

Teaching Novels in an English Language Classroom: A Qualitative Study

Shvan Gharib M. Faraj *

Independent Researcher, Sulaymaniyah, Iraq
 E-mail: shvangharibmdfaraj@gmail.com

Access this article online

Received on: February 28, 2021

Accepted on: May 23, 2021

Published on: June 30, 2021

DOI: 10.25079/ukhjs.v5n1y2021.pp90-97

E-ISSN: 2520-7806

Copyright © 2021 Shvan. This is an open access article with Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial No Derivatives License 4.0 (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0)

Abstract

This research article explores and studies the role of the English novel in English Language Teaching (ELT) from the students' perspective. Novels are considered to motivate and enhance literary materials used in the classroom. The study used a qualitative approach. The research targeted senior students selected from an English Department. Use of the novel was observed to be a flexible learning tool. Novels have the ability to appeal and satisfy each learner's unique style of learning. It can touch on the learners' creativity and enhance their descriptive and dialogue abilities.

Keywords: English Novel, Language Learning, English Language Teaching, English Language, ELT.

1. Introduction

Learners are unique in terms of retention levels, desired learning strategies and motivation such that one approach to language teaching may not sufficiently accommodate all the learners or produce the desired outcome. At the same time, coming up with an effective approach to English Language Teaching (ELT) is cumbersome because many factors, such as the readiness of the learner, their level of performance and knowledge retention capacities and availability of resources all come into play. As an ELT teacher, it is vital to select varied and authentic learning tools that the learners are most likely to benefit from. An English language teacher should prioritise approaches that would initiate discussions, motivate the learners, and at the same time, provide the desired amount of language practice, thereby, subjecting the whole teaching process to questioning. Literary texts and novels in particular have been identified as effective tools in ELT.

1.1. Rationale for Using English Novels in English Language Teaching

The use of literature in the teaching of ELT is not the researcher's initiative; prominent scholars have researched extensively on the subject and have outlined the critical role English novels play as a tool for learning the English language. Abuzahra and Farrah (2016) state, "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" (pp.23). Several studies consider authenticity to be the main advantage of using literature in the language classroom. There are far more reasons why literature is important to language learning, for example, Violetta (2015) deems that literary genres can be very motivating to learners because they offer rich material that is full of entertaining classroom activities. Researchers also believe that literary texts enhance students' creativity. McRae (1991) states that literature has a space for creativity and a space for the exercise of mental energy. In addition, Violetta (2015) mentions 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. 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) points out that learners can be offered meaningful and memorable texts that would encourage language acquisition. Similarly, Hişmanoğlu (2005) notes that literature is

considered an important part of teaching the four language skills, which are reading, writing, speaking and listening. Therefore, it provides a holistic approach to ELT.

The varied benefits, stated above, clearly outline the fact that the use of English novels benefits not just the learners, but also the teacher and the entire learning process. This paper will discuss the effectiveness of employing literature (novels in particular) to the teaching of ELT. The paper will also attempt to justify the inclusion of literature in language learning as well as ways it can be implemented efficiently in the language learning process.

1.2. Aim

This research prominently aims to explore and study the role of the use of English novels in English Language Teaching (ELT) from the students' perspective. In the past few years, the role of literature in the English language classroom has been reevaluated to gain recognition as a fundamental component of ELT (Carter & McRae, 1996; Collie & Slater, 1987; Duff & Malley, 2007; Lazar, 1999, 1993 & 1990; Paran, 2008). In that sense, the interest of this paper does not solely concentrate on how literature helps students to study and comprehend language skills, rather, it will focus on the examination of the use of literature as a resource for the ELT classroom, how it can assist the planning of lesson content and on the use of tasks and activities related to literary texts that bring language to the central position of examination and study. Therefore, this research avoids giving the impression that it can provide insight on how to develop literary competence; rather, it concentrates on the use of English novels as a means that could potentially encourage, promote and facilitate language learning. The guidelines from this research paper are intended to ensure that the lecturer and learners inculcate the novel effectively in the learning of the English language without compromising the objectives of the lessons.

