THE ROLE OF LITERARY TEXTS IN TEACHING CULTURAL COMPETENCE IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE EDUCATION

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Abstract. The study investigates the role of literary texts in teaching cultural competence within English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms. Literature, as an authentic representation of cultural values, social norms, and historical perspectives, provides learners with insights into the English-speaking world that extend beyond linguistic structures. The article examines how the integration of novels, short stories, and poetry fosters intercultural awareness, empathy, and interpretative skills among students. Drawing on theoretical frameworks of intercultural competence and communicative approaches to teaching, the study demonstrates that literary texts not only enrich vocabulary and grammar knowledge but also expose learners to diverse worldviews. The research concludes that systematic use of literature in EFL instruction enhances students' cultural sensitivity and equips them with tools for more effective intercultural communication.

Keywords: literary texts, cultural competence, EFL teaching, intercultural communication, communicative approach.

Introduction. Teaching a foreign language is not merely the transfer of grammatical rules and vocabulary items; it is also an immersion into the cultural contexts where the language lives and functions. Language and culture are inseparable, and understanding one without the other results in limited communicative competence. For this reason, the integration of literature into EFL instruction has received increasing attention. Unlike simplified didactic texts, authentic literary works embody cultural nuances, historical experiences, and social dynamics that cannot be easily conveyed by conventional textbooks.

This article explores the importance of literary texts in developing cultural competence among EFL learners. By analyzing how novels, short stories, and poetry contribute to language acquisition and intercultural understanding, the study provides theoretical and practical insights into their pedagogical application.

Literature Review. The role of literature in language teaching has been widely discussed in applied linguistics. Kramsch (1993) argued that literature offers a "third place" where learners negotiate between their own culture and the target language culture, developing intercultural competence. Abrams (1997) defined cultural competence as the ability to interact effectively with people from different cultural backgrounds, a skill that literature naturally fosters by exposing learners to authentic cultural content.

Collie and Slater (1987) emphasized that literature enhances language learning by stimulating imagination and personal engagement, which motivates learners to interact with the text beyond surface-level comprehension. More recently, Paran (2008) and Carter (2015) have noted that literature develops not only linguistic competence but also interpretative and critical thinking skills.

These studies suggest that the use of literature in EFL teaching is a multidimensional tool, connecting linguistic development with cultural awareness.

Methodology. This study employs a qualitative approach based on document analysis and pedagogical case studies. The primary sources include literary texts commonly used in EFL classrooms, such as short stories by O. Henry, novels by Jane Austen and Charles Dickens, and selected modern works. The analysis focuses on how these texts contribute to the development of learners' cultural competence, as evidenced in existing teaching practices and research findings.

Results and Discussion. The analysis demonstrates that literary texts serve as powerful instruments for teaching cultural competence in EFL contexts. First, literature provides learners with authentic exposure to the social norms, values, and traditions of English-speaking cultures. For example, novels such as Pride and Prejudice offer insights into social hierarchy, gender roles, and etiquette of 19th-century Britain, while contemporary works highlight modern cultural issues such as diversity, identity, and globalization. By engaging with these cultural narratives, learners develop a deeper understanding of the contexts in which the English language operates.

Second, literature fosters empathy and intercultural awareness. Through characters and their experiences, students are invited to view the world from different perspectives, which enhances their ability to relate to people from diverse cultural backgrounds. Short stories, with their condensed form, are particularly effective for classroom use, as they encourage interpretation and discussion of human behavior and values.

Third, literary texts enhance linguistic competence by providing rich vocabulary, idiomatic expressions, and complex grammatical structures. Unlike simplified teaching materials, literature challenges students to deal with ambiguity, infer meaning, and interpret figurative language. This not only improves language proficiency but also trains critical and analytical skills essential for intercultural communication.

Finally, literature promotes learner motivation and personal engagement. Because literary texts often address universal human themes such as love, conflict, morality, and identity, they resonate with students on a personal level, making the learning process more meaningful. Teachers who integrate literature into EFL curricula often report higher levels of student participation and curiosity.

Thus, the results indicate that literature bridges the gap between linguistic competence and cultural competence, preparing learners for more effective and nuanced communication in international contexts.

Conclusion. Literary texts play a crucial role in teaching cultural competence in EFL classrooms. They expose learners to authentic cultural content, foster empathy, enhance linguistic skills, and stimulate personal engagement. While textbooks and functional materials are indispensable for structured learning, literature provides the cultural depth and interpretative challenges that truly prepare students for intercultural communication. Future studies should investigate how digital adaptations of literary texts – such as audiobooks, interactive reading platforms, and multimedia storytelling – can further support the development of cultural competence in online and blended learning environments.

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