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Probing the Approaches to Teaching Literature to EFL Students - Graduate Learners' Perspective

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to explore the effectiveness of certain teaching approaches in a literature classroom in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) setting. The effectiveness of these approaches is outlined from the learner's perspective, and a conclusion is drawn after a deductive qualitative analysis of the learner's opinions. This study also investigates the learner's detailed responses on some approaches to formulate a common consensus on the solidity of these approaches in a literature classroom. The study further signifies the importance of teaching literature in an EFL classroom. A qualitative analysis based on a structured questionnaire is carried out after individual interviews of the participants. The participants have been graduated from the College of Languages and Translation, King Khalid University, Abha, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, with a minimum of three literature courses on their credit. It has been observed that all the participants are convinced in adopting certain approaches in teaching a literary text which not only help in acquiring language symbols but also improve their critical outlook. This study also presents a careful evaluation of the benefits preferred and acquired by the interviewees at certain stages of their educational experiences. The authors have concluded the study by providing a set of suggestions to the Literature teachers who have been sincerely struggling in explaining literary texts to the EFL learners. The researchers propound the language teachers to adopt an eclectic method of teaching by integrating various approaches based on the course objectives.

Keywords: Teaching approaches, teaching literary text, cultural approach, paraphrastic approach, stylistic approach, literature teaching.

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1. Introduction

The prime aim of this paper is to analyze the efficacy of teaching approaches implemented by the literature teachers in an EFL classroom. It throws light on some approaches which are widely used by many literature teachers, and it further explores the learner's viewpoint on these approaches. The benefits of various approaches as asserted by the learners are also highlighted. The study signifies that

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all the commonly used approaches are useful in accomplishing different language learning benefits, and a single approach is not efficient enough to achieve complete benefits. The study also focuses on the importance of including literature in a course curriculum: literature learning is not only to learn about people, culture, and ethics instead it's also to learn the stylistics and diction of a target language. So, selecting an effective approach to teaching is a crucial issue and a teacher needs to act wisely and creatively in choosing the same. He or she must adopt effective learning techniques along with effective teaching methods.

The teaching of literature courses is quite advantageous for EFL learners in many ways. Numerous researchers have discussed it that teaching literature courses in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) is an effective tool to provide the students immense support in learning different linguistic components as well as acquiring an aesthetic approach towards the target language. "Literature is not only meant to address the interpersonal and informational aesthetic value of the learning but also beyond that where the students learn about people, culture, ethics, behaviours, and other social norms" (Mustakim, Mustapha & Lebar, 2018, p.35).

Literature is a mirror to life; how can a language be taught without gaining an insight into the culture, traditions, and values of the target language. Literature courses are indispensable for attaining learning outcomes of proficiency in the language. In other words, studying English literature enhances the learning scope of the language (Mujawar, 2013). A variety of characters with specific literary diction takes language learning to another level.

In this age of technology and innovation, learning skills have changed. In the 21st century, the only way to keep the learner motivated and breathing deep into the sea of knowledge, the curriculum should encompass a profound range of literary works.

There is a dual benefit of including literature in the curriculum, especially at the tertiary level. It not only increases the imaginative powers of the students but also develops an insight into the culture and characters of the English (target language) society in a critical manner (Magulod Jr., 2018). If the importance of teaching literature courses in an EFL setting is undeniable, the question arises that what should be the approaches that a teacher can adapt to impart the full benefit of the literary work to the learners.

In the past, some researchers have raised this issue continuously that the literature teachers should be well equipped and prepared to inculcate a creative sense in the learners.

Muthusamy et.al (2017) discusses the role of the teacher in this regard and states that a literature teacher should know about critically appreciating the literature and command on teaching methodologies.

The literature teachers have to be innovative, creative and adopt such interactive methodologies that don't disappoint the learners. Otherwise, there is a risk of learners developing a negative attitude towards literature courses.

