

Challenges and Difficulties Faced by Iraqi Intermediate Schools' Students in Literary English Texts in Baghdad Al-Karkh Third

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العنوان: التحديات والصعوبات التي يواجهها طلاب المدارس المتوسطة العراقية في النصوص الأدبية الإنكليزية في بغداد الكرخ الثالثة

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المستخلص

تبحث هذه الدراسة في التحديات التي يواجهها مدرسو اللغة الإنكليزية في تدريس النصوص الأدبية في "كتاب اللغة الإنكليزية للعراق". لطالما كان الأدب جزءاً أساسياً من تدريس اللغات الأجنبية. لقراءة الأدب غرض مختلف في مرحلة النهج التواصلية. بالإضافة إلى محتواها، تُسلط هذه النصوص الأدبية الضوء على أهمية استخدامها لتشجيع الأنشطة اللغوية المختلفة. تُركز هذه الدراسة بشكل خاص على الأعمال الأدبية، استناداً إلى مقابلة شبه منظمة مع عشرين معلماً للغة الإنجليزية في المدارس المتوسطة بمدينة بغداد، جانب الكرخ. لكشف الصعوبات التي قد يواجهها المدرسين. وأخيراً، تُقدم بعض الاقتراحات في ضوء وجهات نظر المشاركين الإدراكية. الكلمات المفتاحية: النصوص الأدبية، اللغة الإنكليزية كلغة أجنبية، التحديات، المنهج الدراسي، الوعي الثقافي

Abstract

The current study examines the challenges faced by English teachers in teaching literary texts using the "English for Iraq textbook". Literature has always been an essential part of teaching foreign languages. Reading literature has a different purpose in the Communicative Approach period. In addition to their content, these literary texts highlight the importance of using them to encourage various linguistic activities. This study focuses especially on literary works, based on a semi-structured interview with twenty English language teachers in intermediate schools in Baghdad city, Karkh side. To disclose the difficulties that teachers may encounter. Lastly, some suggestions are offered based on the participants' perspectives. Key Words Literary texts, EFL, Challenges, Curriculum, Cultural Awareness

1.Introduction

English literature is a vital component of education in many nations, acting as a link between language learning and cultural awareness. It helps students develop their critical thinking and cultural competency in addition to their language proficiency. Numerous advantages of incorporating literature into English courses have been acknowledged, including the growth of vocabulary and the improvement of interpersonal skills. The teaching of English literature in Iraqi schools has changed dramatically throughout the years, owing to political, cultural, and curricular shifts. The earlier curriculum, based on colonial paradigms, prioritized grammar and rote learning over literary appreciation. However, instructional changes implemented after 2003 emphasized communication competence, critical thinking, and intercultural awareness (Alrickaby, 24). When reading literary English texts, students at Iraqi intermediate schools encounter a variety of difficult problems. A mix of linguistic barriers, sociocultural differences, disparities in teaching approaches, and inadequately resourced learning environments are the causes of these difficulties. Many Iraqi students struggle in these areas because they are not sufficiently exposed to or supported in comprehending English literary texts, which require advanced inferential skills,

cultural awareness, and vocabulary breadth (Al Obaydi & AL-Bahadli 44). This study examines the significance of teaching English literature in Iraqi schools, focusing on the benefits that students can gain from studying English literary works. The study also explores the difficulties that teachers confront when teaching English literature in Iraq and provides potential solutions.

