



## The Use of Literature in English as a Foreign Language Teaching and Learning Process: The Relationship and Suggested Techniques to be Used in EFL Classrooms

Herminus Efrando Pabur<sup>1\*</sup>, Ismail<sup>2\*</sup>, Muhammad Ilham Ali<sup>3</sup>, Devilito Prasetyo Tatipang<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1,2,4</sup>English Education Department, Universitas Negeri Manado, Tondano, Indonesia

<sup>3</sup>English Language and Literature Study Program, Universitas Negeri Manado, Tondano, Indonesia

\* Corresponding Author. E-mail: [efrandopabur@unima.ac.id](mailto:efrandopabur@unima.ac.id)

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### Abstract

Literature, in a broad definition, can be defined as a term that denotes works such as drama, poetry, novel, and short story. From an educational point of view, literature can be utilized as a medium for teaching English as a foreign language. This study attempts to suggest the activities that can be used to maximize the prominent role of literature in teaching English skills and describe the relationship between literature and the English teaching and learning process. This study employs the qualitative approach with a library research technique. The data are collected from books and articles in various academic journals. The findings show that the relationship between literature and English teaching and learning is symbiotic and inseparable. Literature does have a really important role in teaching English as a foreign language: literature can be used in developing students' language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. However, the use of literature in English classes can be fully optimized when accurate methods or techniques are used. This study suggests that the use of literature to enhance students' language skills has to be done in integration.

**Keywords:** Literature, English Teaching and Learning, Literary Work, English Skills

### Introduction

Teaching English as a foreign language is not an easy matter. There are many things to be considered, such as the environment, approaches, and methods (Pandey, Hampp, & Andries, 2022). The method used can vary according to the teachers and the environment. Up to the late 1960s, the grammar-translation method is used widely in teaching English as a second or foreign language (Sharma, 2019). However, several studies show that the grammar-translation method is still

widely used in the EFL (English as a foreign language) context (Du, 2021; Milawati, 2019; Omar, 2019; Sawsakul & Lynch, 2021). It then indicates that teaching English in the EFL context has its own challenges. The challenges can be the teachers, students, curriculum, and even a country's beliefs.

English teaching and learning in the current time emphasize on developing students' communicative competence, both for ESL (English as a second language) and EFL contexts. Chang and Gosmawi

(2011) defines communicative competence as the knowledge of a language and the ability to use the knowledge in an unrehearsed situation. It means that English teaching and learning should not emphasize the accuracy aspects only, but also have to put emphasis on the fluency aspect. To make it so, many methods have been developed. The methods such as Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL), or Content Based CLT are some examples of the methods which are used to develop students' communicative competence.

It should be noted that there is no perfect method to be used in the English teaching and learning process. The perfect method is the method suited to the condition. In order to make the method useful in the learning and teaching process, teachers or instructors also need teaching media (Amhag, Hellström, & Stigmar, 2019; Sekeon, Rombepajung, & Kumayas, 2022; Yusuf & Ahmad, 2020). The media is used to help teachers and students. For teachers, media can be used as a tool that helps them to make the learning and teaching process meaningful. For students, media can be a good addition to the learning and teaching process so the students feel more engaged in the learning process. So, the role of media in English teaching and learning is very important (Albiladi & Alshareef, 2019; Oroujlou, 2012).

There are many media that can be utilized in the English teaching and learning process, one of them is literature. Literature, in general, is used to refer to any written material on a subject (Ihejirika, 2014). In a comprehensive definition, "literature is a broad term which usually denotes works which belong to the major genres: epic, drama, lyric, novel, short story, ode," (Cuddon, 2013, p. 472). Based on the aforementioned definitions, it can be generalized that literature is a media

used widely in the English teaching and learning process. Literature in the English teaching and learning process, especially in the EFL context, usually takes the form of short stories. As seen in many books used in English subjects in junior and senior high school, there are many short stories used to teach English. Another form of literature used in English class is simple poems. However, the poem used in the class is a simple poem or translated poem because the interpretation of the poem's meaning can be hard for the students, especially in the EFL context. The definitions provided before also indicate that literature has been used for a very long time in English class, the problem here is the prominent role of literature in English class is not fully maximized.

