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EXPEDIENCY OF AUTHENTIC LITERATURE USE IN ESL CLASSES IN UNIVERSITIES

ДОЦІЛЬНІСТЬ ВИКОРИСТАННЯ АВТЕНТИЧНОЇ ЛІТЕРАТУРИ НА ЗАНЯТТЯХ З АНГЛІЙСЬКОЇ МОВИ У ВНЗ

In the article, the authors reveal current issues regarding the expediency of using authentic literature in English language classes in higher education institutions. Emphasis is placed on the need to introduce innovations into the educational process in order to train a competitive specialist who is able to freely express opinions and carry out analytical activities in accordance with modern challenges. The aim of the article is to investigate the effectiveness of using authentic literary texts in English language classes, which contributes not only to the deepening of language skills, but also affects the comprehensive development of the student's personality, forms cultural awareness and activates critical thinking. Modern foreign studies were analyzed, which considered the advantages of using literary texts, in particular, confirmed their role in the formation of cultural awareness of students, promoting the development of critical thinking and emotional intelligence, improving creative writing based on offered tasks. The attention of researchers is focused on the expediency of using modern literature, taking into account the relevance of the topic and its diversity, which makes language learning interesting, conscious and productive. The authors of the article analyzed the pedagogical advantages and practical application of modern literature in educational programs, in particular, indicated their effectiveness and efficiency. A survey was conducted for students of the first (Bachelor's) and second (Master's) levels of higher education in order to find out the influence of authentic modern literature on the development of language skills and critical thinking. The answers of the respondents regarding the question of the effectiveness of the use of the mentioned literature in English classes, the understanding of the author's position and their own vision of the problematic of the work were analyzed. It is concluded that working with an authentic text in class activates the educational activity of students, provides an opportunity to freely express their own opinions, discuss and justify their own position.

Key words: authentic literature, critical thinking, ESL classes, cultural awareness, contextual learning.

У статті авторами розкрито актуальні проблеми щодо доцільності використання автентичної літератури на заняттях з англійської мови у закладах вищої освіти. Закцентовано на необхідності упровадження інновацій в освітній процес задля підготовки конкурентоспроможного фахівця, здатного вільно висловлювати думки та здійснювати аналітичну діяльність відповідно до викликів сучасності. Метою статті є дослідження ефективності використання автентичних літературних текстів на заняттях з англійської мови, що сприяє не тільки поглибленню мовних навичок, а й впливає на всебічний розвиток особистості здобувача освіти, формує культурну обізнаність та активізує критичне мислення. Вивчено сучасні зарубіжні дослідження, в яких розглянуто переваги використання літературних текстів, зокрема підтверджено їх роль у формуванні культурної обізнаності здобувачів освіти, сприянні розвитку критичного мислення та емоційного інтелекту, покращенні творчого

письма на основі окремих завдань. Увагу дослідників зосереджено на доцільності використання сучасної літератури, враховуючи актуальність тематики та її різноплановість, що робить вивчення мови цікавим, усвідомленим та продуктивним. Авторами статті проаналізовано педагогічні переваги та практичне застосування сучасної літератури у навчальних програмах, зокрема вказано на їх результативності та ефективності. Проведено анкетування для здобувачів першого (бакалаврського) та другого (магістерського) рівнів вищої освіти з метою з'ясування впливу автентичної сучасної літератури на розвиток мовних навичок та критичного мислення. Проаналізовано відповіді респондентів щодо питання ефективності використання зазначеної літератури на заняттях з англійської мови, розуміння авторської позиції та власного бачення проблематики твору. Підсумовано, що робота з автентичним текстом на занятті активізує навчальну діяльність здобувачів освіти, надає можливість вільно висловлювати власні думки, дискутувати, обґрунтовувати власну позицію.

Ключові слова: автентична література, критичне мислення, заняття з англійської мови, культурна обізнаність, контекстне навчання.

Problem Statement. Contemporary education faces numerous challenges that impact both educators and students. Current educational programs and legislative frameworks highlight the necessity of developing well-rounded, creative individuals who can adapt to a rapidly changing world, engage in critical thinking, address complex problems, devise innovative solutions, and contribute effectively to both professional environments and society.

Education across all levels must embrace innovation by integrating advanced pedagogical practices and cutting-edge technologies. This area of research is progressing, supported by a comprehensive array of established methods designed to facilitate the acquisition of essential skills while prioritizing knowledge acquisition.

A significant topic of discussion in both domestic and international educational communities is the value of employing authentic materials in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) university courses. Despite the extensive research on this subject, a consensus has yet to emerge regarding the effective integration of literature into language learning, its role in fostering personal development, and the practicality of implementing literature-based instruction within the Ukrainian high school context.

