



# Teaching Literary Texts through Cultural Model to EFL Students

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## Abstract

This paper examines how the Cultural Model of teaching literature in the Applied linguistics scenario can adopt a trans-disciplinary approach to teaching of language and skills courses. The premise stated is that it does not focus merely on language learning but also makes an impact on other variables like learners' autonomy and motivation to learn. In the context of EFL, this study also premises that the Cultural Model assists in enhancing the learners' autonomy and learners' motivation as literary texts are directly related to their cultural consciousness. The Cultural Model allows both the teachers and the students to go beyond the lexis and consider the literary aspects of a text as it is culturally closer to their consciousness. A questionnaire (for students) and semi structured interview (for teachers) were designed to study the perception of teachers and students and find the relationship between such variables as Learners' Autonomy and Learners' Motivation with Cultural Model of teaching literature. The study carried out multiple linear regression tests on a sample of 120 EFL respondents. The data was analyzed with SPSS 25.0 to ascertain the influence of predictors and dependent variables. Results showed the evidence of significant relationship between Learners' Autonomy and Learners' Motivation with Cultural Model of teaching literature. This shows that the Cultural Model of teaching literature acted as a predictor to enhance Learners' Autonomy and Learners' Motivation. The study recommends that students should not be passive receivers of the teaching content with undeveloped skills but should build in them autonomy and motivation to read, interpret, evaluate and criticize a literary text. Besides, teachers should also make efforts to make students read literary texts in cultural contexts.

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**Keywords:** Learners' Autonomy, Motivation, Literature Teaching, Language Learning, Cultural Model

## 1. Introduction

There is a dearth of research studies on teaching of literature in EFL/ESL classrooms. The teaching of literature has almost lost its importance due to the common belief that it is incongruous and irrelevant in the domain of Applied linguistics and that it has no practical utility in language classrooms. For this reason, applied linguists and academicians find teaching of literature as potentially disruptive in educational institutions. Language courses are prioritized at all post-secondary and tertiary levels. Even text books that contain extracts from literary prose,

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fiction and poetry, exercises focus on language drills and rhetoric instead of literary aspects. A paradigm shift is required to include teaching of literature in the mainstream, using a literary text is essential in EFL/ESL classroom context for teaching language skills (Khatib and Mellati, 2012). Moreover, literature provide enrichment of the texts built up for teaching language skills (Reading, Writing, Listening and Speaking) and including Vocabulary, Grammar and conversation (Hişmanoğlu, 2005, Nurhayati, 2016). Besides linguistic competences, teaching of literature also develops socio-cultural values as the domain of literature is known to be culturally representative.

Two contrasting approaches set the design of teaching literature models: The Language Model and the Cultural Model. The Language Model conventionally focuses on the way language is used in literary texts with grammar, lexical and discourse perspectives. This makes learning too mechanistic and destroys the aesthetics of reading literature. On the other hand, the Cultural Model adopts a trans-disciplinary approach to teaching of literature. While it emphasizes on language acquisition as the primary objective, it also aims to develop learners' awareness about a country's socio-cultural and historical legacy. In the EFL context particularly the cultural method would assist both the teacher and the students to go beyond the lexis and consider the literary aspects of a text, along with socio-cultural contexts and also derive the aesthetic pleasure from learning a text.

Collie and Slater (1987) regard literature as a rich source of 'authentic material' useful in understanding 'language in use,' but at the same time it makes an aesthetic representation of a language in a certain cultural context. Gilroy and Parkinson (1996) opined in their seminal work that it is not possible to teach language without literature. Their contention hints at the theory that literature ought to act as the main contributor for teaching English in language classes, particularly in EFL/ESL situation. Moreover, ELT experts have insisted on considering students' cultural background among the criteria for selecting the EFL/ESL teaching material and textbooks (Collie and Slater, 1987, Lazar, 1993, Alam, 2015). This is consistent with writings of other critics (Duff, 1990, Brigitta and Máté, 2005) who have also emphasized on giving more attention to the teaching of literature in ESL/EFL classes and the use of literary texts in language curricula. Besides, (Sage, 1987, Rahman, 2013), (Ghouti and Mohammed, 2014), Healy (2010) and Bibby and McLroy (2013) share how researchers in the field of ELT and EFL emphasize upon the use of literature for language teaching claiming it to be interesting and significant.

