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DEVELOPING LANGUAGE AND CULTURAL AWARENESS THROUGH LITERATURE IN EFL

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Rezumat

Articolul argumentează necesitatea utilizării de texte literare, indiferent de gen, în didactica limbii engleze ca limbă străină, evidenţiindu-se multitudinea de beneficii educaţionale ale acestora începând cu etapele timpurii de studiere a acesteia. Sensibilizarea faţă de alte culturi şi importanţa competenţei (inter)-culturale sunt abordate în mod aparte, ca valenţe cheie ale funcţionării eficiente în societatea post-modernă, care reclamă o abordare didactică multi-dimensională în procesul de predare-învăţare a limbii engleze ca limbă străină.

Cuvinte-cheie: Engleza ca limbă străină, literatură, sensibilizare (inter)-culturală, competenţă interculturală, abordare didactică.

The controversies in terms of using literature in foreign language classes has been debated extensively in many academic contexts ever since the 1980s, when an anti-literature movement started in Australia, which gradually gained force and had a tremendous impact on curricula across the world.

Denying the manifold educational benefits of literature in the language classroom has led to a significant number of deficiencies in the formation and education of the young generation among which: impoverished language proficiency caused by limited vocabulary, diminished attention spans,

poor imagination and dysfunctional critical thinking skills, which are all essential abilities to facilitate a person's integration in the post-modern society.

Modern day researchers, theorists and teachers alike have succeeded in demonstrating that a foreign language curriculum is incomplete without literature and that interaction with it at all levels is crucial in the development and education of the new generation. Hence, many international organizations, sociolinguists, neuroscientists, educators and so forth insist on the need of bringing literature back into the classroom due to its potential to engage emotionally, intellectually and culturally, in line with Alan Malley's conception, who insists on *bringing literature back to the pedestal* [A. Malley, 1989, Apud 1, p.249], into the EFL particularly, in order to ensure a sound balance between *language-literature and culture*.

Despite the continuously growing body of research that highlights the relevance and need of using literature in foreign language education, there is still paucity of effective frameworks and guidelines of how to approach such texts for the best educational outcomes. When we plan to use literature in the language classroom, it is absolutely important to question ourselves as educators what aspects we have to consider, how we are going to approach a particular piece of literature, what educational outcomes are expected from our learners and so on.

Before delving deeper into various aspects that deal with using literature in language education, we would like to explore briefly what *literature per se* stands for to clarify why it deserves a special place in curricula worldwide and in the Republic of Moldova, particularly.

Literature has been defined in a multitude of ways and one could conclude that there is no universally adopted definition: the concept continues to evolve getting new connotations. In Europe, before the XVIIIth century, the term *literature* was used with reference to all books and types of writing [7, p.28]. The Romantic period generated a more restricted meaning of the concept and ever since it started to refer to "imaginative" literature [9, p.406]. According to the definition from the *www.thefreedictionary.com* literature represents *"the body of written works of a language, period or culture, written material such as poetry, novels, or essays."*

Literature has a very long history, representing and reflecting essential features of the earliest civilizations, the Sumerian and that of Ancient Egypt, when the first *written literary texts* came into being.

If we refer to the literature transmitted by word of mouth, it has an even older history: it appeared much before the old civilizations known to man nowadays and might represent the basis for the written literature.

Arthur Krystal, 2014, synthesizes several definitions of literature and its evolution from different historical periods and concludes that nowadays the concept has significantly extended its meaning and has got to mean not only what is written but equally what is voiced, what is expressed, what is invented, in whatever form" — *in which case sermons, comic strips, cartoons, speeches, photographs, movies, war memorials, and music all huddle beneath the literary umbrella, breaking the classical literature canon and extending the traditional meaning of literary genres* [11]. All these forms of imaginative expression reflect the evolution and the culture of a country/people, which obviously means that in terms of pedagogy, a different approach is required in order to capitalize on these forms of imaginative expression.

Why use literature in the classroom: Literature is an important aspect in studying and learning about a language and its culture. The interaction with literature in educational settings aims at achieving different objectives, all oriented towards developing and improving a whole set of competences like understanding the plot of a story, metaphorical competence, literacy and

overall communicative competence. In addition to that, students have to be able to write about texts because literature "demonstrates how interaction between the text and the reader can occur" [5, p.109].

Increasing (inter)cultural awareness: Nowadays, in the context of excessive migration and globalization that have had a considerable impact on education all over the world, educational systems are placing more and more emphasis on developing learners' (inter)cultural competence which is deemed to facilitate communication across borders. In this regard, literature particularly in foreign language learning, represents the main resource that should be capitalized upon to ensure intellectual, linguistic and most importantly, (inter)-cultural competence. According to the Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, literature is a type of text which is particularly suited to promote *"a deeper understanding of others and oneself"* [Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research 2006/2013, p. 1 Apud10, p. 29]. Thus, the use of literature as a teaching resource should lie at the heart of all language teaching programs, based on the assumption that it represents the perfect resource to expand linguistic knowledge, to increase cultural awareness and to promote critical thinking, one of the key abilities required in the 21st century.

