

INTERVIEW WITH DR. OĞUZHAN KALKAN ABOUT THE ROLE OF LITERATURE IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE EDUCATION

HOW WOULD YOU DEFINE THE ROLE AND IMPORTANCE OF LITERATURE IN SECOND LANGUAGE EDUCATION?

Literature is a part of the language produced. It does not only offer linguistic content; it provides an authentic environment where different functions and properties of language are displayed. It offers a context where learners could see and understand how real language is used in a lifelike setting. Unlike isolated dialogues and grammar drills allocated in course books, literature allows learners to experience the hidden potentials of language. It helps students integrate the four skills and gives them a cultural awareness through authentic materials. Furthermore, literature deals with universal dilemmas of human beings such as love, identity, social problems which are also common topics for the students. By evaluating such texts, students also develop their critical thinking skills. Briefly, literature should not be an auxiliary in language teaching. It is a core component of language teaching that enhances the linguistic knowledge of students by providing a cultural insight into the target language.

COULD YOU SHARE SOME EXAMPLES FROM YOUR OWN TEACHING EXPERIENCE WHERE YOU INTEGRATED LITERATURE INTO LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION?

In my teaching experience, I have always liked using literary texts, especially in intermediate level classes where students begin to understand and appreciate more complex linguistics materials. For example, short stories of O. Henry which include some twists and turns work great in my classrooms because the students can easily follow the simple narrative structure, understand character motivations and try to work out the ending of the story.



I also like using poems in classes where we have limited time. After doing the pre-reading activities, I let my students work on the text. They use their dictionaries and work in groups to understand the condensed message hidden in the poem. Then we discuss their opinions about the poem. If I can find videos of the poems online, we watch them together. Poems by performance poets such as Michael Rosen gather the attention of the whole class. At the end of the class, I sometimes let them write their own poems. By this way, they imitate the language they learned and add something more on it.

WHAT TYPES OF LITERARY TEXTS (POETRY, SHORT STORIES, NOVELS, DRAMA, ETC.) DO YOU FIND MOST EFFECTIVE IN LANGUAGE CLASSROOMS, AND WHY?

I believe any kind of authentic material is useful in language education but in my experience, short stories and drama are more effective. Short stories are concise and profound in terms of covering the target outcomes of the lesson. They present samples of the target language within a limited length, which makes them ideal for classroom use, particularly within time-constrained curricula. Additionally, their focused structure is attractive for analyzing grammar, vocabulary, or discourse.

If it can be performed, drama can be effective in developing oral fluency and interactional competence. Its performative nature provides opportunities for pronunciation, intonation, and the development of pragmatic awareness. Even small roleplays may encourage learners to use language dynamically and contextually.

Finally, literary circles can be a good option to work on different types of literary texts. For example, excerpts from novels can be used in such groups. Through collaborative working, they can examine different features of language and enhance their listening and speaking skills; improve their comprehension by building vocabulary and grammar; increase learner autonomy; and finally develop their critical thinking and inter-cultural awareness.

HOW DO YOU THINK LITERATURE CONTRIBUTES TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF CULTURAL COMPETENCE IN LANGUAGE LEARNERS?

Literature is one of the best ways to help language learners understand different cultures. Cultural competence means more than just knowing about the customs and beliefs of a different culture. It helps students develop empathy, critical thinking skills, and the ability to interact with people from other cultures in a respectful way. Literature readily presents characters, settings, historical periods, and social conflicts of the target language and culture.

In her book *Context and Culture in Language Teaching* (1993), Claire Kramsch notes that “foreign language learners have to be exposed to different types of texts from the most conventional to the most particular, but if they are eventually to find their own voice in the foreign language and culture, literary texts can offer them models of particularity and opportunities for the dialogic negotiation of meaning”. As can be understood from this quotation, reading different types of texts will help students to find their own voices in a foreign language and culture.

DO YOU THINK IT IS REALISTIC OR EFFECTIVE TO USE LITERARY TEXTS WITH BEGINNER OR INTERMEDIATE LEVEL STUDENTS?

Yes, it is both realistic and a good teaching method to use literature with beginner and intermediate level learners, provided that the materials are chosen and adapted thoughtfully. For beginners, children's literature, fables, and short stories can be especially effective. These texts usually have simple sentences, repetitive language patterns, and clear stories.

At the intermediate level, students are more capable of engaging with authentic literary texts. Simplified versions or graded readers can be useful tools to help students build skills. The best way is to combine the literary material with activities that help students prepare for reading with vocabulary and setting context activities, while supporting reading with glossaries, guided questions, and videos if possible. Role-plays, creative writing, or discussion groups as post-reading activities can help students understand the material better. For such classes, my favorites are O. Henry, Oscar Wilde and Roald Dahl because of the accessible language and engaging plots.

Literature has numerous benefits for language teaching, but there are also challenges. One of the main issues is the linguistic difficulty that literary texts may pose, especially those written in non-standard English. Cultural references, idiomatic expressions, and intertextual allusions may also impede comprehension. Furthermore, some students find literature irrelevant to their learning experience.

**WHAT ARE SOME OF THE CHALLENGES
OF
USING LITERARY TEXTS
IN LANGUAGE TEACHING?
DO YOU THINK LITERATURE
HELPS INCREASE STUDENT MOTIVATION ?**

Despite these challenges, literature has great potential to enhance student motivation. Stories engage the imagination and emotions, which can foster a stronger connection to language learning. Furthermore, when students identify with a character or are moved by a narrative, their interest in language learning deepens. They become more curious and more willing to further their language learning experience.

Here, I would like to share a personal anecdote. I remember the first two novels I read in English when I was at the prep class of the secondary school. As a child, it was difficult to understand the texts, but the adventures of David Copperfield and Pip in Charles Dickens' novels were very attractive for a young boy like me. As I raced from one adventure to the next alongside them on the pages of the novels, I could see that my English was improving. As I saw that I understood the texts, my self-confidence grew and I wanted to read more.

DO YOU BELIEVE LITERATURE HAS ENOUGH SPACE IN TODAY'S LANGUAGE EDUCATION CURRICULA? WHAT CHANGES, IF ANY, WOULD YOU RECOMMEND?

This is a very difficult question but I see that literature does not have many advocates in current language education curricula. It is sometimes pushed to the periphery of language teaching and confined only to elective courses. By doing this, the students are deprived of cognitive, emotional and cultural benefits of literature.

An integrative approach in curriculum design which weaves literature into broader skills framework may be a good option to overcome this challenge. For example, a short story can be integrated into speaking tasks (dramatizing the text or brainstorming on questions like "Would you do such a thing if you were this person?"), or into writing tasks (Write an alternative ending for this story, prepare a character diary, ...) or into listening or video tasks which can be easily find on the internet.

Finally, I believe that literature is necessary in language teaching and that adding literary texts from different genres and movements to the curriculum will broaden students' view of the world as well as their language skills.