



Improving EFL Learners' Critical Thinking through Teaching

Literary Texts

A Case Study of Secondary Schools, Alhasahiesa Locality, Gezira State,
Sudan,(2022)

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ABSTRACT

The study aims at improving EFL learners' critical thinking skills and enriching their cultural background through teaching literary texts. The study adopted the descriptive analytical method. The population of the study was the EFL teachers of secondary schools in Alhasahisa Locality. There were two hundred and twenty (220) teachers in Alhasahiesa. The questionnaire were distributed to fifty (50) of them as a sample who were randomly selected, for the data collection. Then the collected data were analyzed by the SPSS program. The results indicate that: many EFL learners are not critical thinkers as they are weak in language skills, teaching literary texts enhances EFL students' critical thinking, teaching literary texts enhances EFL learners' cultural background, teaching literary texts enhances students' interpretation abilities, reading literary texts sharpen EFL students' sense of responsibility and teaching literary texts enhances EFL learners' writing skills. The study recommends: EFL learners should be enabled to develop critical thinking skills, they also should be enabled to develop cultural background, exposed to authentic texts and they should gain the skills of writing through reading literary texts.

Key Words: teaching literary texts, improving critical thinking skill, cultural background.



المستخلص

تهدف الدراسة إلى تحسين مهارات التفكير النقدي لطلاب اللغة الانجليزية وتغذية الخلفية الثقافية لديهم خلال تدريس النصوص الأدبية. اتبعت الدراسة المنهج الوصفي التحليلي. تكون مجتمع الدراسة من مائتين وعشرين (220) معلماً ومعلمة للغة الانجليزية في محلية الحصاصي. تم توزيع إستبانة لجمع البيانات اللازمة للدراسة على خمسين (50) معلماً ومعلمة تم إختيارهم عشوائياً من مجتمع الدراسة. تم تحليل البيانات بالنظام الاحصائي (SPSS) حيث توصلت الدراسة الى: ان الكثير من الطلاب يعانون من الضعف في مهارات التفكير النقدي لضعفهم في المهارات اللغوية، تدريس النصوص الادبية يطور مهارات التفكير النقدي ويدعم الخلفية الثقافية لطلاب اللغة الانجليزية كما يطور مقدرات الإستيعاب والإحساس بالمسؤولية و يطور مهارات الكتابة. لطلاب اللغة الانجليزية. توصي الدراسة بتمكين الطلاب من تطوير مهارات التفكير النقدي خلال تدريس النصوص الأدبية، تغذية الخلفية الثقافية وتطوير مهارات الكتابة للطلاب خلال تدريس النصوص الأدبية.

Introduction

Critical thinking is recognized as an important competence for students to acquire in academic language. Critical thinking enables EFL learners to conceptualize, apply, analyze and evaluate information (Sezer, 2008) argues that, critical thinking as a part of educational courses. According to Angeli (2009). All of the skills of scientific investigations are matched by critical thinking, which is therefore a scientific method used in everyday life. Reading literary texts has an important effect on the development of critical thinking. A reader needs to recognize patterns within text, fit details into these patterns, then relate them to other texts and remembered experiences. Moreover, critical thinking assists students “examine the deep meanings, personal implications, and social

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consequences of any knowledge, theme, technique, text, or material. Critical thought about a subject reveals its internal structure. Thus, educating good critical thinkers “combines developing CT skills with nurturing those dispositions which consistently yield useful insights and which are the basis of a rational and democratic society. Halpern (1999:72) states: that critical thinking is “an attitude or disposition to recognize when a skill is needed and the willingness to exert the mental effort to apply it. Cortell, (2005), argues that, using literary texts promotes critical thinking which is important in traditional education systems. It deals with how to read, question, and analyze critically. According to Brown, and Feng (2009) the importance of teaching critical thinking is nowadays obvious to all educators. CT is essential as a tool of inquiry

Problem of the Study

Some of EFL students are weak critical thinkers. They are unable to question or evaluate the knowledge. They also lack the ability of creating interaction and communication in the classroom. Many of students lack confidence to actively participate in the international community.

