

RESEARCH TITLE

Teaching English Language through Literature

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Abstract

This study investigates the pedagogical value of integrating literature—specifically poetry, drama, and fiction—into the teaching of English as a foreign or second language in Sudanese educational institutions. Employing a descriptive analytical approach, data were gathered through interviews and structured questionnaires from 250 English language teachers in Khartoum State. The findings underscore the positive impact of literature on students' linguistic competence, motivation, cultural awareness, and critical thinking. Literature was shown to enrich classroom interaction and enhance vocabulary retention, writing skills, and interpretive abilities. However, the study also reveals key challenges such as insufficient teacher training, large class sizes, and a lack of appropriate literary materials. To address these barriers, the study proposes genre-specific teaching strategies and policy recommendations aimed at institutional support and curricular reform. Ultimately, the research affirms literature's transformative potential in fostering communicative and cultural competence among learners and calls for its systematic incorporation into English language teaching practices in Sudan.

Key Words: Literature, ELT, Sudan, language acquisition, pedagogy.

تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية من خلال الأدب

المستخلص

تتناول هذه الدراسة القيمة التربوية لإدماج الأدب - لا سيما الشعر والمسرح والسرد القصصي - في تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية أو ثانية في المؤسسات التعليمية السودانية. وباستخدام المنهج الوصفي التحليلي، تم جمع البيانات من خلال المقابلات والاستبيانات المنظمة التي استهدفت 250 معلماً ومعلمة للغة الإنجليزية في ولاية الخرطوم. أظهرت النتائج التأثير الإيجابي للأدب على كفاءة الطلاب اللغوية، وتحفيزهم، وزيادة وعيهم الثقافي، وتطوير مهارات التفكير النقدي لديهم. وقد ثبت أن الأدب يثري التفاعل داخل الفصل الدراسي ويُحسن من اكتساب المفردات ومهارات الكتابة والقدرة على التفسير والتحليل. ومع ذلك، كشفت الدراسة عن عدد من التحديات، أبرزها نقص تدريب المعلمين، وكثرة أعداد الطلاب في الفصول، وقلة توفر النصوص الأدبية المناسبة. وللتغلب على هذه المعوقات، تقترح الدراسة استراتيجيات تدريسية خاصة بكل نوع أدبي، إلى جانب توصيات على مستوى السياسات التعليمية، تهدف إلى توفير الدعم المؤسسي وإصلاح المناهج. وتؤكد الدراسة في الختام على الدور التحويلي للأدب في تنمية الكفاءة التواصلية والثقافية لدى المتعلمين، داعية إلى إدماجه بشكل منهجي في ممارسات تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية في السودان.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الأدب، تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية، السودان، اكتساب اللغة، البيداغوجيا.

1. Introduction

The teaching of English as a foreign language has traditionally emphasized grammar instruction, vocabulary memorization, and syntactic accuracy. Over time, this approach evolved to include communicative methods that prioritize fluency, contextual learning, and student interaction. However, one of the most effective and often underutilized tools in the English language classroom remains literature. Literature, by its nature, is a rich repository of authentic language, cultural values, and human experience. It represents the highest form of linguistic expression and can play a critical role in helping students acquire language in meaningful, memorable, and engaging ways.

Incorporating literature into English Language Teaching (ELT) is not merely about reading stories or poems for pleasure—it involves using literary texts as pedagogical tools to develop language skills, stimulate discussion, encourage creativity, and foster critical thinking. Through exposure to the nuanced language of literature, learners are invited to engage with syntax, semantics, and pragmatics in ways that traditional textbooks often fail to deliver. Furthermore, literature helps students explore the deeper dimensions of communication such as tone, emotion, symbolism, and cultural context.

In the context of Sudan, where English is taught as a second or foreign language in universities and secondary schools, there has been growing interest in alternative methods that move beyond rote memorization and passive learning. Literature presents an opportunity to revitalize the English classroom, enabling students not only to learn the language but to live it—through characters, dialogue, and narrative worlds that mirror real-life situations.

Despite its potential, the use of literature in ELT in Sudan is still limited. Many teachers lack the training or confidence to use literary texts effectively. Additionally, curriculum constraints, large class sizes, and a lack of institutional support present further challenges. This study emerges from a belief that literature, when properly utilized, can transform English language teaching in Sudan and beyond. It seeks to explore how literature can be effectively employed in the language classroom, what impact it has on students' learning outcomes, and what obstacles need to be addressed to maximize its benefits.

