

Techniques Used by University Instructors in Teaching Short Story

Majeed Mohammed Midhin

Iraqi Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research
University of Anbar
Iraq
&
University of Essex
UK

Among all types of literature in general and fiction in particular, the short story is considered an effective tool in EFLT. It is not only attracting the students' attention but it is also self-motivating. Since it is relatively short and condenses, the short story is a valuable material for mastering the four language skills that is, listening, speaking, reading and writing. Therefore; the teaching techniques used by the teachers in teaching should be reasonably chosen. The real value of using these techniques lies in the fact that as much as these techniques are varied, they lead to a successful and fruitful process of learning a foreign language. It is hypothesized that the current techniques that are used in teaching short story are in need to be developed in order to meet the student's needs. These teaching techniques must be effective and make the students of English departments acquire different skills without concentrating on limited skills such as reading and memorizing only. However, literature plays a vital role in teaching English as a second language. The use of literature for EFL classes presents valuable materials for the in-class and out of class activities of language teaching, learning and practice. Stern emphasizes that teaching literature in foreign language classroom help to master the four skills of language namely reading, writing, listening and speaking.

Besides, they help students to master the vocabulary and grammar of the language and develop the four levels of thinking, viz, literal, inferential, analytical and evaluative.¹ This is so because literature can open horizons for students to question, interpret, connect and explore. Literature then, cans the vehicle to improve students' overall language skills. It can expose students to a wide variety of styles.² The short story as a part of literature acquires a great importance in teaching English as a foreign language. It not only attracts the students' attention, but also links their personal experiences to the contents which contribute greatly to their reading development. Through teaching stories, the students can learn new words and expressions. Their minds become accustomed to the syntactic and structural patterns of the new language they are learning.³ Because of its shortness and abundance of themes, it becomes a challenging activity in teaching process.

Also the techniques that are used in teaching the short story cannot satisfy all the needs of the students. So, it is the responsibility of the instructor to choose the correct and suitable technique that enables him to pass to his students the ideas of the writers. The primary purpose of learning a foreign language is to acquire the ability to communicate ideas, feelings, meanings and attitudes in the foreign language.⁴ It is clear that it is the instructor, through the teaching techniques he uses, who decides the form and content of classroom interaction⁵. It follows that the techniques used by instructors are the only vehicle available inside classroom that help students learn and have experience to achieve the objectives set beforehand.⁶ Therefore; the mission of the story instructor involves imparting and developing notions of taste, assessing validity and the ability to recognize beauty.

¹L. Susan Stern, "Expanded Dimension to Literature in ESL/EFL: An Integrated Approach" in Forum, Vol.XXV, No. 4(Washington, 1987), p. 47.

² J. Langer, "Literacy acquisition through literature", Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy, 40(1997), p. 607.

³ J. Fitzgerald, "Literacy and Students Who are Learning English as a Second Language," The Reading Teacher, 46(8)(1993), p. 643.

⁴ P. Gurrey, Teaching English as a Foreign Language (London: Longman, Green and Co.Ltd., 1969), p.168.

⁵ Raja T. Nasr, The Teaching of English to Arab Students (London: Longman Green & Co.Ltd, 1963), p.163.

⁶ Mary Ashowrth, Beyond Methodology: Second Language Teaching and the Community (London: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 124.

Accordingly, the instructor needs to consider a variety of strategies that provide the students with the analytic abilities with enjoyment rather than subject matter.⁷

As far as short story is concerned, Brinton et al emphasizes the importance of teaching techniques to acquire foreign language skills and enhance students' literary oral development.⁸ Unlike the novel, the short story is comparatively easier in terms of length and shortness. The short story is more suitable to the needs of the Iraqi students of English as a foreign language. It is a recent genre that developed mainly in the 20th century.⁹ So its language is modern in comparison with that of the 18th and 19th century's novels being taught in Iraqi universities. Hence, these techniques need more attention and deeper investigation. Harrison and Arnold states that the teaching of literature in general and short story in particular is a difficult task since literature is a manifestation of verbal culture and cannot be filtered out or separated from language.¹⁰ It is an art that reflects, as Lazer indicates, an imitation of life to which the teacher of literature could be a magician with a key in his hand.¹¹ In addition to the fact that not all the students appreciate literature, the teaching effective techniques used by instructors are good means to motivate them. Here, his genius appears to guide his students to full understanding of literary texts. However, the difficulty of teaching literature lies in deciding the ideal or systematic approach, effective method, or most appropriate techniques in TEFL used by instructors of literature at the university level. It has been found that the lecture dominates the teaching of literature. In doing so, there is a little interaction between the teachers and the learners. This means that the students have no chance to express themselves or to show any literary tendencies. The problem is that lecturers at the Iraqi universities try to do their best to achieve a successful lecturing situation. Surveys conducted by Al-Jezaire and others show that the majority of university students graduate without ever attaining the objectives of the teaching of English literature in their language classes. In addition, teaching literature is rather a challenging affair. It is not a mere translation into mother tongue. This is one of the defects that are committed by majority of instructors. They teach literature for its own sake. They are after finishing the syllabus. In doing so, the subject of literature loses its values as a means of language teaching. For the aim of this study, it is important to shed light upon the basic definition of two terms; technique and short story.