"It is therefore, important to explore the teaching methodology issue thoroughly, sensitively and from diverse perspective" (Al-Mahrooqi, 2012, p.173). This research will explore and highlight such approaches that can go a long way in teaching English literature courses to EFL students.

The research methodology adopted for this study is a deductive qualitative analysis based on five commonly used approaches of teaching literature in an EFL classroom at the undergraduate level. Ten female students, who have been exposed to intensive courses of English literature during the past five years at the College of Languages and Translation, King Khalid University, Abha, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia participated in the study. The data were collected through online interviews and were later coded and transcribed for further analysis. Finally, major trends and choices of the respondents are noted. The research finding shows that each specific area has specific benefits, and their degree of efficacy varies. According to the participants' responses, the learner-centered approach fulfills maximum benefits of learning. From the research findings, it is inferred that a teacher must adopt a suitable approach based on the needs of the learners and the course objectives. This study will help the literature teachers in designing their teaching strategies and teaching modules and is going to benefit the EFL learners as well.

This paper consists of the literature review and further discusses the five literature teaching approaches which are currently in practice. i.e. the Teacher-centered approach, Stylistic approach, Learner-centered approach, Paraphrastic approach, and Culture-based approach. The research

methodology has been discussed in detail, the findings of the study are illustrated through a graph, based on the research findings. The authors have elucidated some recommendations for the literature teachers and finally, some concluding remarks to the study have been mentioned.

2. Literature review

It is a widely debated argument that effective teaching of literature will not only expand EFL learners' critical outlook but also motivate and encourage them in learning the English Language. Literature learning helps to develop the personality of language learners by improving their self-awareness (Atek, et al., 2021).

Keeping in view the benefits of teaching literature courses to EFL students, it has become imperative to promote literature teaching in institutions. The students will be aware of the global problems as well as the cultural issues because literature portrays all of them (Mustafa, 2016). Beers & Probst, 2011 favor the same idea: "Literature offers our students the chance to think not only about the characters they meet in the pages of the book but also about their own lives" (p. 8). If the choice of material is suitable, the students will identify the literary texts with their lives and find them purposeful (Lazar, 1993).

As the importance of teaching literature is highlighted by many critics, the selection of effective teaching approaches is equally important. An approach will help in devising teaching strategies (Rashid, et al.2010). There is no fixed methodology of teaching a literature course, yet the teachers can adopt certain approaches to devise classroom activities under the umbrella of the specific approach they choose.

The authors have filled the gap by outlining the specific teaching approaches and their respective benefits in one research paper. There has been little research focused on the learners' responses and this research explores the learners' perspectives who have been exposed to variegated teaching approaches in an EFL setting. Fogal, (2010), supports this type of research: "Accurately assessing how students feel about a teaching methodology is essential, as this perspective can help influence teaching strategies and aid curriculum development" (p.p.1-15). The previous works also provided an insight on the Literature teaching approaches but the selection of the popular approaches and their discussion in the interviews is very unique. Another motivation behind this research is that nowadays our attitudes towards teaching and learning literature have changed. The researchers have not drawn a line between these approaches; instead, these approaches are with open borders, which can be used individually as well as merged by keeping in view their multiple benefits.

2.1 Teacher-centered approach

In teaching English literature, the role of a teacher is inarguable. This approach covers the role of a literature teacher and depends on the knowledge imparted by the teachers to the learners. The teacher adopts the techniques of lecturing, explaining, and demonstrating. The involvement of the learners is minimum, and they are just passive. This approach sometimes creates boredom, students lack motivation, and the literary text becomes a burden. This approach is beneficial for preparing the students for examination (Carter & McRae, 1996 as cited by Affendi & Abdul Aziz, 2020).

2.2 Stylistic approach

Lazar (1993) has highlighted some approaches to teaching literature and has recommended carefully selecting the course material. The material should be based on some stylistic features of both language and literary merits.

