Reading and the Study of Prose Literature

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ABSTRACT

Teaching prose literature reading of any language is basically an essential tool on which language learning revolves. Therefore, teaching prose literature has a lot of responsibilities attached with it. It is the most important task in the hands of a teacher to achieve the possible outcome. Teaching prose literature enables the students to understand any literary text, to read fluently, to enrich their vocabulary, to enjoy reading and writing. It enables them to extend their knowledge of vocabulary structures and to become more proficient in the four language skills. It develops the ability of speaking English correctly and fluently.

Teaching English prose literature is a major concern in our curriculum. It requires innovative measures in teaching prose and more active participation by students in teaching and learning experiences as well as feeling that both the teacher and the student in the classroom should make teaching and learning a more satisfying experience.

This paper addresses reading strategies and technical aspects associated with it. The main objective of teaching prose literature and how to develop the language ability of the students of the English language departments at our universities, where it requires intensive study of the reading skill of the language which in turn helps the language ability of the students and to use the English language without any problem.

Keywords: reading, prose teaching , reading strategies, English teaching.
يتطلب اتخاذ تدابير مبتكرة ومشاركة أكثر نشاطا من قبل الطلاب في تجارب التعليم والتعلم بالإضافة إلى الشعور بان كل من الأساتذة والطلاب في الفصل الدراسي عليه أن يجعل التعليم والتعلم تجربة أكثر إرضاء.

تتناول هذه الورقة استراتيجيات القراءة والجوانب التقنية المرتبطة بتدريس الأدب النثري وكيفية تطوير القدرة اللغوية لطلاب أقسام اللغة الإنجليزية في جامعاتنا، حيث يتطلب دراسته مهارة مكثفة في قراءة اللغة والتي بدورها تساعد على القدرة اللغوية لدى الطلاب، حيث أن دراسة الأدب بصفة عامة تساعد الطلاب على التطور من خلال تعلم اللغات الأجنبية وبالتالي يستطيع أن يكيف نفسه مع الانطباعات العربية، لتجهيز نفسه لأخذ المعرفة والتفكير في اللغة الجديدة.

الكلمات الرئيسية: القراءة، تعليم النثر، استراتيجيات القراءة، تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية
Introduction

Etymologically the word "prose" is derived from the Old French "prose" which in turn originated in the Latin expression “prosa oratio” which means "literally straight forward or direct speech." Prose is the written in words, phrases, sentences, paragraphs and chapters. Prose is made up of fiction and nonfiction. Fiction includes novels and different types of stories whereas nonfiction writing includes essays, autobiographies, speeches, journals and articles.

Reading prose literature is an interactive process and the chosen pieces must be examined to ensure successful text comprehension. Both the factors should be compatible; meaning that the text must be comprehensible to the reader thus reading becomes a pleasure. Many scholars have pointed out that a match between the text reading factors is essential for the reader to make sense of the written language that eventually ends in a focused reading process.

Maley [7] found out that successful reading depends on factors such as reader characteristics, text features, and instructional strategies. She identified that comprehension entails three components, the reader, text, and the activity. Additionally, Anderson [1] said that comprehension depends on a variety of reader-related, text-related, and situational factors. The proposed idea from these researchers is that apart from other factors, text-reader factors play a significant role in developing literacy skills.

Generally teaching English literature to non English speaking people is a difficult task. Several attempts have been made to simplify the process of this type of teaching. The main aim of teaching prose is to develop the language ability of the learners. It is the intensive study of a language. The language ability helps the students to use the English language without any problem.

Learning the reading prose literature is a new approach in the teaching of English language. It could simplified process of teaching and learning and it is more logical and natural. Such learning involves all the four skills are interlinked. Negligence of any skill will damage the learning process. Separate texts are assigned
for each learning activity. The titles of prose texts are selected as subjects for lectures.

The integration of reading prose literature component in the English language subjects is one of the programs implemented in English Departments in our Universities to improve, if not enhance, English language proficiency among the students especially in reading. Therefore the study examined the prose teaching steps in the literature component prescribed for students in Libya. This is to gauge whether the prose forms selected match the students’ needs to ensure the effectiveness of the intervention programs conducted.

The research question:

Teaching English prose is a major concern of all schools and colleges, but in what shape is it and how is it poised?, if at all, to take on new tasks critical to the development of awareness and understanding the young in an age of rapidly evolving information technology. Goodman takes this even further claiming that the most dramatic development that has taken place in the field of English language teaching in the last 50 years has been the shift in its primary function from being mainly the native language of nations such as the UK or USA, to being mainly a global means of communication, [5].