1.3. Questions

This research does not seek to promote the view that literature increase the learners' language proficiency, but rather, it seeks to establish the attitudes of the learners with relation to the use of the novel in the English language learning, the value of the novel to language learning and potential shortfalls of the novel in language learning situations. The research further seeks to explore the benefits of the literary text to language learning. This will add to the repository of very limited studies examining students and teachers' attitudes towards using literary texts in language courses, and the findings will help us understand both the students' perceptions and involvement with literary texts as well as the teachers' reflections regarding their use and implementation. The research questions examined are:

1. What are learner attitudes with regards to learning the English language using an English novel?
2. Can English novels enhance knowledge retention, motivate learners, improve their linguistic level and enrich their cultural knowledge?
3. Do students find the use of an English novel effective in organizing learning content, lesson delivery to the learner and retaining motivation to learn English among the learners?
4. What problems are students likely to encounter while studying an English novel in the classroom?

2. Literature Review

This section reviews several studies that were conducted concerning the use of novels in English language learning classroom situations. The section will examine the role of literature as a language learning tool. Criticisms that led to the unpopularity of using literature in ELT will be explored. Now that the use of literary texts in ELT has been revived, it is prudent to look at factors that have promoted this sudden resurgence of the genre in ELT classrooms. This section also aims to highlight the positive role played by narrative texts in the planning and selection of learner material, enhancing learner retention and maintaining classroom motivation. Lastly, teacher and learner attitudes will be examined to establish if novels should really be part of the English language learning process.

2.1. The Historical Development of the Novel as a Tool for Language Learning

The question of whether or not English literature should be used or linked with English language learning has been a subject of strong debate among a large number of scholars, since questions regarding how, when, and why literature can be used in the classroom to enhance the English language skills have been put to the front. According to Paran (2006), language teachers considered that literature was acquiring an irrelevant position in the language classrooms, especially with the advent of communicative language teaching. Thus, the use of literature was regarded as inappropriate and not essential for language learners who associated literature with the unnecessary method of grammar translation (Duff & Maley, 2007).

However, the role of literature in the twenty first century classroom has evolved as a result of the consideration that some literary texts not only provide input for language acquisition, but also consist of a great resource of authentic materials for the language learner. As Collie and Slater (1987) suggest, literature provides a "bountiful and extremely varied body of written material" which is vital in the sense that it talks, describes, and shares fundamental human issues which are "enduring" rather than "ephemeral" (pp. 3). Authentic materials are important in that they increase the students' motivation and interest. This is especially so if we consider that one of the most intriguing reasons for learning

a second language is to get closer to its speakers and learn more about their everyday lives, routines and habits – and the students' integrative motivation can have a huge impact on their willingness to learn and bring the target culture closer in order to make it more accessible. Moreover, the view of literature as an authentic material is accompanied by the presupposition that literary texts are not uniformly designed for ELT purposes. This fact makes the language used in literature purely authentic and relevant to be used in the language learning process. As a result, learners will be greatly benefited by exposure to a language that is “as genuine and undistorted as can be managed in the classroom context” (Collie & Slater, 1987, pp. 3).

2.2. Why Specifically Novels?

A plethora of factors justify prioritizing prose above other genres of literature as central to the English language classroom. The only concern centers on the selection of an appropriate text for study with particular emphasis on the size of the novel, the linguistic level of the text in relation to the learners' as well as the contents of the text with considerations on how those contents overlap with the learners' daily experiences. Literature in itself is a broad category embracing genres like drama and novels. Scholars believe that all genres of literature are vital and relevant to language situations, but the researcher in this instance, emphatically feels that the examination of the use of novels in particular is important because it fills the gap of an empirical investigation of the use of novels in the language classroom, examining both teachers' as well as students' perceptions of their use and implementation, as well as reporting on their implementation in the classroom through classroom observations.