As regards technique, there is no certain definition for the term "Technique ". It is defined differently by many specialists. Good defines technique as "an instructional procedure designed to relate to the student the material being presented in order to facilitate learning."¹² It is defined by Anthony as referred to by Allen claims that a technique "is implementational - that which actually takes place in a classroom"¹³. It is a particular trick, stratagem or contrivance used to accomplish an immediate objective."¹⁴ For Cobuild technique is defined as "a particular procedure of doing an activity, usually a procedure that involves a particular skill."¹⁵ As far as short story is concerned, Esenwein defines it as " a brief, imaginative narrative, unfolding a single predominating incident and a single chief character, it contains a plot , the details of which are so compressed, and the whole treatment so organized, as to produce a single impression."¹⁶ While Miller et al states that a short story is "a fairly short prose narrative that is carefully crafted and usually tightly constructed."¹⁷ Are used to enhance students' thinking.

⁷ Rachell I. Wright , "Teaching Literature," in English Teaching Forum, Vol.31, No.2 (April, 1993), p. 2.

⁸ D. Brinton, et al. Content-based Second language instruction (New York: Newbury House, 1998), p. 2.

⁹ Jermy Hawthorn, Studying the Novel (London: Closet Private Ltd, 1987), p. 44.

¹⁰ B. Harrison and Arnold E. Arnold English as a Second and Foreign Language(London :Longman, 1973), p.46.

¹¹ Gillian Lazar, "Literature and Teaching: Exploring Literary Texts with the Language Learner" TESOL Quarterly, Vol.30 (Winter, 1996), P.74.

¹² Carter V. Good, Dictionary of Education (3rd edition) (New York: McGraw Hill Book Company, 1973), p. 591.

¹³ Carter V. Good, Dictionary of Education (3rd edition) (New York: McGraw Hill Book Company, 1973), p. 591.

¹⁴ Edward M. Anthony, "Approaches, Methods, and Techniques," in Teaching English as a Second Language, ed. by Harold B. Allen(USA : McGraw-Hill Book Company: 1965), p. 96.

¹⁵ Collins Cobuild, English Language Dictionary (London :William Collins Sons and Co. Ltd., 1987), p. 1501.

¹⁶ J. Berg Esenwein , "What is a Short-Story" in What is the Short Story ? by Eugene Current-Careia and Walton R. Patrick(USA: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1961), p. 56.

¹⁷ James E. Miller et al. The United States in Literature(USA: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1989), p. 960.

Literature offers rich and different kinds of oral and written materials to the learners of any language.¹⁸ McKay argues that using literature for teaching English as a foreign language provides three major benefits for learners.¹⁹ These are;

- 1-It demonstrates the importance of authors' choice of form to achieve specific communicative goals.
- 2-It is an ideal resource for integrating the four skills.
- 3-It raises cross-cultural awareness.

However, the relationship between language and literature cannot be separated. It is an intimate one. Teaching language in isolation from literature will not move students toward mastery of the four language skills.²⁰ Each has a professional side to be offered in the development of a well-rounded student. Literature teaches idiomatic language and cultural context; it can also improve reading and comprehension skills, promote correctness in speech and writing and encourage students to read for enjoyment. In addition, Erkaya points out that by integrating literature in curricula, students can learn the four skills more effectively because of the literary, cultural, higher-order thinking, and motivational benefits.²¹ To achieve these benefits, EFL instructors should choose carefully teaching techniques that meet the needs of their students. Nowadays, the use of literary material in language teaching is recommended since language learners become familiar with a process of engagement through which the learners begin to feel a sense of involvement with the target language.²² Throughout the past century (1960-1980), there was the belief that if students were exposed to the best of literature, they would somehow become proficient in the language, specifically English.²³ This belief did not give the expected hopes because of the approach used. During this period the Structuralism Approach was concerned with correctness of grammatical form and not with content, interpretation of the written word or style. Also the grammar exercise books proliferated and teachers were mainly concerned with correctness of grammar use.

