

Investigating the Teaching of Literature in the Algerian Secondary Schools; The Case of First Year English Textbook at the Crossroads



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Summary:

This research paper tried to examine the status of literature in teaching English in the Algerian secondary schools. It is meant to study whether first year secondary school English syllabus includes literature in the teaching / learning of EFL, and whether the way it is used fulfills its role in promoting the learning of EFL. Throughout this study, this issue is examined with reference to the relevant theoretical background, the first year secondary school textbook "At the Crossroads" analysis, and the teachers' working experience. The evaluation of "At the Crossroads" and the data gathered from the teachers' interview demonstrate that literature is not adequately covered within the textbook nor properly invested as teaching/ learning tool. Thus, the study shows that literature content represents only twenty percent (20%) of the whole textbook, and it is compressed in one single unit "Once Upon Time". Besides, this literary content is devoted only to literature and philosophy stream. As for the literary works used in the textbook, the interviewed teachers emphasized that they are beyond learners' level and interests.

Keywords: Literature; Secondary School; Textbook; Getting Through; Learners' interest.

1. Introduction

The use of literature in different EFL teaching areas is proved to demonstrate positive results (Kramsch, 2013). Therefore, many researchers favoured the use of literature in EFL classrooms. They emphasized its role in meeting the needs of language learning. Since it gives value to the form and the meaning; as well as, it communicates with the feelings and the minds of the readers (Goef Hall, 14). Besides, Reading Literature helps

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learners to develop the reading and writing skills. In addition, literary works provides the most valuable source to access worthwhile culture of the speech community. Having said that, the use of literature in the teaching of English as foreign language (EFL) is just like any other teaching technique, if the theory is not met with the proper application, the technique is doomed to fail. The primary aim of this research paper is to investigate the place of literature in first year secondary school English syllabus. This enables us to highlight, how literature is utilized in the Algerian EFL classroom, including what is to be taught and how to be taught. Researchers are also interested in shedding light on the weaknesses in the use of literature in English classrooms and how to make the process more affective. Thus; through this research, we will try to answer the following questions:

1. Does first year secondary school English syllabus includes literature in the Teaching/Learning of EFL?.

2. What is the role of literature teaching in the first year secondary school English syllabus?

To answer the above mentioned questioned, it is hypothesised that;

1. Literature in the Algerian context is somewhat marginalized, and it is not clearly introduced in the in the first year secondary school English syllabus.

2. First year English syllabus includes part of literature yet it is regarded as an extra teaching material to be included in the classroom that may certainly not fully fulfill its role in promoting the teaching/learning of EFL.

2. Literature review

The last two decades have witnessed further researches on the relationship between literature, language, and education; consequently, there has been strong inclination toward the study of literature and its integration in the curriculum. Since many researchers have emphasised the use of literature in the second language (L2) curriculum. (Bobkina, 2014)

2.1 Defining Literature

Even though the concept literature has existed for so many years and has been a subject to study as well. Still, there is vagueness surrounding its usage, also no clear substance to remove the ambiguity of the concept itself. This is what Marry Kennedy emphasised, "Even though the literature review is widely recognized genre of scholarly writing, there is no clear understanding of what constitutes the body of literature." (2007, p 139).

Kennedy, M (2007) also added that etymological definition provides no help in defining literature; therefore, it should be viewed, as historical and social phenomena, and focus should shift toward the investigation of circumstances and condition of their production and reception.

MrioKlarer (2004) in his book *Introduction to Literature* stated the concept of literature can be used to refer to anything written however not every written

expression is literary work. The definition included one key element that distinguishes literary works from non-literary works that is "Aesthetic" or "Artistic". In Upadhyay (2015) somehow holds similar view about literature; he defines literature as a permanent expression of some thoughts and feelings about life and the world in ideas whereas Bullton (as cited in Upadhyay, 2015) highlighted the functional aspects of literature. He views literature as imaginative production that gives four Rs :Recreation, Recognition, Revelation, and Redemption.