The speakers of English whose L1 is another language already vastly out number native English speakers, and the number of such countries is growing. For most of such learners, English is no longer remaining a foreign language.

Research methodology:

Active learning methodology is a form of activity based learning and it makes all students to participate in learning. In this method the students involve in reading, writing, speaking, sharing, expressing the skills and questioning individually and in groups.

This development has brought with it a number of changes in the principles and practice of English language teaching. Methodology books of the twentieth century typically talk of the culture of the English – speaking people as the ‘target culture’, Berardo [2] , assumes that reading texts in course materials should be
copied or adapted from ‘authentic’ texts from English speaking countries. He adds, courses today may include not only texts from English speaking countries, but also those written in English, or translated into it, from anywhere in the world. And in most teaching contexts, it is inappropriate to talk about a ‘target’ culture, meaning a native-speaker one. Most learners need to become aware of an international, cosmopolitan set of cultural customs, literature, art forms and so on, rather than those of a single community, [2]. It is therefore, more important in these days to foster multicultural awareness on the part of our students than to teach them particular codes of conduct or traditions. We cannot, obviously, teach them all the cultures of the world. However, we can expose them to a sample though our materials making them sensitive to the kinds of differences from their own cultures that they may come across and foster intercultural competence.

**The Study of Prose Literature:**

Up to this point we have been chiefly concerning ourselves with bringing the students’ skill in reading up to the standard at which he can read and enjoy newspapers and books in a foreign language. We may now ask ourselves whether there is a place for prose literature in an economical language course. First, we must be modest enough to admit by literature we mean writing better than most of us can write in a textbook. Cruz, said in this aspect and explained, if we mean whatever writing is excellent in its sphere and include any classics of old English writings, we shall see that we impoverish the course and its emotional and intellectual appeal by leaving it out. If we attach any importance to the value of mental set as an aid to learning, we must see that writing which appeals by reason of its charm and excellence, its splendor of thought and pattern and the musical rhythm of its sentences, has a very important part to play in the total effect which the language makes on the student. If we deprive it of its prestige we deprive it of its chance to survive except in odd corners as a curiosity, [4].

At the end of the course the language must be a possession which the student values and delights in for its own sake as well as for the power and adaptability
for us that may be latent in it. In the short view its appeal to him will depend in the
delight it gives him. The literature is a part of language, not a supplement to it.

**Teaching of Prose.**

Teaching the prose of a language is basically a tool on which language
learning revolves. Therefore, teaching of prose has a lot of responsibilities attached
with it. It is the most important tool in the hands of a teacher to achieve the possible
outcome. Teaching prose actually means teaching reading with comprehension. All
the four skills of language learning are to be developed by teaching prose. The main
aims of teaching prose are:

1. Literary aim.
2. Subject matter aim.

Both these aims have to be fulfilled by teaching prose. Teaching prose should
be intensive as well as extensive depending upon the need, the class and age of the
students. It includes the teaching of structures, the vocabulary, grammar, language in
general and the ability to achieve mastery on all the four skills of language learning.

If we try to sum up the general aims of teaching prose, they are:

1. To enable the students to read and understand with comprehension.
2. To develop the habit of loud and silent reading.
3. To enrich the vocabulary.
4. To help the students think imaginatively and develop creative writing.
5. To understand applied grammar and be able to utilize it effectively.
6. To be able to listen and understand and answer correctly with
   confidence and fluency.
7. To be able to fit ourselves in the real life situations.

**Introducing Prose Texts:**

In watching many lessons on prose texts Nuttall, is of the opinion in
increasing dissatisfaction with the process of bringing classes in contact with prose
literature due to stumbling, cumbersome reading that estranged rather than brought
near. When some teachers began to reject some years ago the method of teaching by
reading the piece line by line which made a major barrier to enjoyment and
understanding and that of course slowness the progress from difficulty to difficulty,
from obscure word to idiomatic turn of phrase.
It seemed as if a cactus hedge of difficulty and dullness was allowed by the teacher to grow in front of the piece which was to have been enjoyed; by the time the end of the piece was reached the beginning had either been forgotten or the conclusion was no longer a surprise or worth reading, [8]. If this was the result of tackling worthwhile prose literature, so that it ceased to be worthwhile in the process, surely we had better abandon the attempt and stick to textbookese. This was the way to make the learner hate what he was told he should like.

