

The Impact of Using Literature in Foreign Language Teaching: Exploring the Views and Perceptions of Majmaah University's English Department Members

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Abstract

This study examines the significance of the role of literature in teaching and learning language skills. The issue has often kept worldwide surging and resurging, but there remains a gap in investigating it thoroughly, adequately and timely in the context of Saudi/Arab. To this end, the study reviews critically a large body of pertinent existing literature along with the analysis of interview data collected from ten highly-experienced and qualified language instructors and researchers who are currently working for Majmaah University, KSA. Both the literature reviewed and the interviews analysis indicate the significance and urgent need for incorporating literature into language education. Literature has been viewed as central and integral to acquiring not only the language skills (the code per se; vocabulary, grammatical structures, sound systems and patterns, etc.), but also and equally as an effective tool for training learners in foreign/second language cultural knowledge and intercultural communication, emotional intelligence, motivation and engagement, cognitive and metacognitive learning skills (e.g. critical and creative thinking, self-awareness and personal planning, etc.) and ecological knowledge. Theoretical, pedagogical and future research implications have likewise been discussed in the light of the study's findings. Remarkably commendable, is that, and without ignoring due limitations, literature should be incorporated into EFL programmes in Majmaah, Saudi and Arab settings.

Keywords: language skills, literature, foreign language teaching and learning, second language, language education, intercultural communication.

1. Introduction

The role of literature in language teaching and learning, has long been recognized in educational circles. However, its role in foreign and second language education, has always been a subject of debate, in a way similar to the contention over the role of grammar in language teaching, which has long shaped the theory and practice of EFL/ESL education. Over the last three decades or so, the issue of the role of literature in second and foreign language education, has resurged much more preeminently, and with much more renewed recognition of its tremendous significance in language education (Calafato, 2024; Bedel, 2016; Hrivikova, 2020; Paran, et al. 2020; Sharifian, 2017). The past negligence of literature foreign/second in language programmes, could be attributed to many reasons. According to Collie and Slater (1990):

Not so many years ago, there seemed to be a decisive swing against literature in English as a foreign language. The emphasis in modern linguistics on the primacy of the spoken language made many distrust what was seen as essentially a written, crystallised form. Literature was thought of as embodying a static, convoluted kind of language, far removed from the utterances of daily communication. Because of this it was sometimes tarred with an 'elitist' brush and reserved for the most advanced level of study (p. 4).

Another reason could be partly interpreted in terms of the tradition of disciplinarity (the late 19th and much of the 20th

centuries culture in education and research in which too much narrow a focus had been given on isolated disciplines (branches of knowledge). However, since the rise of interdisciplinarity during the late 20th century and the start of the new millennium, the academic scene has drastically changed and the disciplines have since moved closer to one another. This has resulted, in turn, in considerable research and pedagogical methodological changes including EF/SL. Within this new interdisciplinary culture, Brumfit and Carter (1986) consider literature as an "ally of language" and both researchers and teaching practitioners in the field of second and foreign language teaching have become more cognizant of the inseparability of language and literature. The more recent developments in linguistic theory in discourse studies, sociopragmatics, systemic functional linguistics and cultural linguistics have, furthermore, contributed to bridging the gaps between the internal micro-levels and external macro-levels of language (Sage, 1987; Widdowson, 1987, 1992, 1994, 2007).

The significance of literature in language teaching and learning has since started to regain more attention, at least in research, even if not as much in classroom practices. It has been increasingly demonstrated that literature can play a crucial role in helping learners acquire language skills (reading, writing, listening and speaking) along with micro-level skills such as intercultural communication, socio-pragmatic skills, multicompetence (Collie & Slater, 1990; Cook & Wei, 2016), critical and creative thinking competences, creating and sustaining motivation and engagement, etc.

This paper purports to revisit and cast new light into the issue of the role of literature in language education. To this end, it aims to explore the literature discussing the significance of literature in EFL education together with an empirical investigation of the opinions and perceptions of a group of ten faculty members of Majmaah University currently teaching and researching English as a foreign language at Majmaah University, KSA. Thus, its design combines a critical review of the relevant and more recent literature with an analysis of qualitative interviews of EFL instructors.

2. Literature Review

This section provides a review of some key studies of the role of literature in language teaching and learning. It will first consider the philosophy of the relationship between language and literature. Then, it will discuss the significance of literature in foreign language education with a particular focus on EF/SL. The final part of the section explores the benefits of the various literary genres in teaching and learning foreign/second languages.

