

RELIGACIÓN

R E V I S T A

Introduction to English Literature for Arab Students

Introducción a la literatura inglesa para estudiantes árabes

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ABSTRACT

When a professor prepares an introduction that has this name, s/he has to deal with a lot of literary works. S/he has a single semester and a limited number of hours to accomplish the mission. What could s/he do? This prompts him/her to set limits and work on them. As we know, specifying one work for each literary genre does not mean much, but this is the only option whenever you teach non-native students. After realizing the shortcomings of the prescribed plans and their negative effects on teaching English literature to non-native speakers, I prefer to introduce my experience, and share my opinion with my colleagues in the field. Hence, I rely on my experience as a background for what I discuss in this article. I conclude that the goal of the course should focus primarily on the culture of the source language. It should be offered to students at a level that allows them to discuss, read, and criticize, and not be offered to beginners who find it difficult to master all of these literary skills. I will present this topic from personal experience and discuss it in this article.

Keywords: Introduction; English; literary genre; literature.

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<http://doi.org/10.46652/rgn.v9i39.1143>
ISSN 2477-9083
Vol. 9 No. 39 January-March, 2024, e2401143
Quito, Ecuador

Submitted: December 01, 2023
Accepted: February 06, 2024
Published: February 21, 2024
Continuous Publication



RESUMEN

Cuando un profesor prepara una introducción con este nombre, tiene que enfrentarse a muchas obras literarias. Dispone de un solo semestre y de un número limitado de horas para cumplir su misión. ¿Qué puede hacer? Esto le lleva a fijar límites y a trabajar en ellos. Como sabemos, especificar una obra para cada género literario no significa mucho, pero es la única opción cuando se enseña a alumnos no nativos. Tras darme cuenta de las deficiencias de los planes prescritos y de sus efectos negativos en la enseñanza de la literatura inglesa a alumnos no nativos, prefiero presentar mi experiencia y compartir mi opinión con mis colegas en este campo. De ahí que me base en mi experiencia como trasfondo de lo que expongo en este artículo. Llego a la conclusión de que el objetivo del curso debería centrarse principalmente en la cultura de la lengua de partida. Debería ofrecerse a estudiantes de un nivel que les permita debatir, leer y criticar, y no ofrecerse a principiantes a los que les resulte difícil dominar todas estas destrezas literarias. Presentaré este tema a partir de mi experiencia personal y lo debatiré en este artículo.

Palabras clave: Introducción; inglés; género literario; literatura.

Introduction

There are many anthologies that contain excerpts and introductions prepared for such a topic, but they contain a large amount of literary works that are difficult to teach, all or most of them, and it is also impossible to ask students to purchase one introductory anthology while only a few pages will be studied. Also, what will be the focus on due to the ambiguity and complexity of the term, as well as the lack of time, and other determinants, all of which makes it difficult to choose. The culture involved, educational background, and prevailing orientation in the country in which students study such an introductory course.

The issue of teaching English literature is addressed by different researchers because of its importance in teaching and learning English in general. For example, Omar (2017), discusses challenges in teaching and learning English literature in Malaysia while Purtanto (2023), focuses on Indonesia in his research. Researchers tend to focus on regions such as Farida and Sinha (2014), who write about challenges of introducing English literature to Bangladeshi students. In turn, Yavuz (2014), applies his study to Turkish students. Back to Chesterman (1983), Finland becomes the region of his study. Moreover, Hussein and Al-Emami (2016), limit their study to students at the University of Hail of Saudi Arabia. Similarly, Dahiru (2020), selects Nigeria as the place of the study in question. Finally, Gubair and Eltahir (2019), present their case study of Khartoum University and address some challenges of teaching English literature there. In brief, all those studies address common challenges in teaching and learning English literature and reflect the researchers' personal opinions.

To some extent, I am going to present in this article those challenges I experienced while teaching this important subject. I do share those writers their concerns regarding what takes place while teaching English literature to non-native speakers. In this article, I will try to address the main points and obstacles. Of course, my experience will have a major role in this presentation.

Methodology

Although everyone realizes the necessity and importance of teaching English literature, the quantity and method of teaching it remains a matter of controversy and disagreement. Each educational institution adopts a curriculum subject to certain conditions. These curricula are usually developed in haste without considering what other educational institutions have and what practitioners in the profession advise. After a period of practice, I realized the shortcomings of these prescribed plans and their negative impact on the entire process of teaching English literature to non-native speakers. This paper is a presentation of my experience, which I would like to share with my colleagues in the specialty.