Thus, pinning down a clear cut definition has proven to be quite difficult. However the analysis of different definition showed that most of them admit some common elements, Abhisek Upadhyay (2015) in his percue of gathering definition highlighted five elements:

- Literature is imaginative
- Literature expresses thoughts and feelings.
- Literature deals with life Experience.
- Literature uses words in powerful and effective yet captivating manner.
- Literature promotes recreation, revelation of hidden facts. (p 4)

2.2 Literature and EFL Learning

Literature—be it English or American—has been the constituent of non-English speaking countries curriculum for more than a century (Stern 1985 as cited in Bobkina 2014, p 3).In the early part of the twentieth century, literature was the key component of Grammar Translation Method (GTM). Back then, literary texts in the EFL classroom were used as good writing examples as well as indication of grammatical structure (Kramsch,2000). But with the failure of GTM, literature was overlooked. There was inclination toward conversations and dialogues which provided more real life situation (Mustakim, (n.d). In fact, the absence of literature from language learning curriculum lasted from 40s to the 60s (Carter, 2007 as cited by Keshavarzi, 2012) . This paved the way for linguistics to became the main focus of language programs (Widdwson, 1982 as cited by Keshavarzi,2012).

In fact, the late of the 60s represents a turning point in the history of teaching and learning process of literature. For example the king's conference on education, which held in Cambridge in 1963, brought to light the importance of literary texts as useful tool to promote language teaching /learning and questioned the traditional method for its failure in developing communicative skills (Keshavarzi, A. 2012). In spite of all the efforts made, literature use in language classroom remained neglected for a number of years.

In 1980s, some changes took place after the public opinion was stirred up by the inadequacy of the basic content knowledge as well as by the poor language ascertained among language students (Stern 1985 as cited by Keshavarzi, A. 2012). This dilemma created the need to present learners with basic literary text to provide them with the needed reading requirements (Gilray-Scott,1981, p 1 as cited by Keshavarzi, A.2012). Thus, the necessity of rehabilitation and

reintegration of literature as fundamental part of communicative language programs was plainly expressed (Keshavarzi, A. 2012).

Nowadays, the use of literature in different EFL teaching areas is proved to demonstrate positive results. Thus, further research is done to restate the role of literature and culture in language learning to develop suitable language materials such as syllabi and curriculum, as well as to provide an effective means of interaction between language learners and the target language literature. (Kramsch, 2013 as cited Keshavarzi, A. 2012)

3. Research Design.

3.1 Research method

To increase the validity of this research, the researcher adopted a mixed approach method (qualitative and quantitative) to investigate the status of literature in first year secondary school syllabus. The general purpose and central evidence of mixed methods research is that it provides a better understanding of research problems and complex phenomena than either approach alone (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). Thus, this method helps and enables the researcher to draw on all the possibilities and provides a broader perspective to the study as the qualitative data helps describe aspects and opinions that the quantitative data cannot address. Thus, using both forms of data allow the researcher to generalize results from a sample to a population, to gain a deeper understanding of the study and to confirm or disconfirm the research hypotheses.

3.2 The sample

The study was carried out in some secondary schools, in Tiaret, in the first term of 2020-2021 academic years. Eight English language teachers participated in the study and the information related to them is given in Table 1 below.

Teachers	Gender	Experience	Schools
1	Female	2 years	Khaled Bekhaled
2	Female	5 years	Raid Si Zoubir
3	Male	23 years	Ibn Rostom
4	Female	18 years	Kadiri Khaled
5	Male	11 years	Zakaria School
6	Male	7 years	Akid Lotfi
7	Female	2 years	Belhaouari
8	Female	4 years	Bouchareb Naceur

Table 1. The Information about the Participants

3.3 Research instruments

3.3.1 Teachers 'interview

An interview about the place and the value of literature was prepared by the researcher. The participant teachers answered the questions in an interview setting, and the interviews were conducted individually and analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively. The main items of the interview include the inclusion of literary texts in the first year syllabus and their objectives, the importance of literature in learning English, teachers' attitudes toward the time

associated with teaching literature, the degree of literature representation in the textbook and possible suggestions to promote literature in learning English. Some questions that target directly the issue of teaching literary texts in the first year syllabus are put below;

Do you include literary text in your teaching of English? if yes what are they? What are your objectives of using them?

All the interviewees confirmed that they use literary texts in their teaching of English. But only with literary stream since it is part of their syllabus in the unit under the title "Once upon Time". Three out of seven said that they use Texts like Poems, short stories, extracts from novels, fiction, etc. The objective is to encourage students to appreciate literature, explore the literary aspect of the language, learn new vocabulary within context, realize how the language functions through authentic texts, and more importantly to develop a critical thinking that leads, in the end, to a creative writing. The remaining five (5) interviewees indicated that the only literary text they have used was a passage from the novel *Things Fall Apart*, which is used in the textbook. The main objective for the use of this passage is to get learners to read and interpret a blurb and a literary portrait.

Do you think literature is useful for promoting the learning of EFL? If Yes how?