Even though the relationship between language and literature in the last decades particularly, has met an increasing revival of attention, the use of novels with language learners still remains an underdeveloped topic with very few exceptions (Collie & Slater, 1987; Lazar, 1990, 1993; Tsai, 2012; Tseng, 2010; Yang, 2001) since there are few reports or studies which exclusively empirically examine how novels can be used in the classroom for second language learning, exploring how teachers and students see their contribution. Consequently, this research aims to shed light on the use of novels in the language learning classroom by investigating how students and teachers view their involvement in English language learning courses.

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.

2.3. Novels as Tools for Learner Motivation

Novels are considered to be motivating and enhance 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” (pp.2). Lazar (1990) illustrated that using novels provides students with the opportunity to practice activities that are motivating such as extensive reading. To this end, the teacher has a critical role in selecting a text that is not only relevant to the level of the learners, but is also enticing. Long volumes can be tedious, time-consuming and often an unnecessary distraction from the main purpose of language acquisition. Stories that learners can relate should be prioritized.

2.4. Novels as a Vehicle of Culture

Many authors have provided some thoughtful appreciation on the relation between culture and language in the field of language teaching (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989; Byram, 1989; Duff & Maley, 2007; Ur, 1996). Novels are believed to enrich the cultural knowledge among students (Alkire, 2010; Lazar, 1990; Tsai, 2012; Hışmanoğlu, 2005). Alkire (2010) noted that students easily comprehend other peoples' cultures when they study novels. Tsai (2012) believes novels also help students understand how the citizens of a country about whom the novel is written think, behave, and believe. Introducing the learners to an English novel allows them to perceive the target language from the perspective of the native speaker and that should immensely reduce the chances of fossilization.

As Kramsch (1993) suggests, language and culture are both indispensable parts of language teaching that belong in our linguistic heritage. She maintains that culture is often considered as information “conveyed by the language, not as a feature of language itself” where cultural awareness is treated as an educational aim, which is distinct from language. Since language learning is perceived as a social practice, culture too becomes “the very core of language teaching” and as a result, cultural awareness enhances language proficiency by being the outcome of reflection on language proficiency. It becomes the ‘heart’ of language teaching because culture is a facet of language where learners are introduced to the social and cultural meanings of language. The learners become familiarized with the concept that considers language use “in dissociable from the creation and transmission of culture” (Kramsch, 1993, pp. 9) and where the teachers' purport deliberates teaching language in its social context. Consequently, language teaching is seen as a social practice. This occurs, for example, by ‘contextualizing grammatical sentences and situating them in socially appropriate verbal exchanges’ (Kramsch, 1993, pp. 34).

Teaching culture should be perceived as teaching the language. This is noted in the way speakers and readers give meaning to utterances produced and received (Kramsch, 1993, pp. 177). Therefore, both 'social and personal voices' interconnect to initiate the central code of a culture that consists not only of customs and proprieties, but most importantly 'all the culture's ground of meaning, its system of major values, habitual patterns of thought, and certain prevalent assumptions about human nature and society' that the learner of a foreign language should be prepared to encounter (Nostrand, 1989, pp. 51). Culture of the target language has traditionally been associated with the provision of information about the people of the target country, their attitudes, beliefs and customs. However, Kramsch (1993) observes that what has been essentially ignored is that culture is a social construct and the role of language as a social practice should be re-examined in order to redefine the relationship between language teaching and culture.

Cook and Bassetti (2011) propose that language teaching theorists have documented that learning a language means not just learning the language, but also "the way of life that goes with it" "where language teaching is the creation of intercultural competence" (Byram, 1997). According to Collie and Slater (1987), learners like to visit countries whose language they are studying and if they cannot do so physically for some reason, reading a novel can take them there alternatively.

Mckay (2001) proposes that using literary texts in the language classroom increases the student's potential development of cross-cultural awareness. This becomes particularly essential if we consider the rapid technological developments in our era, with the development and introduction of social networking systems, which have as a main language of instruction and communication of English language. The language thus uses both native and non-native speakers of English, and the language itself quickly transforms itself to be the means of exploration of cultural diversity and cultural awareness. In other words, the English language becomes a tool to explore and differentiate an assortment of cultural dimensions.