Language as Literature and Literature as Language

Language and literature are closely related forming “an ally” in the words of Brumfit and Carter (1986). The separation between the two was largely procedural rather than epistemological, and it all took place within the past dominant disciplinary academic and educational canon. In fact, language and literature are in many ways unified. Besides being the vehicle of literature, language, by its very nature, contains literary features and devices such as metaphor, imagination and figures of speech even in everyday use as shown by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) in their account of conceptual metaphor. Literature is expressed and channeled primarily through language. Even, in digital literature which uses multimodal discourses, literary texts are also carried out via language (the more recent concept of text includes audios, pictures and videos as well). Both language and literature play a crucial role in constructing, conveying and shaping knowledge. In many ways, we understand and construct the world through language and in the way in which language is used in literary texts, including multimodal texts.

Another area where language and literature are constantly at work is the concept of meaning. Traditionally, meaning is viewed as simple, rather fixed and one-sided. Nevertheless, since the advent of poststructuralism approaches, linguists as well as literary critics have become increasingly aware of the complexity, and multifaceted and multilayeredness nature of meaning. Literature is where meaning is best seen as exceedingly subtle, nuanced, dynamic, multisided and continuously shifting. As an illustration, literary works tend to employ the technique of ‘defamiliarisation’, also known as ‘estrangement’, where the familiar and ordinary is represented as if it were strange, extraordinary, novel and entirely new (Shklovsky, 1965). What is more, discourse and literary studies have clearly delineated that identities are constructed and reconstructed via language with many literary works showcasing how this is enacted and subtly played out in texts. The shaping and reshaping processes of identities are, in turn, interconnected with the concept of power dynamics (Fairclough, 1989) and literary writers may opt to enact certain voices rather than others, and thus empowering them, or making the text a site of polyphony (multivoicities) Bakhtin (1981, 1984); hence, involving a diversity of voices and identities.

The Significance of Literature in Foreign/Second Language Education

Literature has been shown across the past decades to be invaluable in language teaching and learning. Though literature has always taken its place in first language programmes, particularly in B.A. programmes, the situation has never been the same in foreign and second language programmes, and there have been many counterarguments to using literature as a tool in foreign classrooms. Nonetheless, over the last few decades there has been a surge of interest in the significance of literature as an effective tool in developing foreign and second language skills (Babae & Wan 2014; Duff & Maley, 1990; Hismanoglu, 2005; Pinter, 2006). In the early stages of EFL methodologies (Grammar-Translation Method), the role of literature was recognized and was not precisely viewed negatively. But, as many scholars have maintained, literature was chiefly used to show evidence for vocabulary and grammatical rules and structures (Duff & Maley, 1990). The sociocultural aspects of literature were not adequately exploited within this method. The later approaches within EFL, including the communicative approach, which is based on the concept of communicative competence, incorporated the notion of intercultural competence. In addition, Krashen’s (1985) Input Hypothesis and Filter theories also suggest that the use of literature can foster natural and context-based language learning together with providing motivation for learners; and by reducing the degree of stress and tension allowing for more learning to take place (lowering the filter). Later on, much more recent developments in both applied linguistics and EFL/EFSL methodologies have consolidated the need for more incorporation of sociocultural aspects which are usually found subsumed in the language of literature. The rise of research and pedagogical practices on global Englishes over the last few decades has likewise predominantly stressed “respect for diverse culture and identity in ELT” to put it in the words of Rose, et al (2021, p. 4). Idiomatic expressions, culture-bound terms, sayings and proverbs, metaphors, eponyms and ecological references all figure prominently in literature. Pertinently, Kern (2000) discusses the role of literature in providing students with many cultural, social and communicative knowledge and skills. Similarly, Paesani and Allen (2012) have probed thoroughly key studies on the complex relationship between language, culture and literature with a specific pedagogical perspective in mind. Collie & Slater (1987) provide a wide range of activities and practical tasks about how to utilise literary texts and materials in the classroom.

Furthermore, research in literature often exhibits how language frames cognitive and mental conceptualizations of everyday life (Cook, 1994). Learners can enrich their cognitive experiences by contemplating the different and subtle ways in which language is employed in literature. They may also recognize the active role of the reader in partly shaping the meaning of the text. This way, they can acquire critical, creative and analytical thinking abilities.

