Using Novels in the Language Classroom at Hebron University

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ABSTRACT

This quantitative and qualitative paper investigated the use of novels in the EFL classroom. It examined students' attitudes towards using novels in the EFL classroom; evaluated the advantages of using novels and whether they motivate students, develop their linguistic level, and enrich their cultural knowledge. Moreover, it identified certain problems that students may face in the process of learning novels in the EFL classroom. A total of 56 students participated in this study and responded to the questionnaire in the fall semester of 2015/2016 at Hebron University, Palestine. In addition, the researchers interviewed three instructors teaching at the English department. The findings of the questionnaire showed that students held positive attitudes towards using novels in the EFL classes. Mainly, they agree that novels have a number of advantages. For example, novels can motivate them, enrich their cultural knowledge, and improve their language ability. The interview with instructors revealed advantages of using novels and some challenge. Finally, researchers recommend that teachers keep using literature in the language classrooms and students keep reading novels due to their benefits.

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INTRODUCTION

Literature has various definitions; for example, it may refer to any written work that has a literary merit, or it may be considered as the works of prose and poetry that have imagination and reflect human experience. Also there are many systems according to which literature can be classified such as the national origin, language, and genre. It can be classified according to genre

into four major types which are novels, short stories, drama, and poetry. This paper will discuss the issue of teaching literature in general and novels in particular.

Literature with its different forms has been used to teach language in classroom for it has many benefits. For instance, Abuzahra and Farrah (2016) stated that "the authenticity of the literary work, the richness of the language, the scope of imagination and creativity and the process of critical thinking, are just a few advantages for using literary genres in the language classroom" (p.23). Literature is beneficial not only for the students, but also the teachers, and the process of language acquisition. Therefore, communicative methodologies stressed the importance of including literary texts in the language teaching materials especially when noticing that the materials used in the classroom are not sufficient enough and do not help the students be communicative when using language. As a result, teachers started using some literary genres like novels to teach students in the classroom.

Advantages of the Literary Texts

Literary texts have many advantages for students. First, literature provides learners with authentic material that can be used in the language classroom. Several studies have discussed the point that literary texts offer authentic materials for the students and many researchers considered authenticity as if it is the main advantage of using literature in the language classroom. Kataja (2018) stated that literature has the potential develop students' comprehension skills with authentic materials. According to Stern (1992), using authentic materials "involves learners in authentic communication and in genuine experiences which have value, importance, or significance for them (p.302). Long (1986) investigated a study on using literature in the language classroom and found that authentic materials are important for that the activities teachers use with them are genuine and don't relate to a fabricated text. In addition, Carter and McRae (1996) found that authentic texts help students in that they build experiences in a stunning way by giving students examples of difficult situations they may face in reality and not mentioned in the other texts they study. To conclude, Barnett (1989) mentioned the benefits for authentic texts such as, motivating learners, contextualizing learning, transmitting the target language culture, and preparing learners to read outside the classroom. This is in line with other studies that highlighted the importance of using authentic materials and literary texts in providing students with the opportunity to develop their linguistic ability, improve their language awareness, and to be highly motivated.

Second, literature increases students' motivation. Violetta (2015) deemed that literary genre can be very motivating to learners because it offers a rich material that is full of entertaining classroom activities. Daskalovska and Dimova (2012) explained that literary texts can be very motivating. Their study gave a good example on how literary texts motivate students.

Third, literature promotes active involvement of learners. Literary texts involve students as actively as possible. Carter and Long (1991) investigated a study on teaching literature. They

found that by using literature as one of the materials used to teach language, teachers will be able to give their students activities that depend on interesting materials by which students are involved actively. Wallace (1992) found one benefit of active involvement of learners. He found that literary texts are rich in the meanings that can only be realized if there is good interaction between the students who read the text and the text itself. Wallace's study was important for he mentioned that the meaning can't be realized unless students interact in the classroom with the text itself. The other benefit as mentioned by Daskalovska and Dimova (2012) was that if readers want to understand the text, they should predict and have questions regarding the text, and sometimes use their own personal experience till they come to good interpretation and appreciation of the text.