Even though, if the teacher had been given as the first rule when began to learn how to teach a foreign language he should always introduce the main words and sentence patterns of a prose text before he lets the students read it. It may seem too difficult and he may be questioned whether the rule was applicable once genuine literature was to be read. Yet again this was the way to teach fresh language at the beginner's stage. Could there be some real advantage in introducing the words which were unknown to the student but had to be known if the piece was to be fully grasped before we started to read it? It would at least mean that we could use them in different ways, perhaps in another setting, perhaps in the same setting but not bound to the actual theme of the piece, so that the reading could be quick and fresh, the climax not postponed by innumerable explanations. Could we cut down the number of explanations drastically? Were we bound to submit to the boredom of these laborious and toneless readings round the class?

At first we may have spent too long on the introduction of unknown words and phrases, but gradually we came to see that explanations which took us away from a natural discussion of the main theme of the piece were best dropped, and instead it was quicker, more economical and easier simply to let the words drift in and use them in various ways that made their use familiar, but left an exact definition, perhaps, to a later stage. We may have found that it is usually better not to forestall the impact of the piece by outlining the story or argument, but to begin with any experience anyone in the class, or may have a similar or comparable circumstances and make as much use as possible of the vocabulary which has to be introduced in developing this theme.
Establishing the Setting of a piece in the mind:

A description of a scene of any book or a story is difficult to grasp unless one has seen such a scene or has an imagination which is easily roused by words to see in the mind's eye images of what the writer wishes to convey, this is partly a matter of practice. Carter, takes this even further claiming that and said to grasp the relationship of the various setting, one must read the opening chapters of what he reads very attentively. This might not seem to be important for its own sake but attentive reading of the opening chapters puts the reader in the right mood and atmosphere for the experience of the rest of the book and helps the reader to submit himself to the intentions and spell of the author, [3].

So establishing the setting of any piece requires careful interpretation and attention to detail on the part of those who make it but, more than that, the words are recognized and give meaning by the work of the fingers. The following of the description and the recognition of the words and sentences are then very simple for everyone else. Language which altogether unfamiliar and even complicated is easy to identify and learn if the attention and interest are completely absorbed in the situation it explains. The significance of each item is instantaneously clear through the situation being clear.

Reading Prose Texts:

When the teacher judges that the class knows enough vocabulary and is familiar enough with the setting or theme of the piece to understand at least the gist of it, the teacher reads the piece over once, fairly quickly. If he had based his introduction on the board or by the Power Point program, he may be able to read any piece over and rely on any scene brought to his students' minds in this way to interpret what he reads and hold their eyes while he reads. He may point to objects mentioned as he reads about them. For the first reading their books are better shut, so that they can concentrate fully on what he reads as he reads it.

The teacher may have decide that the piece contains too many new words for to him to introduce them all conveniently in his preparation, if so, he can make a list of the most important, the most generally useful ones and introduce them first.
The less important ones he may divide up to bring into prominence successively, a few at a time at each reading. In this way each reading may have new interest and there will never be too many new words at any one time for the student to grasp.

We may find that reading the piece over aloud several times, with a break here and there to illustrate the use of a new word and to repeat it several times over to make its sound familiar, is the best way to help our student to understand the piece and know it well, sometimes we pause for words to be filled in by the class, perhaps pointing to a detail in picture to suggest the word. After several readings we open our books and individual are asked to read aloud, a sentence each, quickly with no pauses between sentences. After the first reading, each reader can read two sentences, after the second, three and so on.

If the period come to an end before the class have read it aloud they can be asked to read over several times silently at home before coming to the text lesson. It can also be suggested that they ask questions at home about the topic, so that they have some ideas for discussion when the time comes.

If the piece has been chosen by the teacher as suitable for his class at the stage they have reached because it involves the learning of new material but does not contain too many difficulties to the point of being discouraging, there may not be any words at all – not even unimportant ones – which have been left unintroduced when the piece is read through for the first time. We have to keep in our minds, when preparing for the exams, it is often hard to choose pieces precisely graded to the capacities of particular classes.

In reading sentences of unusual construction, one can substitute, in the first one or two readings an equivalent sentence of simpler construction, as soon as one sees from the reactions of the students that they have understood the sentence, one goes back to the reading of the sentence as it is in the text, possibly reading both – one after the other – if it is particularly difficult at a transition. In a study conducted by Leech, who says, we should make it a rule to follow every simplification, abridgement or gloss with a return to the original words of text because all these aids are designed, not to bring the ideas of the piece within
reach of the class in a simplified form or to provide the class with a cheap substitute, but to take them to the original. It is not to bring the text down to their level but to raise them up to the level of text, [6].