The Benefits of Literature: The Genres

This section explores more details of the benefits of key literary genres in foreign and second language education.

Novels

Novels possess a great potential for teaching and learning languages. Reading novel texts provides learners with imagination, pleasure, authenticity, socio-cultural knowledge,

ecological knowledge, etc. In addition, novels can acquaint students with complex authentic vocabulary and grammatical structures. The dialogues found in novels could also familiarize students with various levels of informal language and usage. When, read aloud in classrooms, novels may train students in listening and speaking, too (Abushihab, et al., 2023; Oda & Khaz 'al, 2009). In their Arab context study, Abushihab, et al., (2023) conclude that, "the inclusion of novels and other literary texts is necessary in the EFL curriculum because they provide the necessary basis for building social and cultural competencies and other language skills and components" (p. 20169). The integration of audio-books and video-books into language teaching has likewise recently been discussed and implemented (Alone, 2023). The integration of audios and videos can better assist the incorporation processes of literary materials into language teaching.

On the whole, using an appropriate novel raises motivation and interest in learners. Although some learners may think reading a novel is studious and boring, it can, in general, be an effective tool for developing reading comprehension skills and building vocabulary. In fact, reading novel broadens the learners' horizons, and makes them more aware of other cultures, promoting, as a result, their social competence intercultural communication skills alongside ecological knowledge, promoting learners' connectedness with nature.

Short-story

Short-stories along with flash-fiction can be of great value to language education. They usually contain a complete fictional world handily compressed in a very small or tiny space. Depending on the nature and underscoring purposes of their authors, short-stories provide language instructors with a rich pool of linguistic resources. These can encompass: vocabulary, grammatical structures, authentic usages, creative and critical reading strategies alongside providing students with cultural knowledge and skills (Abdel Halem, 2020; Sage, 1987). Adel Halim (2020) who studied the use of short stories in EFL classrooms in the context of Egypt, concludes that "Adding short stories to the curriculum is beneficial as it allows students to question, interpret, connect, and explore. It also creates a highly motivating, amusing, lively curriculum that helps create proficient, culturally competent, and active critical thinkers" (p. 16). In a similar way, Eren (2004), urges that, "short-story can be used to develop students' language skills. Therefore, we recommend the use of short-story in public high Schools supplement to course books. In this way, instead of students knowing the rules but not being able to use English, we can have students both comprehending and producing the language" (p. 47). Arigoul (2001), lists a number of short story benefits including improving learners' attitudes, motivation, critical thinking and cultural competence. Fiction of all types may also serve as a valuable source for activating learners' schemata (background knowledge).

While some researchers believe that short stories may be more appropriate for advanced levels (Arigoul, 2001), others have argued that it can be used for all levels depending on which story selected for which level (Küçüköğlü, 2011). It would, however, seem more reasonable to argue that short-stories, can be appropriate for a wide range of levels provided a judicious selection has been made.

Poetry

Poetry is the oldest and greatest literary genre and probably the oldest and greatest of all arts. As such, it has always been predominantly influential in human life. It is therefore reasonable to assume that it must have an important role in education, in general, and language education, in particular (Çubukçu, 2001; Shklovesky, 1965; Widdowson, 1992; Zubair, 2022). In poetry language, texts are used in a particularly unusual way, and it hence, requires particular ways of their reading, understanding and interpretation. They are generally full of intensity, imagination, metaphor, figures of speech, symbolism, etc. In poetry, meaning is exceedingly complex, subtle, nuanced and multi-layered. According to Shklovsky (1965), one of the most central functions of poetry, and literariness, in general terms, is that of "defamiliarisation/estrangement", i.e. to make readers feel the world anew, make the ordinary look and feel strange and different. With these features and functions, poetry offers an invaluable rich source for foreign language teachers and learners.

Whether employed as primary or secondary/supplementary materials, poems and their analysis can be of enormous benefit. More specifically, and as demonstrated by many studies, poetry can be used to improve reading skills, foster creative and critical thinking, create and support cultural awareness, improve listening skills and pronunciation (e.g. via training in stress and intonation), encourage creative writing, create and sustain motivation, improve acquisition of advanced vocabulary and complex grammatical structures, etc., (Munden & Skjaerstad, 2018).