Duff and Maley (2007) express those literary texts have become a representational vehicle of culture for the target language teaching and for the target culture itself, promoting the awareness of "difference" and "developing tolerance and understanding" (Duff & Maley, 2007, pp. 5-6). As Vygotsky says, "a word is a microcosm of human consciousness" (Vygotsky, 1986, pp. 256) and therefore the diversity of meanings found in literature lead to a manifestation of differences between the students' culture and the culture of the language in which the literary text is written. Allen (1975, pp. 11) makes a similar point, arguing that literature is one of the "facets" of a culture and its importance can be appreciated in relation to its culture. Therefore, teaching literature in the language classroom allows students to "work" in an ideological and cultural environment different from their own, thus understanding the cultural differences between their own traditions and the culture of their target language.

Lastly, if carefully selected, prose texts have the potential to inculcate a reading culture in the learner. Captivating books that generate the interest of learners are catalysts to constant interaction with the target language, which potentially speeds up acquisition of the target language.

2.5. Gaining Language Competency Through Literary Texts

Using novels improves students' level of language proficiency (Maples, Cianca, & Maloy, 2016; Alkire, 2010; Tsai, 2012; Lazar, 1990; Ghiabi, 2014; Hişmanoğlu, 2005; Collie & Slater, 1988). Maples, Cianca, and Maloy (2016) pointed out that novels provide a non-threatening piece of literature that offer students with opportunities to practice their new language and literacy skills. Reading novels encourages students to express their feelings and thoughts, and consequently, develops their language skills. Tsai (2012) found that while reading novels, students improve the four language skills: reading, writing, speaking, and listening.

Lazar (1990) and Lazar (2007) conducted studies on the problems students may face while learning novels such as the large number of words unfamiliar to them. Lazar (1990) stressed the point that learners, regardless of their level, will feel confused when they cannot understand the meaning of vocabulary as is the case when students read novels. However, Lazar (2007) found that students should be able to increase their vocabulary when reading literary works.

Novels are a genre of literature, which introduce the learner to several different themes, motifs and symbols, and require the readers to be able to interact with them, analyse them, but most importantly, experience them. Experiencing a novel though, should not necessarily discourage the learner from reading efferently, focusing only on the plot, characters, setting and background.

Perhaps one the most important presuppositions is that the learner needs to have reached an adequate level of proficiency where reading competence has become an extended practice (Brumfit & Carter, 1986). In addition, Trengove (1986) argues that an increased awareness of language variety is an imperative requirement in order for a learner to be able to respond to literary language perceptively. He also suggests that increasing awareness of different varieties of English is vital for sufficient introduction of literature in the language classroom, and more specifically, in a foreign language classroom where a necessary prerequisite for language should be a developed awareness of language functions.

English language has numerous literary uses found in novels, which can be explored and developed through language-based activities, resulting in an intensified understanding and escalation of reader appreciation of the literary techniques of language. Nash (1986) supports this view by focusing on the technique of paraphrasing and summarising, which he distinguishes as extensively adopted language teaching methods – a practice, which can be particularly beneficial if we are making an exploration of literature in language by introducing language features like summaries, paraphrasing, proverbs, sayings, and idioms. In fact, the significance in paraphrasing is seen through our everyday conversations and ‘ordinary language’, where we constantly refer to things said by other people and what we actually perceive from the real world comes as a reference to paraphrasing. This is why novels can be considered as the perfect tool for paraphrasing purposes since their representations in everyday situations, as well as their contribution to social ‘voices’ and cultural aspects of the language, challenge the students to acquire the ‘hidden’ meaning by paraphrasing either a sentence or a larger piece of writing.

