

The Role of Literature to Develop EFL Learners language through Literary Texts
A Case Study of Secondary Schools, Wad Madni Locality, Gezira State, Sudan (2018)

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Abstract

Literature in Education for instance, develops the potential of students in a holistic balanced and integrated manner, encompassing the intellectual, spiritual, emotional and physical aspects. This study aims to develop learners' language skills through literary texts, investigate the usefulness of teaching literary text in EFL classes, and help teachers select the relevant texts for EFL classes. The study adopted the descriptive analytic method. The data for the study were collected by means of questionnaire which was distributed to (50) in wad Madni secondary schools teachers. The data were analyzed by the (SPSS) program. As a result of the analysis teaching literature develops students' literary texts and exposes them to different cultures, pair and group work activities encourage students to explore their depth of thinking, using literary texts in the classroom exposes students to interesting ideas and new expressions. Based on the findings it recommended that teachers should be well qualified in developing their students in literary texts, literature should be adapted in the English language classrooms in the secondary schools; teachers should create group activities for improving literary text.

Keywords: Develop EFL Learners through Literary Texts

1. Introduction

Literary texts have traditionally been employed as a source of studying grammar structures and vocabulary, and related exercises have aimed at general comprehension of the text. However, recent studies have pointed to the possibility of engaging students into the process of giving meaning to the narrative strategies adopted by the author, stimulating them to cross interdisciplinary boundaries by including elements from areas such as postcolonial or gender studies. Thus, to encourage students to generate and communicate their personal interpretation of a literary work, the reader-response approach that assigns the reader an active role in meaning-making (Egan et.al, 2005, Hall, 2015; Yaqoob, 2011) becomes the most suitable method to negotiate reading for pleasure and critical thinking.

1.1 Objectives of the Study

1. To develop learners' language skills through literary texts.
2. To investigate the usefulness of teaching literary text in EFL classes.
3. To help teachers select the relevant texts for EFL classes.

1.2 Question of the Study

1. To what extent do learners develop language skills through reading literary texts?
2. What is the usefulness of teaching literary in EFL classes?
3. What is the importance of the reading text's relevance in EFL classes?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

Moody (1987) writes that literature springs from our inborn love of telling a story, of arranging words in pleasing patterns, of expressing in words some special aspects of our human experience.

Boulton (1980) defines literature "*from a functional perspective as the imaginative work that gives us recreation, recognition, revelation and redemption*". Rees (1973), after describing what he regarded as literature, summed up that literature is a permanent expression in words of some thoughts or feelings in ideas about life and the world.

2.2 Defining of Literary Text

A definition of literacy must account for the nature of this concept which is situated, contextual and, consequently, relative and culturally bound. Literacy is much more than -the individual capacity of processing written information in daily life'as it is commonly defined. As Barton (2009) argues literacy is above all of a social nature, it is culturally sensitive, and it is always embedded in a specific situation and context. This is why definitions of literacy are so broad and heterogeneous. However, by assuming that literacy is a stable, coherent, identifiable configuration of practices'(Barton, 2009: 38) serving a specific purpose in a specific context, it is possible to present a definition of literary literacy in the context of majors in LLC, in Portugal. Therefore, in this study, literacy equates to the continuous and creative processing of the written word that occurs in a given situation and in a given context. This continuous and creative processing of written work can be revealed when reading a literary text or writing a job application letter, for instance.

The common goal is always to produce —something with meaning, taking into account the conventions of the context in which the literacy skills are activated. Transferring this definition of literacy to the context of the majors in LLC, the context this study focuses on, one can merge it with the concept of interpretative communities' presented by Stanley Fish (1980), according to whom communities/contexts define the reading and interpretation strategies of literary texts. From Fish's point of view these strategies are imposed on the reader who, as a consequence, does not act independently. In my opinion, it is not just the community the person belongs, but the different contextual dynamics, that influence literacy events: the particular activities where literacy plays a role' and literacy practices: the general cultural ways of utilizing literacy which people draw upon in a literacy event' (Barton, 2009: 37). If the community could fully determine literacy activities, then every student in a given university class would present the same interpretation of a particular literary text. Thus, although context shapes literacy activities, it does not totally determine them; other dynamics interfere, such as the individual's character, the individual's attitude or the type of task to be performed. In sum, literacy implies the activation of specific skills, which are determined by a configuration of practices in a given situation and context. In the next section I will focus on a concept often associated with literacy: the concept of skill.