Drama

Drama is a huge source for foreign and second language education. It has been found by many scholars to significantly contribute to promote sociocultural awareness and intercultural communication, develop learners' vocabulary, critical and creative thinking, listening skills, self-awareness, emotional intelligence (e.g. empathy) (Angelianawati, 2019; Dougill, 1987; Hismanoglu, 2005; Lee, 2015; Lenore, 1993; Livingstone, 1985; Sariçoban, 2004; Shang, et al. 2024). The research literature in drama is so vast and indeed it has been found to develop transformative and interactive learning as teachers tend to capitalize on using the function of role-play in drama (Livingstone, 1985; Uysal & Yavuz, 2018; Welkner, 1999). What is more, drama could be used to train learners in some life skills (one of the 21st century skills) as it, in many ways, mirrors the reality of everyday life resonating with Shakespeare's famous quote in "As You Like":

All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players;
They have their exits and their entrances;
And one man in his time plays many parts,
His acts being seven ages. At first the infant,
Mewling and puking in the nurse's arms;
And then the whining school-boy, with his satchel
And shining morning face, creeping like snail
Unwillingly to school. And then the lover,
Sighing like furnace, with a woeful ballad
Made to his mistress' eyebrow. Then a soldier,
Full of strange oaths, and bearded like the pard,
Jealous in honour, sudden and quick in quarrel,
Seeking the bubble reputation

Even in the cannon's mouth. And then the justice,
In fair round belly with good capon lin'd,
With eyes severe and beard of formal cut,
Full of wise saws and modern instances;
And so he plays his part. The sixth age shifts
Into the lean and slipper'd pantaloan,
With spectacles on nose and pouch on side;
His youthful hose, well sav'd, a world too wide
For his shrunk shank; and his big manly voice,
Turning again toward childish treble, pipes
And whistles in his sound. Last scene of all,
That ends this strange eventful history,
Is second childishness and mere oblivion;
Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything.

The above text is a supremely subtle and humorous epitome of the entire life cycle of the human being. It is such a vast text for instructors to exploit in training learners linguistically, culturally, aesthetically together with helping them gain some wisdom and life skills.

Nonfiction: Essays, folklore and myths

Literary genres also incorporate nonfiction pieces like essays, folklore and myths. These exist and possess their own linguistic and literary features. They can, and are actually employed in foreign language education.

Myths and folklore are really rich sources often steeped into the foreign language history, culture, values, traditions, morality, idiomatic expressions, etc. As such as, they can be utilised in immersing students into the foreign language cultural knowledge and keep them constantly engaged and motivated (Hojeij, 2021; Lwin, 2016). Learners may, for instance, be asked to summarise or retell these stories. Instructors can, furthermore, train their learners to analyse these folktales and myths. In this way, learners may as well develop critical and creative thinking skills. In a similar way, nonfiction essays can be used to develop expository writing, interpretation and critical thinking competences.

3. Method

This section provides a synopsis of the research design, the participants, the data collection and analysis techniques, states the research objectives and questions and describes some strategies to ensure the validity of the data and the limitations and delimitations of the overall study.

This study casts light on the role of literature and literary materials in language education. The issue is a worldwide long-standing one in the history of language teaching. However, it has been ignored for quite a time, until recently being brought up to the forefront again. The context is Majmaah University, Saudi Arabia, Department of English. The study combines a descriptive method with a qualitative analysis of interview data from Majmaah University. It is imperative to note that the review of literature on the role of literature in foreign/second language education, in this study, has been conducted and managed with a two-fold purpose in mind: the usual role of a review to contextualise the study and as a descriptive tool of research per se.

The interviews were conducted with ten highly qualified and long-experienced faculty members who have been teaching EFL/ESL for a long time.

Objectives of the Study

The study sets out to achieve the following objectives:

1. To know the general role of literature in teaching and learning FEL?
2. To identify the specific role of literature in teaching and learning FEL?
3. To analyse the specific role of literature in developing EFL skills?
4. To identify the role of literary genres in developing specific language skills?

4. Research Questions

1. What is the general of literature, if any, in foreign/second language (EF/SL) teaching and learning, as seen by Majmaah university's EFL faculty members.
2. What is the specific role of literature, if any, in foreign/second language (EF/SL) teaching and learning, as seen by Majmaah university's EFL faculty members?
3. What is the specific role, if any, does literature play in developing foreign/second (EF/SL) language skills, as seen by Majmaah university's EFL faculty members?
4. In what way(s), can the different literary genres be used to develop foreign/second (EF/SL) learners' language skills, as seen by Majmaah university's EFL faculty members?