Moreover, researchers believe that literary texts enhance students' creativity. McRae (1991) stated that literature   is a space for creativity and a space for the exercise of mental energy. In addition, Violetta (2015) mentioned that because literary texts are full of dialogs, they help learners improve their own responses to a particular literary work in a way that guarantees their use of creativity. Daskalovska and Dimova (2012) maintained that using literature in language teaching promote greater awareness of the language among learners and offer them the prospects of experiencing and using language more creatively.

Furthermore, literary texts introduce students to different cultures and provide them with cultural background. Violetta (2015) conducted a study to show how the cultural knowledge of students is enriched through learning literature. She found that teachers emphasized the importance of literature in encapsulating the good aspects students have felt regarding the culture of the literary text they studied. In addition, literary texts are beneficial in that they introduce students to the historical, political, and social background of the country the literary work describes not only of the particular literary work. Pinar and Jover (2012) pointed that when students study literature, they are introduced to a vast range of cultures. However, they noted that teachers should be careful when dealing with cultural aspects of literature.

In addition, literary texts contribute to language acquisition. Pinar and Jover (2012) conducted a study on the benefits of using literature. They found that literature may provide a convenient way of encouraging language acquisition. Also, Lazar (1993) pointed that learners can be offered meaningful and memorable texts that would encourage language acquisition.

Not only but also literature in general and novels in particular play a great role in the growth of learners' awareness. Daskalovska and Dimova (2012) found that when learners read authentic literature outside the classroom they get to learn some uncommon and infrequent uses of the language, and thereby extend their knowledge of language. Pinar and Jover (2012) found that by studying literary texts in the language classroom, students are helped to be more aware of some features of the language.

 Besides, literature contributes to the learners personal involvement in what they are learning. Violetta (2015) investigated a study about teaching literature. She found that literature,

in addition to the linguistic function it has, may have a greater educational importance in the classroom in that it can help to increase the emotional awareness of the students. She also stated that "Helping students to read literature more effectively is helping them to grow and mature as individuals as well as their relationships with the people around them"(p.75). To conclude, all of the authors recommended that students should be introduced to literature in the classroom so that they will be personally more involved and become more encouraged.

Finally, literature contributes to language skills enhancement . Violetta (2015) found that literary texts are beneficial in that they encourage students to develop the language skills, such as reading, speaking, and writing. Kataja (2018) literature can be used to improve the learners performance because it provides them with knowledge of the language itself. Similarly, Hişmanoğlu (2005) stated that literature is considered an important part of teaching the four language skills. Accordingly, language skills should be taught within literary genre in an integrated manner to enable learners to develop their ability to communicate with others using the second language.

In conclusion, using literature is extremely beneficial in the language classroom for many reasons such as authenticity, motivation, cultural enrichment, language improvement and personal involvement.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section reviews several studies that were conducted about using novels in the classroom. According to Lazar (2007), novels provide teachers and learners with exceptional educational and linguistic opportunities. However, teachers should be aware of the problems students may face while learning novels in addition to the methods they should be following in the class with this specific genre.

Also, it introduces reasons behind teaching novels in the classroom. It mentions different benefits of teaching novels for both teachers and students such as motivation, cultural enrichment, and language improvement. According to several researchers, the benefits of using novels in the classroom are the following:

Motivation

Novels are considered to be motivating and enhancing literary materials in the classroom (Alkire, 2010; Lazar, 1990; Tsai, 2012; Pinar & Jover, 2012). Alkire (2010) found that students enjoy reading novels, so they become motivated in the classroom. In addition, she stated that novels "foster personal involvement in the language learning process" (p.2). In addition, Lazar (1990) illustrated that using novels provide the students with the opportunity to practice activities that are motivating such as extensive reading. She also found that students will be highly motivated when being able to read a novel regarding its authenticity. Tsai (2012) investigated the issue of motivation, and he found that novels deal with events related to our life. Therefore, students

become enthusiastically motivated to read more and to be more comfortable with reading this genre.