## 2. Literature review

### i. Approaches to teaching literature

Contextually, the teaching of literature depends upon three main approaches as expostulated by Carter and Long (1991): the linguistic approach, the cultural approach and the personal growth approach. The linguistic approach requires the use of grammar, lexical and discourse analysis to develop students' knowledge of the English language and focuses on the manner language is used in literary texts. Because of it being mechanistic in nature, this approach fails to invoke any creativity while acquiring knowledge from the text and also often demotivates the pleasure of reading literature. Even the exercises are typical of an EFL classroom such as prediction exercises, jumbled sentences, role-play, etc. instead of using exercises that might encourage literary interests. The Cultural approach brings teachers and students closer to the target language as they are required to develop a multi-disciplinary and multi-cultural approach in teaching. Rather than focusing only on language acquisition, they also learn about a country's culture and its national heritage and ideologies. Students go beyond the lexis and grammar, syntax and pragmatics, and explore the social-cultural context of a text, along with the literary and historical (Yimwilai, 2015). On the other hand, the Personal Growth approach is rather individualistic and depends more on the teacher and learners who act as a link between the linguistic and the cultural approach. In other words, the focus is given to language learning in the cultural context of the text. Learners do not passively receive the instructions but grasp the message intellectually and emotionally, getting the true feeling of the aesthetic and cultural elements in the text.

A very pertinent reason for this issue was cited by Yu Chang (2007) in the context of Taiwanese classrooms. He asserted that learners faced difficulty in literature courses because they do not get

much opportunity to read authentic literature written in the English language in their high school or pre-university programs (tertiary levels). Studies like Cruz (2010), Khatib and Mellati (2012), McKay (1982), Padurean (2015), Tseng (2010), Zhen (2012), Zyngier (1994), Vural (2013), and Yu Chang (2007) hint at perhaps the contents of the textbooks in EFL situations are not culturally adapted therefore leaving no room for developing students' autonomy nor develop any intrinsic motivation to understand such texts.

### ii. *Literature as a knowledge resource*

Carter and Long (1991) have emphasized upon using literature as a resource and not just a study subject. According to them a literary text acts as a resource of knowledge about literature. The literary text allows learners to make connections between their own experiences and that of the writer of the text. This develops their critical thinking. Likewise, a study was conducted in Aurel Vlaicu University (Parkinson and Thomas, 2000) which supported this assertion. The study found out that literature can provide not only excellent writing and linguistic competence, but also offered mental training and developing interpretation skills especially in teaching poetry and literary criticism. As a result, it is necessary that literature should have sufficient representation in acquisition of linguistic and cultural knowledge of a foreign language.

A few other ELT experts (Hişmanoğlu, 2005, Llach, 2017, Rivers, 2018, Tasneen, 2010, Yeasmin et al., 2011) have strongly recommended the use of literature in language teaching and claim that literature allows students to get a rich exposure to various cultures, levels and styles. Although all literary texts may not be suitable for using in language classrooms since a few literary texts use a language different from the standard, functional language. However, it is still considered that teaching of literature for non-native learners is a good source of attaining knowledge about Western history and culture (Rivers, 2018). In the Middle East, for instance, several textbooks have the Middle East versions which are culturally adapted. A question therefore arises whether this is done at the cost of the literary contents in those text books. Often teachers of English language in the Middle East have dealt that teaching language with the adapted literary elements is unattractive as well as ineffective. Several researchers of literature backgrounds in Middle East countries (Al Khalidi, 2019, Billah, 2015, Khatib et al., 2011b, Khatib et al., 2011a, Khatib and Mellati, 2012). Sahidullah et al., (2001) have also observed the absence of literary texts or literary elements in the textbooks at tertiary level English textbooks. One of the reasons for learners' disorientation from literature could be this.