Many previous studies have emphasized the prominent role of literature in English class. Ihejirika (2014) asserts the prominent role of literature in English class by describing the relationship between literature and English as a symbiotic relationship. Yazan, Yazdanpanah, and Fraccascia (2020) define the term symbiotic as a cooperative relationship. It means that the relationship between literature and English teaching and learning is a cooperative relationship that benefits each other. Another study conducted by Hismanoglu (2005) investigated the use of literature as a popular technique for teaching both basic language skills and language areas. Keshavarzi (2012) and Can (2021) point out that the use of literature in teaching English can help the students understand the real use of language, the cultural values in the literature used and helps them to be critical thinkers.

Other previous studies also showed that literature in the form of novels, poems, and drama can be used in teaching English. The study conducted by Sasalia and Sari (2020) shows that English novels

can be an alternative way to enhance students' English skills, specifically reading. Another study, conducted by Firman (2022), claims that literature such as novels and poems can be used in English teaching and learning activities to improve students' writing skills. Several studies also show that drama is an effective teaching technique to improve students' English skills and enhance the teaching and learning atmosphere (Ewing, 2019; Luh, 2019; Zengin, Başal, & Yükselir, 2019). The last, findings from the study conducted by Cronin and Hawthorne (2019) show that poetry can be used to teach writing and improve students' reflective skills.

As previous studies have shown, literature can be used as a media and a technique in teaching English. Literature can also be used to enhance students' basic skills in English (listening, speaking, reading, and writing). However, this prominent role of literature is not fully maximized in the English teaching and learning process, especially in the EFL context. This study attempts to suggest activities that can be used to maximize the prominent role of literature mentioned before, so the prominent role of literature can be maximized in the EFL context, especially in teaching language skills. This work also attempts to explain the relationship between the literature and the English teaching and learning process.

### **Method**

This study employs the qualitative approach with a library research technique. Library research is defined as a method of examining and analyzing the data from existing literature available from various sources in order to gain new information, (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 80). This research was carried out by conducting a systematic review of the existing sources such as books and articles from various academic journals. The books and articles

selected are related to the topic of literature in the English teaching and learning process. In total, there are 3 books and 19 academic articles used in this research. The books and articles used were published from 2002 to 2022. The data were then analyze descriptively in order to describe the relationship between literature and the English teaching and learning process and to suggest the technique used to teach English skills using literature

### **Findings and Discussion**

#### ***The Relationship between Literature and English Teaching and Learning***

There is a close relationship between literature and English teaching and learning. Ihejirika (2014) describes the relationship between literature and English teaching and learning as an inseparable relationship. It means that it is hard to discuss literature without discussing language, and literature can be very helpful for English teaching and learning in understanding the use of language features in relation to the context. Furthermore, "Literature helps to develop the learner's linguistics performance ... It helps learners to develop fluency and the ability to comprehend what is read." (Iheirika, 2014, p. 86) It means that literature can help the students in understanding language in a better way. Literature offers knowledge on the use of language in a particular context. It then makes the students understand easily the function of language in its relation to a particular context. It also helps students in developing their reading skill. It means that language also needs literature in case of understanding language features. Then it can be

concluded that language and literature need each other.

Since literature and language need each other, “inclusion of literature in English classroom provides valuable authentic material, develops personal involvement and help contribute to readers’ cultural as well as language enrichment,” (Collie and Slater in Arafah, 2018, p. 25). By providing authentic material, teachers can teach their students how to use language features as the native speaker does. It also develops students’ personal involvement in case the students can reflect on themselves in relation to the context of the literature’s content. It then helps students to understand themselves and others. In other words, we could say that literature helps students become more mature. The last it helps students in developing their cultural awareness and language awareness. By using literature students can compare their culture with the culture where the literary works is published or is written. It then makes the students see how language is implemented in a particular situation which causes students see about the use of language. Furthermore, there are five reasons for using literary works in ELT: “motivating materials, encouraging language acquisition, expanding students’ language awareness, developing students’ interpretative abilities; and educating whole person,” (Lazar in Al-Selwi, 2018, p. 3).