2. Statement of the Problem

Despite the widespread acknowledgment of literature as a powerful tool in language learning, its practical integration into English language teaching remains limited in many educational contexts, including Sudan. Teachers often favor grammar-focused or communicative approaches and may perceive literature as too abstract, time-consuming, or irrelevant to students' immediate language needs. The result is that learners are deprived of the rich linguistic, emotional, and cultural resources that literary texts offer.

Moreover, some instructors hesitate to use literature due to a lack of training, institutional support, or appropriate materials. They may be unsure how to select texts suitable for different proficiency levels, how to design engaging literary activities, or how to assess student outcomes effectively. In addition, many educational systems emphasize passing standardized language exams rather than nurturing communicative competence or critical thinking—two areas in which literature is particularly beneficial.

This study seeks to address these concerns by investigating the benefits of using literature in teaching English, identifying the practical obstacles teachers face, and proposing solutions and strategies for more effective implementation in Sudanese classrooms.

3. Objectives of the Study

The study aims to:

1. Explore the pedagogical significance of literature in English language teaching.
2. Evaluate the impact of literary texts on students' comprehension, engagement, and language proficiency.
3. Identify the challenges faced by teachers in integrating literature into ELT classrooms in Sudan.
4. Propose practical examples and strategies for teaching different literary genres in ELT.

4. Research Questions

This study is guided by the following questions:

1. What is the significance of literature in English language teaching?
2. How does the use of literature affect students' language acquisition and engagement?
3. What are the main barriers that prevent the effective use of literature in ELT classrooms?
4. How can teachers effectively teach poetry, fiction, and drama as part of language instruction?

5. Significance of the Study

This research contributes to educational theory and classroom practice by emphasizing the value of literary texts in developing learners' language skills and cultural knowledge. For policymakers and curriculum designers, the study offers evidence supporting the inclusion of literature in English programs. For educators, it provides practical approaches to literary instruction that can foster critical thinking, empathy, and fluency among learners.

In Sudan, where traditional methods continue to dominate, this study is especially relevant. It sheds light on local challenges and suggests context-appropriate strategies that teachers can implement to make their classrooms more dynamic, student-centered, and culturally enriching.

6. Definitions of Key Terms

Literature: In this study, literature refers to written artistic works such as novels, short stories, plays, and poems that reflect language, culture, and human experience.

ELT (English Language Teaching): The teaching of English to speakers of other languages, including ESL (English as a Second Language) and EFL (English as a Foreign Language).

Linguistic Competence: The ability to use language accurately and appropriately, including vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and fluency.

Literary Genres: Categories of literature such as poetry, prose (fiction), and drama, each with distinct forms and instructional approaches.

7. Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

The integration of literature into English language teaching is supported by a range of theoretical perspectives that highlight its role in developing linguistic, cultural, and cognitive competence. The following section outlines the key theories and previous research that underpin this study.

7.1 Literature and Language Acquisition

According to Krashen's Input Hypothesis (1982), language acquisition occurs when learners are exposed to comprehensible input that is slightly above their current level of proficiency. Literary texts provide such input in rich and varied ways. Through stories, poems, and plays, students encounter new vocabulary, idioms, sentence structures, and discourse patterns in meaningful contexts.

Lazar (1993) emphasizes that literature offers "genuine texts" that challenge students intellectually and emotionally. These texts encourage deeper processing, which aids memory and understanding. Collie and Slater (1987) argue that literature provides meaningful content for language study and helps bridge the gap between classroom language and real-world communication.

7.2 Literature as a Cultural and Emotional Resource

Literature plays a vital role in helping learners understand the values, traditions, and perspectives of different cultures. This cultural competence is especially important in language learning, where understanding social context is key to appropriate communication. Gholson and Stumpf (2005) argue that literature enables students to access the beliefs and behaviors of target-language communities, promoting empathy and intercultural awareness.

Moreover, literature stimulates emotional engagement. Students connect with characters, themes, and narratives on a personal level, which increases motivation and retention. As Singhal (1998) notes, emotion and cognition are interconnected in language acquisition, and literature can help stimulate both.

7.3 Cognitive and Critical Development through Literature

Hişmanoğlu (2005) asserts that literary texts enhance students' critical and creative thinking. Interpretation, prediction, character analysis, and thematic exploration all require analytical skills. These activities not only improve reading comprehension but also foster intellectual independence.

Vygotsky's Social Constructivist Theory (1978) further supports the use of literature in group discussions, collaborative interpretation, and dialogic learning. Literature becomes a space for social interaction where learners co-construct meaning and language use.

7.4 Genre-Based Pedagogy

Different genres of literature—poetry, drama, fiction—offer unique instructional benefits and challenges. Genre-based pedagogy, which draws from systemic functional linguistics, encourages teachers to explore the formal features, functions, and cultural contexts of various genres. This approach allows learners to recognize how language operates differently in expressive, narrative, and dramatic forms.

