

## Utilizing Literary Texts in the College EFL Classrooms: Focused on Linguistic Aspects and Affective Ones

Young-Hee Kim

Tabula Rasa College, Keimyung University

### 문학텍스트를 활용한 대학 교양영어 수업: 의사소통의 언어적 측면과 정서적 측면을 중심으로

김령희

계명대학교 타블라라사 칼리지

**Abstract** This study aims to investigate the effects of literary texts as a teaching tool to enhance college students' English communicative competence both in linguistic aspects and affective ones. The control group used only the course book as study material, whereas the target group read four short stories along with it and engaged in a series of follow-up tasks. To measure their English competence, the researcher had both groups take a pre-test and a post-test, compared the results, and analyzed the data using SPSS. The study indicates that though the target students' post-test scores increased, the result failed in reaching a significant level. Nevertheless, reading and discussing literature facilitated the target students' affective aspects of communication. This article points out some other limitations of utilizing literary texts in language teaching and suggests the need for further research to deal with the issues.

**Key Words** : Literary text, Creativity, Communicative competence, Learner-centered, Liberal arts

요 약 본 논문은 대학교의 교양 영어 수업에 문학 텍스트를 활용하는 것이 학생들의 언어적, 정서적 의사소통 능력의 향상에 미치는 효과를 검토하는데 그 목적을 두고 있다. 통제 그룹은 지정된 교재만을 사용하였고, 목표 그룹은 교재와 더불어 네 편의 단편 소설을 읽고 일련의 추가 활동을 수행하였다. 그들의 영어 의사소통 능력 향상을 측정하기 위해, 연구자는 학생들로 하여금 사전 시험과 사후 시험을 치르게 하였고, SPSS 통계 프로그램을 이용하여 자료를 분석하였다. 비록 사후 시험에서 목표 그룹의 성적 평균이 향상되긴 하였지만 그 차이가 유의미한 수준에 이르지 못하였기에, 이들의 영어 능력 향상이 본 연구에서 제시한 전략에 의한 것임을 확인할 수는 없었지만, 이 전략을 통해 목표 그룹의 정서적인 의사소통 양상이 촉진되었음은 추정할 수 있었다.

주제어 : 문학텍스트, 창의성, 의사소통 능력, 학습자중심, 교양교육

### 1. Introduction

One of the keywords that represent the 21st century would be “consumer-centered.” The concept of “consumer-oriented” or “consumer-customized” has become a critical element in the development of

organizations and their members[1], not only in policy-making and business management but also in the educational environment. Given the current situation, it is a pressing need to research the learner-centered teaching mode in the field of English education, too. In this rapidly changing global era,

\*Corresponding Author : Young-Hee Kim(hazymaze@kmu.ac.kr)

Received May 12, 2018

Accepted June 20, 2018

Revised June 11, 2018

Published June 30, 2018

students, who are the primary recipients of university education, should be those who can contribute to their society based on their competitive assets while simultaneously setting their values and goals of life the right way. To achieve this, teachers need to provide the students with self-directed learning methods that can reflect their diverse tendencies and help them realize their potentials to the full. Through the course they offer, the teachers should also give their students opportunities to reflect their own lives and feel empathy toward other members of society.

This article aims to investigate the effects of utilizing English literature in a college English course on enhancing students' communicative competence and fostering a self-initiated class. In this class, students are exposed to diverse literary texts and learn to think out of the box as they discuss a wide variety of themes with their classmates, and the teachers or, more preferably, the facilitators can arouse students' dormant emotions and enhance their creative communication skills.

Exploiting literature in an EFL classroom is by no means a new trend in higher education at all, of course. Still, the main texts are usually canonized novels or essays, which are too heavy or hard for students to accept without inhibition. The tendency to treat literature as a form of high art has contributed to frequently held misconceptions that literature cannot be compatible with learning English.