1.1 Advantages of Incorporating Literature in EFL Classrooms

There are several advantages of including literature in EFL classes. Language competence, cross-cultural awareness, and analytical reasoning are all significantly enhanced. Additionally, it helps EFL students emotionally by encouraging sentimental resonance and a strong bond with culture and language. Moreover, the use of literature in EFL courses is widespread, with students favoring short stories and achieving optimal learning through the exploration of significant themes (Lina & Arshad, 21). Literary materials must be included in the English curriculum because they offer authentic language samples, grow vocabulary, improve reading, and foster sociocultural competency in language acquisition. Literary works promote language learning, analytical and creative thinking, aesthetic appreciation, and cross-cultural understanding. While learning a new language, literature can also improve pupils' communication and cultural understanding. Teachers can help students become interested, focused, and resilient language learners by including literature (Bobkina & Dominguez, 249). It is widely acknowledged by educators that literature is an indispensable resource for strengthening language competencies, which include reading, listening, speaking, and writing. Even when activities require adaptation to different skill levels, adding literary adaptations into educational settings, such as screening cinematic adaptations of books, can increase student engagement, encourage critical literacy, and stimulate interest in the original texts (Altun, 45). Using literary works also aims to stimulate readers' interest in literature and generate enthusiasm for English-language literature while simultaneously encouraging language acquisition through developing a feeling of social and cultural connection to the text. Several strategies have been proposed to enhance literature-based instruction; they include information-based and moral-philosophical approaches, the integration of technological tactics for education, and student-centered initiatives (Choudhary, 3). Since literature sheds light on other cultures, values, and customs, it is crucial for fostering cross-cultural understanding. Language learners can better understand religious ideas and cultural values by reading literature, which introduces them to the artistic aspects of different civilizations. Therefore, by exposing students to the national traits and customs of the culture they are studying, reading literary works helps them become more Inter-culturally competent while also improving their language skills. (Lovrović & Kolega, 187-188). In addition, literature has the power to question long-held beliefs and prejudices, urging readers to face their own biases and learn to value the unique qualities of those around them. Literary works have the dual purpose of enlightening readers and fostering mutual appreciation and understanding among people of different backgrounds and customs through the presentation of distinct cultural tales and experiences (Zhang, 90).

1.2 The Objectives and Approaches of the Literary Texts in English Textbooks

Literary texts in English textbooks serve a variety of goals and are analyzed using a range of different methods. They are used to enhance language learning outcomes, develop communication and language skills, foster creative and critical thinking abilities, and promote understanding of other cultures. In addition, literary works are useful tools for teaching language and culture. They help improve intercultural competency, aesthetic delight, critical analysis, and fluency in sociocultural norms and traditions (Gywali, 60). According to Shukri, reading literary works can be a great approach for students to improve their grammar and vocabulary. They employ the target language more naturally, containing expressions and terms that students might not encounter in everyday speech. The full connotative force of words is frequently on display in well-crafted literary works due to the careful use of language and sentence structure. Through exposure to literature, pupils can hone their cognitive and aesthetic abilities while enhancing their critical thinking and sound judgment capacity. Literary texts in Iraqi English textbooks try to increase language acquisition by incorporating cultural values, ideas, and beliefs. Literary texts encourage more reflective and real language learning, improving students' language understanding and subtlety. In addition, literary works can evoke personal responses from students, helping them engage with the content more deeply by combining their views, emotions, and past knowledge to construct meaning and improve their literary competencies (Mousa & Ayad, 7).

1.3 Obstacles and Standards for Choosing Appropriate Literary Texts

The suitability of literary works for use in the classroom mostly depends on their readability, cultural importance, language complexity, and alignment with educational objectives. Choosing books carefully, taking into account students' reading levels, cultural and linguistic insights, authenticity, and suitability for higher levels of

investigation support, will guarantee that texts will not only help students develop their language skills but also encourage critical and creative thinking. Literary works evaluated by these criteria are therefore helpful tools for teachers attempting to help their pupils develop their language proficiency and viewpoint in the classroom. (Al-Saeed & Alenezi, 44). The "English for Iraq" series replaced the "Iraq Opportunities" series in the academic year 2013-2014. It is a twelve-level international series exclusively intended for students and educators in institutions located in the Republic of Iraq. Terry O'Neill and Peter Snow are the authors of this series. The Editorial and Adaptation Committee and Garnet Publishing Company modified it to accommodate Iraqi culture (Al-Ogaily, 2,3). With its multi-syllabus (functional-structural) approach and theme-based learning units, "English for Iraq" helps students build a practical plan for enhancing their speaking, listening, reading, and writing abilities. However, the students' book emphasizes the practice in the Activity Book as well as the structures and exponents of functions. This series takes a student-centered approach at its core, which implies that the communicative method is its main tactic because it uses interactive and individual assignments to enhance learning. "English for Iraq" also combines national and international culture into its curriculum. In addition to highlighting the social and moral ideals prevalent in Iraq, this series provides examples of the country's natural surroundings. The instruction of skills, vocabulary, and grammar is clearly incorporated into the curriculum to make the learning process more efficient for Iraqi students. The "English for Iraq" (EFI) program incorporates several literary works into its lessons to foster pupils' capacity for original thought and expression. Parts of the curriculum that are most important involve:

Scrapbooks: In the first level of intermediate, students put together short paragraphs, phrases, and sentences in scrapbooks, sometimes accompanied by colorful pictures. As part of this assignment, students are encouraged to express themselves creatively through the use of both textual and visual components.

School Magazines: During the second intermediate level, students cooperate to produce a school magazine. This magazine comprises articles, poetry, essays, interviews, and other works that students select and produce about themselves. This project enables students to showcase their creative writing and take pride in their accomplishments. Building a book of short stories is an assignment for students in the third intermediate level. The goal of this more advanced task is to push students to think critically, use complex terminology, and compose unique ideas. They find a way to express themselves through narrative via stories that mirror their originality. The EFI curriculum encompasses various literary styles, including poetry, journalism, and magazine-style presentations of scientific information, among others. This approach exposes children to several writing styles and genres, enhancing their vocabulary and fostering a more profound understanding of literature.

2. Strategies for Effective Implementation

The purpose of this study is to examine, from the teachers' perspective, the difficulties that Iraqi intermediate school students who are learning literary texts implicit in English textbooks curriculum. The study's population consists of male and female instructors at intermediate schools located in Al-Kurkh 3rd, Baghdad. For the academic year 2023–2024, the study's sample is restricted to EFL teachers, both male and female, employed at Baghdad's Al-Kurkh 3rd intermediate schools. Ten intermediate schools and twenty English teachers make up the study's sample. A qualitative research methodology was selected for the study. The researcher used semi-structured interviews to gather teachers' opinions on topics related to the study's research questions, which included the challenges EFL teachers face when teaching literary texts in English for Iraq Textbooks and whether or not these texts align with the curriculum objectives. Teachers were encouraged to thoroughly express their points of view during the semi-structured interview process. Every participant would most likely feel comfortable speaking in English and Arabic, given that the interviews were performed in those languages with prompts as needed. For approximately half an hour, each of the interviews was done with a single subject. To properly evaluate the data provided by the interviewees, the interviews were audio-recorded with their consent and supplemented by taking notes of the pertinent material.

2.1 Participants Profiles

All the teachers involved in the study were non-native speakers of English, teaching three-level students at eighteen government schools and two non-government schools in Baghdad. Some of the participants completed M.A. and PHD, and most got a bachelor's in English.

2.2 The instrument

Teachers were urged to elaborate on their opinions throughout the semi-structured interview. The interviews were conducted in Arabic and English, which is the language that all of the participants would most likely feel comfortable speaking, and they were accompanied by prompts as needed. Each participant only had one

interview, which lasted about thirty minutes. In order to thoroughly examine the information supplied by the interviewers, the interviews were audio recorded with the participant's permission and supported by notes of the essential details.

2.3 Analyzing and arranging the data

According to the direction of the interview, some questions were changed during the interviews. The natural flow of the questions was maintained by paying attention to how each interviewee answered. To get more information about the interviewees' thoughts and feelings, the researcher sometimes went deeper into the conversation during a semi-structured interview. Still, the conversation was based on open-ended questions, so the researcher did not have any personal opinions. Some questions were modified throughout the interviews based on the flow of the conversation. Observing each interviewee's response allowed the questioning to continue in a natural flow. The researcher occasionally probed further into the participants' thoughts and emotions during a semi-structured interview to learn more. However, the researcher did not have any personal opinions because the discussion was based on open-ended questions.

- Their response or viewpoint regarding the modifications made to the English in the Iraqi textbooks, with a particular emphasis on the literary passages that are included;
- The difficulties they faced and the reactions of their pupils while instructing those works of literature;
- The perspectives of the teachers about the texts' efficacy in fostering communicative ability through successful exploitation;
- Apprehensions regarding the tasks and questions used to gauge students' proficiency in communication from literary texts;
- An urge for adjustments or modifications.