Duff and Maley (1990) stress that genre-based instruction enables students to appreciate stylistic variation and to practice using language for multiple communicative purposes. For example, drama can improve oral fluency, poetry can develop phonological awareness, and fiction can expand vocabulary and reading stamina.

8. Methodology

8.1. Study Methodology

The researcher adopted the descriptive analytical method for this study. This approach was chosen due to its effectiveness in exploring educational phenomena, allowing the researcher to present data both qualitatively and quantitatively. According to Best and Kahn, the

descriptive method is useful in collecting information about prevailing conditions, practices, and trends (Best and Kahn 118).

8.2. Spatial and Objective Limits

The spatial limits of the study are defined as Khartoum State, with particular emphasis on the Khartoum locality and Jabal Awliya locality.

The objective limits focus on English language teaching in Sudanese schools and institutions, specifically examining the practices and challenges faced by English language teachers and supervisors.

8.3. Study Tool

The researcher relied on questionnaires and interviews as data collection tools. The questionnaire employed a five-point

Likert scale:

Strongly Agree

Agree

Neutral

Disagree

Strongly Disagree

This scale was selected for its widespread application in educational research, allowing for the collection of both qualitative insights and quantitative data. The questionnaire was validated by a panel of academic arbitrators, ensuring apparent honesty—a term that refers to the tool's face validity and clarity in achieving its intended purpose.

8.4. Total Study Community

The total study population consisted of 500 English language teachers and supervisors. The breakdown is as follows:

Table 1: Total Study Community

Group	Female	Male	Total	% of Total
Teachers	225	235	460	92%
Experts	35	55	90	18%
Total	260	290	550	100%

8.5. Study Sample

From the total population, a sample of 250 English language teachers was selected, using stratified random sampling to ensure representativeness.

Table 2: Study Sample

Category	Number	Percentage
Female	135	45%
Male	115	46%
Total	250	100%

The female representation (54%) slightly outweighs the male (46%), which is acceptable and still maintains a relatively balanced gender perspective in the study. This is especially valuable in educational research where gendered experiences may differ.

8.6. Sub-Dimensions of the Questionnaire

The questionnaire was divided into two main axes (sub-dimensions), each containing 10 items. Reliability was verified using Cronbach's Alpha, yielding a high level of internal consistency.

Table 3: Sub-Dimensions of the Questionnaire

Reliability Coefficient Cronbach's Alpha

Number of Items Sub-dimension

0.925 0.856 10 First Axis

0.869 0.856 10 Second Axis

8.7. Analytical Method for Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using descriptive statistical methods, including frequency distribution and percentages. The Likert five-point scale was the primary tool for analysis, supported by the descriptive approach that provides both depth and breadth to the research findings. This method aligns with established standards in educational research, where clarity, objectivity, and reproducibility are essential (Gay, Mills, and Airasian 162).

8.8. Apparent Honesty

"Apparent honesty" refers to the extent to which the questionnaire appears to measure what it is supposed to measure. It reflects the face validity of the instrument and is confirmed when experts and arbitrators agree that the scale aligns with the objectives of the study.

9. Discussion and Findings

9.1 Results from the Questionnaire

Table 3. Responses of the Study Sample about the Questionnaire.

Phrase	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total Responses	Comments
Using literary texts in the language classroom can make the student more aware of the language they are reading	1 (0.4%)	11 (4.4%)	8 (3.2%)	50 (20.0%)	180 (72.0%)	250	High agreement
Literature can be potential source of learner motivation	3 (1.2%)	12 (4.8%)	13 (5.2%)	72 (28.8%)	150 (60.0%)	250	Strong positive trend
Literary text offer a rich source of language input	0 (0.0%)	13 (5.2%)	22 (8.8%)	79 (31.6%)	136 (54.4%)	250	Balanced agreement
The group activities developed speaking and writing abilities for students	3 (1.2%)	27 (10.8%)	13 (5.2%)	100 (40.0%)	107 (42.8%)	250	Slightly divided
teaching literature can help students become more effective communicators in the target language	4 (1.6%)	10 (4.0%)	4 (1.6%)	73 (29.2%)	159 (63.6%)	250	Highly favorable
The study of literature is the best method by which	5 (2.0%)	16 (6.4%)	55 (22.0%)	53 (21.2%)	121 (48.4%)	250	Mixed responses