Objective of the Article. This article aims to investigate the effectiveness of utilizing authentic literary texts in university-level English as a Second Language (ESL) classes to enhance language acquisition, promote cultural awareness, and develop critical thinking skills. It seeks to analyze the pedagogical advantages and practical applications of incorporating literature into ESL curricula, providing insights into how authentic texts can foster more profound engagement with the language.

Discussion of the Main Material. A considerable body of research has examined this issue from multiple perspectives. A notable study by G. Lazar in the late 20th century affirms the high regard for literature in various countries. This value allows

students engaged in English studies to experience genuine accomplishment when engaging with literary materials in the classroom. For students familiar with literature in their native language, exploring literary works in English presents a compelling and thought-provoking opportunity for comparison [5, p. 15].

Literary texts offer a dynamic and flexible approach to language, exposing learners to various linguistic forms while fostering an understanding of language norms. This quality distinguishes literature from other language teaching materials, which may be perceived as more rigid and less engaging [8, p.1060]. Literary contexts provide an avenue for understanding language creatively and authentically. They allow students to engage with idiomatic expressions, examine stylistic features, and appreciate cultural references, thereby enhancing their overall linguistic proficiency.

Nad-Kolozhvari E. (2022) indicates that the textbooks educators utilise are aligned with national curriculum guidelines, which are designed to establish clear teaching and learning objectives while providing a systematic approach to language syllabus design. However, it is essential to note that these textbooks predominantly include texts intended for academic study, often lacking elements of enjoyment and authenticity [7, p. 365-367]. Literary excerpts carefully tailored or adapted and included in nationally approved manuals can enhance language skills, particularly in vocabulary development. However, they may fall short of fostering more critical personal competencies such as critical thinking, creativity, and cultural awareness.

In light of this, Md. Momin Uddin (2019) conducted a study on the role of literature as a pedagogical tool in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms. He highlighted that engaging with English literature allows EFL learners to deepen their understanding of English-speaking cultures. Through this process, learners can gain insights into the thoughts, emotions, aspirations, and expressions of English speakers, thereby approaching English language acquisition in a manner akin to that of native speakers [13, p. 17].

Argemiro Arboleda-Arboleda and Angela Yiceli Castro-Garcés (2019) examine the role of an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teacher within the classroom context. They emphasize that, although a teacher may not possess specialized training in literature, they can still leverage a wide range of exceptional literary works to facilitate language learning for their students. The design and execution of literary text-based activities need not conform to the structure typically used in content-based literature courses. Instead, EFL teachers may adopt a more adaptable and informal approach to literature instruction, even without extensive expertise in the field. Provided that they have a solid command of the target language, a genuine appreciation for literature, and a willingness to share their enthusiasm for this enriching realm, these educators can effectively engage their students and enhance their learning experience [1, p. 106].

Recent literature since the 2010s underscores the significance of cultivating critical thinking skills, particularly within language classes. The concept of critical thinking is relevant across various fields of knowledge. It necessitates the active engagement of learners in the process of knowledge construction through thoughtful reflection and deep analysis. Essential characteristics of critical thinkers include curiosity and the propensity to ask questions, as these individuals consistently seek answers to the challenges they pose [10, p. 2].

In the contemporary landscape, the ability to make sensible decisions, address complex challenges, and evaluate sources' reliability is paramount. Consequently, integrating critical thinking into university curricula is an essential asset across all academic disciplines. Engagement with intricate themes, character development, and diverse viewpoints in contemporary literature enables students to cultivate critical thinking skills.

This process encourages them to assess characters from multiple perspectives, recognize authorial biases, and question established norms. Furthermore, students who enhance their language abilities through literary analysis also develop foundational thinking skills, allowing them to articulate their ideas effectively and understand complex concepts, which are integral to meaningful discourse [4, p. 32].

Contemporary Anglophone literature holds significant relevance for university students, as it reflects modern societal issues, explores relatable themes, and features familiar settings. Many authors engage with topics such as identity, migration, and global interconnectedness, which often resonate with

students' diverse experiences. This literature has the potential to broaden their perspectives on issues they may not have previously considered, thereby fostering critical thinking skills.

However, one challenge is the complexity of the language used in these texts, particularly in terms of syntax and vocabulary. The literary vocabulary and grammatical structures are often perceived as intricate, rendering the reading experience demanding. Scholars S. McKay and C. Savvidou have highlighted that the language of literary texts frequently deviates from the conventions of Standard English, which are more accessible for students across different proficiency levels [6; 11]. Concerns may arise regarding the feasibility of integrating literary texts into the EFL classroom, particularly considering the diverse language backgrounds of students and the constraints of limited instructional time.

In this context, Fan-ping Tseng (2010) proposes that introducing literature currently relevant in society – especially when adapted into other media such as films or musicals – could serve as a motivating factor for students. Engaging with contemporary literature would illuminate its significance, demonstrating that literature is both relevant and an integral part of everyday life [12, p. 54].