Later on and with the appearance of the Communicative Approach in the late 70's and early 80's, literature as a teaching tool becomes prominent. There was a tendency in the EFL classroom to teach usable and practical contents. So dialogues proliferated as a means of communication and gave the EFL student the necessary tools to communicate in the most practical manner.²⁴ After being a notable source of material, literary texts have been considered a valuable variety for the ESL/EFL classes to supplement materials for the in-class and out of class activities of language teaching, learning and practice. This interest in using Literature in language teaching lies in three interrelated elements: authenticity, culture and personal growth. Firstly, literary texts can be more beneficial than informational materials in stimulating the acquisition process as they provide authentic contexts for processing new language. Also containing real examples of grammatical structures and vocabulary items, the literary texts raise learner's awareness of the range of the target language and increase their competence in all language skills.²⁵ Secondly, using literature in language teaching has the advantage of providing cultural information about target language. It provides a link between language and culture.²⁶ Lastly it encourages personal growth and intellectual development.²⁷

Literature in general, with special reference to short story, offers the learners of EFL potential benefits in many fields. It, therefore, occupies a special place in the teaching foreign languages to non-native speakers. This applies to English as a foreign language especially in the following fields:

¹⁸ S.D. Krashen, *Principles and Practice in Second Language Acquisition*(London : Prentice –Hall International, 1987), p. 183.

¹⁹ S.L. McKay, *Literature in the ESL Classroom* in C. Brumfit and R. Carter (Eds.), *Literature and Language Teaching* (Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 319.

²⁰ L.A. Abulhajja (1987), *English language and literature in EFL situations*. Retrieved July 12, 2000, from the ERIC database.

²¹ O.R. 21Erkaya, *Benefits of Using Short Story Stories in the EFL Context*. *Asian EFL Journal*, 8(2005), pp.1-13.

²² J. Collie and S. Slater, *Literature in the Language Classroom*(Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 5-6.

²³ M. H. Short and C. N. Candlin , " Teaching Study Skills for English Literature" in C. J. Brumfit and R. A. Carter, eds., *Literature and Language Teaching* (Oxford : Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 91.

²⁴ J. Langer, " Literacy acquisition through literature," *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, 40(1997), p. 6.

²⁵ J. C. Povey, *Literature in TESL Programs: The Language and Culture in* H.Allan and R. Campbell(Eds.), *Teaching English as a second Language*(New York: McGraw-Hill, 1972), p. 187.

²⁶ Robert Lado, *Language Teaching : A Scientific Approach*(New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1964), p. 151.

²⁷ Roland Carter and Micheal N. Long, *Teaching Literature*(New York: Longman, 1991), p. 2-4.

1-The linguistic field

Because of its relative shortness and concentration, the short story is usually considered the perfect literary type to help university students master the basic skills of the English language. The short story is suitable to this end as it can help students enrich their vocabulary and provide easy reading of high interests, and profit.

2-The cultural field

The short story can provide university students with deep insight in the culture of the language they are learning. This can help them secure efficient and trusted learning as it deepens their understanding of the way language work in relation to its native speaker's habits and attitudes. Being the most accessible category of literature, the short stories provide a mirror to the life and cultural context of the target language. Marquardt states that " knowledge of the deep structure of the target language and of the underlying values, assumptions, beliefs and inter group attitudes of the culture are now seen to be as important in the real mastery of a language as the usefulness of the using of pattern of every day speech."²⁸ This is highly relevant to the use of the short story in language teaching. So the study of culture through the short story is probably the best way to obtain a full mastery of English as a foreign language.

3- The Aesthetic Field

Among all types of literature in general and fiction in particular, the short story provides the best way to acquire unique aesthetic and intellectual experience. The short story is short, direct, and accessible by university students. So, it offers a comparatively easy way to master its formal elements and properties, like plot, characterization, theme, style, point of view, etc. These elements provide great opportunities for the learners to practice critical and linguistic skills. Students can respond, analyze, or identify any of these elements in a relatively short piece of writing and a limited context. The short story, moreover, motivates students to have the desire to develop their habits of reading both in and out the class. This can be achieved since short story can be highly stimulating, interesting and enjoyable.

1- Approaches of Using Literature in ELT

There are many approaches in the use of literature in the TEFL classroom. These approaches are:

1-1Language Based Approach

In this approach literature is used as a resource which provides stimulating language activities. These can be simply explained in finding the verbs in a paragraph from short story, or as complex as writing the continuation of a paragraph. Such an approach enables learners to access a text in a systematic and methodical way in order to exemplify specific linguistic features, e.g., literal and figurative, direct and indirect.²⁹ This approach concentrates on specific linguistic goals. Carter and McRae describe this approach as taking a "reductive" approach to literature since literature is used in a rather purposeless and mechanical way determined by the teacher.³⁰ According to this approach, the instructor can choose an extract presented with deletions in text and that makes the students focus on the vocabulary and the author's style. The instructor in class groups can make suggestions about the deleted words by drawing on their understanding of the style and the language that is used in the text. It will draw the students' attention to syntax. This will develop the students' awareness of how the text is constructed. Moreover, the instructor can cut up the extract into sections and the group of students will speculate on what is going to happen in the next section. However, in this approach there is little engagement of the learner with the text other than for purely linguistic practice. El-Sayed argues that literary texts are used for reading and writing purposes only.³¹ This leads both the teacher and students to focus on certain aspects of the text and analyze them according to author's linguistic devices.³²

²⁸ Albert H. Marckwordt , *The Place of Literature in the Teaching of English as a Second or a Foreign Language*(California : East-West Center, 1987), p. 185.