Due to these misconceptions, literature has not been effectively utilized and has played a marginal role in college English courses up to now. Some teachers regard it as "a luxury they cannot afford"[2]. Others complain that literary texts contain a raft of difficult words and far-out expressions which are not related to real life, causing literature to be dismissed from language classes[3]. The researcher attempted to broaden the opportunity of reading and interpreting English literature, which has been given only to English majors so far, to non-majors who took English courses as the subjects of liberal arts.

In tandem with Savvidou's opinion that "the separation of literature from language is a false dualism since literature is language and language can indeed be literary"[4], the researcher of this study opted for short and entertaining stories which could be covered in a session of 75 minutes and examined whether using literature had any significant effects on the students' communicative competence both in linguistic ways and affective ones at the end of the semester.

## 2. Theoretical Background

With the rapid growth of the Internet and mobile devices, the amount of information that a learner can access has drastically increased, and thus his or her basic communication ability to handle these vast amounts of data is imperative. Especially, communication skills of college students are critical to prepare them for social advancement and to make them adapt to social life[5]. Educators of foreign languages also place a greater emphasis on learners' sharing and reproducing knowledge through communication rather than merely acquiring knowledge[6]. In this regard, utilizing literary texts as a teaching resource in college English classrooms can bring home to English learners that a deeper understanding of cultures and values is a basic framework for effective communication[7].

Through discussions on various themes and characters of English literary texts, students can gain not only a high level of competence in English, but also the capacities of self-expression, challenge-addressing, problem-solving, and understanding of multiculturalism, which can lead to the cultivation of their imagination and creativity. As Delanoy et al. contend, literature is "a potentially empowering discourse which can help learners develop creative abilities, critical thinking and empathy for other people"[8]. Creativity does not necessarily connote an artistic and aesthetic facet of human minds, but it relates to "abilities to effect change by approaching

problems from a different perspective”[9]. In the process of examining various aspects of life woven into literary works, students will broaden their thinking horizon and gain insights into their own lives as well as the lives of others. By exploring values in literary texts, they develop attitudes towards themselves, and “these values and attitudes relate to the world outside the classroom”[10]. In this respect, teaching literature can support a whole person education.

Kang suggests that we need to define communicative competence to assess the status of literature in the context of language education and maintains that communication is not confined to linguistic aspects but extended to affective ones[11]. Falvey and Kennedy also emphasize the importance of affective dimensions in language learning in their book on language education through literature.

Learning a language entails more than just making grammar deposits in a language bank account. It is not only an intellectual process but is tied up with values and emotions. All the contributors to this book concur in the view that the forgotten emotional content must be put back into language learning[2].

Yorke lists the benefits of applying literature, more specifically short stories, to develop students’ awareness of how language is used in literature and, at the same time, to improve their ability to discuss human and social problems[12].

These days, increasing numbers of pedagogists and linguists concur that literature can appeal to language learners’ emotions and motivate them to broaden their perspective to the world[13,14]. Teaching literature can be complementary in language education and broaden learners’ experience “beyond the traditional and curriculum-bound EFL classroom”[8]. Hall also considers literature as including “spoken and written features, diverse levels of formality, social, professional styles, dialects, sociolects, and idiolects”[15]. Furthermore, the dialogue in stories provides students with examples of the actual usage of a language and

prepares them to read between the lines of the text, thereby motivating them to take on the “elaboration of meaning beyond the facts directly represented by the story” and “to explore the open space” in the text[16,17].

On the basis of this theoretical background, the researcher investigated whether literature had any significant implications for facilitating language learners’ linguistic competence both in a cognitive way and in an affective way. In the process, the researcher also attempted to induce the students to lead the class for themselves by actively participating in diverse class activities.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1 Participants

The study was conducted at K University located in South Korea for the freshmen enrolled in “Academic English” course during the first semester of 2017. The class met twice weekly in 75-minute sessions for 16 weeks. The control group was composed of 27 students majoring in business administration, and the target group consisted of 25 students majoring in humanities.