Cultural Enrichment

Novels are believed to enrich the cultural knowledge among students (Alkire, 2010; Lazar, 1990; Tsai, 2012; Hişmanoğlu, 2005). Alkire (2010) conducted a study about using novels. He found that students will be able to understand other peoples' cultures when they learn novels. Tsai (2012) illustrated that novels also help students understand how the citizens of the country about whom the novel is written think, behave, and believe. Moreover, he stressed the point that novels provide students with the needed information about the setting where the events take place, which in turn make students understand more clearly. Similarly, Hişmanoğlu (2005) found that different literary genres, mainly as novels help students understand the way people in different countries communicate with each other. His study highly stressed the important role novels play in enriching students' culture. Maples, Cianca, and Maloy (2016) pointed that novels provide culturally relevant content that help students make connections and develop an understanding about others.

Language Improvement

Using novels improves students' level of language proficiency (Maples, Cianca, and Maloy, 2016; Alkire, 2010; Tsai, 2012; Lazar, 1990; Ghiabi, 2014; Hişmanoğlu, 2005; Collie & Slater, 1988). Maples, Cianca, and Maloy (2016) pointed that novels provide nonthreatening piece of literature that offer students with opportunities to practice their new language and literacy skills. Collie and Slater (1988) stated that "a literary text can serve as an excellent prompt for oral work" (p.7). Alkire (2010) conducted a study on the use of novels. He found that language acquisition can be stimulated by making use of novels in classroom. In addition, reading novels encourages students to express their feelings and thoughts, consequently, develops their language skills. Tsai (2012) found that while reading novels, students improve the four language skill; reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Also, Lazar (1990) stressed that novels are beneficial for they make students linguistically take a part in the classroom. First, they improve the reading skill. Ghiabi (2014) mentioned that researchers' recommendation was to use novels in the classroom, for example in order to motivate students to read outside the classroom so that they will improve their reading skill. Moreover, Hişmanoğlu (2005) found that using novels motivate students in the whole process of reading, thus contribute to the development of their reading skill. Second, they improve the writing skill. He stated that when students are exposed to literary texts such as novels in the language classroom, they learn about certain syntactic features of sentences, the diversity of possible structures, and the multiple methods of connecting ideas. All of this contributes to improving and enriching their writing skills. He also mentioned that students consider the literary work such as the novel a modal when they try to write since the literary work is an authentic and original work. Third, they develop the speaking skills.

Developing Interpretative Abilities

Students' ability to interpret and understand the language was increased when they were taught novels. Pinar and Jover (2012) found that literary texts such as novels are a good source for students to conclude meaning and to make explanations because they have more than one level of meaning. They also state that "this very useful skill can be transmitted to other situations where students need to make an interpretation based on implicit or unstated evidence"(p.3). To conclude, novels can be very useful by developing students' ability to infer meaning and that is the point discussed in their study.

Problems that Students Face while Learning Novels

In this part, the researchers review several studies that discussed the problems students may face while learning a novel in the language classroom.

The problems students face while learning a novel are the following

The large amount of vocabulary

Lazar (1990) and Lazar(2007) conducted studies on the problems students may face while learning novels such as the large amount of words unfamiliar to them. Lazar (1990) stressed the point that learners regardless of their level will feel confused when they can not understand the meaning of many vocabularies as the case is when students read novels. Students should never feel that the number of unfamiliar vocabulary is too large; otherwise, they will be discouraged to complete reading. Furthermore, Lazar (2007) found that students should be able to increase their vocabulary when reading literary works.

There were some solutions suggested by researchers regarding the problem of the large amount of vocabulary found in novels (Lazar, 1990; Lazar, 2007). Lazar (1990) mentioned that one solution for this problem is that teachers can prepare at home a glossary for the students. In which, they get familiarized with the new words. Lazar (2007) mentioned another solution which is encouraging students to read in order to get the summary instead of focusing on each detail.