²⁹ C. Savvidou , *An Integrated Approach to Teaching Literature in the EFL Classroom*. Consulted January 2007 at <http://iteslj.org>, p. 3.

³⁰ R. Carter and J. McRae(eds.) *Language, Literature and the Learner*(Harlow: Addison Wesley Longman, 1996), p. 78.

³¹ A.M.M. El-Sayed, "Status of English Instruction in Gulf," *Indian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, xlx, 1(1993), p. 76.

³² C. Dicker, "Introducing Literary Texts in the Language Classroom," *English Teaching Forum*, xxvll , 2(1989), p. 6. For more explanation, see M. R. Zughoul , *Formulating Objectives for the English Departments in Arab Universities*(Dirasat: A Research Publication of the University of Jordon, 1985), p. 101

1-2 Content Approach

This approach takes the content of the literary piece as a starting point. It intends for the student to analyze and interpret the literary piece. It uses the social, political and historical background of the text which found expressions in biography of the author, genre and everything that can help the student understand the content of the piece and the circumstances that surrounded the period when it was written. Brinton et al states that content approach is "the integration of a particular content [e.g. literary work] with second language aimsIt refers to the concurrent teaching of academic subject matter and second language skills ".³³ According to Krashen, in content approach, students can acquire the content area of the subject matter with comprehensible input, and simultaneously increase their language skills.³⁴ To achieve the goal of language skills improvement, Krashen emphasizes that the focus of the teaching is on the authentic and meaningful input, not on the grammatical form.³⁵ In the content approach, there are two types of models. The first type is a theme-based model in which selected topics or themes provide the content for students to learn.³⁶ From these topics, EFL teachers should extract language activities which follow naturally from the content material. In this respect, Krashen and Terrell (1998:85) suggest that EFL teachers must choose reading texts at an appropriate level of complexity and the topic has to hold students' interest to increase their motivation for learning.³⁷

The other type of the content approach is the adjunct model. This model rather emphasizes the importance of concurrently teaching the academic subject matter and foreign language skills. EFL teachers have to design various teaching activities that combine four modes, i. e. speaking, listening, reading, and writing in order to enhance students' literacy, oral development, and thinking skills positively. To achieve this enhancement, Krashen advocates that using one extended text, such as a novel or a short story, can help students develop familiarity with a particular literacy style and later promote their literacy development.³⁸ As a result, reading instructors need to relate to the EFL students' background knowledge for better reading performance. Lin proves that through reading stories, students not only get involved when they are reading , but also link their personal experiences to the contents , which are positive to their reading development.³⁹

1-3 Personal Growth Approach

In this approach, students are encouraged to express their opinions, feelings, and make connections between their own personal and cultural expressions and those expressed in the text. The students constructs meaning on the basis of their own experience. Carter and Long state that the personal growth approach is an attempt to bridge the gap between the previous two approaches.⁴⁰ This approach highlights the need of the students' personal engagement with the reading of literary texts. It focuses on the use of literature as a resource and not on the study of literature, or as Carter and Long put it "the knowledge of and the knowledge about literature ".⁴¹

The first one involves the reading of literary texts within the academic setting of literary studies. It deals with the knowledge and use of critical concepts and literary conventions which is often required by students in talking and writing about literature. As opposed to this, using literature as a resource or the knowledge of literature aims to the development of language competence and literary competence of the students. It is better expressed in terms of the pleasure and personal fulfillment which come out of the reading of literature. Accordingly, this approach aims to infuse a continuous love and appreciation of literary texts, which would continue beyond the classroom.⁴² Moreover, the personal growth approach concentrates on the pedagogical role of the teacher as an educator who has the ability for transmission of knowledge rather than as the infallible possessor of knowledge who gives his/her lectures for the sake of implementation of a syllabus .This situation will lead them to ignore or miss the real communication with the students.

³³ D. Brinton, et al. Content-based Second language instruction (New York: Newburry House, 1989), p. 2.

³⁴ S. D. Krashen, Principles and Practices of Second language acquisition (Oxford : Pergamon Press, 1982), p. 4.

³⁵ Ibid., 42.

³⁶ D. Brinton, et al. Content-based Second language instruction, p. 7.

³⁷ S. D. Krashen and T. D. Terrell, The natural approach: Language acquisition in the classroom(New York: Prentice Hall International, 1998), p. 85.

³⁸ S. D. Krashen , The input hypothesis: Issues and implications(New York: Longman, 1985), p. 134.

³⁹ W .S. Lin, "The Theory and Practice of Literature group," Journal of Education Research(2004), p. 126.

⁴⁰ Roland Carter and Micheal N. Long , Teaching Literature(New York: Longman, 1991), p. 92.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 3-4.