Nash (1986) also stresses the importance of paraphrasing in the representation of a student’s effort to engage with the text, explaining and relating to it as part of their competence in language. This kind of paraphrasing is the foundation for an understanding and involvement of literary language in language teaching, and in that sense, paraphrasing is “at least a useful language drill [which] at their best are a step towards the comprehension of literary values” (Nash, 1986, pp. 83).

Short and Candlin (1986) support the use of literary texts in the language classroom. They support the view that literary language is not ciphered and differentiated from a common language use, but instead, it shares the same features with it. In that sense, if learners of the English language are given the possibility to investigate textual analysis and literariness in language, they can ultimately increase their understanding and awareness towards literary texts and they will be able to develop language skills, which are central to their overall sensitivity towards all kinds of texts.

Povey (1972) believes that by using literature in the language classroom, students will enhance all of their language skills because “literature will extend linguistic knowledge by giving evidence of extensive and subtle vocabulary usage, and complex and exact syntax” (Povey, 1972, pp. 187). If we consider that it is complicated to make a distinction between literature and other types of language linguistically, then there is no reason for not assuming that language is principal to literature, even though literature – on some occasions – can be more than language (e.g., about education, historical, social and cultural implications, reader response, etc.).

Furthermore, Short and Candlin (1986) explain that even though a teacher may acknowledge and set a division between language and literature, a learner’s understanding feels literature to be language, and we have to utilise the learners’ enjoyment in reading literature to motivate them and use literature as a component in language learning. The novel is a great example of language structures in use, and it is these structures that learners should focus on in order to improve their language skills in reading comprehension, grammatical analysis and explanation. When students are more competent in having an understanding towards stylistic variation, that means that literature can be used as a vehicle for discovering the variations among language varieties therefore, this process is considered as an initiation into formal written register.

Tsai (2012) argues that the difficulty in creating authentic circumstances for language learning is easily resolved by using literature in the classroom. This takes away the isolation from the natural environment that learners of a foreign language normally experience. Literature creates its own natural contexts that the learner would find sufficient and satisfactory. To support this view, authors stress the involvement of natural language when reading literature, in which the reader acquires the role of the ‘onlooker’ examining the events shaped by language. Consequently, these events construct a completely new context of the status of the language in the book, which surpasses the unnatural and simulated classroom state and forms the basis for an authentic situation for language.

After acquiring some competence in the language, learners begin to have access to the themes that lie beneath the language used in literature and respond to the text by making assumptions, parallelisms and broadening their mindset. According to Littlewood (1986, pp. 180), this can be named the level of transition from “receptive to productive skills, and from the recording or responding of students we move on to the generalizing or theorizing”. It is at this level where students will have to respond to activities based on the literary text, and it is certainly the stage during which they enhance their linguistic knowledge, since they will be producing written work, in which they will elaborate on their thoughts and responses by theorising their understanding of a text. Thus, students will be working on their productive skills, responding to ideas, which will eventually stretch their competence in the target language.

2.5. Challenges with Prose Narratives

Despite their ability to enhance language development, prose narratives have another side. Ghiabi (2014), points at lengthy novels as unnecessary and time consuming. Because of this, often, learners do not finish such texts. Lazar (1990) further argues that lengthy novels result in boredom among the learners, although this can be alleviated if learners are tasked to summarise to the class instead of going through the whole text.

Vocabulary is another key concern when deciding on a text to use in class. Too many unfamiliar words in a text is both confusing and discouraging to the learner. Lazer (2007) believes that the level of proficiency of the learner should determine the kind of text to be used for learning. Ghiabi (2014) believes that shortfalls of the literary text should be anticipated and countered by the teacher.

3. Methodology

The study is largely qualitative in approach. This section first explains the ethical considerations that have guided this study. It also highlights the data collection tools used and the reliability of those tools. The data obtained was studied, interpreted and is presented under this section.

3.1. Ethical Procedures

The following steps were adopted to protect the participants. The researcher highlighted to the Head of the English Department that participation is based on free will. The researcher pledged to protect the participants through anonymity. All responses from participants are regarded as confidential. A signed consent form was issued by the university principals before any interviews were carried out with the participants.