Alexis Martel-Robaina and M. Carmen Gómez-Galisteo recommend utilizing "Twilight," the inaugural instalment of Stephenie Meyer's acclaimed vampire saga consisting of five novels and six successful film adaptations, as an educational tool for engaging students in discussions about gender roles, gendered perceptions, and the reliability of first-person narrators. The narrative, which centres on a teenage female protagonist grappling with feelings of misunderstanding and isolation, provides a valuable framework for instructors to address the prevalent feelings of angst and alienation experienced by students during their formative years [3, p. 3].

To support these claims and deliver a thorough analysis, we conducted a survey consisting of yes-no and open-ended questions to gather extensive data from students. Among the interviewees were 26 students of 3rd, 4th Bachelor's years and 1st year Master's students of both Secondary Education and Philology specializations of Uzhhorod National University. In the course of the questionnaire, students' attitude toward literature in EFL and its efficacy in the language skills development played an important role, since the majority of their respective educational programmes contain several compulsory disciplines connected to the said topic.

The survey was designed to obtain comprehensive data by including a total of 17 questions. It contained a combination of open-ended and closed-ended formats, allowing for a diverse scale of responses. This methodology ensured the collection of sufficient information, facilitating a comprehensive understanding of students' perspectives, as they were able to provide detailed responses.

Based on the survey findings, we may observe that the interviewees unanimously concurred that literature plays a significant role in fostering critical thinking skills; however, their perspectives on the methods by which this is achieved varied. Below are some insights shared by the participants:

1. Engaging in literature can help one see the world from a different perspective, think outside the box, and gain insights about life and one's actions. People can see themselves through the words of the author and gain a deeper understanding of what's around them. Literature helps one understand the context better, as it gives valuable information that can be used further.

2. Literature significantly develops critical thinking skills by challenging readers to interpret, analyze, and question complex themes, characters, and narratives. It encourages examining multiple perspectives, prompting readers to compare their views with those of the characters or the author.

3. Literature exposes readers to hypothetical scenarios through plot conflicts and resolutions, encouraging them to think through solutions and anticipate outcomes, a vital aspect of critical thinking. Engaging with characters' thoughts and emotions also helps readers understand complex human behaviour, improving their ability to analyze.

We conducted a comparative analysis of our findings with existing data obtained from various educational institutions across the globe. The findings indicate consistent patterns that align with the conclusions drawn from earlier studies. By employing literature in these practical contexts, students are not only able to engage deeply with the texts but also to cultivate critical thinking skills through the analysis of characters and the examination of diverse, often conflicting perspectives.

This approach not only promotes the emotional development of students but also cultivates their capacity for autonomy. By encouraging active participation in interactions, we can empower them to take on a more engaged role in their learning process [9, p. 106].

The findings indicate that students exhibit a genuine interest in implementing literature-based

instruction within language courses. This approach not only aids in enhancing language proficiency but also fosters critical thinking through the exploration of complex topics. By making reading a vital part of a language class, an educator obtains a chance to help his/her students improve reading strategies, teach them to analyze problems, put forward questions and even prompt them to compare their views with the ones, already established in, for instance, critical reviews of the said texts.

In terms of practical applications, we recommend the integration of creative writing exercises alongside critical thinking development when engaging with contemporary literature. By encouraging students to analyze literary texts while also crafting their narratives inspired by themes or characters, they can creatively explore language while reflecting critically on the structure and message of the originals. One possible exercise involves asking students to rewrite scenes from alternative perspectives, thereby nurturing their analytical and expressive skills.

A teacher may recommend less complex writing assignments, considering the time constraints in the classroom environment. In their comprehensive resource, "Literature in the Language Classroom: A Resource Book of Ideas and Activities," J. Collie and S. Slater offer several strategies for engaging students in discussions about significant conflicting themes within a language learning context.

For example, in Somerset Maugham's novel "The Moon and Sixpence", the protagonist makes the sudden decision to leave behind his wife, children, home, and career. In this context, students are invited to reflect on their own lives by contemplating the following questions: How would they approach such a decision? Would they plan in advance? What preparations would they undertake? Would they communicate their intentions to anyone? What items would they choose to take with them? Where would they envision themselves going? What kind of new life would they aspire to create? [2, p. 18].

Summary and possibility of future research. Given all that has been mentioned so far, one may suppose that integration of authentic literary texts into EFL curricula at the university level appears to be an effective and engaging tool, perfectly applicable for specialities where English is the language of instruction. Theoretical findings and practical results indicate how authentic literature, such as novels, short stories, and poetry, exposes students to contextual lesson, rich with natural language that goes beyond artificial texts that may usually be found in manuals. The analysis also

leads to the conclusion that the use of authentic literature is not only feasible but highly beneficial for developing students' various professional competencies, thus preparing them for modern challenges. Future research should consider the potential effects of literature-based instruction more carefully, for example by analysing the results of students' creative work with the texts.

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