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Teaching English literature in general educational institutions of Ukraine

Вивчення англійської літератури в загальноосвітніх закладах України

Summary. *This article deals with the role of authentic children's literature in foreign language teaching. The acquisition of a foreign language is a long and complex process in which language learners encounter a myriad of teaching methods and strategies. The importance of the study lies in the fact that literature, which is a crucial element of language and culture learning, is relatively neglected in foreign language teaching in schools. The aim of this paper is to explore, analyse and present, based on the scientific literature, the role of authentic literary works in language teaching, highlighting the advantages and at the same time describing the disadvantages and the difficulties encountered so that teachers can better adapt if they wish to use this approach in their own pedagogical repertoire.*

Literature contributes to a deeper knowledge and acquisition of the target culture and different languages and thus plays an essential role in the process of foreign language learning. Authentic, i. e. original, English-language literature provides teachers with an excellent opportunity to use appropriate language samples and examples to demonstrate real language use. The main purpose of using literature in foreign language classrooms is to promote learners' overall language skills [5; 6; 17; 21]. Literary texts contain many examples of real-life language that are not found in textbooks. At the same time, literature is often criticised as being inappropriate to learners' language level, challenging both syntactically and lexically.

The literature analysis and its synthesis are presented in detail in the article. This paper also introduces prominent scholars in the field and analyse the latest research on the study of literature in the English classroom in primary and secondary schools. Finally, conclusions are drawn, and the case for further study of the issue is argued.

Key words: *authentic, children's literature, English language, foreign language, Ukraine.*

Анотація. У статті розглядається роль автентичних творів художньої літератури в навчанні іноземної мови. Вивчення іноземної мови – це тривалий і складний процес, під час якого ті, хто вивчає мову, стикаються з незліченною кількістю методів і стратегій. Важливість дослідження полягає в тому, що під час вивчення іноземної мови у школі один із дуже важливих елементів пізнання літератури, мови й культури відходить на другий план. Мета статті – дослідити, проаналізувати та представити роль автентичних літературних творів у викладанні мови на основі літератури, висвітлити переваги та водночас пояснити недоліки і труднощі, які виникають при цьому, щоб учителі могли легко пристосуватися, якщо вони хочуть застосувати цей підхід у своєму педагогічному репертуарі.

Література сприяє глибшому пізнанню та засвоєнню цільової культури й різних мов, тому вона відіграє важливу роль у процесі викладання іноземної мови. Автентичні, тобто оригінальні, літературні твори англійською мовою дають учителям чудову можливість використовувати відповідні мовні зразки та приклади для демонстрації реального застосування мови. Основною метою використання літератури на уроках іноземної мови є сприяння розвитку всіх мовних навичок учнів [5; 6; 17; 21]. Художні тексти містять багато прикладів реальної мови з повсякденного життя, які неможливо знайти в підручниках. Література є ідеальним інструментом для підвищення обізнаності щодо використання мови, яку вивчають учні. Водночас літературу часто критикують за те, що мова літературних творів не відповідає мовному рівню учнів і є викликом як із синтаксичної, так і з лексичної позиції.

У статті детально представлено аналіз наукової літератури та її узагальнення. Описано погляди відомих авторитетів у цій галузі та проаналізовано останні дослідження щодо вивчення літератури на уроках англійської мови в початковій і середній школах. Сформульовано висновки за результатами аналізу, а також представлено можливості та обґрунтовано необхідність подальшого вивчення проблеми.

Ключові слова: автентична, дитяча література, англійська мова, іноземна мова, Закарпаття.