3.2. Population of the Study

The research targeted senior students selected from an English Department. Participants' ages and the gender were not considered to be a factor, but the researcher ensured that both genders were represented.

3.3. Research Instrument and Procedure

One instrument was adopted to elicit data from the participants: interviews of the students. Interview questions determine the attitudes of the students towards the use of novels in a language classroom as well as establish challenges that are likely to emerge from utilising literary texts in language lessons. Interview questions sought to establish the positive effects of the use of literary texts inside and outside classroom situations.

4. Data Presentation and Analysis

Students participated in the interviews and their responses to the questions are highlighted below. The responses are also discussed and analysed to establish how accurately they fall into previously researched narratives.

The first question establishes the attitudes of the learners towards the use of novels in the classroom. It also sought to establish if the use of texts contributes to class and individual motivation. All the learners admit that the plot is what fascinates them most when reading a novel. Unraveling the plot is exciting and takes the reader down the journey of imagination (Ghiabi, 2014). Participant interest also extends to the character and setting. According to Collie and Slater's (1987) learners have characters they relate to, share feelings with and develop personal attachments with, so when they read a text, it is like taking a personal journey to them. When this happens, learning takes place consciously or unconsciously (Collie & Slater, 1987). Six of the participants, indicated literary texts as their preferred learning tool in a language classroom. Some learners expressed that they felt that they are in charge of the learning process when they are allowed to read or summarise texts to the other learners. Dornyei (2007) believes that learner autonomy is key to second language acquisition. Autonomy grows learner confidence, which is critical in sharpening their speaking skills since it allows them to practice the target language without fear of making mistakes. The participants pointed out that texts allow them to acquire new grammar structures, new vocabulary, and expressions. Participants also indicated that texts liven the learning atmosphere not just because they bring a variety of learning approaches, but also because the novel brings an element of adventure, anticipation and uncertainty.

These three factors culminate towards motivation and the critical role of motivation in an English language lesson. Alkire (2010) concurs by asserting that to prevent cultural misunderstanding; students must study the culture of the target language. Akire's (2010) studies support that learners enjoy studying English through novels. Such students are highly motivated. Daskalovska and Dimova (2012) carried out similar studies, which revealed that novels provide authentic language, which maximizes the chances of learners succeeding in that language. Ushioda (2012) believes that engagements and activities that a novel provides to a language class ensures that learner motivation is retained throughout the learning process. Lazar (1993) aptly sums up the role of novels towards motivation by pointing out that a good novel may be "particularly gripping in that it involves students in the suspense of unravelling the plot [and] this involvement may be more absorbing for students than the pseudo-narratives frequently found in course books" (pp. 15).

The second question sought to establish if learners had preferences about the type of novels they would rather use in a language classroom. From the responses, it emerged that most learners prefer texts that are short. These learners feel that long novels either congest the timetable or strain time for other classroom activities, especially if they have to read the text prior to the English language lesson. Other participants indicate lack of patience with longer texts. Interestingly, most learners find texts with familiar vocabulary ideal because then, they would not have to constantly refer to the dictionary to find the meaning of complex words and expressions. Lazar (1990) proposes that a text with too much new vocabulary is often discouraging for the learner. Upon probing, it emerged that some of the participants that prefer

longer and more challenging texts have been reading novels for a much longer time, thereby suggesting that they are natural readers. Akire (2010) posits that unless learners find them enjoyable, long texts are often disliked by learners. As discussed earlier in the literature review, long novels should be summarized by a group of students to the other learners (Lazer, 1993). Upon further probing, most of the participants expressed dislike for the overuse of the text during the lesson. To them, it creates monotony and predictability. Their views are in synergy with well-established studies, which reveal that teaching methods should constantly change in order to sustain curiosity, anticipation and motivation in the classroom. Dornyei (2007), for example, is against overuse of texts on the premise that it creates the impression that learners are studying literature, thereby undermining the primary reason for using the literary text in class.