### iii. *Learners' Autonomy and Motivation*

Learner autonomy plays an important role in learning a language. It is defined variably as 'self-regulation or 'self-efficacy' (Koban Koç, 2016, Nakata, 2019) particularly when applied in EFL or L2 environment. In a self-regulated environment, learners set their own educational goals and take responsibility for their own learning irrespective of what they learn and how they learn. Learner autonomy can be meaningful only when the EFL learners are intrinsically and extrinsically motivated. In a recent study (Ding and Shen, 2019), it was investigated how Chinese EFL learners exhibited behavioral and the psychological traits in exercising learner autonomy. Participants utilized metacognitive strategies closely resembling their culture, besides making use of motivation and emotion control strategies to regulate their learning. The findings highlighted the potential of language to foster learner autonomy in a motivational environment. Further, the study also explored how learner autonomy triggered self-assessment activities in an EFL situation. There are similar other studies in the EFL scenario that found evidence of significant relationship between learner autonomy and proficiency; contribution of innovative and creative means to stimulate language learning in a game-based writing environment (Chang et al., 2021); the impact of digital storytelling with literary images on student motivation and in EFL environment (Hava, 2019).

Teachers' autonomy also plays a significant role in developing learners' autonomy and their level of motivation. Agustina (2017) emphasized upon the need for teacher's professional development before the start of each academic semester and prior to implementing a curriculum. Such professional training if imparted will help teachers to modify their beliefs about learner autonomy in a learner-centered environment. In an autonomous environment, particularly in Saudi context, students need to be motivated to learn new things with their own efficiency and effort. A recent study (Al Khalidi, 2019) unexceptionally emphasized upon the need for motivation

in EFL classrooms to develop learner autonomy provided learners are allowed to get direct experience. It is consistent with [Erkaya \(2011\)](#) who stated that a literary text can enhance learners' motivation and turn passive learners into active ones. For instance, short stories and literary fables are highly motivating due to their narration and setting. The structure of a short story having a beginning, middle and the end engages students in the text until they find out how the conflict or the suspense gets resolved. [Elliot \(1990\)](#) too affirmed that in order to appreciate the aesthetic qualities of a literary text, students should get genuinely and holistically motivated to read it.

### 3. Research Methodology

#### i. Problem Statement

A major challenge before ELT experts and teachers is to determine the type and length of literary texts to be included in the English language curriculum. While determining the criteria of selecting a literary text to teach in a literary classroom, it is also essential to ascertain the learning outcomes which the literary texts would contribute to. The deteriorating performance of ELT students is mainly because of students' failure to comprehend the literary aspects of their curriculum. A question then arises that under these circumstances, which literary texts are appropriate for the university level students. Should the text suitability or its cultural linkage help learners to feel more motivated and gain autonomy to understand literary texts? Should the curriculum designers consider the cultural framework as a prerequisite while designing a literary curriculum and frame exercises and activities accordingly?

A need was therefore felt to examine all these views and opinions and find out answers to all the doubts raised for the use of literature in EFL classes. This study therefore discussed these issues in the light of the literary texts in a curriculum of any EFL undergraduate English Language program. This study also attempted to examine the relationship between variables like Learners' Autonomy and Learners' Motivation with Cultural Model of teaching literature.

#### ii. Objectives of this study

This study is based on the premise that teaching language through literature is not much different from teaching language through any other written tool. For instance, if a linguistic activity like role-playing or conversations and dialogues is carried out using a non-literary text, it can also be carried out using literature texts. However, using literature texts may have some issues like cultural issues, ambiguities about the meaning of texts, but these could be easily tackled with if there is a pre-dominance of cultural artifacts. Keeping in view this broad purpose, this study has the following objectives ([Table 1](#)).