To guard against invalidity factors, the interview guide was checked by some experts and their comments were well-taken and due corrections and amendments were made accordingly. The construct validity was generally deemed appropriate to deal with the type of data required for this study.

5. Limitations and Delimitations

Both the constraints controlled by the researchers (delimitations) and the ones beyond their control (limitations) will be discussed in this section.

This study has been constrained by various factors. The interview data involved ten faculty members from Majmaah University, and thus its findings may not necessarily be generalizable to all Saudi or regional contexts. In addition, the data was not varied enough to include survey/questionnaire data. This constraint may also have affected the findings, in some kind of way. Additionally, the students' opinions and perspectives about the role of literature in language learning have not been surveyed. This could have made the data much richer and thus the findings more inclusive. Overall, however, and despite these limitations and delimitations, the study explored a long-standing and continuously debated issue concerning the role of literature in language education. Drawing on some key works on the issue, along with interview data collected from ten well-experienced and highly-qualified English language faculty members, Majmaah university, the researchers' conclusion has emphasized the crucial role of literature in language learning and teaching.

6. Interview Analysis and Discussion

This section analyses the interview data collected from ten participants (highly qualified and experienced faculty members of English language and literature at Majmaah University). The participants were asked to answer four questions about the role of literature in language teaching and learning. Each question targets to collect specific information relevant to the topic. Question one targets general information about the role of literature in language teaching and learning whilst the second question seeks particular information about this role. Question

three seeks information about the particular language skills that the informants see that literature is capable of providing students with. Question four targets information about the genres that informants view as most impactful in language teaching and learning.

The interviews were conducted both in-person, through email and WhatsApp and included both male and female EFL/ESP faculty members. Interviewees were asked to answer the following questions:

1. How do you view the role of literature, if any, in teaching and learning language, in general?

2. How do you view the role of literature, if any, in teaching and learning English language, in particular?
3. What specific role, if any, do you think literature plays in developing English language learners’ skills?
4. Which literary genre(s), if any, do you see as most impactful in developing English language learners’ skills? Can you elaborate?

In what follows, we discuss the interviews’ answers to each question? (see table 1):

Q. 1: How do you view the role of literature, if any, in teaching and learning language, in general?

Table (1) A Summary of interviews’ responses to Q (1)

| No | Questions | Themes/Items | Selected Quotes |
|----|--|--|---|
| 1. | How do you view the role of literature, if any, in teaching and learning language, in general? | All interviewees emphasized the significance of literature in language learning and teaching. Descriptions include: vehicle, great/vital/key/crucial role, providing inspiration, rich resources, activation, etc. | <p>“Literature plays a crucial role in teaching and learning language for several reasons... Literature is the main vehicle for teaching and learning language.”</p> <p>“Literature gives the teacher new inspiration to activate the lecture and enhance the process of teaching through presenting different genres of literary works.”</p> <p>“Literature is the window for philosophical and cultural knowledge that can never be attained without literature.”</p> |

All informants stressed the importance of the general role of literature in language teaching and learning and in the acquisition of a second/foreign language. The key point for them, is that literature is the vehicle for language learning and provides a rich context for that. This can be gleaned from their use of descriptive adjectives like: great, vital, key, crucial role, rich and nouns like inspiration, activation, window, etc. The following quote from one of the informants, sums up the key philosophy of literature in language education programmes,

“Literature is the window for philosophical and cultural knowledge that can never been attained without literature.”

The informants’ views comport in most cases with a large body of the relevant literature (Brumfit & Carter, 1986; Calafato & Hunstadbråten, 2024; Dudd & Maley, 1990; Fook & Sidhu, 2010; Sage, 1987).

Q.2 How do you view the role of literature, if any, in teaching and learning English language, in particular? (see Table 2).