The third question intended to find out if novels enhance cultural awareness about English language speaking countries and if this awareness is in anyway beneficial towards their quest to learn the language. The role of culture in language learning was dealt with at length in the literature review. For example, Abuzahra and Farah (2010) strongly suggested that language is transmitted through culture and that to fully appreciate a new language; learners need to understand the social context in which that language hinges upon. Responses from the participants to this question strongly subscribed to these views by Auzahra and Farah (2010). Respondents believe that they know more about the English culture now than they did prior to the study of literary texts as tools for learning English language. When asked if they find this knowledge about English speaking culture helpful, varied responses emerged, but all the responses pointed to the fact that they find such information helpful to their learning. Some expressed admiration for the English-speaking culture while some feel that it is the closest they will get to English speaking people since they are limited from doing so physically. To these participants, reading the text is an adventure, a journey they undertake to satisfy their curiosity. Other participants feel that the knowledge about English speaking culture causes them to feel, act and attempt to speak in a native-like manner during the learning process. Hismanoglu (2005) supports novels for their cultural enrichment abilities. It allows learners to understand how people within a particular locality communicate with each other (Maloy, 2016). Others admit to having taken up reading English novels as a hobby while others have taken up watching related films for the same cause. From such responses, it is crystal clear that these participants are culturally influenced by the novels they read. They no longer read the novels as an obligatory process of learning, but also as a means to fulfill their ego and quest for knowledge about English speaking culture. Consequently, they have developed a reading culture, which extends to outside classroom situations. The motivation generated by all this should not be understated, since it aids in the process of language acquisition.

The fourth question focused on establishing whether literature has improved language proficiency of the participants. Lazer (1993) stated that novels are an authentic way to linguistic development and responses from the participants seemed to suggest so. All the participants appreciated the role of novels in improving their language skills. They admitted that their vocabulary had increased tremendously. Tsai (2012) believes that reading novels help learners' ability to express feelings and thoughts. The learners also pointed to an improvement in their reading skills. This benefit is reinforced by Hismanoglu's (2005) view that novels motivate learners to read, of which reading is central in perfecting the skill of speaking. Since these learners have extended this reading culture to out-of-school situations, the skill of reading is essentially reinforced. Ghiabi (2014) points out that reading novels helps develop a reading culture within or outside the schooling boundaries. All participants reported that their language expressions, syntactical ability to construct sentences and ability to derive meaning out of sentences have all improved tremendously through reading novels. Meaning in novels can be interpreted differently because in most cases, there are two meanings: surface and implied. The ability to infer meaning is critical in comprehension courses of learning a new language (Pinar & Jover, 2012). Hismanoglu (2005) concurs that novels have the capacity to sharpen these skills. He believes that the novel is a modality, which is important in developing writing skills since it is original and authentic.

The last question was generalized and sought to establish if there is anything the learners feel should be considered by their teachers during lessons in which literary texts are used. Some respondents feel that they should be involved in the choice of the texts they use in the classroom. One particular student had no issue with who should select the texts, but that whoever does so, should vary the texts according to the historical period being fictionalized. Kim (2004) suggests that texts must vary to cater to each individual's emotional and intellectual needs so as to generate genuine opportunities for every individual as a learner.

5. Conclusion

This research was not intended to establish if learners in the selected department have been exposed to literature in the English language learning class. Overwhelming evidence has already suggested that literature is an integral part of the language learning process. The central thrust of the research was to capture learner interest, feelings, perceptions, and general opinions on the value of the use of literature in English language learning. Since opinions and perceptions can be subjective, it was seen rational to gather related data from the department.

After analyzing responses from the participants, it became clear that literature is and should be an integral part of the language learning process. Clearly, teachers should not overuse literature for it can generate monotony and predictability to learning which are two elements that can corrupt the learning process. Literature must be used sparingly and to diversify and compliment the classroom material repertoire. Responses from the students strongly suggest that the learners are aware of the perceived benefits of literature as a tool for learning the English language. Below is a summarized report of these perceived benefits of literature as obtained from the researchers' interaction with the learners.