The bigger contribution which is provided by the use of literature in English class is its role to develop students’ language skills. As shown in previous studies, literature contributes significantly

to reading and writing skills (Firman, 2020; Sasalia & Sari, 2020). However, it does not mean that literature can only be used for teaching reading and writing. Literature in the form of drama can be utilized to develop students’ speaking skill (Khusnia, 2018). So, literature can be used in developing students’ language skills – listening, speaking, reading, and writing – by using appropriate methods or techniques in English class (Hismanoglu, 2005). For example, by using the information gap technique, literature can be a good material to develop students’ language skills, especially speaking and listening.

### ***Literature and Listening***

By using appropriate methods or techniques, literature can help students in fostering their listening skill. For example, a teacher asked one of his/her students to read a passage of a literary work in front of the class and asked other students to take notes based on the information read by the student. By using this technique, the teacher can maximize the role of literary works in developing students’ listening skill. Literary work is more effective to be used in fostering students’ listening skill because literary work requires students’ personal involvement. A literary work usually presents a good storyline which makes the students feel more engaged in the literary text as well as in the activity planned by the teacher – note-taking. By using literary works “the students become more enthusiastic to find out what happens as events unfold via climax; they feel close to certain characters and shares their emotional responses... this can have

beneficial effect upon the whole language learning process,” (Ozkan, A., & Tongur, 2014, p. 67). It then indicates that literary works are an effective media to be used in English class compared with other kinds of materials.

The use of literature in English teaching and learning processes can help the students get used to the target language, English. Neugebauer & Currie-Rubin (2009) as cited in Chen (2014) claims that listening to interesting texts (literary works such as short stories or passages of a novel) helps students’ language acquisition. However, “since listening to a new language takes a high level of mental energy, do not overtax the listeners,” (Chen, 2014, p. 234). It means that the use of literary works in listening activity can make the students get used to the target language. Literary works also make the students put more attention to the text and then make the students feel more engaged in the activities.

### ***Literature and Speaking***

Literary works can also be used in enhancing students’ speaking skills. An appropriate method or technique can make it so. The role of teacher in preparing a good literary text will be very useful in fostering students’ speaking skill. The activity such as enacting small role play based on the novel can be a good example of a method which can be used for fostering students’ speaking skill. Shahid (2016) suggests an activity that can be used in English to foster students speaking skill as follows:

“The teacher may ask the students to enact a small

scene from some play or novel. And then they may start discussing it. Though it takes a lot of time, but this method works on the speaking as well as listening skill of the learner. The teacher may also take the help of audio-visual aids and display the scenes to the students. Gradually they become familiar with the right articulation of words with proper stress and intonation.” (Shahid, 2016, p. 28)

Shahid’s explanation indicates that the use of literary works in English class could foster students’ language skills simultaneously. It means literary works are very useful in language class. Besides using literary works such as novels in speaking activity, another form of literary works such as drama can be very useful in fostering students’ speaking skill because “Drama provides players alternative perspectives and increases comprehension,” (Chen, 2014, p. 235). It means drama can make the students see a phenomenon from another perspective and it makes them more independent in understanding the story. There are many activities that help the development of students’ speaking skill.

Temple, Martinez, and Yokota (2004) suggest two activities that can be used in developing students’ speaking skill: Story theatre and Creative drama. In story theatre, the drama should be conformed with the students’ level of English. It is best to use children’s drama for the beginner

level. There are audiences for this drama because the value of this activity is the participation of students. It means that this activity tries to develop students' courage to speak so unconsciously students develop their speaking skill. The choosing of the characters served as the catalyst for this action. Each student is given a certain role to play. The story is then read aloud by the teacher, and the children respond to the story by carrying out the necessary action. No sets or props are needed for this exercise. The finest stories for story theatre are those with lots of action and little speech.

The second activity which can be used is Creative Drama. In this activity students enact the stories asked without narration. The story is delivered through dialogue and actions. The dialogue in the story is made by the students (adlibbed). Students in this activity have known story events and are required to create their own dialogues to be performed. As opposed to story theatre, this activity allows the students to use particular properties. It is suggested to use stories with long (extensive) dialogue and complex or simple action for this activity (Temple Martinez, & Yokota, 2004).