Table (2) A Summary of interviews’ responses to Q (2)

| No | Questions | Themes/Items | Selected Quotes |
|----|---|--|--|
| 2. | How do you view the role of literature, if any, in teaching and learning English language, in particular? | Provides multiple contexts, multiple interpretations/different levels of meaning, enriching input, joy, etc. | <p>“Literature, also, has a role beyond improving language proficiency that is facilitating learners’ whole-person development.”</p> <p>“Literature provides the necessary context for learners to be familiarized with new vocabulary, structures, and idiomatic expressions.”</p> <p>“Literature not only enriches language learning but also cultivates a deeper cultural understanding and appreciation of the English language.”</p> <p>“It diversifies the teaching techniques in presenting the literary texts such as presenting, acting, role playing in drama, telling story with different tones and pitches, discussing the themes, and connecting them with real life issues in novel, and singing with rhythm in poems.”</p> |

In response to this question, informants repeatedly highlight the significance of literature in providing rich contextual resources for language use. According to many of those interviewed, literature gives students opportunities to see the texts from an array of different perspectives. It trains them to understand the complexities of meaning and deal with its different layers. In this way, students develop intercultural competence and in the words of one informant, “Literature, also, has a role beyond improving language proficiency that is facilitating learners’ whole-person development.” Another informant argues that, “Literature not only enriches language learning but also cultivates a deeper cultural understanding and appreciation of the English language.”

Other informants believe that literature enables instructors to diversify teaching methods pointing to drama as providing a context for using ‘role-play’, thus catering for speaking and listening skills alongside opportunities provided by short stories, novels and poetry. As insightfully, put by an informant, “It diversifies the teaching techniques in presenting the literary texts such as presenting, acting, role playing in drama, telling story with different tones and pitches, discussing the themes, and connecting them with real life issues in novel, and singing with rhythm in poems.” This is more or less in total or partial agreement with a wide range of studies discussed in the literature (Abushihab, et al. 2023; Abdel Haliem, 2020; Ariogul, 2001; Elliot, 1990).

Q.3 What specific role, if any, do you think literature plays in developing English language learners’ skills? (see Table 3).

Table (3) A Summary of interviews’ responses to Q (3)

| No | Questions | Themes/Items | Selected Quotes |
|----|--|--|---|
| 3. | What specific role, if any, do you think literature plays in developing English language learners’ skills? | Vocabulary, grammar, syntax, listening, speaking, style, culture, meanings & interpretations skills, translation, critical & analytic skills, etc. | <p>“As much as students are exposed to literary texts, they are improved in reading skills. Through literature, students are exposed to a large amount of vocabulary that can improve their knowledge and use of that language... encourages students to negotiate their opinions, develop their concepts, try new intellectual ways in arguing and speaking. ”</p> <p>“It develops vocabulary acquisition, writing, listening and speaking skills. It raises learners’ cultural awareness and opens them to cultural differences...by assimilating these skills, critical thinking is secured for sure.”</p> <p>“Literature plays an important role in equipping the students with critical thinking.”</p> |

Most informants cite that: vocabulary, grammar, syntax, listening, speaking, style, culture, meanings & interpretations skills, translation, critical and analytic skills, etc., as the most important skills that literature provides learners with. Almost all informants stress the active role of literature in developing and improving all of the major language skills, vocabulary building, reading, writing, speaking and listening. Correspondingly, many have highlighted skills such as critical and analytic thinking drawing on the features of literary texts. One interviewee argued that “as much as students are exposed to literary texts, they are improved in reading skills”. Another informant maintains that, “through literature, students are exposed to a large amount of vocabulary that can improve their knowledge and use of that language... encourages students to negotiate their opinions, develop their concepts, try new intellectual ways in arguing and speaking.” This comports with a prevalent concept in the literature (Ariogul, 2001; Collie & Slater,1990; Custodio, & Sutton,1998).

In addition, it has been noticeable that many interviewees have clearly mentioned that the study of literature trains students on cultural awareness making them much more interculturally aware and communicative; “It raises learners’ cultural awareness and opens them to cultural differences...by assimilating these skills, critical thinking is secured for sure.”, as put by one of them. The study of literature is likewise seen as providing learners with authentic textual data that can be read from a wide range of angles. Furthermore, some interviewees maintain that literature can train students in the art of negotiation and argumentation as it “encourages students to negotiate their opinions, develop their concepts, try new intellectual ways in arguing and speaking”, in the words of one informant. In fact, a wealth of literature on the relationship between language and culture, cultural studies, schemata and intercultural communication supports these interviewee’s perceptions (Carter, 2007; Hrivikova, 2020; Kramsch, 2000; Paran, 2008; Sharifian, 2017; Witherspoon, 1980).