Phrase	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total Responses	Comments
students can dive into the cultural expression of the language							
Teaching language through literature leads to improving pronunciation for the students	6 (2.4%)	13 (5.2%)	17 (6.8%)	73 (29.2%)	141 (56.4%)	250	Positive trend
developing linguistic knowledge Teaching language through literature	1 (0.4%)	3 (1.2%)	22 (8.8%)	92 (36.8%)	132 (52.8%)	250	Mostly favorable
The effective use of literature in the ELT depends on the appropriate selection of literary texts	1 (0.4%)	13 (5.2%)	22 (8.8%)	92 (36.8%)	122 (48.8%)	250	Balanced favorability
Literature indeed has a strong place in the ESL curriculum and teaching language	4 (1.6%)	7 (2.8%)	9 (3.6%)	78 (31.2%)	152 (60.8%)	250	Strong positive response

From table 3 showed the following:

- Using literary texts in the language classroom can make the student more aware of the language they are reading This statement received overwhelmingly positive responses, with 92% of participants selecting “Agree” or “Strongly Agree.” Such a high level of consensus suggests that educators widely recognize the value of literature in enhancing students’ language awareness. The minimal disagreement (0.4%) reinforces the perception that literary texts play a significant role in deepening learners’ engagement with linguistic structures.
- Literature can be a potential source of learner motivation A strong majority (88.8%) of respondents affirmed that literature is a motivational force in the language classroom. This strong positive trend indicates that educators believe literature stimulates student interest and engagement, possibly due to its narrative appeal, emotional depth, and relevance to human experiences. The low rate of disagreement (6%) further supports this perspective.
- Literary texts offer a rich source of language input While 86% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with this statement, a small percentage (8.8%) chose “Neutral,” indicating some uncertainty or context-dependent interpretations. Nonetheless, the overall pattern suggests that most teachers view literature as a meaningful supplement to traditional language materials, providing authentic input in a rich linguistic context.
- The group activities developed speaking and writing abilities for students Responses to this statement were more divided than others. While 82.8% expressed agreement, there was also a relatively higher level of disagreement (10.8%). This distribution may reflect variations in how group activities are implemented in classrooms. It suggests that although many teachers see the potential of literature-based group tasks in enhancing productive skills, challenges such as classroom size or student participation may affect effectiveness.
- Teaching literature can help students become more effective communicators in the target language. This item was met with highly favorable responses, as 92.8% of participants agreed or strongly agreed. These results indicate a strong belief among teachers that literature helps students develop communication skills, likely by exposing them to expressive language, dialogue, and diverse contexts that mirror real-life interaction.
- The study of literature is the best method by which students can dive into the cultural

expression of the language. The responses to this item were more mixed. While 69.6% agreed or strongly agreed, 22% remained neutral and 8.4% disagreed. This suggests that some educators question whether literature is the most effective cultural gateway or whether other pedagogical tools might offer better results. The data points to a need for more discussion about the relative merits of various methods of cultural instruction in ELT.

7. Teaching language through literature leads to improving pronunciation for the students
This statement showed a generally positive trend, with 85.6% agreement. However, the 6.8% neutrality and a modest amount of disagreement may reflect differing views on literature's impact on phonological skills. Literature, especially poetry and drama, can enhance pronunciation when used effectively, though its success may depend on instructional methods and class dynamics.

8. Developing linguistic knowledge through teaching language via literature
A large majority of respondents (89.6%) supported the idea that literature can foster linguistic development. This result reinforces the widespread view that exposure to literary language enriches learners' vocabulary, grammar, and syntactic awareness. The minimal disagreement indicates near-universal support for this pedagogical approach.

9. The effective use of literature in the ELT depends on the appropriate selection of literary texts

This item yielded balanced but strong favorability, with 85.6% agreement. The nearly even split between "Agree" and "Strongly Agree" suggests that educators clearly recognize the importance of choosing literary texts that align with students' linguistic levels and cultural backgrounds. The small percentage of neutral and disagreeing responses may reflect concerns about text accessibility or curriculum constraints.

10. Literature indeed has a strong place in the ESL curriculum and teaching language
This statement received one of the most positive responses in the dataset, with 92% of participants endorsing the idea. It reflects a broad consensus that literature is not just an enrichment activity but a central component of effective English language instruction. Such support underscores the need for curriculum designers and policymakers to prioritize literary content in ESL programs.

9.2 Summary of Key Findings

The findings reveal a strong consensus among participants regarding the value of integrating literature into English language teaching, particularly in enhancing language awareness, learner motivation, and communicative competence. Teachers widely agreed that literary texts enrich linguistic and cultural understanding and support student engagement. However, the effectiveness of literature-based instruction was seen as dependent on the appropriate selection of texts and the use of effective pedagogical strategies. While most responses were highly favorable, there was some variation in perceptions regarding literature's role in improving pronunciation and the impact of group activities, indicating that outcomes may vary based on classroom implementation.