Objectives of the Study

The study aims to:

- 1.enable EFL learners to think critically through reading authentic texts.
2. Enrich learners’ cultural background through teaching literary texts

Questions of the Study : The study will answer the following questions:

1. To what extent does teaching literary texts enables learners to think critically?
2. To what extent does teaching literary texts enrich learners cultural background.?.

Hypotheses of the Study

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The study hypothesizes the following:

1. Teaching literary texts develops EFL learners' critical thinking skills.
2. Teaching literary texts enrich EFL learners' cultural background.

Significance of the Study

This study shows the EFL teachers the importance of improving EFL learners' critical thinking skills and enriching EFL learners cultural background through teaching literary texts in EFL classes.

Methodology of the Study

The study will adopt the descriptive analytical method. The population of this research are EFL teachers and students in Al-hasaheisa Locality, Gezira State, Sudan (2022). The samples of the Study are fifty (50) EFL teachers who will be randomly selected from the general population of the study. A questionnaire will be used for data collection. Then the collected data will be analyzed with the SPSS program.

Literature Review

Correll, (2005), argues that, using literary texts promotes critical thinking which is important in traditional education systems. It deals with how to read, question, and analyze critically. Critical thinking is the intellectually disciplined process of actively and skillfully conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and/or evaluating information gathered from, or generated by, observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication, as a guide to belief and action (Sezer, 2008). According to Brown, and Feng (2009) the importance of teaching critical thinking is nowadays obvious to all educators. CT

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is essential as a tool of inquiry. Carroll (2005:12) asserts that: “ the ideal critical thinker is habitually inquisitive, well-informed, trustful of reason, open-minded, flexible, fair-minded in evaluation, honest in facing personal biases, prudent in making judgments”

As such, critical thinking is a liberating force in education and a powerful resource in one's personal and civic life. While not synonymous with good thinking, critical thinking is a pervasive and self-rectifying human phenomenon. Teaching literary texts improve students' creativity and creativity” (Naji et al., 2019, p. 7). This can be achieved through thought-provoking, challenging activities related to literary texts. Alternatively, students can retell story from point of view of another character as a way of improving their ability to look at an issue from a different perspective (Sage, 1987). Additionally, teachers can ask authentic questions with no pre-determined answers or with more than one possible answer, which can draw students into deeper discussions about the text. These kinds of activities can foster students' critical and multidimensional thinking skills more so than traditional language learning texts.

Reading Literary Texts to Enhance Students' Culture Background

The concept of culture is a value concept; empirical reality becomes culture to us because and insofar as we relate it to value ideas (Varenne, 2004, p. 3). Based on the above definitions of culture, the main goal in selecting L2 material and designing syllabuses for EFL students should be familiarizing them with values, beliefs, customs, ideas, and social markers of L2 people in order to help them develop an appropriate level of intercultural competence by looking at L2 from a



different angel. In this way, teachers will manage to open doors to new horizons to the students and help them to digest L2 culture more easily.

Besides being used as teaching material in language classes, literary texts also offer invaluable opportunities for learners to get to know the target culture (Lazar, 1993). In this way, they can identify the similarities and differences between their own and the target culture, and thus deepen their understanding of cultural diversity. Collie and Slater (1987) explain the significant role of literature in raising cultural awareness as he believed that the 'world' of a novel, play, or short story is a created one, yet it offers a full and vivid context in which characters from many social backgrounds can be depicted. A reader can discover their thoughts, feelings, customs, possessions; what they buy, believe in, fear, enjoy; how they speak and behave behind closed doors. This vivid imagined world can quickly give the foreign reader a feel for the codes and preoccupations that structure a real society. Literature is perhaps best seen as a complement to other materials used to increase the foreign learner's insight into the country whose language is being learnt. However, culture should be integrated into the curriculum and literature is one feature in the cultural domain that provides added value beyond the level of language acquisition. Literature helps students to expand their linguistic and cognitive skills, cultural knowledge and sensitivity. Oster (1989) affirms that literature helps EFL students to write more creatively. Instructors can create a variety of writing activities to help students to develop their writing skills. They can ask students to write dialogues (Murdoch, 2002) or more complex writing activities if students have reached a high level of language proficiency. Literary texts are effective when teaching culture to EFL students.