Q.4 Which literary genre(s), if any, do you see as most impactful in developing English language learners’ skills? Can you elaborate? (see Table 4).

Table (4) A Summary of interviews’ responses to Q (4)

| No | Questions | Themes/Items | Selected Quotes |
|----|---|--|--|
| 4. | Which literary genre(s), if any, do you see as most impactful in developing English language learners’ skills? Can you elaborate? | All genres have been mentioned repeatedly across the interview data; Fiction (novels, short stories), drama, poetry; Non-fiction (essays, critiques, etc.); Folklore & Myths, etc. | <p>“Fiction often features relatable characters and engaging plots, which can draw learners in. This genre helps improve reading comprehension, vocabulary acquisition, and narrative structure understanding. Analyzing character motivations and themes encourages critical thinking and discussion.”</p> <p>“Non-fiction literature provides factual content while also introducing learners to different writing styles and persuasive techniques. Analyzing arguments and personal narratives helps develop critical thinking and the ability to articulate ideas clearly.”</p> <p>“Drama is one of the literary genres that would open different angles in teaching and learning a new language. It can be presented as a story line with exposition, climax, and resolution. As well, it can be acted in the class; that would give the students a chance to role play different characters.”</p> <p>“...short stories, and to a lesser degree lyrical poetry, are the most effective genres for improving English language teaching, given their simpler vocabulary and structure compared to other genres.”</p> |

All types of literary genres have been mentioned with each one seen more appropriate for specific skill(s). These include:

Fiction: Novels, short stories, etc.

These are seen as providing learners with a range of literary texts that train them in practicing profound reading. According to many informants, fiction enables learners to try multiple interpretations of the same text as literary texts are often, by their very nature, open to multiple meanings. In this way, students learn to deal with meaning diversity, complexity and subtleness; as one informant argued:

“Fiction often features relatable characters and engaging plots, which can draw learners in. The genre helps improve reading comprehension, vocabulary acquisition, and narrative structure understanding. Analyzing character motivations and themes encourages critical thinking and discussion.”

Overall, the findings as showcased in the table above resonates with a vast body of the reviewed literature on the role of the different genres in foreign/second language education (Abdel Haliem, 2020; Bakhtin, 1984; Dougill, 1987; Widdowson, 1992).

Drama

lays according to many informants are immensely invaluable in training language learners in speaking and listening by providing instructors with authentic data for role-play practice. In addition, drama can train students in analytic and critical thinking by making use of such aspects as theme development and character analysis, as insightfully put by one interviewee, “Drama is one of the literary genres that would open different angles in teaching and learning a new language. It can be presented as a story line with exposition, climax, and resolution.

As well, it can be acted in the class that would give the students a chance to role play different characters.” Similarly, another informant adds that, “the dialogue format allows learners to practice conversational English and understand dynamics like tone, emotion, and body language, which are crucial for effective communication.” This is particularly so, drama usually uses more informal and everyday language in the dialogues and thus caters more for everyday communication. In many ways, this aligns with Lenore’s (1993) arguments with regard the role of drama in the language classroom. Other similar works include Angelianawati, (2019) and Dougill, (1987). Some works like the former are of utmost significance as they provide instructors with a range of activities to make use of in the classroom. Others like Lee, (2015) and Livingstone, (1985) provide a pivotal focus on role-play and how it can be utilised creatively and effectively.

Poetry

Almost all informants mentioned the significance of poetry in language learning. The language of poetry is often profound, metaphorical, musical and steeped in imagination. As such, instructors may capitalize on it to train learners to deep and sensitive reading, critical thinking, creative writing, etc., (Çubukçu, 2001; Kilic, 2023; Widdowson, 1992). “Poetry is rich in language play, imagery, and emotion. It exposes learners to different rhythms, sounds, and styles of English. Analyzing poetry can enhance language sensitivity and encourage learners to explore figurative language and symbolism, fostering creativity in their own writing.”, noted one interviewee. Likewise, poetry is conceptualised as where the multiplicity of meaning can work best helping learners to be more deeply engaged and critically-engaged.

For one informant poetry aids in phonetic awareness and pronunciation, "the musical qualities of lyrical poetry can aid in phonetic awareness and pronunciation, making it easier for learners to memorize the newly-acquired vocabulary and structures." However, a few of them have pointed out that poetry would be more appropriate for more advanced language learners. While others insist that it can work for younger learners as well. The latter point appears more reasonable as it suggests that poetry is useful for all levels depending on the appropriate selection of poems and tasks.