⁴² Ibid., p. 3-6.

On the one hand the teacher is going to encourage his students to read and appreciate literature. Thus, he contributes to their emotional and psychological growth. On the other hand, the teacher should motivate the students in the literature by selecting appealing works to which they can respond linguistically and emotionally so that the process of reading should be an enjoyable, responsive, individual and collective experience for all.⁴³

The personal growth approach highlights also the necessity for developing the students' critical awareness so that they become critical readers of literary texts and not passive accumulators of whatever is being taught to them.⁴⁴

Another aspect of personal growth approach is that it helps learners develop knowledge of ideas and language content through themes and topics. This function relates to theories of reading which emphasize the interaction of the reader with text. As Cadorath and Harris point out "text itself has no meaning, it only provides direction for the reader to construct meaning from the reader's own experience".⁴⁵ In this respect, learning is said to take place when readers are able to interpret text and construct many on the basis of their own experience.⁴⁶ These three approaches differ in teaching literature. What is needed here is an approach to teaching literature in the EFL classroom which attempts to integrate these elements in a way that makes literature accessible to learners and beneficial for their linguistic development.

2-The advantages of Using Short Stories in TEFL

Today reading has become a minor activity in people's lives with globalization, technological program and a fast-growing media industry. In Universities, student's interest is increasingly difficult to stimulate, especially when it comes to literature in the English Second Language classroom. Students are to fast information input without necessarily having to become active themselves; they lose concentration easily when the learning programs taken too long or they lose patience when they do not understand right away. However, the use of short stories in the English Foreign Language Classroom is one solution to motivate students for learning. Using stories is considered an effective tool in teaching FL. Collie & Slater list the advantages of using short story for language teachers. They point out that short stories are practical as their length is considered enough to be covered entirely in one or two class sessions; they are not complicated for students to work with on their own; they have a variety of choice for different interests and tastes; and they can be used with all levels, ages and classes.⁴⁷ Spack highlights the importance of story selection and states that a teacher should choose stories that would interest students, enjoyable to be read and taught.⁴⁸

Moreover, the stories have been long recognized as an important part of healing, self knowledge, personal and spiritual vehicle for connecting the listeners to other people, it is a means for understanding ourselves and others. Stories are used to construct meaning and communicate with other people. They can help to recognize and make sense of life experience. Nelson states that stories are widely employed as a powerful medium of teaching and learning since they are believable, remember able, and entertaining.⁴⁹ They deal with human or human like experience that the learner lends to perceive as an authentic and credible source of knowledge. Burner suggests that stories invite...indeed demand...active meaning making and they develop the "landscape of the action" and the "landscape of consciousness...the element of human intention. He also states that stories can create emotional attachment to goodness, and a desire to do the right thing.⁵⁰ Stories provide a wealth of good examples that are often missing from the learner's day to day environment and they familiarize youngsters with the codes of conduct they need to know and they help to make a sense of life. Jackson explains that stories can be used as instruments of transformation, as well as information, since they lead to a personal growth.⁵¹ This In turn can function as motivators, and source of encouragement to adult learners.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 16-19.

⁴⁴ N. Zafeiriadou, "On Literature in the EFL Classroom". Consulted February 2007 at <http://tesolgreece.com/nl/71/71.4.html>, p. 1.

⁴⁵ J. Cadorath and S. Harris, "Unplanned Classroom Language and Teacher Training", *ELT Journal*, 52/3 (1998), p. 188.

⁴⁶ N. Zafeiriadou, "On Literature in the EFL Classroom," p. 2.

⁴⁷ J. Collie and S. Slater, *Literature in the Language Classroom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 196.

⁴⁸ R. Spack, "Literature, reading, writing, and ESL: Bridging the gaps," *TESOL Quarterly*, 19(1985), p. 142.

⁴⁹ O. Nelson, O. Storytelling Connections: Ways to catch children's imaginations and excite them about learning (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1995), p. 386.

⁵⁰ J. Bruner, *Acts Of meaning* (Cambridge: M.A.:Harvard University Press, 1986), p. 103.

⁵¹ N. Jackson, *Different ways of relating events in narrative: Across linguistic development study*(Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum, 1995), p.