Introduction. Today, starting foreign language learning at an early age is increasingly accepted and encouraged. There is a greater focus on teaching English to young learners. Foreign language instruction in Ukraine begins in the first grade and is required until the 11th grade. Since 2005, the language policy-making documents have been following the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) [20]. The foreign language curricula in force, the document of the New Ukrainian School concept, clearly states that general secondary foreign language teaching aims to develop foreign language communication competence in direct and indirect intercultural communication, ensuring the development of other key competencies and meeting the child's various needs. This programme sets out the main tasks and objectives of foreign language teaching. Among other things, it places great emphasis on listening

comprehension of the content of authentic texts and reading comprehension of authentic texts of different types and genres [1]. It means that understanding authentic texts is a priority. But first, knowing what we mean by authentic texts is essential. Before the 19th century, books were not especially written for children's entertainment. But the 19th and 20th centuries brought the turning point. The changing attitudes towards childhood and children's development, along with the increased sophistication of print technology, led to the development of children's literature as a major industry. The twentieth century is known as the "Golden Age of Children's Literature" because many classic books were published then.

The textbooks, designed in Ukraine and based on the national curriculum guidelines, used by teachers of foreign language learners, strive to set clear teaching and learning objectives and provide a systematic approach to language syllabus design. However, despite efforts to make the textbooks more engaging and motivating for young learners, promoting the use of authentic texts is generally unsuccessful. These books mostly contain texts designed for study rather than enjoyment and authenticity. Therefore, it is self-evident that authentic foreign language children's literature can have an increased potential in the educational process.

Analysis of latest publications. To start with, we need to clarify what we mean by authentic children's literature in this study. In the field of literature, several definitions of children's literature can be found. We use J. Bland & Ch. Lütge's [4, p. 1] definition throughout this study. According to them, children's literature is a term "generally used to cover all literature for children and adolescents, including oral literature, reflecting the eclectic interests of children". We focus on English-language literary texts not published for teaching purposes or any educational context primarily aimed at children.

A considerable body of scientific literature exists on the role of children's literature in teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) or second language (ESL). Besides other scholars, S. Ahlquist, R. Lugossy, J. Bland, Ch. Lütge, G. Ellis, J. Brewster, I.-K. Ghosn, J. Kovács, É. Trenninné Benkő, S. McKay, P. Pardede, A. Wright dealt with the use of children's literature in teaching languages [2; 3, 4; 8; 11; 13; 21; 22; 27].

There are several reasons for using storybooks in foreign language classes. G. Ellis and J. Brewster [8] compiled a comprehensive list of reasons, and the author of the present paper would like to give a short summary of this. First, children love stories; they enjoy listening to tales, stories, and songs in their mother tongue, and by age 5–6, they become familiar with narrative conventions. That is why authentic children's literature can provide a perfect introduction to a foreign language. Authentic children's stories often contain repetitions, interesting words, rhythm,

rhyme, and memorable contexts. Stories are motivating, challenging and enjoyable, providing a positive attitude to other nations, cultures and languages. Children like role-plays and can become personally involved in a story through these activities. Literature can help children to create a link between their real lives, fantasy and imagination. When listening to stories in class, children participate in a shared social experience that may boost their self-confidence and encourage social and emotional development. While reading or listening to authentic stories, teachers can introduce or revise new vocabulary, and the exciting context may help to memorise how to use these words in different contexts. Listening to stories can develop pronunciation, and children can become aware of the rhythm and rhyme of the target language. Storybooks may present different cultures, thus encouraging cultural and intercultural understanding and acceptance. Language learning strategies can be developed through literature, e. g. listening for general meaning, predicting, guessing and hypothesising. Last but not least, literature has the potential to create cross-curricular links, linking a foreign language with other disciplines.

Problem statement. Today, there is a misconception among many teachers that the use of authentic children's literature in foreign language classes is not compatible with the communicative approach to language teaching. This worry, however, does not always mean that reading materials should be limited to 'useful' literature. As a result, this paper urges "a closer integration of language and literature in the classroom" [16, p. 27]. It is more important for literature to add something special to a language classroom rather than to replace other forms of materials.

This study aims to analyse and synthesise the scientific literature regarding the use of children's literature in teaching English as a foreign language. The main task is to gather and present the advantages and disadvantages of story-based language teaching. By highlighting the pros and cons, we can help practising teachers make better decisions about the content and methods of the teaching material.