Discussion

The course is offered to beginning students in their third semester at the college. Students who have only studied the principles of the language and basic skills, and they are not mastering the language. The objectives of the course stipulate that the basic elements of different literary genres are presented, and the curriculum sections contain a short story, a play, and a few poems (Dohal, 2022). This content must be done during a semester not exceeding fourteen weeks, and three hours per week.

Of course, the teacher first begins by selecting the basic elements, which consist of important terms and their definition, such as literature, literary genre, novel, story, play, and so on. The problem is that the teacher does and presents all of this material in the classroom and is the focus of the entire educational process (Dohal, 2020; 2021).

Indeed, s/he explains to students who do not read, and there is a lot of vocabulary that needs to be translated, and after that s/he begins with a number of very short and simple-to-understand poems, and tries to present them to the students, and the teacher cannot go on and present more than four poems that are easy to understand, such as: 'Daffodils' by William Wordsworth, 'Sonnet 18' by William Shakespeare, and 'Anthem for Doomed Youth' by Wilfred Owen. In addition, s/he must explain some poetic terms, such as: poetry, poem, figures of speech, sound devices, and how to analyze a poem.

After that, s/he moves on to a short story like 'The Lottery' by Shirley Jackson. S/he must review vocabulary specific to novels and English prose, for example fiction, types of fiction, novel and its types, elements of fiction, character, plot, etc.

Finally, s/he must choose a short play such as 'Trifles' by Susan Glaspell. Also, due to time constraints, s/he explains a limited number of related terms like drama, elements of a play, feature, and types of drama (Roberts, 1998).

Unfortunately, when the language is foreign, students who do not read, and the course requires extensive explanation; all this hustle stifles the entire process and forces many elements to be left out and overlooked. Literary analysis, in-depth criticism, and the like cannot be done by the teacher. Also, the quality of the students, their willingness to learn the literature of a foreign language and to explore its culture are important matters that are not paid attention to. And the teacher is expected to do everything, even train the students on questions that they memorize to use in the final exam of the course and to answer the questions.

Questions that do not, in their entirety, require no more than putting a mark in front of the correct paragraph, linking the term to the definition, or filling spaces with words they have memorized without understanding them. It is rare to find a question that requires analysis and discussion. There may be a question about writing a short paragraph of about five sentences or so addressing a main character or an event. Of course, such a question has been discussed thoroughly in class and students summarize the answer; students have exchanged those summaries and memorized them by heart.

There is no doubt that there are many factors that affect learning, and the provision of material that represents English literature, the most important of which is the content that is new to students. Well, the subject matter requires reading and effort, and the difference in culture represents another obstacle. In addition to what has been said, there is the difficulty of choosing specific works that represent English literature. With the short period and limited communication hours, one of the significant obstacles is the level of students and their ability to try to learn.

The large number of students in the hall is also one of the obstacles that make follow-up difficult, and feedback and questions do not serve their purpose. If the number exceeds twenty students, it becomes difficult to follow up and the matter becomes tough to us as teachers without discussion or awareness of what should be understood. In addition to what was mentioned, expectations are also another matter; all students think they will get high grades, especially if they have limited number of pages to be memorized. Those students who have memorized those summaries think they have the right to get the highest grade.

In fact, even if their answers in the final test are the same and identical because they depend on memorization, the semester work will inevitably differ, and this is something that many students do not realize or ignore. You can imagine that all students memorize a summary that someone brought from the Internet or from a book in no more than two paragraphs or sixty words about the story, and two other short passages about the summary of the play without going into discussion and analysis, which makes studying such a course useless. The student memorizes three or four papers that express only summaries of events, without delving into analysis or discussion of any relevant topic.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that a college course called Introduction to English Literature for Arab students in a country like Saudi Arabia will eventually become one of the courses that focuses on the language and teaching it as a skill more than anything else, and this reflects the failure of the course to achieve the goal for which it has been set.

The surrounding factors, such as lack of reading, poor level, large number of students, and the inability to choose a punch of representative works make a course like this one of limited benefits as a specialty, and as a material that should be benefited from, especially when such a course is taught in a completely different culture. Everything mentioned above and the pressure from the administration of the institution in question on the teacher to let students succeed with the least effort negatively affects the results for which it has been approved. A course like this should explore new ideas and spark discussion, not ultimately be limited to questions that do not go beyond correcting, linking, or writing a sentence or phrase.

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Statement

Conflict of interest

I have no conflict of interest to disclose.

Funding

No financial assistance from parties outside this article.

Notes

This article is not the product of previous research.