery and visualization abilities; and gaining new perspectives by testing their ideas with that found in books.

1.1 The Problem of the Study

Many of EFL learners lack knowledge about other people cultures. They also need to improve their performance of English language. They lack motivation to learn EFL. In addition, they lack vocabulary and face many difficulties in interacting confidently in the classrooms.

212 Sara Madani Mohammed Rahma , Al haj Ali Adam Ismail, Improving EFL Learners' Cultural Background through Teaching Novels

، مجلة البطانة للعلوم التربوية العدد التاسع عشر ، 2025 ، ص(225-211)



1.2 Objectives of the Study

This study aims to fulfill the following objectives:

- 1.enriching EFL learners 'cultural background through reading novels .
- 2.increasing EFL learners motivation through reading novels.

1.3 Questions of the Study:

This study tries to answer the following questions:

- 1.To what extent does teaching novels enrich EFL learners 'cultural background?
- 2.How does teaching novels increase EFL learners motivation ?

1.4 Hypotheses of the Study

The study suggests the following hypotheses

- 1.Using novels in EFL classes enriches learners 'cultural background.
2. Utilizing novels in EFL classes increases learners motivation.

1.5 Significance of the Study

The study is of great importance for teachers, learners and all those who interest in EFL teaching and learning. For the teacher it shows them motivating teaching materials, for learners it brings to them rich teaching material that help in improving their performance. It also provides to them enjoyment, exposure to languages varieties.



1.6 Methodology of the Study

The study adopts the descriptive analytical method. The researcher will use a questionnaire as a tool to collect the data from the EFL teachers at secondary level. Then it will be analyzed statistically with SPSS Program me.

1.7 Limits of the Study

This study is limited to: Improving EFL Learners cultural background at secondary schools Madani locality, Gezira state ,Sudan. (2025).

2. Literature Review

Language does not exist apart from culture, that is, from the socially inherited assemblage of practices and beliefs that determines the texture of our lives. In a sense, it is ‘a key to the cultural past of a society, a guide to social reality’. Culture and communication are inseparable because culture not only dictates who talks to whom, about what, and how the communication proceeds, it also helps to determine how people encode messages, the meanings they have for messages, and the conditions and circumstances under which various messages may or may not be sent, noticed, or interpreted...

Literary texts provide students with many examples of the real use of language in various contexts, settings, and styles that they can imitate and use in practice Khatib et.al (2011). Although the connection between reading and speaking is not directly related, several studies of extensive reading programs suggest that students who read extensively not only improve their reading proficiency and writing skills but also their vocabulary, listening, and speaking abilities (Day and Bamford,

214 Sara Madani Mohammed Rahma , Al haj Ali Adam Ismail, Improving EFL Learners’ Cultural Background through Teaching Novels

، مجلة البطانة للعلوم التربوية العدد التاسع عشر ، 2025، ص(225-211)



1998). Speaking abilities can be developed by repeating after the teacher, reciting a memorize dialogue, or responding to mechanical drills. According to Khamkhien (2010), speaking is the most important aspect of learning a second language. Students' speaking skills can be improved by question-answer, debate, and role-playing in literature class. According to (Kramsch, 1998), the role of literature as producing discourse and not reproducing the text itself, or the culture it is representing: “the teacher can explain and teach the rhetorical structure, the form and content of the text, but an understanding of the values, intentions, and beliefs embedded in the text can only be achieved through open discussion and negotiation of meanings. It has long been recognized by linguists and anthropologists that the forms and uses of a given language mirror the cultural values of the society in which the language is spoken.

Teaching language in isolation cannot make a learner of the language competent in that language. They need to be aware, for example, of the culturally appropriate ways to address people, express gratitude, make requests, and agree or disagree with someone. They should know that the behaviors and intonation patterns that are appropriate in their own speech community may be considered otherwise by members of the target language speech community. They have to realize that, in order for communication to be successful, language use must be in harmony with the culturally appropriate behavior. In this increasingly globalized and multicultural world, where English has got the status of the *lingua franca* or international language, EFL teachers cannot afford to ignore importance of teaching culture in developing what (Byram, 1997) calls „intercultural communicative competence.



Clearly, everyday language is tinged with cultural bits and pieces fact most people seem to ignore. By the very act of talking, we assume social and cultural roles, which are so deeply entrenched in our thought processes as to go unnoticed. Interestingly, culture defines not only what its members should think or learn but also what they should ignore or treat as irrelevant. That language has a setting, in that the people who speak it belong to a race or races and is incumbents of particular cultural roles, is blatantly obvious

Culture is the foundation of communication. It could be argued that culture never remains static, but is constantly changing. Knowing a second or foreign language should open windows on the target culture as well as on the world at large. On a practical note, culture teaching should allow learners to increase their knowledge of the target culture in terms of people's way of life, values, attitudes, and beliefs, and how these manifest themselves or are couched in linguistic categories and forms. More specifically, the teaching of culture should make learners aware of speech acts, connotations, etiquette, that is, appropriate or inappropriate behavior, as well as provide them with the opportunity to act out being a member of the target culture. Equipped with the knowledge that such notions as "superior" or "inferior" cultures are nothing but sweeping generalizations emanating from lack of knowledge and disrespect to other human beings with different worldviews, learners can delve into the target language and use it as a tool not only to communicate in the country where it is spoken but also to give a second (or third) voice to their thoughts, thus flying in the face of cultural conventions and stereotypes.