All of them stand for the role of literature in promoting EFL learning. According to them when studying literature, students can improve not only their language such as vocabulary, reading and writing skills, but also helps students learn about their creativity and imagination, interacting with the text themselves, and playing different literary roles. Literature must be presented as an authentic task, so the students can get through the texts discovering their different learning styles and immersing in a different time and into different characters.

Do you think that time devoted to literature in first year syllabus is sufficient? Justify.

The entire sample consents on the deficiency of time devoted to literature in first year syllabus. For their part, the focus is rather on the language structures and grammar. Little time is devoted to deal with literature-based tasks that will not allow the learners to fully develop their understanding of the literary concepts and conceive at least some basic understanding. They also highlighted another fact that though "Once Upon Time" unit is second in order in the textbook, it is the last unit teacher should tackle according to the syllabus. Since, the school syllabi are too long and teachers usually cannot finish the textbook content, this unit most of the time is subject to slimming down or omission.

Do you devote time for introducing the major concepts related to literature? If yes how?

Three out eight respondents state that they do not do that due to the severe lack of vocabulary and basic language elements of most first-year secondary school students. Literary concepts are utterly hard to grasp based on the on the lack of vocabulary and mental cognitive abilities of their learners. On the other hand, the rest of the population asserts that this can be done when they have

extra time during class, or by giving students assignments such as summarizing a short story, making poem variation, writing a book review, or simply writing one's own impression after reading the literary text.

Do you think the way literature is integrated in first year syllabus helps in promoting the learning of EFL? If no, Justify?

Two interviewees see that it does. Yet it is not enough. Much literary content should be integrated. On the other hand, the rest of the interviewees do not share the same view because the texts that are included in the syllabus are not well selected; most of them are beyond the learners' level and interests, not to say boring. So, the teacher had better provide more enjoyable, motivating and engaging texts.

What do you suggest for promoting the role of literature in Teaching of EFL for first year students?

As far as the recommendations are concerned, the eight interviewees suggested that the teacher should encourage his students to develop the habit of reading. They must know that reading is the key to language learning. Then, gradually introduce literary texts that meet their needs, tastes and train them to appreciate these texts through a range of activities that stimulate their thinking and imagination. For example, students can be asked to imagine another ending to a story.

3.3.2 Document Analysis (At the Cross Road)

To collect a further solid foundation for the current research, the researcher opted for a second data collection tool namely document analysis. It is meant to analyse the English textbook. It aims at exploring the place of literature in first year secondary school syllabus, and whether it serves its purpose in promoting the learning of EFL. Based on a descriptive analytical approach in analysing the textbook "At the Cross Roads", the focus is generally put on the relevance and adequacy of the literary content incorporated in first year text book used in Algerian secondary schools.

"At the Cross Road" is a textbook basically designed for first year learners who have studied English for four years in the middle school. It asserts to comply with the educational reform introduced by the National Ministry of Education in January 2005. Its primary focus is to embrace Competency-Based Approach in teaching this foreign language to all streams. The textbook is composed of five units dispensed on the basis of 20 hour per unit. Though one unit "Once upon Time" is devoted mainly to the literary stream. Each unit consists of four sequences and each sequence is divided into rubrics. In addition, book designers devoted a section for the clarification of some language aspects that learners come across in the process of learning including: grammar, spelling, and sound system, under the title "Stop and consider."

To start with, in first year textbook " At The Crossroads", Course designers have not re valued literary genres in language curricula, despite the fact that

English is Algeria's second most important foreign language after French. Despite the fact that the Algerian policy makers and decision-makers have decided to embark on a comprehensive reform of the Algerian educational system, notably in terms of teaching methods, much work remains to be done in the field of foreign language teaching techniques and methods. (Bouriguig, 2020). In his study of the use of the short stories in EFL teaching the case of first year secondary school textbook, he ascertained that literary genres such as poetry, novel, biography, and folktale represents only twenty percent(20%) of the whole English textbook content; which is not sufficient nor it is estimated as useful tool in EFL teaching/learning.