The control group used only the given textbook as main study material, while the target group covered four short stories of two to four pages, along with the course book, during one semester. Taking into account the changed dispositions of language learners who are accustomed to audio-visual media in the digital society, the researcher of this study occasionally resorted to music and video clips of the same subject in both groups and tried to break the frame of the traditional English class heavily dependent on written texts. Thereby, meeting the needs of these new learners who “are different in terms of digesting and consuming literary texts from those of previous generations”[18], the researcher induced them to relate their acquired knowledge to the real world they lived in.

### 3.2 Material

The English courses were not targeted for English majors but intended as a liberal arts subject open to all the freshmen. Since it was a compulsory subject, the instructors were supposed to use a designated course book, to cover a certain number of reading units, and to follow a standard curriculum. Due to these restrictions, the researcher decided to select the literary texts, all of which were short stories, with themes the same as or similar to those of the reading passages in the textbook. They were also the stories bringing up topics “that can relate to students or are controversial so that the students can think critically about the meaning of the text”[19].

For the control group, the researcher did not utilize any literary texts but relied on the given course book as a teaching tool. The students covered twelve reading units in the textbook during the semester. For the target group, the researcher selected four short stories as study materials and examined if there were any changes in the students’ communicative abilities. The target students covered six reading units in the textbook and read four short stories during the semester.

For the target group, “Desiree’s Baby”(1893) by Kate Chopin, “After Twenty Years”(1906) by O. Henry, “The Chaser”(1940) by John Collier, and “Black Dress”(1999) by Valerie Collins were selected as reading texts. “Desiree’s Baby” had the students ponder on the world of racial discrimination and distorted prejudice toward others. In case of “After Twenty Years,” the synopsis was already known to many students, and this prior knowledge lowered the barrier to entry into the original English version of the piece. The course book for “Academic English” contains reading passages on friendship, which offered the students a chance to glimpse multifaceted relationships between friends. “The Chaser,” the witty but cynical story by John Collier has a host of expressions with double meanings, which are quite functional in expanding students’ vocabulary and helping them draw

inferences. A spooky tale disguised as a young adult story, “Black Dress” is an excellent example of a literary text which abounds in figurative expressions and foreshadowing. This story allowed the students to put a wide range of interpretations as to what happened in the end. All the stories were unabridged and authentic texts containing somewhere between 1200 and 2,000 words.

### 3.3 Procedure

#### 3.3.1 Pre-reading Activities

To feel relaxed and to encounter the literary texts without fear, the target students were asked to work in groups of three or four at random each time and to share their sentiments toward the given story before they took on the close reading. They were also provided with definitions and brief explanations of difficult words in advance so that their lack of vocabulary should not hinder their appreciation of the texts. Some of the pre-reading discussion topics are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Pre-reading Discussion Topics

Short Stories	Topics
“Desiree’s Baby”	1. Do you know how women were treated in the past in America, in your country, or in the world? 2. Guess the meaning of the name Desiree.
“After Twenty Years”	3. When and how did you meet your best friend? 4. How do you maintain a good friendship?
“The Chaser”	5. What does the word “chaser” remind you of? 6. Do you believe in love at first sight?
“Black Dress”	7. Have you ever craved for anything desperately? 8. Do you think to be slim equals being beautiful?

Trying not to interrupt the students’ unconstrained and spontaneous responses, the researcher seldom gave them any opinions or interpretations. This activity was intended to help them “gain a better understanding of the crucial elements” in the given text and set them ready to read it with expectation[20].

### 3.3.2 Post-reading Activities

After finishing a close reading of the text, the students were invited to participate in two follow-up activities as follows.