Use Specific language medium which enables the formation of cognitive ideas with the aim of imparting information and forming/interpreting a coherent sequence of utterances. It is supposed to be endowed with referential continuity and logical reasoning. For this

reason, to create, understand and translate a text means to form a specific cross connection between its semantic contents. Within the ambit of text linguistics, text was initially viewed as an organised unit larger than a sentence which consists of a sequence of formally (i.e. morpho-syntactically) and semantically linked utterances unified thematically as well. This means that a text was understood as a network made of intertwined syntactic wholes: individual sentences and paragraphs. This, by a long way, oversimplified formal conception of a text was substantially altered after the so-called communicative-pragmatic turn in linguistic studies at the outset of the 1990s when a text started to be conceived of as “text-in-function”, “text-in-situation”, as a “socio-communicative functional unit” (Schmidt qtd. in Göpferich, 2006: 61).

Hand in hand with this, one of the central issues became the elaboration of the notion of textuality: which properties does a text have to possess in order to be called a text? In this regard, deBeaugrande and Dressler (2002:10) interpret text as a “communicative occurrence” which must meet certain standards/criteria of textuality, these being: cohesion, coherence, intentionality, acceptability, informatively, situationally and intertextuality. If any of these standards is not considered to have been satisfied, the text will not be communicative and in turn, non-communicative texts are treated as non-texts. However, in case of some literary texts, the author may play with the above on purpose in order to produce a certain effect on the text recipient. Göpferich offers the following definition of text in her article in the seminal German publication *Handbuch Translation* by Snell-Hornby: A text is a thematic and/or functionally oriented, coherent linguistic or linguistically figurative whole which has been formed with a certain intention, i.e. a communicative intention and which fulfils a recognizable communicative function of the first or second degree and represents a functionally complete unit in terms of content (for the communicative function of the first or second degree); (Göpferich, 2006: 62; translation by author).

As it follows from the recent definition of text given above, the modern perception of text takes it beyond a mere list of sentences and emphasizes the communicative act-in-situation providing the framework in which the text has its place. Nowadays, the linguistic and semiotic fashioning of text seems determined by its communicative function and the requirements for the above-said thematic orientation, intentionality, a recognizable communicative function, coherence and completion, seem common for the majority of text definitions available (cf. de Beaugrande and Dressler, 2002; Doloughan, 2009). However, in

the Anglo-phonic setting, “text” in the narrow sense of the word implies its formal facet only, without any context since the term “discourse” is preferred for utterances perceived as meaningful wholes with a certain communicative intention (Cook, 1994: 156).

2.3 Benefits of Literary Texts

Using literary texts in language teaching is very advantageous as it offers four benefits: authentic material, cultural enrichment, language advancement and develops critical thinking as a personal growth. Erkaya et al (2005:82) state that: “*four benefits of using literary texts to teach/EFL, i.e. motivational, literary, cultural and higher-order thinking benefits*” “However literary texts can be more beneficial than information materials in stimulating the acquisition process as they provide authentic contexts for processing new language. Literary texts expose learners to fresh themes and enjoyable language. In this sense, a literary text is an authentic text to which we can respond directly Brumfit and Carter (1986: 15) claim that:

“The quality appears to make literature suitable and valuable to language teaching in many contexts and cultures. In addition, since literary texts contain language intended for native speakers, literature stands as a model for language learners to become familiar with different forms and conventions”

On the other hand, literary works contain real examples of grammatical structures and vocabulary items. Such texts raise learners' awareness of the range of the target language and advance their competence in all language skills. Povey, (1967:86) claims that “*Literary texts are not written for the specific purpose of teaching. Instead, they deal with things which mattered to the author when he wrote them*”. So, compared to the language samples in the textbooks, the language is far richer and more varied. Many genuine features of the written language such as (the formation and function of sentences, the variety of possible structures, and the different ways of connecting ideas) are presented at numerous levels of difficulty Collie and Slater, (1994: 5) state that: “*By assigning learners to explore the literary language, they have been at the same time been encouraged to think about the norms of the language use*”. Learners are encouraged to familiarize themselves with different language uses, forms or conventions. Such exposure is essential for the learners especially for their language development.