Length

Novels' length is considered a problem for students while reading (Alkire, 2010; Lazar, 1990; Lazar, 2007). Alkire (2010) stated that" traditional narrative will more likely be successful than an overly descriptive, overlong, or experimental work" (p.3).Lazar (1990) investigated that the length of the novel should surely suit students' level of proficiency. She also mentioned that the text of the novel should not be too long, otherwise, students will get bored and they may not complete reading. She mentioned different approaches teachers can take to deal with long novels in the classroom. Lazar (2007) mentioned another different approach teachers can take which is asking different students to summarize different chapters for the rest of the class in order to be able to manage the class with long novels.

With these themes in mind, the researchers in this study attempt to answer the following research questions.

Research Questions

1. What is the general attitude of students toward learning novels?
2. What are the advantages of teaching literature in the language classroom?
3. Can novels motivate students, enrich their cultural knowledge, and improve their linguistic level?
4. What are the problems students may face while learning novels in the classroom?

Significance of the Study

This study is beneficial for students and teachers as well. On one side, teachers will become more aware of the problems their students face while learning a literary text, consequently, solve them. In addition, they will become more proficient in teaching such texts therefore, achieve the goals of teaching. On the other side, students will enjoy studying literary texts and improve their language skills.

METHODOLOGY

The current study utilized both quantitative and qualitative research methods. This section discusses the population, instrument for data collection, developing the questionnaire and its reliability and data analysis.

Population of the Study

The participants in this study were university students (45 females, 11 males) in the English Department of Hebron University, Palestine. Most of them were seniors (36 students were seniors, 17 students were third year students, and three students were in their second year). The interviews were conducted with three instructors.

Research Instrument

In order to achieve the objective of the current study, the researchers used two instruments; a questionnaire to examine students' attitude toward learning novel and interviews with instructors.

Procedures of the Study

The researchers used a questionnaire that was distributed to 56 students at the English Department at Hebron University; the statements of the questionnaire were designed to answer the research questions. Also, the researchers conducted interviews with three instructors and asked them four questions regarding teaching novels at Hebron University. After that, the

researchers analyzed the questionnaire and discussed the results of both; the questionnaire and the interviews.

Questionnaire

Development of the questionnaire

The questionnaire was based on the literature review in order to examine students' attitude toward learning novels. The questionnaire has two parts. Part one covers demographic information; while the second part of the questionnaire included 24 statements. the participants were asked to indicate the degree of disagreement and agreement, using Likert scale from 1-5 (strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree and strongly agree). The items were related to the benefits of using novels and the problems students may face while learning novels.

Data Analysis:

This is a quantitative qualitative study. Quantitative data was analyzed statistically by using the SPSS program (Statistical Package for the Social Science) version 22.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the results of part one in the questionnaire, the demographic information.

Part One

Table 1
Demographic Data

Variables		Frequency	Percent
	Female	45	80%
Gender	Male	11	20%
	Total	56	100%
	Second year	3	5%
Year of study	Third year	17	30%
	Fourth year	36	65%
	Total	56	100%

The following section presents results that are related to Part Two of the questionnaire. It aims to answer the research questions of the current study (For detailed information, see appendix).

Research Question 1: What are the advantages of teaching novels in the language classroom?

Table 2
Mean and Standard Deviation for Question 1

Statement	Mean	Std. D.	Item No.
Using novels in the classroom is beneficial.	3.60	0.55	1
Novels encourage students to read outside the classroom.	4.05	0.45	6
Novels introduce students to different cultures.	4.23	0.63	7
Novels motivate students inside the classroom.	3.62	0.70	8
Novels provide students with authentic material.	3.87	0.58	9

Table 2 shows the means and standard deviations for the items that are related to the benefits of using novels. The results showed that students believe that novels are somehow beneficial for them in different aspects such as cultural enrichment, language proficiency, and personal involvement. This is in line with many studies that indicated that literature in general and novels in particular are beneficial (Alkire,2010; Lazar,1990; Tsai, 2012; Daskolava & Dimova, 2012; Violetta, 2015; Hodge, 2000; Wallace 1992; Ghiabi, 2014).

