

EFL LEARNERS' RESPONSES AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS LITERARY TEXTS: THE ALGERIAN CONTEXT

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the present paper is to explore the teachers' and the students' views about using literary texts in the language classes at the level of university. How much compatible are the classroom activities with their views and attitudes; and what kind of strategies our teachers prefer to use in their English language classes is also subject of the study. The purpose is to argue the effectiveness of instruction, in hope to assist teachers to develop their learners' strategic knowledge to enhance their language skills and thus, asses their learners' attitude, and motivation in terms of how our EFL students may have distorted views about English in general, and literature in particular.

Keywords: Learners' attitudes, learners' responses, Teaching Methodology, Algerian EFL learners, Algerian Context.

INTRODUCTION

In our Algerian EFL context, although the overall picture of students' responses of different literary genres is less explored, there is some empirical research reporting students' favorable attitudes toward a specific genre used in their language classes, for example, poems, short stories of children's literature, and simplified novels of young adult literature. Nevertheless, this is an attempt to examine the effects of that particular literary genre on our EFL students' development of language skills. Therefore, students' positive attitudes towards literary texts taught might be interpreted as their acknowledgement of literary texts as useful instructional materials, but probably not as their true appreciation of literature for literature's own sake. In our EFL classrooms Literature teaching has been always relying on analyzing the linguistic elements of the literary text or on examining the linguistic benefit that literature teaching claims to provide for students. As it is stated, 'literature is always more than language' Brumfit & Carter, (1986, p: 41), to the extent that a pure literature syllabus should not be confused with syllabuses for the teaching of language or of culture. It is believed that as long as EFL students get immersed in their preferred literature which is taught for literature purpose, without other appending purposes, the potential linguistic, personal, and cultural benefits of literature teaching are then likely to ensue. At the present time, there seems little research in exploring such literature syllabus in Algerian EFL context, or in examining Algerian EFL students' attitudes toward different literary texts. Consequently, the current study is exploratory in nature, and it will be will be guided by the following research questions:

- What might be our EFL teachers' views on using literary texts in the language classroom?
- What might be our EFL learners' attitudes on using literary texts in the language classroom?
- Are the classroom activities corresponding to the teachers' views and the students' attitudes on using literary texts in the language classroom?

Research Methodology

Case study research excels at bringing us to an understanding of a complex issue or object and can extend experience or add strength to what is already known through previous research. Moreover, *“It provides a unique example of real people in real situations, enabling readers to understand ideas more clearly than simply by presenting them with abstract theory or principles.”* Cohen *et al* (2000:181), therefore, the present research instruments have been used for the sake of revealing the students' responses and attitudes to teaching methodologies employed in their classes, thus, both qualitative and quantitative investigations of the data have been obtained through semi-structured interviews for both learners and teachers.

The present research serves to illustrate the impact of literary texts teaching in the Algerian EFL context and to investigate and reflect the responses and the attitudes of our EFL learners towards literary texts employed in their classes. Accordingly, this study provides a thorough account of the research instruments and procedures seeks to incorporate both qualitative and quantitative paradigms where possible, as Salomon (1991) also points out, for the research objectives of the study and the present researcher, the issue is not qualitative-quantitative at all, but whether we are taking an "analytic" approach to understanding a few controlled variables, or a "systematic" approach to understanding the interaction of variables and what is going on in a complex research environment. The data gathered from such research tools and procedures are then quantitatively and qualitatively analysed.

Participants

The subjects selected as a sample population in this present study is 63 first-year EFL students at University of Tlemcen. The Four literature teachers of English department have been also selected to better cross-check data of this investigation.

FINDINGS AND DATA ANALYSIS

The present study has focused mainly on the attitudes of our Algerian EFL learners towards literature in an EFL classrooms and Teacher methods as an effective strategy to enhance students' awareness to language use. Here is the analysis and interpretation of data driven from teachers' semi-structured interview and student semi structured interview.

Students' Semi-Structured Interview Analysis

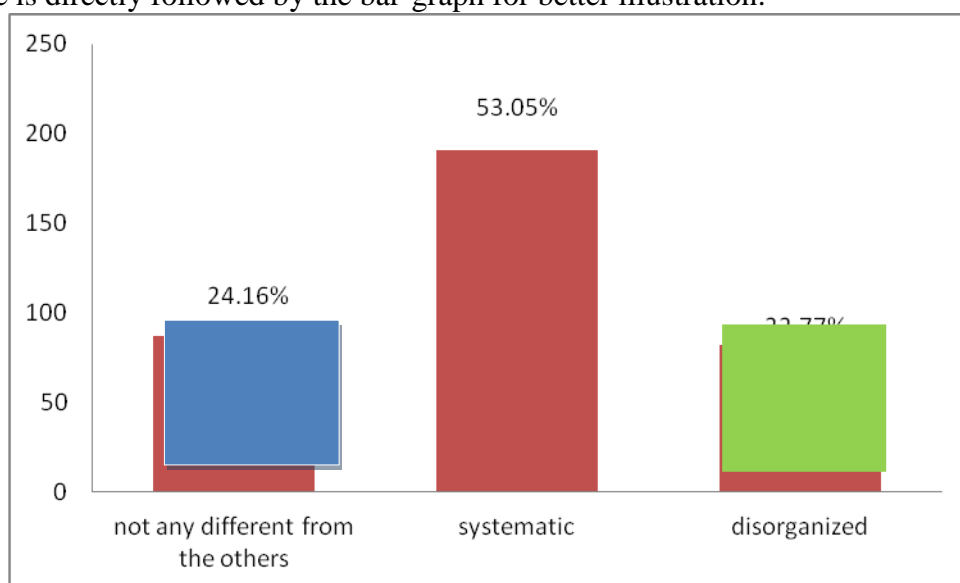
The data on the students' responses in a group to the teaching methodology were collected through a semi-structured interview and have been extremely positive. 53.05% responses of the students thought that the teaching process they went through was systematic. The majority of students about 24.16% stated that the teaching process was not any different from the others; a fact indicating that this type of teaching is more or less the common practice in their classes. A result which indicates that for the students in the research setting this type of teaching was quite a novelty.