Lazar, (1993) Students can appreciate the richness and variety of the language and become more sensitive to its features. Consequently, using literary texts in language teaching has the advantage of providing cultural information about the target language. Literary texts increase foreign language learners' insight into the country and the people whose language is being learnt which fosters learners' ability to interpret discourse in different social and cultural target language contexts. Savvidou, (2004:94) states the following:

“By reading literary works, learners learn to see a world through somebody else’s eyes , observing human values and a different kind of living and discovering that there are others living in very different societies. They will understand and become broadly aware of the social, political, historical, cultural events happening in a certain other society”

Therefore through literary texts learners can deepen their cultural understanding. Creative and critical thinking (Carter and Long, 1991) is a way of looking at problems or solutions from a fresh perspective that suggests unorthodox solutions which may look unsettling at first. Creative thinking can be stimulated by structured and unstructured processes. However through literary work analysis, critical thinking of learners can be promoted. Carter and Long, (Ibid: 2-4) explain that, *“reading literature requires students to look beyond the text”*. There are two basic reasons why teaching literature is somewhat effective in enhancing students’ critical thinking abilities. The first is the fact that literature itself has always meanings beyond the surface. Thus, they believed that by analyzing a literary text, students are motivated to recall, retrieve and reflect their prior knowledge in order to be able to judge the literal or simplified meaning, differentiate factor or opinions, understand narrator's tone, be able to perform with different points of view, make moral reasoning and fair judgment about to the students' real life. A second reason is that, literary texts are also closely related to life. Carter and Long, (ibid) add *“Teaching literary texts enables students to understand and appreciate other cultures, societies and ideologies different from their own; it encourages personal growth and intellectual development”*

In accordance with these ideas of using literary texts in EFL classes, literary language creates its own context. Littlewood (2000:179) thinks that:

“The actual situation of the reader becomes immaterial as he or she looks on the events created by language. These events create by turn a context of situation for the language of the book and enable to transcend the artificial classroom situation.”

Based on these ideas, it is obvious that literary works undoubtedly enable students to better understand the language by providing them with real world experiences, relationships between society and people where the target language is spoken; even if they are fictions. Therefore literary text is indispensable because it exposes students to meaningful contexts that are replete with descriptive language and interesting characters. Vandrick (1997:43) mention that “*structuring lessons around the reading of literary work introduces a profound range of vocabulary, dialogues, and prose*”. In addition to developing students’ English language skills, teaching literary texts also appeals to their imagination, develops cultural awareness and encourages critical thinking about plots, themes, and characters.

Most importantly, the activities that one can apply with literary lessons easily conform to the student-centered and interactive tenets of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). So literary texts successfully catered to the students’ interest in the first place, it closely matches its movie version, which is popular among EFL audiences. The entertaining feature of movie-watching more or less brings pleasure to text-reading and counteracts the anxiety provoked by the text. Nevertheless, interest alone is not enough to sustain reading motivation from the beginning to the end, especially when the text’s linguistic complexity is above the students’ current proficiency level. For some of the students it is considered to be somewhat beyond comprehension. A text of this level of difficulty may not suit the purpose of pleasure reading. However, this is exactly why it is suitable to serve instead as a course material, before students of intermediate proficiency are ready to venture into reading a literary text on their own. Vandrick (1997: 45) argues that;

“Reading fiction is a process to which students need to be oriented. This is especially true with readers. With a supportive context constructed, students will not feel overwhelmed by the authentic text”

According to Uyemura, (2006)through carefully planned class instruction, students acquire adequate text-reading strategies and confidence that can be applied to their future independent reading.

2.4 How Can Best Literary Texts be Selected

In choosing acceptable texts for the EFL context there are several factors to consider. A number of important reasons lead a language teacher to choose literary texts in the classroom. Brunt, (2005:35) notes that:

“The first factor is the difficulty of the vocabulary and syntax which compel teachers to look for works that match the level they are teaching. Other factors that make a literary text difficult are the historical, social and political references that add complexity for non-speakers of English”.

Brunt,(Ibid)Claims those students’ cultural unfamiliarity with texts causes problems and makes the students dependent on the teacher’s interpretation. As a result, students often have to study literary texts by listening to the teacher's translation and writing new words. Collie and Slater (1990:3) state that: *“literary texts are valuable as authentic material, cultural enrichment, language enrichment and personal involvement”*. In a sense, readers are exercising what the CT experts' call explanation, analysis, synthesis, argumentation and application.

2.4.1 Authentic Material

Literary texts are authentic materials. Most works of literary texts are not created for the primary purpose of teaching a language. Many authentic samples of language in real-life contexts (i.e. travel timetables, city plans, forms, pamphlets, cartoons, advertisements, newspaper or magazine articles) are included within recently developed course materials as Brunt,(2005:34)states *“Learners are exposed to actual language samples of real life /real life like settings. Literary texts can act as a beneficial complement to such materials that make learners creatively read then think”*. However in reading literary texts, students have also to cope with language intended for native speakers. They become familiar with many different linguistic forms, communicative functions and meanings.