Table. 1 Objectives of the study in relation to pertinent issues

Pertinent issue	Specific objectives	Study questions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The English teachers in EFL context face serious issues in teaching literary texts to EFL learners, particularly when the literary texts are a part of linguistics and skills courses.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To identify what challenges teachers and students face in teaching and learning literary texts in EFL classrooms.</li> <li>To ascertain the suitability of a literary text included in the curricula of linguistics and skills courses</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What are the difficulties that teachers and students face in teaching and learning literary texts in EFL classrooms?</li> <li>What kind of texts are suitable to be included in the text books of linguistics and skills courses</li> </ul>

#### iii. Instrument

To achieve the objectives of the study, both qualitative and quantitative research methods were adopted. A questionnaire was designed for the student participants using the Likert scale with five levels of answers reflecting the largest or smallest level of agreement in relation to the participants' opinions about how they thought the Cultural Model aided in learning literary texts. For the qualitative approach, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the teachers teaching to the sampled students. The semi structured interviews provided an opportunity to the

researcher to investigate whether the findings of the questionnaire were coherent with the research objectives and questions of the study.

The questionnaire had three sections with 10 items each on Learner Autonomy, Motivation and their linkages with Cultural Model of teaching literature. All 30 items were tested in terms of their validity and reliability. The validity tests employed bivariate test methods with r table of 0.124 which proved all items valid and reliable. The internal consistency coefficient Alpha Cronbach was used for the reliability assessment. Table 2 presents Cronbach alpha and reliability status:

Table 2. Reliability test of items in the instrument

Factor	Cronbach Alpha	Mean	Std.	Result
			Dev	
Cultural Model	0.810	2.63	0.85	Reliable
Learner Autonomy	0.820	2.33	0.58	Reliable
Motivation	0.840	3.52	1.10	Reliable

The Cronbach's alpha for each variable was measured above 0.80, which indicates the fitness of the model as well as having good internal consistency. The mean score (>2.50) is also positively high and acceptable with adequate standard deviation. This implies that Cultural Model affects both learners' autonomy and motivation level of participants of this study.

Prior to administering the questionnaire to all 120 participants, its validity was adjudged by instrument experts and content experts who were also experts in both language and literature. Based on their recommendations, 36 questions were restricted to 30 questions by eliminating 6 few redundant items. The questionnaire items were then subjected to Pearson correlation analysis which resulted in coefficient values of 0.79, 0.78 and 0.86 for each of the three sections of the questionnaire with an overall value of 0.81. These coefficient values are indicative of high internal consistency of the questionnaire. These correlation coefficient values of the items with their domains are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Pearson correlation coefficient of questionnaire items in three domains.

Domain	Correlation of the items with their domain
Cultural Model	0.79
Learner Autonomy	0.78
Motivation	0.86
Overall	0.81

\* All the values were statistically significant at ( $\alpha=0.05$ ).

The questionnaire was distributed via the Google forms and all 120 respondents participated. Mean and standard deviation were used to analyze data for the research questions. Decision on the research questions was based on the criterion mean of <2.50. This implies that any item with mean value of 2.50 and above was regarded as agreed and by extension needed while any item with mean value of less than 2.50 was regarded as disagreed and by extension not needed.

Using the SPSS 25.0 package, the multiple linear regression and t-tests were measured. Table 4 presents the statistics with coefficients being the dependent variable, i.e., Cultural Model.

Table 4. Multiple linear regression test. Coefficients

Model	Unstandardized Std. Error	Beta	Standardized	t	Sig.
Constant	21.470	8.80	0.00	2.599	.010
Learner Autonomy	.110	.054	.110	2.042	.042
Motivation	.346	.065	.263	5.800	.001



The data reveals that the influence of cultural model on Learner Autonomy was measured with a sig. value of 0.042 and on motivation with sig. value of 0.001, both of which are smaller than 0.05. These results are evident of a significant impact of Cultural Model on Learner Autonomy and Motivation. These findings also suggest a positive and significant relationship among variables of the study.