The following table represents how literature is distributed throughout the first year textbook:

Genres	Unit one: Getting through	Unit two: Once upon a Time	Unit three: Our Findings Show	Unit four: Eureka	Unit five: Back to Nature
Sort story	/	-The Voyages of Sinbad the Sailor p48. -Lion p56. -The Stork and the Pitcher P68. -The Oak Tree and the Reeds p68.	/	/	/
Song	/	/	/	/	/
Poem	/	-My Country by Dorothea Mackellar.	/	/	/
Novel	/	-Peter Pan, Treasure Island, the Adventure of Tom Sawyer, and Dracula.P52(<i>only referred to</i>). -Things Fall Apart by Chinua Achebe p52. -Hard Times by Charles Dickens p57.	/	/	/
Drama	/	/	/	/	/
Biography	/	-William Shakespeare P65	/	/	/

Table 2. Literature Content in First Year Secondary School.

As seen in the table above, we can notice that the first year English textbook contains different literature genres including short stories, novels, poems and bibliography with noticeable domination of novel sand short stories. Moreover, It can be clearly observed that the literature content is compressed in a single unit "Once upon Time".

Among the five units which constructs the textbook; Once Upon a Time is the only unit devoted to the use of literature in EFL teaching.

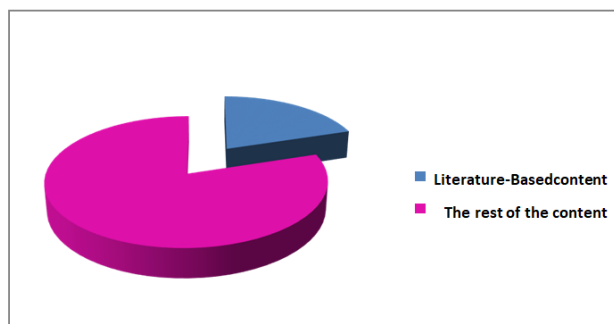


Table 3. Literature-Based content in the Textbook

The following circle diagram show the number of literary works mentioned or used in the unit:

<i>Genres</i>	<i>Novels</i>	<i>Poems</i>	<i>Short stories</i>	<i>Bibliographies</i>
Frequency	6	1	2	1

Table 4. Unit Organization in the Textbook

4. Discussion of Findings:

Based on the findings obtained from the evaluation of the textbook and the findings of the interview devoted to teachers, several important concluding remarks can be drawn.

Data gathered has revealed that literature is integrated in first year secondary education syllabus. However, it is not properly integrated. Literature-based content represents only twenty (20%) of the textbook. Besides, it is all compressed in one unit "Once upon Time". In addition, literary-based content is devoted only to literary stream whereas scientific classes are not concerned with this unit. Moreover, literature based unit is the last unit to be taught. Because of the length of the syllabus and time inadequacy, it can be omitted or slimmed down.

In fact, literature used in the textbook is not restricted only to one literary genre. Textbook includes extracts from novels, short stories, bibliography, folktales, and poems. Though there is focus on one genre over the genres (novels and short stories). This can hinder the fulfillment of the final goal set by course designer that aims at familiarizing learners with all forms and genres of literature. In addition, the teacher's interview results highlighted the fact that the literary text included in the text book are not well selected. Since, most of them are beyond learners 'level and interest.

Moreover, it is noticed that the literary text used in the textbook are utilized as supporting material to promote the four skills, while little –if no - attention is given to the study of literature as subject of interest or as source of cultural

aspects. To illustrate, the Voyage of Sindbad (the Arabian Night Tales) is used to teach listening and speaking. Another example to be illustrated, *Things Fall Apart* novel is also used as supporting material in reading and writing session, where learners are supposed to read an extract from the novel. In addition, the interviewed teachers confessed that they rarely devote time to introduce the major concepts related to literature or provide information about literary work to be studied except when having an extra time because of the overloaded syllabus and time inadequacy.

To sum up, the gathered data from textbook evaluation and teachers' interviews results helped in answering the main research question set by the researcher.

4. CONCLUSION

The present study is built on the assumption that literature is taken into consideration into the teaching of EFL. However, the teaching of literature in the Algerian context is somewhat marginalized. It is regarded as an extra teaching material to be included in the classroom. Besides, literature is not well used to fully fulfill its role in promoting teaching/learning of EFL. The data gathered from textbook evaluation and teachers' interviews led researchers to provide specific recommendations and possible solutions. Respectively, the findings of the current work have confirmed the formulated hypothesis. However there are some literary texts and genres in the teaching/ learning of first year EFL syllabus, it is neither adequately used nor properly implemented to fulfil its role in promoting English language learning. As a conclusion, the present study suggested some recommendations to promote the use of literature in language classroom teaching. They brought to light the criteria to be taken into consideration in the selection of literary texts, reintegrating the literary texts in most units and for all streams. Finally, yet importantly, encouraging a variety of tasks to be implemented according to literary genres used.

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