2.4. 2 Cultural Enrichment

For many languages learners have ideal ways to develop critical thinking and increase their understanding of verbal/nonverbal aspects of communication in the country within which that language is spoken. For such learners, literary works, such as novels, plays, short stories, etc. facilitate understanding how communication takes place in that country. Maley (1989:12) states that: *“Though the world of a novel, play, or short story is an imaginary one, it presents a full and colorful setting in which characters from many social, regional backgrounds can be described”*. It is clear that a literary text is best regarded as a complement to other materials used to develop the foreign learner’s understanding in the country whose language is being learned. Also, literary work adds a lot to the cultural grammar of the learners.

2.4. 3 Language Enrichment

Literary texts provide learners with a wide range of individual lexical or syntactic items. Students become familiar with many features of the written language upon reading a substantial and contextualized body of texts. Giroux (1997:73) states

"Students learn about the syntax and discourse functions of sentences, the variety of possible structures and the different ways of connecting ideas which develop and enrich their own writing skill."

Nevertheless students also become more productive and adventurous when they begin to perceive the richness and diversity of the language they are trying to learn and begin to make use of some of that potential themselves. Thus, they improve their communicative and cultural competence in the authentic richness, naturalness of the authentic texts. When selecting the literary texts to be used in language classes, the language teacher should take into account needs, motivation, interests, cultural background and language level of the students as Collie and Slater (1990:6-7) mention *"to take into account whether a particular work is able to reveal the kind of personal involvement by arousing the learners' interest and eliciting strong positive reactions from them."*

Accordingly choosing books relevant to the real-life experiences, emotions or dreams of the learner is of great importance. Language difficulty has to be considered as well. If the language of the literary work is simple, this may facilitate the comprehensibility of the literary text but is not in itself the most crucial criterion. Interest, appeal, and relevance are also prominent. Furthermore reading a literary text is more likely to have a long-term and valuable effect upon the learners' linguistic and extra linguistic knowledge when it is meaningful and amusing.

However enjoyment(Collie and Slater,1990) a fresh insight into issues felt to be related to the heart of people's concerns, the pleasure of encountering one's own thoughts or situations exemplified clearly in a work of art, the other equal pleasure of noticing those same thoughts, feelings, emotions, or situations presented by a completely new perspective, all these are motives helping learners to cope with the linguistic obstacles that might be considered too great in a less involving material. Students' motivation in the learning process is often determined by their interest in and enthusiasm for the material used in the class, the level of their persistence with the learning tasks as well as the level of their concentration and enjoyment. Literary-based reading has an important effect on the development of critical

thinking. A reader must recognize the patterns within text, fit details into these patterns and then relate them to other texts and remembered experiences.

2.4.4 Personal Involvement

Literary texts can be useful in the language learning process owing to the personal involvement it fosters in the reader. (Maley, 1989) Once the student reads a literary text, he begins to inhabit the text. He is drawn into the text, understanding the meanings of lexical items or phrases become less significant than pursuing the development of the story. The student becomes enthusiastic to find out what happens as events unfold via the climax, he feels close to certain characters, shares critical thinking and emotional responses. Maley (Ibid: 12) states some of the reasons for regarding literary texts as a potent resource in the language classroom as follows:

1. Universality
2. Non-triviality
3. Personal Relevance
4. Variety
5. Interest
6. Economy and Suggestive Power
7. Ambiguity.

So this can have beneficial effects upon the whole language learning process. At this juncture, the prominence of the selection of a literary text in relation to the needs, expectations, interests and language level of the students is evident.

2.4.5 Variety

Literary work includes within it all possible varieties of subject matter. It is in fact, a battery of topics to use in ELT as Mirman, and Tishman,(1988:74) states “*Within literature, we can find the language of law and of mountaineering, of medicine and of bull-fighting, of church sermons and nursery talk*”Therefore Literary texts deal with themes and topics which are interesting because they reflect part of the human experience and are exhibited in ways designed to engaged the readers’ attention.

2.4.6 Economy and Suggestive Power

One of the great strengths of literary work is its suggestive power. Even in its simple forms, (Tishman, 1988) it invites us to go beyond what is said to what is implied. Since it suggests many ideas with few words, literary work is ideal for generating language discussion. Maximum output can often be derived from minimum input.