Another pleasing result has been students' responses to the organized nature of the teaching approach used in class. However, 22.77% of the students thought that the teaching process in their classes was disorganized. The following table reveals the above mentioned results.

Lesson N°	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	Tot
not any different from the others	13	12	15	17	11	8	87
Systematic	2	4	5	6	4	1	191
Disorganized	15	14	10	7	15	21	82

Table1: Students’ Responses

Here, in fact, is a graphic representation of our learners’ responses to the teaching process of literature and what it entails during their ordinary classes, and how it is generally undergone. The table is directly followed by the bar-graph for better illustration:



Bar-Graph 1: Students’ Responses

The students in the group were also asked whether there was enough variety of activities in class. Their different responses to that question are shown in the table below:

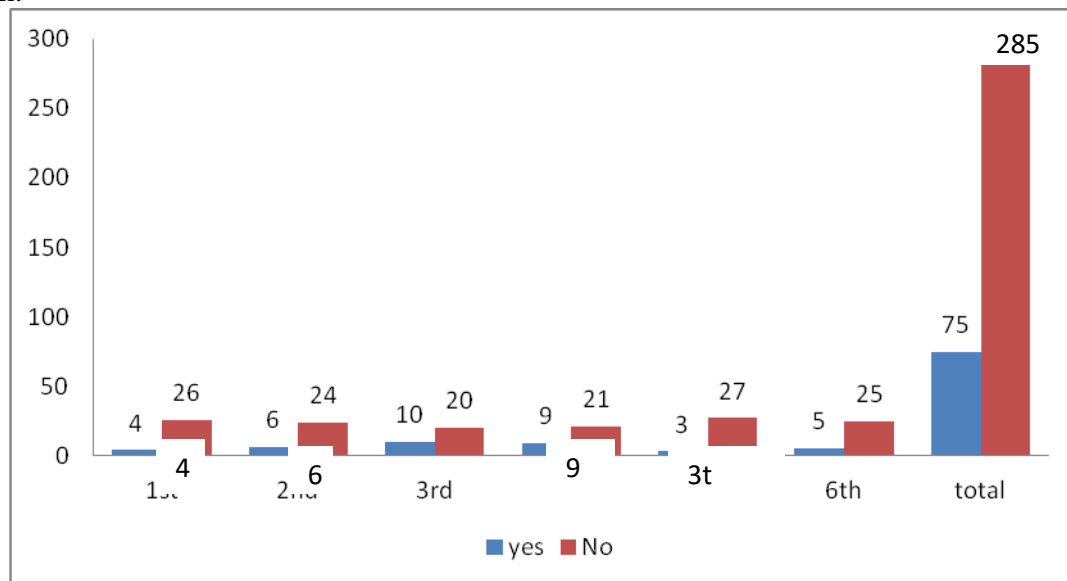
Table 2:

Lesson N°	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	Tot
yes	4	6	10	9	3	5	75
No	26	24	20	21	27	25	285

Frequency of Activities

As it can be noticed in the previous table, the great majority of students thought that there was enough variety of activities in the class; it can be said that the teaching methodology offers more activities. This result has been important especially that contains the necessary

elements towards more student-centred classes. These aspects are also represented the bar-graph.



Bar-Graph 2: Frequency of Activities

Teachers' Semi-Structured Interview Analysis

The transcribed semi-structured interview with teachers proved that in the classroom the teacher utilises most of the time talking and explaining "facts" about literature to the students. Inevitably, in the class it is the teacher who "works through the text", not the students. As Collie and Slater (1987:7) also indicate, in such a traditional classroom, the teacher '*takes the role of an importer of information*'. For interview with the teachers, structured interview questions were used. The interview carried out in teachers' own rooms at the department and took 30 minutes. Although interview with the teachers provided rich qualitative data, due to the length restrictions, main focus will be on the students' responses, and the teachers' responses will only be reported in this dissertation. All of them seem to entirely focus on only *while-reading* strategies neglecting completely those used for activating background and strategic knowledge. Almost all of the interviewed teachers at the research setting complained about:

- varies motivation and tendency towards relying on the teacher's interpretation of the literary text being studied.
- When it concerns analysis, discussion of the texts, they are really motivated.
- Few of them are competent and have self confidence.
- Positive Attitude, interested motivated when students are required to analyse the literary texts most of the time.
- Meta-cognitive awareness is very important. However, not all students perceive it in the same way
- Lack of reading abilities

SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS

To sum up, all of these results together with the teachers' responses to the semi-structured interview questions, not only validated the existence of the previously stated problems in EFL literature class (i.e., *teacher-centredness, low student motivation, lack of reading ability*, etc.) but also revealed once again the fact that to bombard the students with dry knowledge

without providing them with analytical tools that will deepen their understanding and therefore lead to a greater pleasure, never seems to work.

CONCLUSION

Analyses of the Algerian participants' responses to a questionnaire and semi-structured interview showed that most of them held positive attitudes toward literary texts. One may conclude that what is significantly related to their attitudes toward literature study is explicitly the preferred learning styles, such as being given opportunities to express their personal opinions, to look for the underlying meaning of the text, and to read about people and experiences different from their own. In other words, the Algerian students' attitude toward literature may be influenced not only by their own reading habits but also by the teachers' instructional methods.

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