Myths and Folklore

These are seen by at least one informant as an active tool in fostering cultural awareness and intercultural communication, "these stories often convey cultural values and morals, making them rich for discussion and analysis. They introduce learners to various narrative structures and enhance cultural awareness." It can also be added that myths and folklore convey ecological knowledge from generation to generation. In this way, these genres help integrate social and environmental sustainability into language education.

Non-fiction

Non-fiction writing includes essays, bio/autographies and memoirs. These are seen as catering for training learners in critical thinking, argumentation, logical and analytical thinking, etc. In the words of one informant, "non-fiction literature provides factual content while also introducing learners to different writing styles and persuasive techniques. Analyzing arguments and personal narratives helps develop critical thinking and the ability to articulate ideas clearly." Additionally, in some way non-fictional writing may interact and intertext with fiction, enabling it to also borrow some of the features of the latter. As a result of this interaction, teachers can double down on using non-fiction in language classrooms.

7. Conclusion

This section summarises the study, provides some interpretations of the findings and discusses its numerous implications.

This paper explores the role of literature in language learning and teaching. Although the issue has been discussed for a long a time, it still remains imperative, often surging and resurging from time to time. The paper navigates the relevant key literature and combines that with interviewing ten highly experienced language faculty members of the English Department of Majmaah University. Both the exploration of the existing body of literature and the interview data indicate the continuous significance of literary materials in language teaching and learning. The explored literature largely suggests that literature plays a significant role in improving language skills in various ways (Carter, 2007; Brumfit & Benton, 1993; Hrivikova, 2020; Parab, 2015). In the same way, the interview data confirmed the active role of literature in language education and the need to incorporate it into foreign and second language learning programmes.

On the whole, literature is recognized as predominantly invaluable for foreign and second language education and helps learners develop linguistically, cognitively, culturally, emotionally and ecologically.

Implications

The findings from both the literature probed and the interview data suggest a number of important implications: theoretical, pedagogical, course designing, future research, etc. Theoretically, the findings indicate a kind of interdisciplinarity in which language subsume literature and culture and vice versa. Literature is conceived as a vehicle of language providing historical, social, cultural and ecological contexts, along with both authenticity and virtuality. Equally, language is seen as part and parcel of culture of which literature is, in turn, an integral part. Pedagogically, the findings highlight the importance of incorporating literature in foreign/second language teaching programmes. This does not comport with some beliefs that literature is generally too difficult and may not helpful in language teaching and learning. Both the explored literature and the interview data showcase that using literary genres of all types can develop and improve learners' language skills (reading, writing, speaking, listening, critical and innovative thinking, etc.) and help instructors use rich and authentic contexts. Literature is also conceived of as integrating cultural and ecological knowledge, hence, helps learners develop intercultural and environmental skills. This largely aligns with almost the bulk of the literature, "Literature is not only a tool for developing the written and oral skills of the students in the target language but also is a window opening into the culture of the target language, building up a cultural competence in students, (Parab, 2015 p.753).

For course designers, the findings suggest that language courses should be designed to incorporate literature and that literature should be part and parcel of these programmes. This could take place in various ways: including literary passages and/or dialogues in coursebooks, creative writing courses, or even whole literary works in language programmes. Literary audio books could also be created to train students in listening and pronunciation such as stress patterns and intonation. In a similar way, coursebooks could include excerpts from plays, short stories or novellas for learners to read, reflect on, summarise or analyse, depending on the learners' level of proficiency. Reflection tasks could likewise be created to raise critical, intercultural and ecological awareness. Complementary materials including digital ones may accompany coursebooks, too. Literary language by its very nature, is representational rather than referential (referential is more informational, whilst representational is more about mental pictures and conceptual framing). As such, it enables students to reflect on their own selves, identities, feelings and perceptions (enabling 'self-awareness'). Equally, incorporating literature in the foreign and second language programmes, could provide language learners with a good training in social and cultural tolerance. Finally, the findings suggest that more research is needed concerning the issue of integrating of literature into EFL/ESL education. In particular, students' views on the matter need to be taken into account in future research in the context of Majmaah University, and presumably other Saudi/Arab universities as well, where literature is not given due attention in the English language classrooms or course design plans.

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