

Turdiyeva Shohsanam Umrzoq kizi

Master Student, NSIFL

Abstract: *This study explores the role of literature in English language teaching and its impact on students' language proficiency, critical thinking, and cultural awareness. The study examines how incorporating literary texts into the curriculum can enhance vocabulary acquisition, improve reading comprehension, and foster emotional engagement. The findings suggest that literature provides a meaningful context for language learning, making it a valuable tool in English language instruction.*

Keywords: *literature, critical thinking, idiomatic expressions, language proficiency*

1. Introduction

The use of literature in language teaching has been widely discussed in the field of applied linguistics. Traditional English language teaching (ELT) often relies on textbooks, grammar drills, and vocabulary exercises. However, integrating literature into the curriculum offers a more engaging and meaningful approach to learning. Literature exposes students to authentic language use, diverse linguistic structures, and cultural contexts, which are often missing in conventional ELT materials (Basnett & Mounfold, 1993).

This study aims to investigate the effectiveness of teaching English through literature by analyzing its impact on students' language proficiency, critical thinking skills, and cultural awareness.

2. Methods

This study employed a mixed-method approach, combining qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques.

2.1 Participants

The study involved 50 secondary school students aged 12–16 from different proficiency levels. They were divided into two groups:

Experimental group (25 students): Taught using literary texts (short stories, poems, and plays).

Control group (25 students): Taught using traditional ELT methods (textbooks and grammar exercises).

2.2 Materials

The selected literary texts included:

"The Happy Prince" by Oscar Wilde (for narrative structure and vocabulary enrichment).

Shakespearean Sonnets (for poetry analysis and pronunciation practice).

Contemporary short stories (for cultural understanding and critical thinking).

2.3 Procedure

Both groups received 12 weeks of instruction with two lessons per week.

The experimental group engaged in activities such as character analysis, creative writing, and role-playing.

The control group focused on grammar drills, vocabulary memorization, and comprehension exercises.

Pre-test and post-test assessments were conducted to measure progress in reading comprehension, vocabulary acquisition, and speaking fluency.

3. Results

The study found significant differences between the experimental and control groups:

Vocabulary Acquisition: The experimental group showed a 35% improvement in vocabulary tests compared to the control group's 15% improvement.

Reading Comprehension: The experimental group scored an average of 80% on post-tests, whereas the control group scored 65%.

Speaking Fluency: The experimental group demonstrated greater confidence and fluency in oral presentations and discussions.

These findings indicate that incorporating literature into ELT significantly enhances students' linguistic and cognitive skills.

4. Discussion

The results support previous research (Smith, 2020) indicating that literature fosters deeper language engagement. Unlike traditional ELT methods, literature provides:

1. **Authentic Language Use:** Exposure to idiomatic expressions and varied sentence structures.
2. **Improved Critical Thinking:** Students analyze texts, predict outcomes, and interpret character motivations.
3. **Emotional and Cultural Awareness:** Literature helps students connect with diverse perspectives, fostering empathy and cultural sensitivity.

Additionally, using multimedia resources (e.g., audiobooks, film adaptations) further enhances the learning experience by making literature more accessible and engaging.

However, one limitation of the study is that student motivation and prior exposure to literature were not controlled variables. Future research should examine how different genres of literature impact various language skills.

5. Conclusion

This study highlights the benefits of integrating literature into English language teaching. The findings suggest that literature enhances vocabulary acquisition, reading comprehension, and critical thinking skills. Moreover, it fosters emotional engagement and cultural awareness, making language learning more meaningful. Educators should consider incorporating age-appropriate literary texts and interactive teaching strategies to maximize the effectiveness of literature-based ELT.

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TRIGONOMETRIK IFODALARNI HISOBLASH**

Xoshimova Dilobar Kuchkarovna

Shahrisabz davlat pedagogika instituti

Matematika va uni o‘qitish metodikasi kafedrası o‘qituvchisi

e-mail: hoshimovadilobar87@gmail.com

Norova Dilobar Baxromovna

Shahrisabz davlat pedagogika instituti

Pedagogika fakulteti Matematika va informatika yo‘nalishi talabasi

e-mail: norovadilobar3@gmail.com

Хошимова Дилобар Кучкаровна

Шахрисабзский государственный педагогический институт

Преподаватель кафедры Математики и методики ее преподавания

e-mail: hoshimovadilobar87@gmail.com

Норова Дилобар Бахромовна

Шахрисабзский государственный педагогический институт

Педагогический факультет, студент факультета математики и информатики

e-mail: norovadilobar3@gmail.com

Xoshimova Dilobar Kuchkarovna

Shahrisasabz State Pedagogical Institute

Teacher of the Department of Mathematics and its Teaching Methodology

e-mail: hoshimovadilobar87@gmail.com

Norova Dilobar Baxromovna

Shahrisabz State Pedagogical Institute

Faculty of Pedagogy, student of Mathematics and informatics.

e-mail: norovadilobar3@gmail.com