Stories can also enable learners to develop "more efficient listening, more fluent speaking and the ability to read and write easily and completely."⁵² Davis states that stories have the potential to build authentic communities of shared meaning and values, and they are effective in affecting the way people think and behave, since listeners like to hear and retell stories, their imagination will increase and their way of thinking will develop.⁵³

Bettelheim, a Freudian psychologist, argued that stories are symbolic expressions of the inner experience of development in learners. Stories connect beginner learners to psychological realities and folk tales assist them in their imaginative growth.⁵⁴ Applebee claims that stories are important teaching tools and that beginner learners need folk tales when both examined learner's reactions to folk stories and they found that learners made connections between the plots and events in books by connecting their own life experiences to that of fictional characters.⁵⁵ This has encouraged more educators to take stories seriously and to incorporate them in teaching and learning environment. Egan (1997:34) believes that the educative and creative value of stories is the primary function of narrative expression, for him stories are tools of activity, that create an integrated and educated mind, and he also suggests that stories, both in format and presentation, are essential pedagogical tools for teaching and learning because stories enhance the students ability to reflect and develop relationships between the text, teller and themselves.⁵⁶ As a result, these relationships support the students' comprehension, listening and interaction with others. Stories are also tools that link learners to the social world of the learning environment. For all its advantages narrative stories are considered to be an important and essential instrument in the teaching and learning process.⁵⁷ Therefore; the techniques used by the teachers should be reasonably chosen.

3-The Objectives of Teaching Short Story

In teaching a short story for language learning, there are different kinds of objectives that require due attention, and these include the personal, the national and the aesthetic fields. There should be a list of objectives which is usually set forth in the college syllabus; this list often resembles what is experienced in the language class itself. However; in determining the objectives of language learning, we should take into consideration the individual, national, pleasurable and useful needs. These objectives should be chosen in a way that can be noticeable in the students' achievements. As far as our colleges are concerned, there are unfortunately many draw backs in determining these objectives. So, the main objective of teaching short story is the acquisition of pieces of information to be summarized such as the author's life story, the events acted by each character in that short story, etc. The focus of teaching short story is not only to help students comprehend the meaning that the author tries to express, but also to enhance students' thinking and language abilities, as well as study skills. Students have to learn vocabulary, discover questions, evaluate evidence individually and in group discussions, form judgments based on synthesis and analysis, and develop a coherent argument in support of a position.

Generally speaking, the objectives of teaching short story include the following:

- Build on students' educational background and personal experiences based on the topic of the story.
- Help students comprehend the meaning that the author tries to convey in order to enhance their reading ability.
- Provide the opportunities for peer cooperative learning.
- Enhance students' critical thinking & judgmental abilities.
- Develop students' aural /oral fluency by asking questions and sharing their feedback.
- Develop students' writing ability by writing an essay or comments related to the topic of the short story.

In addition to the above objectives, the modern trends of teaching a foreign language present new ones. It includes;

⁵² E. Garvie, *Story as Vehicle: Teaching English to young children* (Clevedon, UK : Multilingual Matters, 1990), p. 161.

⁵³ D. Davis, *Telling your own stories* (Little Rock, AR: August House Publishers, Inc., 1993), p. 66.

⁵⁴ B. Bettelheim, *The uses of enchantment* (NY: Knopf, 1977), p. 89.

⁵⁵ A.F. Applebee, *The Child's Concept Of Story* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1978), p. 34. For further explanation, see A. F. Favat, *Child and tale: The Origins of interest* (Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 1977), p. 57.

⁵⁶ K. Egan, (1997). *Members of Storytelling Association*. An article in the internet : <http://www.eldrabbary.net/roos/st-def.htm>, p. 34.

⁵⁷ N. J. Livo and S. A. Rietz, *Storytelling: Process and Practice* (Littleton, Co. libraries unlimited, Inc., 1986), p. 69.

- 1- The development of an appreciation for a short story which means an enjoyment of reading stories. Thus, as we know that enjoyment is one of the importance aims and effects of education, partly because we react negatively against that we have disliked.
- 2- The formation of civilized character through the modification and enlargement of values, or the development of the ability to think intelligently, maturely, and responsibly. Through reading short story students are going to see how other communities operate and how other cultures behave. By culture, Brooks defines it as “ all the attitudes and behavior patterns of the foreign societies as they appear in their arts and crafts, in their tales and myths and in their religion and everyday life situations.”⁵⁸ We cannot understand other people’s language fully until we see through their eyes these whom they call their heroes, what they have fought for, what accomplishments they prize and what they consider virtuous, courageous, honorable and good reputation.⁵⁹
- 3- The aesthetic field of teaching short story is important. It allows the students to realize the literary values of a short story as a serious and intelligent treatment of human life. The students should be able to view life through the author’s eyes and those of the characters in the story to make a comparison between those characters and his own every-day life experiences and events.⁶⁰
- 4- Learning hundreds of terms, words and expressions in the new language. This vocabulary storage must be accompanied by a list of structure patterns in which the students can make use of these words or expressions.
- 5- Reading a loud clearly and interestingly is artistic skill, it is however an effective practice and test of a student’s ability to read in general. In reading, the student is confronted with written sentences that have not spoken immediately before. This practice helps students to speak what they see written in a sentence. In addition, it encourages them to enrich their vocabulary. Short story can be considered as a source of reading because it is full of intonation, stress, juncture, and consonant and vowel instances of a foreign language.