The growing intensity of intercultural contacts and interaction, as well as the use of English as a global language, pose ever-changing challenges to EFL education worldwide. In the past the main objective of foreign language education was to develop learners' near-native linguistic competence. Nowadays English is extensively used for communication between representatives of different cultures, who speak it as a second or third language. Thus, naturally, the main objective of foreign language education has shifted towards modelling a successful intercultural communicator instead of the native speaker. In contemporary multilingual and multicultural societies the most essential skill that speakers of foreign languages should possess is "adaptability to select those forms of accuracy and those forms of appropriateness that are called for in a given social context of use" rather than "the ability to speak and write according to the rules of the academy and the social etiquette of one social group" [6, p.27]. In today's multicultural, multi-ethnic and multi-religious educational contexts, it is essential that teachers of EFL develop and show sensitivity to diversity and for this they need to deepen their knowledge of such multi-dimensional aspects through the study of literature, which is a reflection of different socio-cultural communities. Expanding their knowledge and skills in this way will facilitate their own understanding of pluri-culturalism and multiculturalism and serve to help learners deal with some difficult topics for them. Cl. Kramsch underlines that the model of the native speaker as the aim of foreign language pedagogy has to be revisited and the idea of the "intercultural speaker" who is aware of his/her own as well the others' cultural identity should become the priority of modern educational systems. It goes without saying that linguistic knowledge is essential to communication, but culture plays a referential function and, communication and understanding can occur only due to it. This correlates with Byram and Cain's reasoning that "linguistic and cultural competences are integrated [Apud 12]. In their view, culture is inseparable from language education since it recharges language activities with meaning and context. Byram's theoretical views based on longitudinal empirical studies and solid data serve as a strong argument in favor of exploring literature from the perspective of developing intercultural users of English [2, p.7-8]. His advocating linking foreign language teaching with cultural studies together with his Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) model based on five elements have been powerful in Europe and shaped the European Union policy towards linguistic and cultural education and the conceptualization of Communicative Competence, clarified in the Common European Framework for Languages and accepted worldwide nowadays.

The crucial role of interacting with literary texts in developing cultural awareness has been observed by a number of scholars: L.Bredella ,2000, Cl. Kramsch,1998, A. Gilmore, 2007, I. Lazar, 2007, J.D. Hanauer, 2001, G. Hall, 2005, D. Xerri, 2012, J. Carter, 1987, etc. One of the main arguments for incorporating literary texts in the second language classroom and intercultural education is concerned with the fact that works of literature enable the reader to observe the world from multifarious perspectives and cherish the diversity of individual perception. J.D. Hanauer identifies three main reasons for integrating literature in language education: *a. motivation booster, b. linguistic development and what comes to the fore is literature in developing cultural awareness,* since judiciously selected literary texts provide language learners with "access to cultural knowledge of the target language community" [4, p. 391].

The world created in works of literature is fictitious, nevertheless it provides a broad and vivid context for literary protagonists, whose background, thoughts, attitudes, beliefs, values, habits and everyday life reveal to the reader codes and rules of the real society [Collie and Slater, 1987, Apud3, pp. 112-113]. Cultures should not be perceived as "monolithic unitary units" [4, p.396]. They are composed of individuals who incorporate varying sets of values, ethics, beliefs and viewpoints, personality traits, and experience. Thus, avoiding generalizations based on individual experience, often leading to stereotypes, appears to be one of the central problems and challenges in cultural education. Hence, teachers ought to specify to their learners that literature reflects only some socio-cultural of a socio-linguistic community and special pedagogical measures will be taken to avoid stereotyping and prejudiced overgeneralizations, which later on may have limitative or harmful effects on their overall (inter)cultural competence.

Hanauer emphasizes that "literature is a valuable source of cultural knowledge precisely because it does present a personal interpretation of the life and values as the author of the literary work experiences them" [4, p.396]. This individual perspective of the author should be capitalized upon, instead of being denied, particularly in a foreign language class where learners get multiple opportunities of interpreting it, comparing and connecting a variety of viewpoints to their prior knowledge and personal experiences to get a deeper insight into the culture they belong to.

Accordingly, the role of the language teacher would consist in providing a selection of texts showing a variety of individual perspectives and making language learner aware that each individual voice is just a single, though unique, element of a complex mosaic that each culture is built of. Such an approach would lead to deeper understanding of what culture really is, helping the learners grasp certain aspects of the target culture, and, on the other hand, restraining them from oversimplifications and stereotyping. In might be concluded then that literary texts used for cultural education should not be treated as "rough guides" to cultures, providing practical tips boiling down to what to do or not to do in a certain cultural context. They should rather be perceived as spring-boards for critical discussion leading to a profound understanding of selected aspects of culture from an individual perspective, special emphasis being placed on the role of the readers as interpreters of the literary text, which has numerous benefits on their (inter)cultural competence development and their overall communicative competence in EFL as well as on their education.