(1) Discussion: To clear up problems they encountered while reading a literary text, or to iron out some of the details in it, the students engaged in discussions for the rest of the class session. Since these courses were designed to be liberal arts subjects, they were not asked for detailed analyses or academic interpretations. Concurring with Zoreda's statement that "the teacher must serve as a listener, facilitator, and 'midwife'"[21], the researcher focused on meaningful interactions among the students and expected them to experience literature open to interpretation. Some of the topics they discussed after reading are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Post-reading Discussion Topics

Short Stories	Topics
"Desiree's Baby"	1. Tell us any ironical situations that you have experienced so far. 2. What kind of prejudices do people have toward others?
"After Twenty Years"	3. What would you do if you were Silky Bob? 4. Discuss Jimmy's action and tell us if you are for or against his choice.
"The Chaser"	5. Why does the old man mention the poison in the story? 6. There is an English saying "Be careful, or your wishes will come true." What do you think it means?
"Black Dress"	7. What are the typical standards of beauty in your country? 8. When did you realize the true meaning of the ending scene?

(2) Finding Related Resources: In line with the belief that educational effects can be maximized when students take the initiative in learning, the researcher encouraged the students to search for any material or media relevant to the text and present it in the next session. It was a team-based after-class assignment which was

geared toward expanding the breadth of their imagination.

### 3.3.3 Pre-test and Post-test

The researcher had both the control group and the target group take a pre-test at the beginning of the semester and a post-test at the end of the semester. Each test was composed of multiple-choice questions, short-answer questions, and short essays, which the researcher marked by 30 points. To compare the test results between the two groups, the researcher employed SPSS (ver. 19) for statistical analysis of the data, and to identify the statistical significance of the data, I also administered *t*-test.

## 4. Results and Discussion

### 4.1 Results

As indicated in Table 3, the target group got a slightly higher score in the post-test while the control group got a lower score in the post-test. In case of the target group, their mean score of the pre-test (15.68) was lower than that of the control group (17.41), but they showed an increase of the mean score (17.08) in the post-test while the control group showed a decrease of the mean score (16.67).

Table 3. The results of the pre-test and the post-test of the control group and the target group

Division	<i>N</i>	Test	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>SEM</i>
Control Group	27	Pre	17.41	5.57	1.07
		Post	16.67	6.06	1.17
Target Group	25	Pre	15.68	6.71	1.34
		Post	17.08	6.08	1.22

Nevertheless, when the researcher conducted the *t*-test to compare the mean differences and analyze them statistically, it was discovered that the mean difference of the target group did not reach a significant level ( $p > 0.05$ ) as shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Comparison of the pre-test and the post-test of the target group

Division	M	SD	t-value	p-value
Pre-test	15.68	6.71	-1.775	.089
Post-test	17.08	6.08		

Indeed the target group's mean score of the post-test increased by 1.4 points at the end of the semester, but the researcher was not able to confirm whether this increase was due to using literary texts in class or to other variables.

Even though the researcher failed in identifying the statistical significance of using literature by the quantitative tests, the researcher attempted to make performance assessments to measure the students' affective aspects. The control group and the target group were asked to write short comments on given questions, and generally, the students of the target group expressed their opinions in a more detailed and creative way than those of the control group. Breaking out of the reading with one correct answer, they experienced literature allowing their own interpretation. The comments of three students in each group are translated into English by the researcher and given in Table 5 as examples.

Table 5. Examples of students' comments on a given question

Question: Why do you think the writer uses the word "foggy" to express loneliness?	
Control group	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. She feels stifled and can't see her future. (Student 1)</li> <li>2. A fog is added to her sense of loneliness, and it expresses deeper lonely feeling. (Student 2)</li> <li>3. First, the weather is actually foggy. And second, she wants to express the vague feeling of being alone like being in a fog. (Student 3)</li> </ol>
Target group	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. All the other people make their ways to schools and businesses, but the writer is leaning against the bus stop and feeling anonymous (foggy) and depressed in a big city. (Student 4)</li> <li>2. When it's foggy, you don't see anything in front of you. Like this, the writer does not know where her sense of loneliness and depression comes from. That's why she uses the word "foggy." (Student 5)</li> <li>3. The writer lives in a coastal city, which is humid all the time. She may have used the word "foggy" to maximize her loneliness and to give the bleak and dismal atmosphere. (Student 6)</li> </ol>

To measure the attitude and sentiment of the students of both groups toward the course, the researcher employed their evaluation of lecture carried out by K University, which is presented in Table 6. Of all the ten items of the evaluation survey, four items related to students' satisfaction, the study material, the professor's assistance, and their knowledge enhancement are presented below. The result of students' evaluation demonstrates that the target group was more favorable toward the course in every aspect than the control group, though both of the groups seemed to be satisfied with the course in general.