Lazar (1993) has also offered a language targeted approach that refers to the stylistics of the target language. This approach helps develop a deeper understanding of a literary text without any ambiguity. It also boosts the confidence of the learners to comprehend a literary work. The literary text chosen for language interpretation is also open to large-scale discussions (Lazar, 1993).

2.3 Learner-centered approach

Maley (2012) has suggested an approach that promotes the personal growth of the learners. This approach is learner-centered and it develops the critical thinking of the students. It also stimulates their imagination and provides them a space for emotional response. The students will explore, discuss,

role-play, enact and improvise their creative writing. The learners will stay comfortable and feel at home while reading a literary text. The literature never loses value in inculcating a critical understanding among students in the complex and ever-changing world (Maley, 2012).

2.4 Paraphrastic approach

This approach refers to simplifying and rephrasing the literary text. Some researchers consider this approach relevant in the context where students have low proficiency levels. Teachers may use another language to reword the literature texts (Ling & Eng, 2016). This type of approach has some drawbacks also. The active learning and the understanding of literary terms, imagery, and concepts might be inhibited.

2.5 Culture-based approach

This type of approach is based on information on the culture of a target language. It stresses the importance of culture, values, and history of a literary work. It demands the teacher’s input in providing various cultural and historical sources to the students. Although it is a traditional approach, it may be incorporated with the technology of the modern age. Many researchers have pinpointed its benefits. If the teachers and the students include multimedia to familiarize themselves with the culture and history of a specific literary work, it makes the lessons easier and more interesting. In this approach, we encourage learners to “understand different cultures and ideologies in relation to their own” (Savvidou, 2004).

3. The instruments

The sample of this study includes 10 Saudi female students, who have been exposed to intensive courses of English Literature, consisting of all genres, during the past five years, at King Khalid University, College of Languages and Translation, Abha. They are graduated and choosing them for the interview will assure their impartiality. They are unbiased in forming an opinion regarding the teaching approaches adopted by their instructors.

The tool to obtain data is zoom interviews, conducted individually. The authenticity of the data is fully realized by using the zoom recording tool. This tool helped in transcribing and outlining the data in the accumulation stage.

The length of the interview depended on the information that every participant was willing to provide. The average time of the interview ranged between 15-20 minutes.

4. The study method

It is deductive qualitative research, based on five basic approaches of teaching literature in an EFL classroom on a tertiary level. A deductive approach to a qualitative analysis is specially adopted for explanatory studies (Fisher & Ziviani, 2004 as cited by Pearse, 2019).

Noel Pearse (2019) has suggested the steps of deductive qualitative research. The following steps are followed to form the structure of this research.

- 1- First of all, a research aim or problem is outlined. That is the specific approaches in literature teaching and their effectiveness for the learners.
- 2- There are three propositions (Choice and idea, Reasons, Benefits); of the selected five approaches in this context (Teacher-centered approach, Stylistic Approach, Learner-centered Approach, Paraphrastic Approach, and Culture-based Approach).
- 3- Then a codebook is formulated based on the responses to these five Approaches (Table 1)

Table 1.

Illustration of codebook.

Choice and Idea	Teacher- centered Approach (TCA), Stylistic Approach (SA),Learner Centered Approach(LCA), Paraphrastic Approach(PA), Culture-based Approach(CBA)
Reason	found it- Effective (E), found it- Sometimes Effective (SE), found it- Not Effective (NE)
Benefits	Comprehensive(C), Critical thinking (CT), Motivating (M), Language Improvement (LI), Informative (I)

- 4- A question matrix has been developed against all the propositions (Table 2). To encourage discussion, follow-up questions are also formulated.

Table 2.
Question matrix of interview questions matched against propositions.