Literature is a language enriching tool that can be harnessed on two levels: classroom and individual. With or without the teacher, learning should continue unhindered as was observed by the researcher. Responses from learners show that novels enhance the learners' receptive vocabulary and increase their vocabulary learning techniques with no intervention from the teacher. As such, new vocabulary is learnt everyday while old and familiar vocabulary is perfected in terms of use in sentence construction. The four language skills are also sharpened, particularly reading, and speaking skills, as learners read and summarize texts in class.

Secondly, literature is both a student-centered and language-based approach to teaching. Both the text and the learner are tools for learning. Learners are actively involved in discussions and activities to such an extent that the role of the teacher is reduced to that of a guide. This approach is a springboard towards learner autonomy and from the responses, it became apparent that learning had extended to an out-of-school environment. A genuine reading culture was observed to have developed in the learners. The learners' desires to learn were cultivated by a personal, emotional, and educational desire that literary texts inculcate in the learners.

The novel is a cultural enrichment entity. It was observed that the cultural background knowledge of a targeted language adds an aesthetic value of the language to the learner. Learners were also able to appreciate cultural diversity, which in turn compelled them to realize that in order to fully understand or appreciate a language, a learner must attempt to perceive the language from the viewpoint of the native speaker of that language. Novels were seen to provide authentic samples of language in context. They present language in its genuine form and use as was noted to cause the learner to make personal investments in the language.

Lastly, the novel was observed to be a flexible learning tool. It has the ability to appeal and satisfy each learners' unique learning style. It touches on a learners' creativity and enhances their descriptive and dialogue abilities. It can allow teachers to formulate a variety of approaches to learning that impact greatly on the uniqueness of learners. It allows learners to explore individual ways of learning and perceiving things. In short, literature encompasses language and methodology learning approaches depending on how one wishes to utilize it in a language classroom.

References

- Abuzahra, N. & Farah, M. (2016). Using Short Stories in the EFL Classroom. *IUG Journal of Humanities Research*, 24(1), 11-24.
- Alkire, S. (2010). Teaching Novels in EFL/ESL Classes. *The English-Learning and Languages Review*. Available at <http://www.lingua.org.uk/novteach.alkire.html>
- Collie, J. & Slater, S. (1988). *Literature in the Language Classroom*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ghiabi, S. (2014). Investigation of the Effect of Using a Novel as an Extensive Reading on Students' Attitudes and Reading Ability. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics & English Literature*, 3(4), 55-64.
- Hişmanoğlu, M. (2005). Teaching English through Literature. *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies*, 1(1), 53-66.
- Lazar, G. (1993). *Materials design and lesson planning: Novels and short stories*. In *Literature and Language Teaching: A Guide for Teachers and Trainers* (Cambridge Teacher Training and Development, 71-93). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. doi:10.1017/CBO9780511733048.006
- Lazar, G. (1990). Using novels in the language-learning classroom. *ELT Journal*, 44(3), 204-214.
- Lazar, G. (1993). *Literature and Language Teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Maples, J., Cianca, M. & Maloy, M. (2016). Using graphic novels to engage English language learners." *Vanguard*, 45(1), 37-39.
- McRae, J. (1991). *Literature with a small l*. London: Macmillan.
- Pinar, B. & Jover, M. (2012). *Literature in the English Language Classroom – Poetry*-. Available at <http://www4.ujaen.es/~gluque/Literature%20in%20the%20language%20classroom%20%28theory%29%20-%20Borja%20Ojeda%20y%20Marina%20Torralbo.pdf>
- Tsai, C. H. (2012). English Language Teaching; Students' Perceptions of Using a Novel as Main Material in the EFL Reading Course. *Canadian Center of Science and Education*, 5(8), 103-112.
- Violetta, K. (2015). The Use of Literature in the Language Classroom: Methods and Aims. *International Journal of Information and Education Technology*, 5(1), 74-79.