4-Modern Approaches of Teaching Short Story

The traditional approach of teaching literature in general and short story in particular is teacher-centered approach or lecturing. According to this mode everything is determined by educators not learners and thus the role of their participation is minimized. With all states that the major aim is to ensure mastery of what is in books and in the educator's minds mostly through verbal communication.⁶¹ This approach is usually regarded as the lecture method where the sender of the message is the lecturer and the receivers are his audience of students.⁶² Today, lectures are still the most common form of teaching in universities. Their recurrent use may be ascribed partly to tradition and partly to economy. Hence, the lecture is the predominant and most common method of teaching in higher education.⁶³ Classroom where educators have long bemoaned the practice of spoon feeding college students.⁶⁴

The task of instructor is to teach something and to provide circumstances which will enable students to do something. Thus the instructor acts as a sender of an educational message. In this respect, Hills believes that lecturing is an example of communication in which there are two main types of the persons who are involved in the teaching/ learning process; the teacher and the student.⁶⁵ Moreover, the lecture is the single most widely used instructor activity in college classroom where educators have long bemoaned the practice of spoon feeding college students.⁶⁶ During the time assigned to the lecture, fifty minutes, the lecturer keeps on talking while the students are merely passive and unmotivated note-takers who learn from lectures through listening, observing.

⁵⁸ N. Brooks, *Language and Language Learning* (New York: Brace and Word Inc., 1964), p. 108.

⁵⁹ Robert Lado , *Language Teaching : A Scientific Approaches* (New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1964), p. 149.

⁶⁰ K. Thomas, K., " Teaching Literature and Human Values in ESL: Objectives and Selection," in *ELT Journal*, Vol. 33/2 (London:Oxford University Press, 1978), p. 135.

⁶¹ J. Withall, “Teacher-Centered Instruction and Learner-Centered Instruction in the International Encyclopedia of Education,” *Research and studies*, Vol.9 edited by Torsten Husen and T. Neville Postile the Waite(Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1985), p. 493.

⁶² Donald A. Bligh, *What’s the Use of Lectures?*(Middlesex: Penguin, 1972), p. 18.

⁶³ George Brown, “Lectures”, *The International Encyclopedia of Education*, Vol.5, Edited by T. Husen and T.N .Post-lethwaite.(Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1985), p. 2987.

⁶⁴ Elmer Ellis, “The Characteristics of Good Teaching in the College: Towards Better Teaching in College”, *Bulletin*, Vol.57, No.13 (Columbia: Columbia The University of Missouri, Mo.PLO., 1956), p. 10.

⁶⁵ Philip J. Hills, *Teaching and Learning as a Communication Process* (London: Croom Helm,1979), p. 13.

⁶⁶ Elmer Ellis, “The Characteristics of Good Teaching in the College: Towards Better Teaching in College”, p. 10.

Summarizing and note-taking⁶⁷ In fact, the lecture can only display information to the students but it cannot ensure that they learn it.

However, the dissatisfaction with lecturing as a method of teaching short story gives rise to a very serious need for an alternative approach that might function as a substitution or at least a partner to lecturing. Recently, two major approaches have come to supersede the traditional impressionistic and subjective method of teaching short story.

These approaches are:

- a) The Stylistic Analysis Approach.
- b) Learners Centered Approach.

These two approaches of teaching short story concentrate on the language, and they motivate and stimulate the students to participate actively in the learning process. They also assign a new role for students in the sense that the students contribute in the analysis of the text. In doing so, they will be creative. Also this process of analyzing the literary text leads to improve their ability to understand and use the foreign language more effectively. A further explanation of these two approaches will be introduced in the following pages:

4-1 The Stylistic Analysis Approach

Sopher defines stylistics as “the linguistic analysis which takes into account every factor contributing to meaning, i.e. content, organization, vocabulary, syntax, morphology and phonology.”⁶⁸ The central purpose of stylistic analysis of the fictional text is to demonstrate in concrete terms, both what has been communicated and how it has been communicated. Since literary communication operates through language, all literary analysis rests ultimately on linguistic analysis. In this regard, Rodger stated that “our task as English teachers is ...not to hand over predigested meaning, and concepts, but to teach our students to read and interpret for themselves by themselves...to be reasonably skilled and sensitive readers, able to feel and judge for themselves, with fidelity to the textual facts, in response to any work of literature they may choose to read...”⁶⁹ Widdowson has argued convincingly that if “we mean to develop the capacity in our students for independent understanding of a short story, we must find means of engaging them actively in the exploration of texts without simply telling them what to see.”⁷⁰ Many authors of EFL have indicated directions for a stylistic approach to the teaching of short story students are encouraged to draw on their knowledge of everyday language structure and use in their exploration of texts, and to relate their observations to perceived effects. Stylisticians are beginning to make claims for the usefulness of stylistics in the foreign language classroom as it was mentioned by Widdowson.⁷¹ The recent revival of interest in literature among EFL teachers has served to give them encouragement. The stylisticians began to direct their attention primarily to how a piece of narrative work exemplifies the language system, so they have treated short story as a “text” or a “message”. The stylisticians claim that stylistics help students to appreciate short story since “linguistic analysis” helps to make intuitions which help them to talk about the novel more articulately. Stylisticians stated the following principles as the main points or features of Stylistic Analysis Approach.⁷²

1. The greater our knowledge (detailed knowledge) of the workings of the language system is, the greater our capacity for insightful awareness of the effects produced by literary effects.