Table 6. Students' evaluation of lecture (Perfect score=5)

Division	Control Group N=27	Target Group N=25
Average score	4.678	4.738
Item 1	4.615	4.720
Item 2	4.615	4.760
Item 3	4.538	4.760
Item 4	4.577	4.720

Item 1: The course was satisfactory in general.

Item 2: The assignments and study materials were helpful in understanding the lecture.

Item 3: The professor made a variety of efforts to assist students' learning.

Item 4: The knowledge related to this course was obtained and enhanced systematically through the lecture.

## 4.2 Discussion

The findings of this study concur with the researcher's assumption that using literary texts can motivate students to interpret narrative texts in their own way and to "internalize the language of the text"[22]. Nevertheless, it must be pointed out that this research showed some limitations, too.

First, in the statistic analysis using SPSS (ver. 19), it failed in reaching a significant level as to the effects of teaching literature in EFL classrooms. Second, the control group and the target group consisted of 27 and 25 students respectively. The number of the samples may be too small to be generalized to the whole language learners. Besides, the research material was

not diverse but confined to short stories. Poems, plays, or other genres of literature may have yielded different results.

Teaching literature in EFL classrooms has some practical limitations itself. First, selecting appropriate literary texts demands considerable time and energy [23], which may exhaust teachers in the process of preparation. Second, some students may have difficulty reading the narrative texts and participating in group discussions due to their low English proficiency or their lack of confidence. Besides, it is not easy to make a fair and objective assessment of the students' communicative creativity.

With these actual and potential problems, however, it is worthwhile to attempt teaching literature in EFL classrooms "to support learners as deep thinkers beyond the demands of the assessed learning outcomes" [24].

## 5. Conclusion

The real goal of education should not be confined to delivering knowledge to students and having them equipped with useful skills for "successful entry into the employment market" [24]. Instead, it should include seeking proper methods to prepare them for future life, which is true of language education, more specifically in English language education as well.

This study aims to explore a learner-centered and self-directed English learning strategy focused on discussions and presentations utilizing selected literary texts. It derives from the assumption that using literature in the EFL classroom can reinforce students' linguistic and communicative skills, much more their critical and transcultural perspectives toward the world.

The participants in this study were given opportunities to read selected literary texts, to engage in lively discussions with their peers, and to present their own interpretations of the texts. They also carried out self-initiative follow-up activities by choosing

other tools and resources related to the given literary piece for themselves. By actively leading the class this way, they were expected to advance not only linguistic proficiency but also insights into themselves, others, and the world, thus achieving a pedagogical vision of learner-oriented education.

This approach to utilizing literature in EFL class has got positive feedback from most of the students, but there are some potential issues to be handled with caution as well. The target students' mean score of the post-test did increase, but the statistical analysis of the data failed to prove the researcher's assumption that teaching literature contributed to this increase. Nevertheless, if the instructors put forth enough effort in planning the course to get over the limitations, literature will be a useful tool in enhancing students' communicative competence.