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Short stories for example transmit the culture of the people about whom the stories were written. By learning about the culture, students learn about the past and present, and about people's customs and traditions. Culture teaches students to understand and respect people's differences. When using literary texts, instructors must be aware that the culture of the people (if different from that of the students) for whom the text was written should be studied. As students face a new culture, they become more aware of their own culture. They start comparing their culture to the other culture to see whether they find similarities and/or differences between the two cultures. Misinterpretation may occur due to differences between the two cultures as Gajdusek (1998) explains.

To avoid misinterpretation, instructors should introduce the culture to the students or ask them to find relevant information about it. Furthermore, Collie and Slater (1990) mentions four main reasons for incorporating literature in the classroom: valuable authentic material, cultural enrichment, language enrichment and personal involvement. Among those who have highlighted the linguistic, motivational and cultural benefits of literature are .

According to (Erkaya, 2005), five advantages can be mentioned for using short stories in EFL classrooms: motivational, literary, cultural, higher-order thinking and reinforcing of skills. The authenticity and brevity of 'short story' had a significant role in their selection and incorporation in the study. Apart 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 (Savvidou, 2006). 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.

The Current Study: Method

The participants of this study were the EFL teachers of secondary schools at Al-hasahiesa locality. The study adopted the descriptive analytical method. The population of the study were the EFL teachers of secondary schools. The total number of the teachers were (220) A questionnaire was designed and revised by a University staff, was distributed to fifty (50) EFL teachers who were randomly selected from the general population of the study for collecting the required data for the study. Then the collected data were statistically analyzed by SPSS program. The statistical results were shown in the following tables.

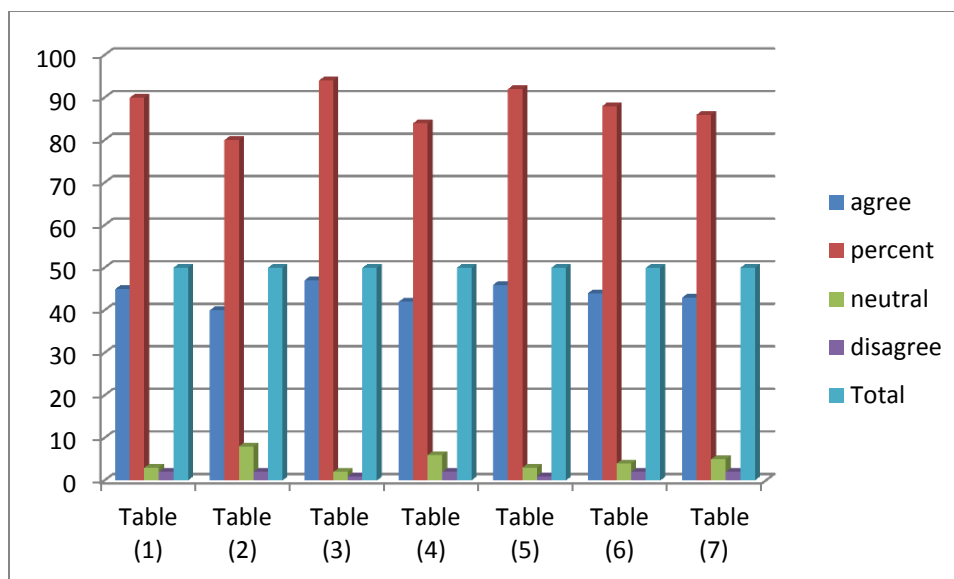
4.0 Data Analysis and Discussions

The collected data were analyzed by the (SPSS) Program. The results are shown in the following table and diagram

Tables	agree	percent	neutral	disagree	Total
Table (1)	45	90	3	2	50
Table (2)	40	80	8	2	50
Table (3)	47	94	2	1	50

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Table (4)	42	84	6	2	50
Table (5)	46	92	3	1	50
Table (6)	44	88	4	2	50
Table (7)	43	86	5	2	50



4.1 Results and Discussions

Statement(1) Literary texts arouses learners' interest to type of the language discourse used in the literary texts.