To this end, language educators should not only work to dispel stereotypes and pockets of ignorance but contribute to learners understanding that begins with awareness of self and leads to awareness of others. It goes without saying that foreign language teachers should be foreign culture teachers, having the ability to experience and analyze both the home and target cultures. Culture is not only inseparably related to language, but also plays an important role throughout the process of language teaching and learning. The question is not whether or not to teach culture, but, rather, what kind of teaching can promote students' understanding of the nature of the language, communication and human relations. The ability to communicate fully in a second language depends on the degree of non-ethnocentrism of the learner. However, other studies have come to the conclusion that using folktales in teaching L2 culture was not so much successful and useful as expected, though it was better than the methods mentioned by Jones (2011). In this regard, Baynham (1997) argues that one of the difficulties in working on folk stories with a group of students. According to him, when the topic is raised out of context in the ESL classroom, the response may well be „oh, I don't know any“ or other similar responses. Another problem was that the stories were used mostly for the purpose of teaching language skills. Culture was the last issue to be considered.

Nevertheless, it must be mentioned that except the papers mentioned above (about folktales), the number of studies done on using folktales to teach L2 culture is very few and as mentioned above, almost all of them have focused on using folktales to teach other aspects of language in the classroom rather than using it primarily to teach L2 culture. For this very reason, the present authors have tried to do this study. Savvidou,(2004) asserts that, part from offering a distinct literary



world which can widen learners' understanding of their own and other cultures, EFL literature can create opportunities for personal expression as well as reinforce learners' knowledge of lexical and grammatical structure, to experience a literary work, it is necessary to understand the language in which it is expressed, the cultural meanings which it contains, and the circumstances surrounding it. The language teacher therefore must understand the intimate relation between a language and its culture. The students cannot go far into the target language without facing differences in cultural meanings, because the meanings expressed in a language are largely culturally determined. Thus, "One cannot understand a language fully without understanding at least some of the distinct cultural meanings expressed through it.

The literature is used in FL classrooms today should no longer be restricted to canonical texts, but it can and must include the works of contemporary writers from a diverse range of cultures and literary schools using English as their means of expression. Nor should FL teachers feel obliged to undertake that laborious literary analysis and elitist discussion of the literary texts with their FL learners that they remember from their literature classes at school or teacher-training colleges" (Gyuzeleva, 2015).

The successful learner must develop "an awareness of and sensitivity toward the values and traditions of the people whose language is being studied. The importance of an understanding of the "culture" in which the target language is spoken for students of a foreign language has become clear. Here, I have to come back to the questions raised earlier; what do people mean by "culture"? In a foreign language classroom, when teachers talk about incorporating culture into language



teaching, it often means simply introducing typical customs or traditions of the given society. Many teachers consider the use novel in language teaching as an interesting worthy. According to (Sage 1987:1) language teachers should teach novels in the language classroom.

Thus the place of novels as foreign language will be unearthed. According to (Tsai, 2007,p.55) a novel is "fictitious narrative in prose of at least 20,000 words" it is a long narrative in prose detailing the action of fictitious people". Novel as long story in prose, instead, actually an extensive and illustrated account of series of events that happened right through the life of the character. The word novel has been derived from an Italian word novella, which means a new story or anew thing. There are more critics have defined the word novel in different ways and one of them: (Tiltyard,2001,p.55) defines novel as "a novel is not too unorganized, fictitious narrative in prose of at least, say, 20,000 words" it as "a long narrative in prose detailing the action of fictitious people" Precisely, we can easily define the novel as long story in prose, instead, actually an extensive and illustrated account of series of events that happened right through the life of the character. It is an in-depth and inclusive autobiography of character in the novel. Whatever may be the meaning of the novel, it apparent that novel is picture-perfect image of the time writer? It is much the same as a mirror, which reflect, the picture of thing put against it. Cultural awareness:

Literary texts such as novels and plays serve as a window to the target culture, showing ESL/EFL learners how native speakers think, communicate, and live. Despite an imaginary one, the world created in a novel not only reflects the author's own culture, it also presents a complete cultural setting in which characters interact

219 Sara Madani Mohammed Rahma , Al haj Ali Adam Ismail, Improving EFL Learners' Cultural Background through Teaching Novels

، مجلة البطانة للعلوم التربوية العدد التاسع عشر ، 2025، ص(225-211)



and actions take place. By reading a novel, the readers obtain virtual access to the culture and discover the ways the characters view the world, and hence the learning of not only the language, but also the historical, social, political, and economical facts that shape the cultural background of the novel.