Without “analytic” knowledge of the rules and connections of normal linguistic communication, we can’t adequately validate the interpretations of language either for ourselves or for others.

2. The principle analysis of language system can be used to make our commentary produced in a literary work less impressionistic and subjective.

⁶⁷ Nelson Salasar, “A New Approach to Teaching Literature,” Forum , Vol.30, No.2(1992) , p. 31.

⁶⁸ E. Sopher ,“An Introductory Approach to the Teaching of Scientific English to Foreign Students” in ELT Journal ,Vol.43,No.2(London: Oxford University Press, 1976), p. 63.

⁶⁹ A. Rodger, “Linguistics and the Teaching of Literature,” in H.Fraser and M. O’Donell, Applied Linguistics and the Teaching of English (London: Longman Ltd., 1969), p. 89.

⁷⁰ H. G. Widdowson, Stylistics and the Teaching of Literature (London: Longman Ltd., 1975), p. 66.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² S. Chatman, Literary Style: A Symposium (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 54. The same view is shared by M.A.K. Halliday, Linguistic Function and Literary Style (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 93.

The EFL teacher should discuss a narrative work by giving more emphasis to language forms, i.e. grammar, vocabulary, choice of idioms, ...etc. what language teachers are usually aiming for is students to read stories in an “analytic” way or style which makes them in contact with the foreign language rules. To sum up, what is important is that the teacher of English can make use of this approach to give his/her students a better insight into the linguistic aspects of the short story they are studying, so that they can appreciate what they read and probably attempt to write something based on it.

4-2 Learners Centered Approach

The main idea of Mikhail Bakhtin’s Language based approach of teaching a short story lies in the “communicative teaching techniques” of teaching a foreign language.⁷³ These techniques emphasize one idea that is “who is speaking”, i . e. students rather than the teacher should do most of the work in and outside the classroom. Full involvement of students in the analysis, discussions and appreciation of the short story is the corner stone of this approach. The approach offers a vast range of experiences, and ideas for using a text and rewriting or introducing it in different modes, styles and forms. In this respect, Strevens states that “the student is not simply a passive recipient of teaching and not just a walking acquisition device.”⁷⁴ On the contrary, he brings to the learning/teaching process a massive contribution of his own, an active and interactive personality, energized by a profile of varied qualities and abilities that shape the way in which he learns. He is, in fact, an active agent who shares others their own experiences, perceptions and opinions. Students’ responses can be encouraged by moving away from theories which insist on the traditional techniques of teaching short story to theories that recognize each text as a part of the social communication, human life, and of course the historical moments in which they are located and interpreted. The main intention of this approach is not to teach students how to study literature from the literary critical or the stylistic view point. The primary aim is to use literary texts as stories for stimulating language activities. What the approach interested in is engaging the students interactively with the text, with fellow students and with the teacher. In this regard, the following points should be noticed:

1. The student is an active agent not a passive recipient. It is vital that the activities provoke genuine interaction between the learners and the text, and between the learners themselves and the teacher.
2. These activities should offer opportunities for the students to contribute and share their own experiences, perceptions and opinions.
3. Texts can be presented in a variety of ways. This sometimes means withholding the text until the end of an activity of using fragments of it only. Texts may also be presented in fresh contexts by juxtaposition with other texts or media.
4. The text is not the only element in the activity. Yet, the teacher can expand many activities out of the text.
5. Fowler demonstrates that:

The teacher in the language classroom can mediate according to this approach between the text and learner.⁷⁵ But the vital initial subjective response on which the “meaning” of the text needs to be based must come from the students if it is not be imposed. The implication of this comes from the teacher who devises ways of encouraging students to view the text as it relates to their own lives and society and to negotiate the meaning of the text as a group. As shown before, the technique of teaching literature requires an active interaction via the instructor and teacher respectively. It is the teacher’s duty to stimulate his/her students to acquire the feature of tasting literature.

⁷³ Geoff Hall, “Mikhail Bakhtin’s Language Based Approach to Literature: A Theoretical Intervention” in Christopher Brumfit, *Literature and the Learner: Methodological Approaches* (London: Modern English Publications at the British Council, 1989), p. 39.

⁷⁴ Peter Strevens, *Teaching English as an International Language from Practice to Principle* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1980), p. 10.

⁷⁵ R. Fowler, *Linguistic Criticism* (London: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 174.