2.4.7 Ambiguity

As it is highly suggestive and associative a literary texts portrays different meanings to different people. In other words, since literature provides students with a wide range of language varieties like socialists, regional dialects, jargon, idiolects, etc. Brunt, (2005:34)

“It is rare for two readers to react identically to any given text. In teaching this has two advantages. The first advantage is that each learner’s interpretation has validity within limits. The second advantage is that an almost infinite fund of interactive discussion is guaranteed since each person’s perception is different”

Therefore a person speaks differently in different social contexts like school, hospital, police station and theatre (i.e. formal, informal, casual, frozen, intimate styles speech) hence, incorporating literature in to a foreign language teaching program as a powerful source for reflecting the sociolinguistic aspects of the target language gains importance. It seems that no two readers will have a completely convergent interpretation establishes the tension that is necessary for a genuine exchange of ideas. One of the main functions of literary work is its sociolinguistic richness. The use of language changes from one social group to another. Likewise, it changes from one geographical location to another. it develops their sociolinguistic competence in the target language as clearly exemplified in a work of art; the other, equal pleasure of noticing those same thoughts, feelings, emotions, or situations presented by a completely new perspective: all these are motives helping learners to cope with the linguistic obstacles that might be considered too great in less involving material in choosing acceptable texts for the EFL context.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Sample of the Study

The sample of the study was Sudanese teachers of English (50 teachers) from different schools who were responded to the questionnaire.

3.2 Instruments of Data Collection

The researcher used two tools to collect the data for this study. These tools are, a questionnaire for teachers.

3.3 Procedures

The questionnaire is designed and used as a tool to collect data for the role of literature to develop EFL learners through literary texts by secondary school students, at secondary school this questionnaire is distributed to the EFL teachers at secondary school.

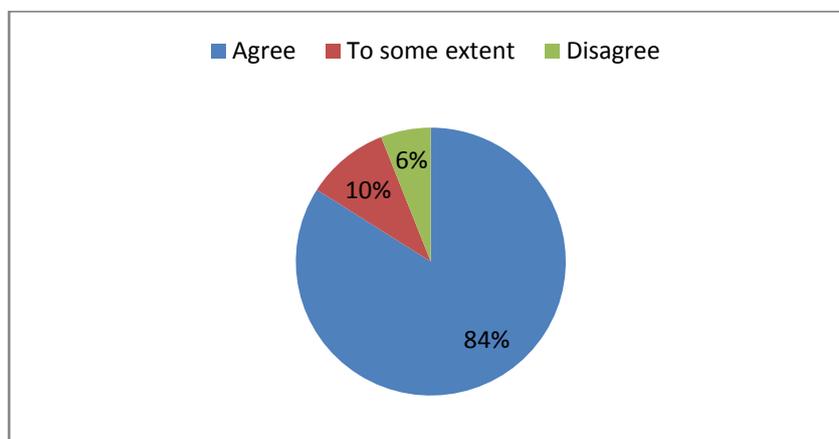
4. DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 The Analysis of the Result of the Questionnaire

Teaching figures of speech in the text helps the students understand the meaning

Table(4.1)

	Frequency	Percent
Agree	42	84.0
To some extent	5	10.0
Disagree	3	6.0
Total	50	100.0



According to the statistical analysis of statement the majority of respondents (84 %) agree that, teaching figures of speech in the text helps the students understand the meaning. Thus this statement is accepted.

Using literary texts in the classroom raises students' awareness of the importance of critical thinking

Table (4.2)

	Frequency	Percent
Agree	38	76.0
To some extent	7	14.0
Disagree	5	10.0
Total	50	100.0

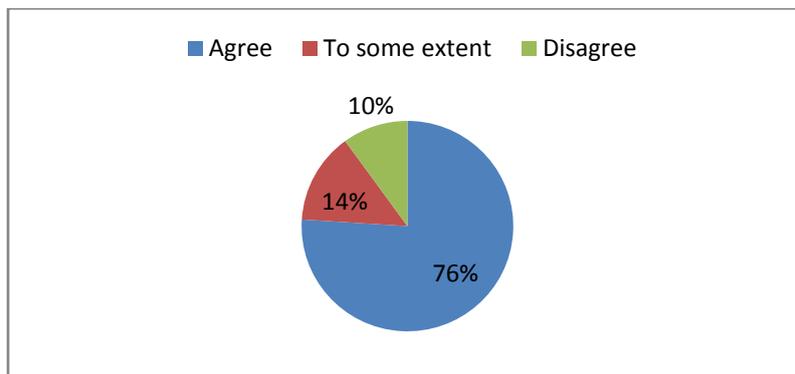


Table and diagram show that, using literary texts in the classroom raises students' awareness of the importance of critical thinking. According to the statistical analysis of statement most respondents (76%) agree that using literary texts in the classroom raises students' awareness of the importance of critical thinking. Only (14%) to some extent and (10%) disagree. Thus this statement is accepted.