Table (1) indicated that (90%) of the sample agree that, literary texts arouses learners' interest to type of the language discourse used in the literary texts while (6%) of the sample are neutral and (4%) disagree with the statement. According to the statistical analysis the statement is justified.



Statement (2) EFL learners can develop critical thinking through reading literary texts.

Table (2) indicated that 40 of the participants (80%) of the sample agree while (8) are neutral and (2) disagree with the statement. Therefore, this statement is proved.

Statement (3) Teaching literary texts enhances EFL learners' cultural background.

Table (3) showed that the majority of the respondents (47) (94%) agree with the statement, (2) of them are neutral and (1%) disagree with the statement. This statement is justified

Statement (4) Literary texts exposes EFL learners to authentic texts.

Table (4) showed that (42) of the respondents (84%) agree with the statement while (6) of them are neutral and (2) disagree with the statement.

Statement (5) Teaching literary texts enhances students' interpretation abilities.

Table (5) showed that (46) of respondents (92%) agree with the statement while (3) of them are neutral and (1) disagree with the statement. Therefore, this statement is proved.

Statement (6) Literary texts sharpen EFL students' sense of responsibility

Table (6) showed that (44) of the respondents (88%) agree with the statement while (4) of them are neutral and (2) disagree with the statement. This statement is justified.

Statement (7) Teaching literary texts enhances EFL learners' writing skills.

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Table (7) showed that (43) of the respondents (86%) agree that teaching literary texts enhances EFL learners' writing skills while (5) of them are neutral and (2) disagree. Thus, this statement is accepted.

Conclusion, Findings and Recommendations

Conclusion

Emphasizing on making critical thinking as a part of educational courses, scholars have suggested that critical thinking can be taught in different classroom areas, such as those suggested by (Shafersman,1991) including teaching literary texts as literary texts develop both critical thinking and cultural knowledge. As a language is rooted in the contexts and culture of its speech community and as it works both as a rule-based system and as a socio-semantic system (Collie & Slater, 1987), to acquire it, a foreigner, along with having mastery over its rule-based system, has also to understand its socio-semantic system. One can develop a fair understanding of the socio-cultural semantic codes of a foreign language by coming in contact with its native speakers.

The target language literature can bring a foreign-language learner close to its native speakers. While reading a literary piece written in the target language, a foreigner can have the feel that s/he is among the native speakers of the language, observing what they speak and how they speak. As literature provides authentic, representative language samples, foreign-language learners finding before them imaginary native speakers portrayed in the literature can acquire speech acts from them. Therefore, this study stress the teaching of literary texts in EFL classes.



Findings:

The study came out with the following findings:

1. Teaching literary texts arouses learners' interest to the language discourse used in the literary texts.
2. EFL learners can develop critical thinking through reading literary texts.
3. Teaching literary texts enhances EFL learners' cultural background.
4. Literary texts exposes EFL learners to authentic texts.
5. Teaching literary texts enhances students' interpretation abilities.
6. Literary texts sharpen EFL students' sense of responsibility
7. Teaching literary texts enhances EFL learners' writing skills.

Recommendations

The study recommends:

1. EFL learners should be enabled to develop critical thinking skills.
2. Literary texts should be taught in EFL classes to enhance EFL learners' cultural background.
3. Language learners should be exposed to authentic learning texts.
4. EFL learners should be able enabled to develop writing ability.

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