Findings and discussion.

Advantages of Using Literature in EFL

This section of the present paper reviews the literature related to arguments that encourage using literary texts as a tool for language learning in general and specifically in a language classroom. Additionally, it analyses numerous study findings and perspectives regarding the significance of literary inclusion in EFL teaching that positively impacts learners' language skills, motivation, personality, creativity and thinking skills, etc.

Al-S. Shaima and A.A. Abdullah [25] categorised the advantages of the use of literary texts in the following way:

1. *Interactive potential of literary texts* – interaction can take place between a reader and the text in addition to conversation among pupils.

2. *Autonomy and extensive reading* – learner autonomy is the capacity or ability to learn independently, which can be supported by promoting extensive reading. Qualitative researches show that the extensive reading of picture books improved learners' language strategies, motivation, confidence and reading skills [15; 19; 12].

3. *Pedagogic contributions of narratives, poetry and drama* – these genres play different roles in the foreign language class (e. g. narratives can help learners to identify themselves with characters and plots without using artificial sentence patterns; poetry elicits different interpretations from the readers, and it may also contribute to native-like language acquisition; plays provide an authentic setting that aids in the acquisition of idioms, phrases and expressions as well as a natural way to practice conversational language [16].

4. *Cultural significance* – the “world” of a narrative is a created one, yet it can “give the foreign reader a feel for the codes and preoccupations that structure a real society” [7, p. 4].

5. *Motivation and subject matter* – children are naturally fond of stories and are always eager to listen to them. According to research, if reading motivation and reading for pleasure are encouraged, interest in reading in a foreign language can be sparked, which may positively impact the other characteristics that influence reading and related skills [8; 27]. In addition, reading literature lowers stress because it is written to be read for pleasure.

6. *Creative and analytical abilities* – another significant contribution of literature is its capacity to encourage and enhance learners' capacity for creativity and critical thought.

7. *Authenticity* – authentic texts are “intrinsically more interesting or stimulating than artificial or non-authentic texts” [23, p. 144]. The use of literature creates an authentic setting for language use.

Besides the previously mentioned advantages, several other pros can be briefly mentioned. C. Ferradas [9; p. 27] enumerates several positive effects of using literature in the language classroom. In short, she argues that literature can motivate learners and is often very thought-provoking. Moreover, literature helps learners improve their language skills and expand their vocabulary, not to mention that it is an excellent way of developing their cultural awareness [9]. A. Rai [24, p. 71] states that apart from developing the learners' four language skills, literature also helps improve different language areas, such as their vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation. V.-I. Koutsompou [14, p. 74] also writes about the positive effects of using literature in the language classroom, making the class

more “lively and motivating”. Several studies have found that children’s literature helps develop visual literacy and language learning competence. According to their results, children’s literature develops traditional language competencies, and visual literacy helps to understand the verbal and visual connections and interpretation of text illustrations.

Disadvantages of Using Literature in EFL

We should also mention that several researchers believe that the utilisation of literature in teaching EFL is not exceptionally compelling because of the special features of literary texts (complex language, unique usage, figurative meaning, etc.). Furthermore, the investigation of literary texts does not contribute to the learners’ occupational and scholarly objectives [21].

Some of the difficulties mentioned by J. Scrivener [26] are: 1) lack of vocabulary needed to understand a particular text; 2) which might result in students constantly using a dictionary; 3) the process of reading itself might be very slow compared to the time we spend on reading the same text in our native language; 4) not to mention that sometimes learners will understand individual words and still not get the whole meaning.

Moreover, F.D. Floris [10] states that literary texts and literary language itself might become a “hindrance” in an EFL classroom as it might seem “incomprehensible” at times. Furthermore, such texts tend to be quite long; in this case, the length of the text can also cause difficulties. Finally, C. Lima [18, p. 4] points out that the language of literary works can often be characterised by the “intentional bending and breaking of grammatical rules”, especially if the teacher decides to use authentic literature instead of graded or simplified reading materials.