#### iv. *Profile of Participants*

The study adopted a non-probabilistic sample selection process, and selected 120 students from an EFL undergraduate English Language program. Besides students, six teachers, three each with linguistics and literature expertise, were selected for the interviews.

## 4. Findings and Discussion

As far as the quantitative result is concerned, the results reveal a simultaneous relationship between the predictors (Learner Autonomy and Motivation) and the dependent variable (Cultural Model of learning language through literary texts). These results are also a testimony of the fact that cultural consciousness significantly and positively influence the variables like Learner Autonomy and learners' Motivation. Such a relationship is consistent with the research findings of [Perliger et al. \(2006\)](#), [Samanci \(2015\)](#), [Duman \(2010\)](#), and [Colak et al. \(2014\)](#) which further assert the significance of culture in EFL environment. This study also supports [Schwarz \(2009\)](#) argument that culture influence education in such scenarios.

On the qualitative side, the interviews with teachers revealed similar results. All the six teachers were unanimous about the influence of the cultural contexts used in the selection of literary texts for the language curriculum and for teaching literature. They explicitly opined that culture-related elements in the texts when modified are made to suit the cultural norms of the learners was conducive to learning. Such a cultural familiarity in literary texts provided them more autonomy and motivation to enjoy the text and understand its meaning. However, two out of six informants suggested some difficulties with poetry as a genre which did not contain any plot or setting as fiction does. Their main observation was that students memorized poetry in order to make its critical appreciation. The results of the research are consistent with the analyses of [Golubeva and Guntersdorfer \(2017\)](#) and [Kotnik and Krecic \(2011\)](#), who strongly recommend the enhancement of cultural sensitivity in order to cope up with the learning and teaching challenges.

Students who scored higher grades in GPA were those who reacted fast to the Cultural Model. This was obvious because literary texts which comprised all genres of literature demanded at least a basic knowledge of the cultural context in which those texts were written. Furthermore, as proved statistically, such learners felt more autonomous and motivated and excelled much better than their peers. The teacher informants admitted that the Cultural Model had become a major factor in scoring high grades. It is therefore proven that literary texts written in a cultural context not only increase the learner autonomy and motivation level of learners but also improves their grades.

An interesting finding of this study stated that learners particularly enjoyed such literary texts that contained a plot or a story, characters and action. There was curiosity and anxiety about knowing what would happen next and how the text would reach its climax. Going deeper in the probe, it was revealed that students are culturally tied to storytelling and listening to tales since their childhood. This is again an evidence of the influence of the Cultural Model in learning literary texts. It was also observed that such students who were culturally more familiar with the literary texts discuss their understanding with their peers. They took the initiative to explain the meaning of the text to their peers. This kind of extended autonomy shown by the learners was recommended by recent studies [Agustina \(2017\)](#) and [Ding and Shen \(2019\)](#) who believed that while learning literary texts in language classrooms, all students are not passive learners, but a few of them are active learners who can participate in disseminating learning by producing more ideas and knowledge. These observations and findings show that the culture-intensive texts also develop the power of critical thinking which is due to the intrinsic motivation and also due to the feeling of more autonomy and self-regulation ([Bedi, 2011](#)).

## 5. Conclusion

To conclude, it has strongly been perceived that teaching literary texts through the Cultural

Model helps students to develop greater learner autonomy, besides increasing their motivation levels. There is evidence that literary texts with cultural intensive material contributed to students' understanding by increasing their understanding skills. It is recommended that teachers should endeavor to make students not only passive receivers with undeveloped skills but motivate them to read, interpret, evaluate and criticize a literary text. In addition, teachers should make efforts to make students read literary texts in cultural contexts. Teachers and educational institutions should create an environment that allows students to develop critical competencies helping them to negotiate different perspectives of analyzing and evaluating literature.

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