Another activity that can be used to teach English speaking skill is Readers Theatre. Chen (2014) explains that this activity relies solely on the players' voices to convey the story. The procedure of this activity is described as follows:

“As the name implies, the players read a script. They only convey their characters through their voices. This form of drama is a

performance. Therefore, players practice voice, inflection, and prosody until their parts are perfected. Players can collaborate, along with the teacher's assistance, to identify the optimum tone of voice for the sly, miserly, and dishonest, as well as the benevolent, good-natured, honest, humorous, and heroic characters. Players must read with expression and energy. Preferably they perform while sitting raised on stools, but chairs can be substituted. Stories filled with dialogue, but little narration and action are best for Readers Theater. Stories with lots of action can be adapted for use.” (Chen, 2014, p. 235)

It is important to note that drama is one kind of literary work because some teachers limit the kind of literary work to novels, poetry, short story, or a passage from a novel. By reminding English teachers that drama is a kind of literary work, it will give teachers a new option to apply literary works in English class to foster students' speaking skill.

### **Literature and Reading**

Using literary works such as novel, poetry, short story, folklore, and short passage taken from a novel is no doubt very useful for fostering students' reading ability. In addition, according to Liando, Dolongtelide, and Maru (2022), the

development of students' reading skill can be measured by how much students understand the reading material (literature in the form of short stories or simple poem). Ihejirika (2014) argues that the use of Literature in English teaching particularly enhances the development of students' extensive reading skills. The role of literature in fostering students' reading ability is not limited to the understanding of the text but also helps students in fostering their vocabulary knowledge. The use of a particular lexical item in a context can help the students to understand how a lexical item (word) can be used in a particular context. Furthermore, it also helps the students in raising their language awareness – especially grammar awareness. By reading many literary works in class students not only acquire the knowledge of the use of lexical items but also acquire the use of grammar in a particular context since a good reading text is composed in good grammar so the meaning can be conveyed to the reader. These facts then make us realize how much literary works can offer in English class. It also affirms the prominent role of literature to be used in a language class (not limited to English).

Chen (2014) suggests two kinds of activity that can be used in English classes to foster students' reading ability: Shared reading and Independent reading. Shared reading refers to the activity in which two or more students share the reading of a text (Chen, 2014). In this activity, students are required to read aloud the text with the teacher. Reid (2002) then explains that the ultimate goal of this activity is to summarize an entire paragraph in their

own words. The procedure of this activity is described as follows:

"The teacher reads aloud at slow pace, but faster than the students can read by themselves. The students' reading should lag slightly behind the teacher's. This helps with learning pronunciation and phrasing. This technique is helpful even for advanced students, because of the word pronunciation support. Resist the temptation to stop at each unfamiliar word. Students should begin to cluster meaning into chunks or phrases." (Chen, 2014, p. 234).

Another activity is independent reading. This activity emphasizes the activity which let the students read independently. Materials used in this activity should be designated based on the students' level of English and their interest. McKenna and Stahl (2003) suggest that the student, in this activity, should recognize 99% of the words in the text and comprehends 90% of the content of the text.

Based on Chen's suggestion, it is important for a teacher to prepare good reading materials, but it is also more important for the teacher to let the students choose the kind of reading materials which suits their interests. By giving students the independence to choose their own reading material students can feel more engaged with the reading materials and it will help them in understanding the text. That is why

independent reading is an interesting activity to be applied in the classroom. While shared reading helps the students in mastering pronunciation and lexical items, independent reading helps students in developing their interpretation ability. Furthermore, the use of literary works in reading activities will help students see how a phenomenon can be interpreted from another point of view. It then will help the students in acquiring new general knowledge.