10. Classroom Strategies for Teaching Literary Genres

In response to the findings, this section presents practical, research-informed strategies for teaching poetry, fiction, and drama in the English language classroom.

10.1 Teaching Poetry

Example Text: "The Road Not Taken" by Robert Frost

Objectives: To develop phonological awareness, metaphor comprehension, and speaking fluency.

Activity Plan:

Pre-reading: Ask students to reflect on a difficult decision they've made.

While-reading: Read the poem aloud with focus on rhythm and stress.

Post-reading: Group discussion of the poem's theme; students write their own four-line stanza about a life decision

Results: Students develop fluency and interpretive skills; poems stimulate emotional connection and metaphorical thinking.

10.2 Teaching Fiction

Example Text: "The Necklace" by Guy de Maupassant

Objectives: Enhance reading comprehension, character analysis, and cultural sensitivity

Activity Plan:

Pre-reading: Vocabulary preview and prediction from title.

While-reading: Read in pairs, summarize each paragraph

Post-reading: Role-play the story from different characters' perspectives; write an alternate ending

Results: Students become more engaged in narrative structure, expand vocabulary, and improve inferencing skills.

10.3 Teaching Drama

Example Text: Excerpt from Romeo and Juliet

Objectives: Improve oral fluency, expression, and collaboration

Activity Plan:

Pre-reading: Introduce setting, key characters, and background context

While-reading: Assign roles and perform a short scene with emotion

Post-reading: Discuss themes of love, fate, and family conflict; relate them to modern Sudanese context

Results: Students practice intonation, stress, and non-verbal communication; performance builds confidence.

11. Implications for Pedagogy and Policy

The findings of this study suggest that integrating literature into English language teaching offers extensive pedagogical benefits. These include enhancing students' communicative competence, vocabulary acquisition, cultural sensitivity, and critical thinking. However, to fully realize these benefits, systemic changes must be made in both teaching practice and policy implementation.

For pedagogy, this implies a need for teacher training programs that include modules on teaching literature effectively, especially in EFL/ESL contexts. Such training should cover genre-based instruction, student-centered activities, cultural analysis, and differentiated instruction for mixed-ability classrooms. Additionally, pre-service and in-service teachers should be encouraged to explore literary texts beyond the canon, selecting material that resonates with students' social realities.

For educational policy, curriculum designers and administrators should recognize literature

not as an optional or enrichment tool but as a core component of English language education. Literature can help achieve national goals related to identity, moral development, and civic engagement. Policies should ensure the provision of suitable literary texts, smaller class sizes for interactive learning, and greater flexibility in assessment methods that include interpretive and creative responses.

Furthermore, assessment frameworks should evolve to measure not only linguistic accuracy but also literary comprehension, intercultural competence, and expressive fluency. Ministries of Education should encourage research-based teaching innovations and support professional development initiatives focused on literature in ELT.

12. Recommendations

Based on the study findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Integrate literature into core English language curricula at all educational levels, emphasizing its relevance to language acquisition and cultural understanding.
2. Develop and distribute teaching guides and literary resources that match the proficiency levels of learners in secondary and tertiary institutions.
3. Organize training workshops and professional development programs focused on genre-specific strategies for teaching poetry, drama, and fiction.
4. Incorporate performance-based activities such as role-play, dramatic reading, and storytelling to enhance speaking and listening skills through literature.
5. Encourage interdisciplinary collaboration between literature and linguistics departments to ensure cohesive language instruction.
6. Provide institutional support for literary initiatives, including access to libraries, audiovisual materials, and digital platforms for literature teaching.
7. Create a national repository of recommended literary texts categorized by level, theme, and genre to facilitate consistent and relevant material selection.

13. Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that literature is not only a medium of artistic expression but also a powerful pedagogical tool in English language teaching. Literary texts—whether poems, plays, or stories—expose learners to authentic language in rich and varied contexts. They foster a deeper engagement with the target language by stimulating the imagination, encouraging analysis, and nurturing cultural awareness.

Despite the well-documented benefits, the use of literature in Sudanese ELT classrooms remains limited due to practical constraints, including lack of training, overcrowded classrooms, and insufficient resources. Nonetheless, with appropriate policy support, teacher preparation, and curricular reform, these barriers can be overcome.

The research highlights the urgent need to reclaim the role of literature in ELT not only for linguistic development but also for building empathetic, reflective, and culturally competent learners. When literature is woven into the fabric of language teaching, the classroom becomes more than a space for grammar drills—it becomes a forum for meaning-making, self-expression, and intercultural dialogue.

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