SHORT STORIES IN THE UNIVERSITY EFL CLASSROOM: A READER-RESPONSE APPROACH FOR UZBEK STUDENTS OF ENGLISH

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Abstract. Literature is part of every English philology programme in Uzbekistan, but it is usually taught through lectures on literary history and plot summaries, while language courses rarely use literary texts at all. This thesis argues that short stories can serve both purposes if they are taught through a reader-response approach. Drawing on Rosenblatt's transactional theory and Paran's survey of research, it proposes criteria for choosing stories and a lesson model that moves from personal response to close language work and creative writing, with English translations of Uzbek stories used for intercultural comparison.

Keywords: literature in language teaching, short stories, reader-response, intercultural competence, EFL.

Introduction.

Students of English philology in Uzbekistan learn a great deal about English and American literature: authors, movements, periods and the plots of famous novels. Examinations often ask them to retell a novel or list the themes of a period. In their reading, writing and speaking classes, however, literary texts hardly appear, because teachers prefer informational texts on education, the environment or technology.

Both sides lose from this separation. Literature courses that deal with information about texts do little for students' English, and language courses that avoid literature give up texts that are rich, memorable and personally engaging. Collie and Slater (1987) gave four reasons for using literature in language teaching: it is authentic, it enriches cultural and linguistic knowledge, and it involves the reader personally. Carter and Long (1991) described cultural, language and personal growth models of literature teaching and argued that good practice combines all three, and Lazar (1993) showed how this can be done in ordinary language lessons.

Aim and methods.

The aim is to offer a practical model for using short stories in university EFL courses. Theoretical and empirical work on literature in language teaching was reviewed, with particular attention to reader-response theory. Criteria for selecting stories were adapted to students at B1–C1 levels, and a lesson model was designed and illustrated with a short teaching sequence. The model is intended for classroom trial.

Main part.

Rosenblatt (1978) argued that meaning does not lie in the text alone but arises in the "transaction" between reader and text. She contrasted efferent reading, in which the reader looks for information to take away, with aesthetic reading, in which the reader attends to the experience of the text itself. Literature teaching in Uzbekistan mostly asks for efferent reading: students extract plots and themes. A reader-response approach starts from aesthetic reading and uses students' own reactions as the basis for discussion and analysis. Paran (2008), reviewing empirical studies, found evidence that literature can support language awareness, vocabulary learning and engagement, although many of the studies were small and descriptive.

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Short stories suit this approach because they can be read in a week of homework or a single lesson and still give a complete literary experience. Stories of roughly 1,500–4,000 words work well, provided most of the vocabulary is within students' reach and the few unknown words on each page can be glossed. The story should present a situation students can relate to, such as a family conflict, a hard choice or leaving home, and ideally have an open or surprising ending. Pairing an English story with an English translation of an Uzbek story on a similar theme adds an intercultural dimension and lets students talk about their own culture in English.

The lesson model has three phases. Before reading, students connect the story to their own lives: for a story about a quarrel over a career choice, they first discuss how such decisions are made in their own families. While reading, they keep a short log, noting at two or three points how they feel, what they expect to happen and which sentences struck them. After reading, the work moves through three steps. Students first compare their logs in small groups and answer open questions (Who did you sympathise with? What would you have done?) that have no single correct answer. The class then studies one passage closely, for example how the writer shows a character's feelings without naming them. Finally, students produce something of their own: a different ending, a letter from one character to another, or a short scene. Over four lessons, a group might read an English story about a young person moving to the city and an Uzbek story on the same theme, and finish by writing a scene that brings the two settings together. Assessment can draw on the reading log, discussion, a short analytical paragraph and the creative piece, none of which requires memorising facts about the author.

Conclusion.

Short stories give Uzbek students authentic, engaging English and a reason to respond personally to what they read. Taught through a reader-response approach, they bring literature back into language courses and make literature courses more useful for language development. In line with Paran's (2008) call for evidence, the next step is to test the model's effect on vocabulary, writing and students' attitudes to reading.

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