Research Question 2: Can novels motivate students, enrich their cultural knowledge, and improve their linguistic level?

Table 3
Mean and Standard Deviation for Question 2

Statement	Mean	Std. D.	Item No.
Novels motivate students inside the classroom.	3.62	0.72	8
Novels introduce students to different cultures.	4.23	0.75	7
Novels help students overcome cultural differences.	3.67	0.68	14
Novels improve reading skills.	4.12	0.63	2
Novels strengthen writing skills.	3.44	0.74	3

Novels develop speaking skills.	3.39	0.79	4
Novels enhance listening skills.	3.01	0.82	5
Novels encourage students to read outside the classroom.	4.05	0.44	6
Novels help students to be linguistically proficient.	3.33	0.75	16
Novels expand students' vocabulary.	4.39	0.56	10

Table 3 reveals the means and standard deviations of the items related to the advantages of using novels regarding the development of the language skills, cultural enrichment, and motivation. The results showed that students believe that novels are motivating which goes in line with several studies that investigated that advantage (Alkire, 2010; Tsai, 2012; Lazar,1990). The results also showed that students strongly believed that novels enrich their cultural knowledge. Finally, the results also showed that novels highly develop the speaking skills, reading skills, and writing skills which go in line with several studies (Alkire, 2010; Violetta, 2015; Collie & Slater, 1988; Lazar, 1990). It should be noted that the item that stated that novels improve students' vocabulary got the highest mean that is 4.39. However, students showed a negative attitude toward the improvement of the listening skill. The item that stated that novels enhance the listening skill got the lowest mean that is 3.01.

Research Question 3: What are the problems students may face while learning novels in the classroom?

Statements	Mean	Std. D.	Item No.
Students face difficulty with the large amounts of vocabulary they find while learning a novel.	3.89	0.66	21
Length is a problem when students learn novels.	3.98	0.56	22

Table 4 reveals that students feel that they face problems while learning novels. Both items got high means that are 3.89 and 3.98. This result is in line with several studies that discussed the problems students face (Alkire, 2010; Lazar, 1990; Tsai, 1988). Lazar (1990) mentioned that novels' length is a problem for students because students will never be motivated to complete reading novels and they will get bored. In addition, she mentioned that students feel confused by the large amount of vocabulary they deal with while learning novels.

Part Two

Interviews

The researchers interviewed three instructors and asked them four questions. Two of the instructors were language instructors and the third instructor was a literature instructor.

Question 1: Do you think teaching novels at Hebron University is beneficial, and if yes why?

When this question was examined, all of the instructors answered yes. They mentioned several benefits for using novels. First, they said that novels present the other cultures of the people about whom the novels talk. This point was similar to what is mentioned in the literature review. For example, Alkire (2010) pointed out that novels help students understand other cultures in a better way so that they will avoid suffering from cultural misunderstanding. Second, the three instructors highly stressed the importance of using novels in the classroom in that they present the kind of language students need to get training in. several researchers agreed on this point too. For example, Daskalovska and Dimova (2012) found in their study that students will excel in their language level if they are taught authentic language. Third, they mentioned that novels are motivating materials for students. This is in line with many researchers also mentioned how novels are motivating. For example, Alkire (2010) has found that students do enjoy learning novels in the classroom.

Question 2: What are the problems students at Hebron University are likely to face while learning novels?

When the researchers asked this question, the language instructors mentioned the linguistic difficulty students with modest language proficiency will face. They mentioned two linguistic problems. First, students are likely to feel confused with the large amounts of vocabulary they learn in a novel. They focused on the point that students shouldn't feel overwhelmed by new vocabularies. Their point was emphasized in the literature review. Lazar (1990) stressed the point that students feel discouraged when they are exposed to novels where there are many new vocabularies. Second, students don't enjoy reading long texts such as novels. Alkire (2010) has agreed on this point. She mentioned that students will never enjoy reading long texts and will not benefit from learning such texts if they don't find them enjoyable. However, the literature instructor mentioned another problem that is students may suffer from cultural difficulty while learning novels. On one hand, students may not be able to understand several cultural aspects of the literary work they are learning.