What to expect? Literary texts are said to mean very little by themselves. Their meaning, which could be polysemous, ambiguous and open to a diversity of interpretations, is revealed through the interaction between the reader and the text, which in its turn, could be challenging as it relies on a number of variables: level of linguistic proficiency, general knowledge, ability to connect ideas and to differenciate between fact and opinion and so forth.

It should be noted that despite the many theoretical approaches to using literature in the foreign language classroom, the existing pedagogical frameworks do not offer enough concrete advice on what can be done and how to explore literature constructively, from a post-modern perspective with an emphasis on developing learners' intercultural competence.

Hence, teachers of EFL are expected to shape their own teaching framework, oriented towards accomplishing the goals of modern education. The difficulties they might face deal with cultural aspects, which might be difficult to perceive, or with methodological ones, since it is always so complicated to create tasks and activities focusing on dimensions as broad and abstract as culture.

For the best educational outcomes, the teacher should make sure that the texts selected for study are accessible to the learners in terms of linguistic complexity and socio-cultural concepts promoted. Mostly important for the teacher is to plan and implement an extensive range of pre-, while- and post-reading activities that will facilitate in-depth text processing from various perspectives. Implementing various types of tasks and activities will not only improve learner's literacy skills and abilities to understand different types of text. The benefits are by far multifarious and include important competencies like imaginative, creative, emotional, social, all considerably facilitated through the interaction with literature.

The linguistic dimension of a piece of literature might also represent different degrees of complexity, as language units do not simply express ideas; they also reflect the culture of a sociolinguistic community. However, according to S. Mckay, this should not be perceived as an impediment to exploring literature since the benefits it offers outweigh the challenges and difficulties can be turned into advantages [8, p.536].

If we refer to using literature with young learners, then we should note that these challenges should be considered in more minute detail, especially if the literature piece belongs to a geographical space or historical period totally different from the ones they are familiar with. That is why when selecting literature works for younger learners, teachers should set clear-cut teaching objective and approach a literary text in a creative way, to enhance its educational benefits.

Children's literature can be effectively used for all age range levels to teach and improve integrated foreign language skills, facilitating literacy and proficiency. Properly selected literary texts provide learners with contextualized, repeated vocabulary and phrases, facilitating incidental acquisition, which will give them a sense of accomplishment.

It is worthwhile noting that selecting the right literary work is more important than applying the most ultra-fashionable teaching/learning strategies. Picture-books, for example are perfect for learners with a very low level of language proficiency, regardless of their age. Nursery rhymes and poems are a valuable resource for teaching phonics and some language structures. Fairy tales, particularly illustrated ones, are absolutely suitable for children and adult learners of EFL since they create image and promote vocabulary and grammar acquisition alongside a variety of cultural aspects, like social norms of behaviour, for example.

Owing to its authentic language use, appealing story plots and special means of linguistic expression, literature is a great teaching tool for promoting motivation to read. Such motivation, as attested by many researchers, contributes to one's overall language and literacy development. Pedagogically speaking, literature has been proven to successfully engage learners in holistic learning experiences in which literacy and language skills are naturally acquired and practiced. It also has the great potential for constructing and expanding learners' knowledge of themselves/ about others, which promotes cross-cultural awareness and critical thinking skills.

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LE MANUEL NUMÉRIQUE INTERACTIF EN CLASSE DE FLE

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Rezumat

În ultimii 30 de ani, revoluţia cauzată de migrarea ediţiilor scrise de la formatele clasice – tipărite - către formatele digitale – electronice - a provocat o schimbare majoră şi asupra manualelor utilizate de actorii procesului educaţional. Sistemele informatice mobile, cu multiple posibilităţi de vizualizare, editare şi control ale datelor digitale, ce permit o comunicare eficientă şi oferă un spaţiu nelimitat de stocare reprezintă pre-condiţiile elaborării manualului digital. Manualul digital e-FLUX conţine un şir de opţiuni de adaptare la dispozitivele de vizualizare - calculator staţionar sau laptop, proiector multimedia, tablă interactivă de diverse modele - şi utilizează conţinuturi didactice în diferite formate electronice (executive - *.exe, *. apk, *. app; video - *.avi, *.mp4, *.mov, *.qt etc.; audio - *.mp3, *.raw, *.waw; grafice *. bmp , *.png, *. jpg, *.tiff; textuale – *.doc, *.docx etc.).

Cuvinte-cheie : manual, digital, interactiv, e-FLUX, FLE.

La définition simple du terme « manuel » renvoie à un ouvrage didactique ou scolaire renforçant les notions essentielles d'une discipline et qui offre une source de connaissance et d'enseignement/apprentissage de cette discipline. Selon Capul [8, p. 8], le manuel est un objet