Using literary texts in the classroom exposes students to interesting ideas and new expressions

Table(4.3)

	Frequency	Percent
Agree	44	88.0
To some extent	1	2.0
Disagree	5	10.0
Total	50	100.0

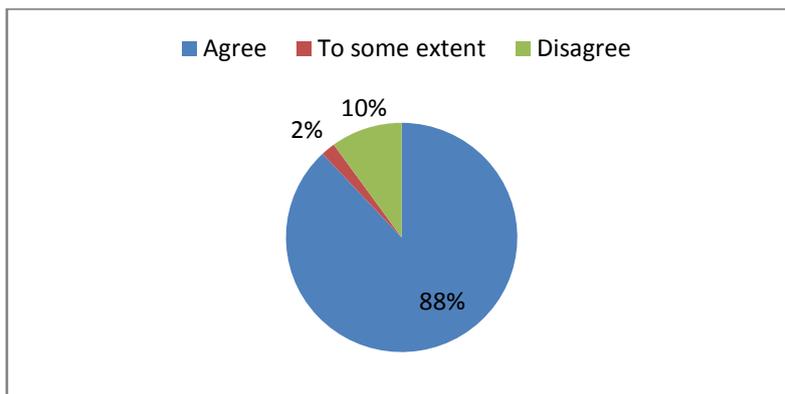


Table and figure teachers who agree are (88%), to some extent (2%) and disagree (10%) according to the result (88%) of the respondent agree that using literary texts in the classroom exposes students to interesting ideas and new expressions.

Students can find out the stylistic features of the text without help from the teacher's

Table (4.4)

	Frequenc y	Percent
Agree	36	72.0
To some extent	4	8.0
Disagree	10	20.0
Total	50	100.0

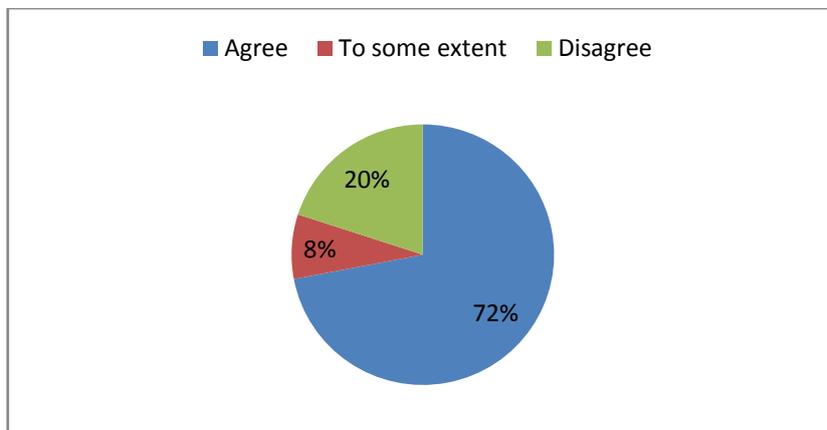


Table and diagram show that, (72%) of the respondents agree with the statement, (8%) of the sample's answer to some extent and (20%) of the sample disagree with the statement, therefore the statement is accepted.

5. CONCLUSION, FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

Literature teaching, as a compulsory subject and an indispensable component of modern liberal arts, occupies a steady seat in tertiary education. It is an undeniable fact that it plays an important role in language teaching and learning in the EFL context.

5.2 Findings

1. Teaching literature develops students' literary texts and exposes them to different cultures
2. Pair and group work activities encourage students to explore their depth of thinking.
3. Using literary texts in the classroom exposes students to interesting ideas and new expressions.

5.3 Recommendations

1. Teachers should be well qualified in developing their students in literary texts.
2. Literature should be adapted in the English language classrooms in the secondary schools.
3. Teachers should create group activities for improving literary text.

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Appendix

No	Statements	Agree	To some extent	Disagree
1	Teaching figures of speech in the text helps the students understand the meaning			
2	Using literary texts in the classroom raises students' awareness of the importance of critical thinking			
3	Using literary texts in the classroom exposes students to interesting ideas and new expressions			
4	Students can find out the stylistic features of the text without help from the teacher's			