### ***Literature and Writing***

The role of literature in developing students' writing skill could be said as the result of literature's role in developing students' reading skill. This assumption is based on the general fact, "a good reader is a good writer". It is no doubt that by exposing many kinds of literary works to the students, students will get used to them. When they get used to them, they will start to imitate the writer's writing style and will make them own their own writing style gradually. Ihejirika (2014) mentions in his work that reading facilitates the acquisition of vocabulary and grammar awareness which can be very helpful in writing activities. It is logical since in doing writing activities students are required to master many vocabulary items and grammar features. If they do not master the vocabulary and grammar, students cannot make good writing. Landi (2010) advocates that reading and writing are closely linked and frequently considered to be one single ability, with reading serving as a catalyst for writing and vice versa. In addition, Hismanoglu (2005) later argues that literature can be a model

of writing. It means that literature can be students' source of writing in case of style or idea. In order to develop students' writing skill through literary works, teachers have to develop students' reading skill first.

There are some activities that can be used in English class to fostering students' writing skill. First, the teacher can ask his/her students to make a summary of what they read. Another activity is the teacher asking his/her students to paraphrase a text which the students just read. Hismanoglu (2005) suggests some activities which can be used to foster students' writing skills as follows:

- Controlled Writing, which is used mostly in beginning-level writing, typically requires the students to rewrite passages in order to improve students' knowledge of specific grammatical structures.
- Guided Writing, which is used for intermediate-level students, classically required the students to respond to several questions or conducted sentence completion tasks.
- Reproducing the Model. In this activity, the students are asked to do several writing activities such as paraphrasing, summarizing, and adapting a text. Students are instructed to restate what they read or hear aloud using their own words when paraphrasing. Paraphrasing is an incredibly helpful tool with poetry since it coincides with the students' attempts to understand the poem. Summarizing is a great writing exercise for the students in order to



show their understanding of a particular short story, novel or drama. Adapting a text can be carried out by asking the students to construct a drama script from a novel or short story. In this activity, students can become aware of the differences between spoken and written English.

- Adding to the Work. This activity requires the students to write an addition to an existing work. For example, students are asked to add more detail to the short story provided by their teacher. Students might write an addition dialogue for an existing drama.
- Changing the Work. By contrasting the author's ending with their own, students can create their own conclusions. It is possible to rewrite short stories entirely or in part from the perspective of a character as opposed to a third-person narrator or a different character.
- Drama-Inspired Writing. In this activity, the students watch a play first. After that, they are asked to adopt the perspective of a character and describe their attitudes and emotions in their writing.
- A Letter Addressed to Another Character. In this activity, the students are asked to compose a letter to one of the characters (in a play or in a novel) in which the students offer the character particular advice on how to handle a certain problem.

Based on the explanations above we can see that in fostering students' language

skills by using literature, teachers should integrate the language skills and not teach them as a separate skill. It will make the students think that a certain skill is not related to another skill. In fact, language skills are related to each other and certain skills can be achieved only when a skill can be mastered. For example, writing skills can only be achieved when students master the reading skill. Furthermore, Hismanoglu (2005) states:

“Literature plays an important role in teaching four basic language skills like reading, writing, listening and speaking. However, when using literature in the language classroom, skills should never be taught in isolation but in an integrated way. Teachers should try to teach basic language skills as an integral part of oral and written language use, as part of the means for creating both referential and interactional meaning, not merely as an aspect of the oral and written production of words, phrases and sentences.” (Hismanoglu, 2005, p. 57)

It then means that a language teacher has to always remember that using literature to teach language skills has to be done in integration. Teachers cannot teach a certain language skill as a separate skill from other skills.

### Conclusion

Literature does have a really important role in teaching English as a foreign language: literature can be used in developing students' language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. However, this prominent role is not fully maximized in EFL classrooms. It might be caused by the environment and beliefs and even by the curriculum used in a country. The use of literature in English class can be fully optimized when accurate methods or techniques are used. The techniques used can be varied according to the skills that are taught by the teachers. For example, the use of sharing and independent reading can be utilized in teaching reading, or the use of story theatre and creative drama can be used to teach speaking. However, it is important to note that the use of literature to enhance students' language skills has to be done in integration. We cannot treat a particular skill as a separate skill from the other skills. Hence, Language skills have to be taught in integration by using literary works as the media.

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