Question 3: How can students deal with long novels?

The three instructors provided almost similar answer when this question was examined. They said that the solution is to keep reading inside and outside the classroom. According to them, practice is the best solution. In addition one instructor suggested that students can prepare at home and make summaries for each chapter and then discuss them with their classmates. The

suggested solutions were similar to the approaches Lazar (1993) mentioned in her study. She suggested that students summarize all the chapters; each group of students summarizes one chapter, and then discusses the summaries with the rest of the class.

Question 4: How can students overcome the cultural difficulty?

When the researchers asked this question, the instructors asserted that it is extremely necessary to pay attention to this problem. They mentioned that students should never take thoughts accepted before thinking clearly about them. In addition, they should be critical when dealing with cultural aspects.

To conclude, the interviews with the instructors showed that they believe that novels are beneficial for students, but at the same time difficult for some of them due to their length and large amount of vocabulary. They suggested some solutions students can take to overcome these problems.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In summary, the results of this study showed that most students believe that learning literary works in general and novels in particular is highly beneficial and has many advantages such as authenticity, motivation, language improvement, cultural enrichment, personal involvement, creativity, and critical thinking development. The questionnaire has asserted students attitude toward learning novels. Most of them feel that novels are beneficial. Moreover, some students who are not highly advanced will face problems while learning novels such as coping with novels' length and large amount of vocabularies. The interview the researchers made with the instructors gave a clear image of these problems. They also suggested some solutions. The researchers agree with what the instructors mentioned. The researchers' recommendation is that students should keep reading novels in and outside the classroom for they have endless benefits.

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APPENDIX

No.	Statements	Mean	Strongly D.	Disagree	neutral	agree	SA
1	Using novels in the classroom is beneficial.	3.60	0%	11%	25%	59%	5%
2	Novels improve reading skills.	4.12	0%	5%	14%	43%	38%
3	Novels strengthen writing skills.	3.44	0%	12%	41%	36%	11%
4	Novels develop speaking skills.	3.39	2%	11%	50%	25%	12%

5	Novels enhance listening skills.	3.01	4%	21%	50%	18%	7%
6	Novels encourage students to read outside the classroom.	4.05	0%	3%	18%	45%	34%
7	Novels introduce students to different cultures.	4.23	0%	4%	7%	57%	32%
8	Novels motivate students inside the classroom.	3.62	2%	7%	29%	48%	14%
9	Novels provide students with authentic material.	3.87	0%	4%	34%	39%	23%
10	Novels expand students' vocabulary.	4.39	2%	2%	2%	44%	50%
11	Novels enhance creativity.	3.67	0%	11%	32%	34%	23%
12	Novels enhance critical thinking.	3.96	0%	4%	29%	37%	30%
13	Novels help students express their feelings.	3.48	2%	18%	32%	32%	16%
14	Novels help students overcome cultural differences.	3.67	0%	5%	30%	45%	20%
15	Learning novels is enjoyable.	3.58	4%	11%	19%	52%	14%
16	Novels help students be linguistically proficient.	3.33	2%	16%	39%	34%	9%
17	Novels help students express their thoughts.	3.58	4%	11%	28%	41%	16%
18	Novels are the least preferable teaching material for students.	3.32	0%	30%	29%	21%	20%
19	Studying novels is challenging for	3.62	2%	12%	27%	41%	18%

	students.						
20	Students are demotivated to learn novels.	3.19	0%	20%	46%	30%	4%
21	Students face difficulty with the large amounts of vocabulary they find while learning a novel.	3.89	0%	4%	25%	48%	23%
22	Length is a problem when students learn novels.	3.98	2%	9%	23%	29%	37%
23	Students face cultural difficulty while learning novels.	3.30	2%	16%	37%	41%	4%
24	Students face linguistic difficulty while learning novels.	3.21	5%	16%	41%	29%	9%