Studying a Text:

This final stage consists primarily of discussion but many include rereading of the piece. The teacher may then increase his students understanding of the niceties of language, noting the correct use of words, subtlety in the interpretation of words, the superiority of one word to another in a particular use and context. He may perceive evidences of tone and intention, sometimes from the style of writing other from the use of one word rather than another.

This is the stage at which real study of the text takes place, it is the stage at which discussion and exploration of the text is interesting, at which interests in the skill and personality of the author begins to justify some further research by a group of the class. It is the stage when the teacher can talk about the social and historical background of the piece, if he thinks it desirable. This background information has more value and significance after the piece has become familiar to the class. Then the interest aroused by the piece gives the subject a place and relevance in the minds of students and arouses interest in the personality of the author.

The essentials of prose materials reading

Helping the student from the elementary use of the language, with a limited vocabulary and simple constructions, to the understanding of reading material written for native speakers of the language, is not easy task, the teacher gives himself a greater chance of success if he delegates what responsibility he can to the members of his class. The responsibility for learning the language is essentially theirs, even if the teacher seems to carry it on their behalf. To pass it on to them in the last years of their course is an important element in the process of preparing them for independent use of the language after they have left college.

The essentials of the way of working are the careful preparation of the class for reading the prose piece by discussion, led either by the teacher or by a group from the class. This discussion lays foundations for the piece in the knowledge of
the class and leads up to introductory material – narrative, dialogue, drama or discussion – which will ensure that all the most important vocabulary and the main ideas of the piece are familiar before they are read.

Penny, takes this even further claiming that, no important words apart from those best grasped from their use in the piece, should be met for the first time in reading the piece through. The reading of the piece should, on no account, be a succession of explanations of words. It should be quick and well understood because the words will not only be understood but fairly familiar, [9]. If the teacher studied every text anew with an open mind every time he teaches it his presentation and reading will be fresh. The must be spontaneity in teaching and reading and a new approach, as if he was reading the piece for the first time, however, often he may have taught it. This calls for great concentration but he can get a fresh view of the piece by seeing it through the eyes of the group that presents it.

The discussion of the piece and the ideas arising from it can carry the class when there is a background of common consciousness of the piece and its main tenor. The discussion, if it is widely directed, can also bring out the meaning of whatever was not precisely understood before. It does not follow that because some words may not be clearly understood at the first reading and because we may be content with the student's getting the general drift of the piece at first, that there should be no effort at precise understanding. The gradual opening up of more and more of the meaning with repeated readings, the absorbing of new words organically and in their settings. The working over them and the ideas they signify, in discussion ensure an organic and fully conscious precise understanding.

CONCLUSION

The present study has provided insights into the reading and the study of prose literature for Libyans students in our universities and the need for careful consideration in future text selection practices. This is especially crucial to maintain students’ interest in reading literary materials in English. It is important to note that when text factors affect participants prose reading, it influences participants interest, their motivation to read and to understand a particular text. Prose literary
text-reader factors are inter-related as an imbalance between the factors would hinder the reading process.

In effect, precautionary measures should be taken to achieve the right balance between the prose text and the student for successful and meaningful reading comprehension to take place. When the right balance is found, students not only learn the English language, but they would derive pleasure, wisdom, and delight from their acquaintance with reading prose in literature.

The skill of prose literature reading plays a pivotal role in the life of every educated man. It is the useful skill for students who want to use English as a second language. Reading prose literature can play a significant role in language learning in general and English literature can be used in the language classrooms for effective language learning in our universities.

To conclude, teaching prose enables the students to understand the passage, to read fluently, to enrich their vocabulary and to enjoy reading and writing. It enables them to extend their knowledge of vocabulary and structures and to become more proficient in the four language skills. It develops the ability of speaking English correctly and fluently.

The review of prose in the field of literature teaching shows that a comprehensive practical approach of teaching prose for facilitating language learning in this approach needs a huge effort from both teachers and students. Anyone may say this subject matter fails to chart out the right courses of action in a language classrooms in our universities. So this paper explored how contextualizing prose teaching with a certain well-defined steps, offers an extensive variety of language learning opportunities to the students in our universities in Libya.