Discussion and a synopsis of the results

All of the teachers noted that they were having difficulty teaching the material. All interviewees discussed the following issues that are prevalent in instructional literature:

(A) Difficulties in Reading Comprehension

Students' reading problems are severe, and the leading causes are lousy reading habits and ineffective instructional methods. The students' aptitude for reading and writing about literature was affected by their level of English proficiency. While understanding the material, some students still struggled to write coherently.

(B) Linguistic Impediments

There are many language obstacles, such as a limited vocabulary and problems understanding indirect references and conclusions. Emotional factors, including the dread of embarrassment in front of one's classmates, make these challenges even worse.

(C) Cultural and Situational Obstacles

Proverbs and other culturally distinctive material, which call for language proficiency and cultural awareness, are difficult for students to translate. Educational approaches frequently fail to address these cultural differences sufficiently, making comprehension even more challenging.

(D) Environmental and Psychological Challenges

Students already have challenges, and their school environment, which lacks English language resources and libraries, worsens things. Additional obstacles that prevent students from actively engaging with literary works include psychological factors like a lack of motivation and the fear of making mistakes in front of their classmates.

(E) Concerning their perspective on language assessment procedures and curriculum objectives.

According to almost all of the participants, there was a significant disconnect or mismatch between the aims of the text and the ways it was evaluated. They thought the exercises in the textbook weren't enough and didn't go along with the course's objectives. In addition, the test items discourage pupils from reading, understanding, and enjoying literature. There weren't any practice tests for your listening and speaking abilities on this test. Students hardly engage with these literary masterpieces because of that same reason. Notwithstanding the importance of these difficulties, some educators contend that students can overcome them and advance their knowledge of English literary texts with better teaching methods and materials.

Recommendations and Conclusion

This study has identified several challenges faced by Iraqi secondary school students when studying literary texts in English, including linguistic barriers, cultural differences, and environmental factors. Iraqi English teachers, by no means, have reported an influential gap between curriculum objectives and assessment approaches, which

obstructed students' engagement with literature. These findings, which are concerned with EFL curricula, emphasize the urgent need to form a balance between linguistic proficiency, cultural awareness, and student-centered approaches when dealing with literary texts. Therefore, collaboration among educators, legislators, and curriculum designers is now required to address these issues. Through sitting things in context, encouraging creativity, and matching assessments to learning goals. It will enable the students to continue interacting with literary books in a meaningful way and gain a deeper comprehension of language and culture.

- To assess the literary texts' efficacy, particularly concerning linguistic complexity and the requirement for prior knowledge. The most essential requirement is to assess these literary works' efficacy immediately. There are numerous methods for carrying out this assessment. For instance, checklists are tools ELT researchers and teachers use to assess teaching-learning resources such as textbooks. Other study techniques include classroom observations to learn about the actual classroom environment and students' opinions regarding the literary works, as well as formal and informal interviews and semi-structured and structured interviews.

- Taking Contextual and Cultural Considerations into Account According to ELT specialists and scholars, an approach that has been established and proven helpful in one environment may not always be effective and efficient in another. "In the context of ELT, refers to the socio-cultural, political, demographic, and economic conditions in which language education takes place," according to Palmieri (2021). There are many different contexts in the world, and language teachers must be cognizant of their students' unique requirements and needs (p. 68). The selection of literary texts is no different.

- Complementing the Literary Texts with Sufficient and Proper Exercises In a classroom teaching communicative language, exercises should incorporate the types of activities that best support learning. More thorough lesson plans and instructional strategies must also be provided together with the texts.

- Bridging the gap between final exams and curriculum objectives There is a tendency for both students and teachers to lose interest in studying the material if it is not covered in textbook final exams. The primary goal of language study for students, instructors, and parents is to get good grades rather than become proficient in the language. Therefore, there needs to be a logical connection between the English for Today evaluation system and the included literary texts so that teachers and students feel compelled to read the materials carefully and suitably.

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