## REFERENCES

- [1] T. Doyle. (2008). *Helping students learn in learner-centered environment*. Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing, LLC. Print.
- [2] P. Falvey & P. Kennedy. (eds). (1997). *Learning language through literature: a sourcebook for teachers of English in Hong Kong*. Hong Kong: Nordia Printing Co. Ltd. 135-46.
- [3] M. Huh & J. Kim. (2004). The use of literature in the L2 writing course. *English Language Teaching* 16.1, 257-77.
- [4] C. Savvidou. (2004). *An integrated approach to teaching literature in the EFL classroom*. The Internet TESL Journal X(12). <http://iteslj.org/Techniques/Savvidou-Literature.html>
- [5] M. Choi. (2017). Convergence study about awareness toward communication, communication ability and self-efficacy : centered on the 'S' university college students. *Journal of Convergence for Information Technology* 7.6, 79-87.
- [6] G. Lazar. (1993). *Literature and language teaching: a guide for teachers and trainers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- [7] C. J. Brumfit & R. A. Carter. (eds). (1986). *Literature and language teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- [8] W. Delanoy. et al. (eds). (2015). *Learning with literature in the EFL classroom*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang AG.
- [9] P. McIntosh & D. Warren. (eds). (2013). *Creativity in the classroom: case studies in using the arts in teaching and learning in higher education*. Bristol: Intellect Ltd.
- [10] L. Clandfield. (2003). *Teaching materials: using literature in the EFL/ESL classroom*. One Stop English. <http://www.onestopenglish.com/methodology/methodology/teaching-materials/teaching-materials-using-literature-in-the-efl-esl-classroom/146508.article>
- [11] S. Kang. (2013). Reading English literature as a communicative activity. *The Journal of Teaching English Literature* 17.2, 5-22.
- [12] F. Yorke. (1986). Interpretative tasks applied to short stories. *ELT Journal* 40.4, 313-19.
- [13] N. T. Thom. (2008). Using literary texts in language teaching. *VNU Journal of Science, Foreign Languages* 24, 120-26.
- [14] W. Tasneen. (2010). Literary texts in the language classroom: a study of teachers' and students' views at international schools in Bangkok. *Asian EFL Journal (Special Issue)* 12.4, 173-87.
- [15] G. Hall. (2015). *Literature in language education*. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK.
- [16] S. Blau. (2003). *The literature workshop: teaching texts and their readers*. Portsmouth NH: Heinemann.
- [17] H. Jeong. (2018). William Faulkner's *Requiem for a Nun*: Temple's moral growth. *Journal of Convergence for Information Technology* 8.1, 105-14.
- [18] K. Suh. (2017). Comparison of digital literature between South Korea and North America. *Studies in English Language & Literature* 43.4, 107-23.
- [19] S. Kim. (2017). The effect of repeated reading on speaking and writing of adult EFL learners. *Studies in English Language & Literature* 43.4, 205-29.  
DOI : 10.21559/aellk.2017.43.4.011
- [20] A. Wing-Bo Tso. (2014). Teaching short stories to students of English as a foreign language (EFL) at tertiary level. *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies* 10.1, 111-17.
- [21] M. L. Zoreda. (2002). *Teaching short science fiction stories in English as a foreign language in Mexico*. ERIC. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED464511>
- [22] Ö. Ş. Bartan. (2017). The effects of reading short stories in improving foreign language writing skills. *Reading Matrix: An International Online Journal* 17.1, 59-74.
- [23] S. Saha. (2014). Addressing the unaddressed:

considering specific teaching context in exploiting short stories to teach language to EFL learners. *Language in India* 14.7, 528-45.

- [24] P. McIntosh & D. Warren. (eds). (2013). *Creativity in the classroom: case studies in using the arts in teaching and learning in higher education*. Bristol: Intellect Ltd.

김령희(Kim, Young Hee)

[정회원]



- 1990년 2월 : 경북대학교 영어교육과(교육학사)
- 1993년 2월 : 경북대학교 대학원 영어영문학과(문학석사)
- 2000년 2월 : 경북대학교 대학원 영어영문학과(문학박사)
- 2010년 3월 ~ 현재 : 계명대학교 Tabula Rasa College 교수
- 관심분야 : 현대영미소설, 포스트모더니즘, 문학과 영화의 융합, 문학과 언어 교육의 융합
- E-Mail : hazymaze@kmu.ac.kr