Adding to the above benefits are (Maley,1989) proposed reasons for using literature (novels being one major genre) in a language classroom: universality, non-triviality, personal relevance, variety, interest, economy and suggestive power, and ambiguity. Other advantages are that novels contribute to students' personal growth, improve critical thinking skills (Hişmanoğlu, 2005), foster student-centered learning, and give students a different reading experience from textbooks (Gareis et al., 2009). Content continuity, suggested by (Melon,1994), is also one virtue of a book-length novel to be used over several weeks of lessons.

Additionally a novel reflects the pattern eccentricities and attributes of the contemporary age with true colors. Jane Austen said "it is only novel or in short only some work in which the greatest power of the mind are displayed, in which the most thorough knowledge of human nature, the happiest delineation of its varieties, the liveliest effusions of wit humor, are conveyed to the world in the best chosen language. .

3.0 Material and Method:

The participants of this study were (50) of EFL teachers who were randomly selected from secondary schools at Greater Madani Locality (2025). They were invited by the researcher to answer questionnaire statements concern the effectiveness of literary texts e taught in EFL classes. The analyses of the data



were shown in the following section.

4.0 Data Analyses and Discussions

Table (1) The Application of Literary Texts in EFL Settings

No of participation 50			
Summary table: statements	Agree	neutral	disagree
1. Teaching novels expands learner' cognitive skills.	40= 80%	7.= 14%	3= 6%
2. Novels improve learners' cultural background.	47=94%	2 =4%	1=2%
3. Teaching novels increases learners' motivation.	42 =84%	5=10%	3=6%
4. Novels serve as a window to the target culture.	41=82%	4=8%	5=10%
5. Novels improve critical thinking skills.	43=86%	5=10%	2=4%
6. Novels improve learners' language awareness	42 =84	4=8%	4=8%
7. Literary texts widen students' imagination	43=86%	4=8%	3.6%
8. Literary texts improve students' performance	45=90%	3=6%	2=4%

Discussions

Table one shows that “Teaching novels expands learner’ cognitive skills” The majority of respondents of the study 80% agreed with the statement, 14% of them are neutral and only 6% of them disagreed with it Thus, the statement is proved.

Table two shows that “Novels improve learners’ cultural background”. Most of the sample 94% of the respondents agreed while, 4% of them are neutral and only 2% disagree . As such, the statement is justified.

Table three “Teaching novels increases learners’ motivation”, 84% of the respondents agreed, 10% of the sample are neutral with the statement and 6% disagreed with the statement. Thus, the statement is justified.

221 Sara Madani Mohammed Rahma , Al haj Ali Adam Ismail, Improving EFL Learners' Cultural Background through Teaching Novels

، مجلة البطانة للعلوم التربوية العدد التاسع عشر ، 2025 ، ص(225-211)



Table four shows “Novels serve as a window to the target culture”. 82.7% of the respondents agree with the statement. 8 % of the respondents are neutral and 10% disagree with it. Therefore, the statement is proved.

Table five : Novels improve critical thinking skills” the majority of the respondents 86 % agree with the statement. 10 % of them are neutral and only 4% disagree with it. According to the statistical analysis, this statement is proved.

Table six shows that “Novels improve learners’ language awareness”. The majority of respondents 84 % agreed with the statement , 8 % of them are neutral and 8% of them disagree with the statement. Therefore, the statement is proved.

Table seven : “Literary texts widen students’ imagination ” the majority of the respondents 86 % agreed with the statement. 8 % of them are neutral and only 6% of them disagreed with it. According to the statistical analysis, this statement is proved.

Table eight : “Literary texts improve students’ performance”

” the majority of the respondents 90 % agree with the statement, 6 % of them are neutral and 4% of them disagreed with the statement. According to the statistical analysis, this statement is proved.

5. Conclusion and Findings:

The study states the following conclusion and findings:

Conclusion

This study is an investigating the role of literary texts enhancing EFL learners’ cultural background and motivation. The study used a questionnaire as a tool for



data collection. The questionnaire was distributed to (50) teachers who teach English language at secondary schools in Greater Medani locality, Gezira state. The teachers were selected purposively according to their experiences. The data were analyzed manually and the results obtained provide the following findings.

Findings

The study come out with the following findings :

1. Utilizing literary texts in EFL classes enhances learners cultural knowledge..
2. Teaching literature increases EFL learners' motivation.
3. Studying literature develops EFL learner' critical thinking skills.
4. Teaching literature enhances learners' language awareness.
5. Reading literary texts improves learners' vocabulary knowledge.
6. Teaching literary texts in EFL classes enhances learners' language skills..

Recommendations

The study recommended that:

1. EFL learners should be enabled to develops cultural background.
2. Literature should be taught in EFL classes to enhance learners' language awareness.
3. Learners should be motivated to learn English language.
4. EFL teachers should always provide a lot of examples of stories or other types of literary texts to improve the performance of students.
5. Vocabulary knowledge should be develop through teaching literary texts in EFL classes.



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