Questions for all interviewees	Background	Proposition 1 Choice and idea	Proposition 2 Reason	Proposition 3 Benefits
There are some approaches for teaching literature courses. What is your opinion on these? 1-What approach do you prefer the most? 2-Why did you choose this approach? 3-How did this approach help you in learning?	Qualifying Question	x	x	x
5- Data is collected through zoom interviews and recorded to transcribe later.				
6- The data is analyzed after transcribing it.				
7- The major trends and preferences of the learners are reported.				

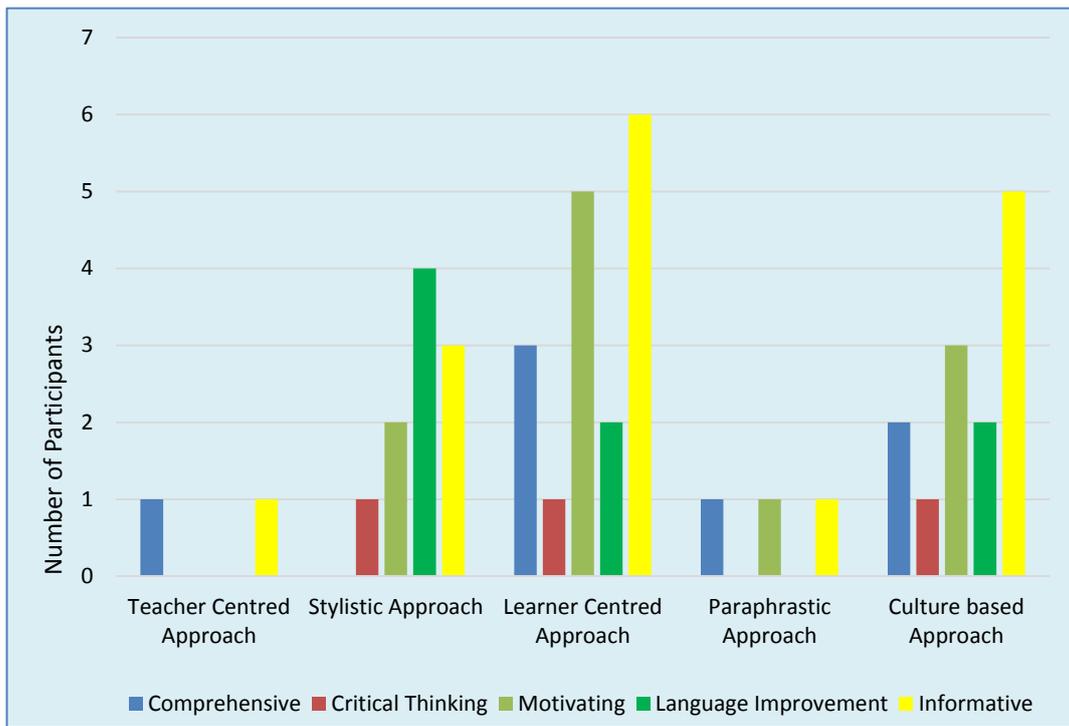
5. The findings and discussion

Table 3 illustrates the number of participants who suggested the variegated benefits of different teaching approaches.

Table 3.
Illustration of the number of participants who suggested the variegated benefits of different teaching approaches.

Various teaching Approaches	Number of Participants identifying the asked benefits of each approach				
	Comprehensive	Critical Thinking	Motivating	Language Improvement	Informative
Teacher Centred Approach	1	0	0	0	1
Stylistic Approach	0	1	2	4	3
Learner Centred Approach	3	1	5	2	6
Paraphrastic Approach	1	0	1	0	1
Culture based Approach	2	1	3	2	5

The results are shown in the form of a graph, to sum up, the choices of the interviewees and the positive points of those approaches.



Graph presenting the choice of Teaching Approaches and their benefits by the interviewees.

It is clear in the Figure (graph) that the respondents have chosen different approaches according to their experiences of learning in a literature classroom. Each specific approach has a specific area of benefit, which ultimately contributes to effective learning output.