Similarly, Savvidou identifies two reasons why literature is unsuitable for language instruction. First, literary language differs from non-literary language in that the creative literary style, such as poetry, may necessitate manipulating the syntax and lexis. Second, it takes more effort on the part of readers of literary writings to correctly interpret the meaning of texts that are removed from their immediate social context.

Another aspect that might cause difficulties is that choosing an appropriate reading material might turn out to be surprisingly challenging. However, even if the reading material is suitable, learners still do not wish to engage in the reading activities or read at all.

Practical recommendations. If teachers would like to apply children’s literature in English lessons, there is a wide variety of books to select from. Educators have to take into consideration the accessibility of the books. i.e. content accessibility, language accessibility, visual and cultural accessibilities. According to G. Ellis and J. Brewster [8], some of the most popular and recommended pieces of literature can be the following books to start with: “The Very Hungry Caterpillar” by Carle; “Brown Bear,

Brown Bear What Do You See?” by Martin and Carle; “Meg’s Eggs” by Nicoll and Pienkowski; “Princess Smartypants” by Cole, or “Jim and the Beanstalk” by Briggs. The use of these books can facilitate the language development and reading comprehension of English learners.

Conclusions. Taking into consideration all these positive and negative features, we have to admit that the number and efficiency of the advantages outweigh the disadvantages. Working with a piece of literature, a story, or a fairy tale is not an easy task. Students work hard, and throughout this process, they have to see the results of their efforts, and the possible outcomes can make their work more meaningful, purposeful and motivating [8].

It is also important to mention that choosing the appropriate piece of literature is not an easy task. If the teacher wants to use a storybook during the lessons, it must be accessible, valuable and relevant for children learning English. According to G. Ellis and J. Brewster [8, p. 19], teachers have to look for five main criteria when selecting storybooks: linguistic, psychological, cognitive, social and cultural aspects. In addition, teachers have to consider the text’s language level, literary devices, content/subject matter, illustrations and layout also profoundly affect children. The educational potential should also be considered (e. g. cross-curricular links, learning styles), children’s motivation is of utmost importance, values that the text may convey, global issues and the content itself.

Unfortunately, in Transcarpathia, most school children cannot access authentic foreign language literature at home or school. It is partly because of the poor socioeconomic status of Transcarpathian people and, on the other hand, because of the limited access to foreign language books, even at bookstores.

The main pedagogical implications of the present analysis of the scientific literature may be that:

- story-based education needs to be more widely disseminated and promoted among practising teachers (e. g. in-service teacher training courses about the use of children’s literature);
- English teacher candidates should be encouraged to use children’s literature while at university (e. g. special courses, pedagogical practice);
- school management should support the purchase of foreign language children’s literature;
- it would be worth contacting parents who might be supportive in this regard.

The writer of the present study is conscious of the potential limits of the paper. In the future, further studies can be made, e. g. a thorough analysis of the textbooks and coursebooks used in the English lessons in elementary and secondary schools in Ukraine. Based on the results, further pedagogical implications can be made.

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Навчання культури на уроках іноземної мови

Teaching culture in foreign language classes

Анотація. *Навчання культури нації, мова якої вивчається на уроках іноземної мови в сучасній українській школі, є надзвичайно важливим завданням у сучасному глобалізованому світі. Формування соціокультурної компетентності учнів полягає в тому, що національна культура різних країн вивчається на заняттях з іноземної мови. Зокрема, учні повинні усвідомлювати відмінності між рідною культурою, культурою, мова якої вивчається, та іншими культурами, а також набувати навичок подолання соціокультурних відмінностей. У визначенні способів викладання культури за основу беремо відмінність між поняттями «велика культура» та «мала культура». «Велика культура» містить літературу, класичну музику, архітектуру, історичних діячів, географію, основні цінності, погляди чи переконання, норми суспільства тощо, тоді як «мала культура» передбачає*