The researchers have collected the data based on three different propositions (as shown in Table1). These propositions helped a lot in evaluating a variety of teaching approaches in a literature classroom. As shown in the graph the teacher-centered approach is reported to achieve two benefits i.e. Comprehensive and informative. The stylistic approach has been reported of achieving multiple benefits which improve language learning (information, motivation, and critical thinking). The learner-centered approach is reported as fulfilling maximum benefits (comprehensive, language improvement, informative, motivating, and critical thinking). The paraphrastic approach is also believed to attain at least three benefits (comprehensive, motivating, and informative). The culture-based approach has also a preference for the learners as they have reported getting all the asked benefits (comprehensive, critical thinking, motivating, language improvement, and informative). After a careful analysis of the collected data, it is vivid that all the approaches to teaching a literary text are effective, but they vary in the degree of effectiveness as well as help in achieving variegated benefits. At this level of the educational journey, the learners are very well aware of the effectiveness of these teaching approaches. They are willing to look beyond a traditional setting of studying a literary text passively. They want to interact and stay active to absorb the language as well as all the aesthetic elements of a literary text. This study proves the fact that now learners' involvement is also the choice of the learners as they are a step ahead to respond to the implementation of all the approaches in a literature classroom.

6. The recommendations

This study intends to prove the importance of all the known approaches in teaching a literary text, especially in an EFL setting. The discussed approaches help altogether in achieving a variety of learning outcomes specified for a literature course. It is recommended that whatever approach the teachers select, they should devise certain techniques to get the maximum benefits of that approach.

For example, if the literature course is chosen to develop the English Language, the Stylistic approach should be preferred and the language models, as well as symbols, should be highlighted by the teachers. The best technique to benefit from this approach is to make students read a literary text

closely and explain the repetitions, grammatical structures, punctuations, and forms to them. The involvement of students is important.

In a Culture-based approach, the teachers may use technology as a tool to explain and familiarize the culture of the target language text. Teachers may ask them to watch the short movie clips related to the text or explore the history of the literary work through different search engines. This approach involves a learner-centered approach as well.

In Teacher centered approach, although the students are not actively participating, still they should be given motivating tasks and interesting information by the teachers to involve students. This approach touches on the explanation of language symbols, so it involves a stylistic approach too.

Similarly, the learner-centered approach is the one in which the personal growth model is involved, and the teachers should introduce the activities like role play, debates, advertisements, and creative writing presentations. The teacher should recommend a documentary or a short film to the students. For example, if a teacher is teaching “Heart of the Darkness” by Joseph Conrad, showing a documentary or a short film on the African social scenario of that time would help a lot in developing a better understanding of the literary work, among the students. This approach here is closer to the culture-based approach.

The best idea is to integrate all these approaches and adopt the teaching techniques according to the course objectives and the learning outcomes. The teacher is the one who devises and creates a teaching environment to make the learners motivated as well as the active participants.

7. Conclusion

This study has provided a framework in which the teaching approaches for teaching a literature course have been analyzed. These teaching approaches fulfill the goals of teaching a literary work of the target language. The role of the teacher is important here as it is like a doctor who decides which medicine needs to be given for a specific deficiency and in what amount that medicine should be given. These approaches are like that medicine, the dose of which needs to be decided by the teacher. The respondents in this research have not denied any of the asked approaches, yet they have prioritized certain approaches keeping in view their benefits in learning a target language. The literature teachers need to be creative at the same time because the literary texts are not a day-to-day affair. They are the most authentic, standardized, and sophisticated pieces of text. They need training in such a way that provides the maximum benefit to the learners. The researchers also feel that there should be more research in this field to familiarize the literature teachers with the involvement of the technology inside their classes, to waive the concept that literary texts are obsolete. In the end, this study postulates that the culmination of all the teaching approaches in a literature teaching classroom will help a lot in involving and convincing the students to gather maximum benefits of the literary text.

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