
Teaching Language Arts through Literature: Utilising Imagination Novels

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Abstract

This paper explores the pedagogical value of incorporating literature—specifically imagination-based novels like *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*—into English Language Teaching (ELT), particularly for second-language learners. Tracing the historical evolution of literature in language instruction, the study highlights the shifting perceptions of literature's role from the Grammar-Translation Method to the Communicative Approach. The research emphasizes the importance of selecting age-appropriate and culturally relevant texts to foster linguistic development, cultural understanding, and student engagement. Special attention is given to the benefits and challenges of using children's literature, noting its capacity to present accessible language structures, cultural contexts, and universal themes. The paper uses *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* as a case study to demonstrate how linguistic play, cultural references, and symbolic themes can be harnessed for language acquisition and critical thinking. Practical strategies for text selection and classroom implementation are discussed, encouraging educators to adopt literature-rich, student-centered teaching practices that promote both language proficiency and cultural literacy.

Keywords: English Language Teaching (ELT). Children's Literature. *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* Second Language Acquisition, Literature-Based Instruction, Cultural Awareness

Introduction

Literature has a long and storied history at the heart of the English curriculum, as shown by those above. The communicative techniques brought some of this legacy back, even though many 20th-century educators turned against the use of literature. Literature began to be recognised for its worth around the turn of the century.

According to Chris Lima's (2010) speculation, educators may have seen the value of literature as a tool for fostering student understanding of language and begun to feel remorse for underutilizing it in their classrooms. Literature is now recognised as a valuable resource for teachers, not just for its actual content but also for its cultural implications. However, language instructors still seldom use literature to teach English, and there is much room for improvement in this approach.

The first and most important step for instructors who wish to include literature in their English courses is to choose the appropriate literary work. Sarah McKay (1982) goes so far as to claim that all instructors must effectively employ literature in ELT is selecting the appropriate material. Some of the drawbacks that have been discussed may be overcome by choosing the right wording. Overly complex books, for instance, might be discouraging and confusing for pupils. For pupils to reap the full advantages of literature, the right material must be chosen. Teachers may be tempted to choose books for their classes based on their preferences or the books' widespread appeal. This method of choice may not be the most useful to pupils. (Eisenmann & Summer, 2020). As a result, choosing a book is a sensitive subject, and educators should give it the attention it deserves.

When deciding on a book for instruction, educators must weigh several variables. Appropriate reading material is likely to vary between student populations. As a result, educators should take stock of their classrooms and evaluate students according to criteria. Learners' existing linguistic language is the first criterion to consider. It is hard to find the right balance between challenging and accessible when selecting reading material for students. (Lima, 2010). Krashen (2004) suggests pairing understandable information, or easily understood material, with only slightly more advanced material for the students. When describing this idea, he referred to a mark of $i+1$, where i is the easily digestible information and $+1$ is the expanded and more complex details. He claims this is the optimal quantity of novel material for facilitating spontaneous language development. Learners' motivation and anxiety levels drop when they are bombarded with the material they do not fully grasp, a phenomenon known as an "affective filter" increase. In the long run, this will prevent the child from learning the language normally. In light of this, educators need to choose materials that challenge their students without requiring them to actively engage in an "I spy" game with every word (Lima, 2010). Teachers can also consider their student's prior knowledge of the country's culture and customs before settling on a book. According to Chris Lima's (2010) research, educators' knowledge and observation of their pupils is the greatest instrument for determining their linguistic and cultural language.

Learners' ages are another crucial consideration linked to their areas of interest. This is because pupils' interests change dramatically as they mature. Therefore, educators should seek reading materials that resonate with their students' backgrounds, interests, and motivations. Educators can better pique their students' attention and motivate them to actively engage with the material if they choose books with personally relevant and universal information. Doing so will ultimately guarantee a good response to the reading content and possibly even a vibrant classroom debate.

Additionally, "if it is meaningful and enjoyable, reading is more likely to have a lasting and beneficial effect upon the learners' linguistic and cultural knowledge." (Collie & Slater, 1987, p. 8). It is also important that the text or book selected does not bore the students; as Chris Lima (2010) puts it, "nothing is more effective in killing the joy of reading than a boring text" (p. 112). However, since educators often see literary works with a greater degree of tolerance and appreciation, it may be challenging for educators to judge whether books are uninteresting for students.

The right text may make all the difference in the classroom, and there are strategies instructors can take to be sure they have chosen the right one for their students. The first option is to give students the freedom to choose the reading material they will use for their assignments. Instead of forcing students to read something they do not like, instructors might give students a choice of books to read (and maybe even suggest some of their favourites). Students would be constrained in certain ways to engage with content appropriate for their language and culture while being allowed to choose a book that interests them. (Lima, 2010) In addition, if students are free to choose their reading material, they will feel less pressured and will likely take greater pleasure in the experience. Students who continue to have trouble reading might still avoid failing tests by avoiding literature in another manner. Teachers might allow students to set aside a book they have selected but are not enjoying. Students would not have to worry about losing interest in reading, developing anxiety, or developing a distaste for literature if this were to happen to them. (McKay, 1982). Naturally, these strategies only make sense when students are expected to perform substantial reading independently. Whenever a group of students is collaborating on a single text, everyone in the class must agree on the text they will use, and that choice must stand for the duration of the course.

Simplifying the text is another technique often utilised when using literature in ELT to prevent the usage of content that is too complicated and challenging for the students. Teachers may avoid making the common error of assigning too difficult work by employing graded readers. However, some academics worry that doing so

may cause instructors to provide students with a text that is not the original. The goal of using literature in English classes would be lost if sections were simplified or cut out to make the material more readable. (McKay, 1982). Gillian Claridge (2005) conducted research in which he compared two manuscripts, one original and one graded, to determine whether or not the graded work lacked authenticity. The author was concerned with fidelity to the original and with the “word frequency distribution” (p. 155) of the text. While the original material is more detailed, the study revealed that the word frequency in the graded text is correctly diversified. Due to the original text’s expanded capacity for expressing techniques like “build-up tension,” its message is clearer. Even so, he concludes that “well-written graded readers can offer an authentic reading experience for learners, which will help prepare them for reading texts that were not simplified.” (Claridge, 2005, p. 157) However, the quality of graded readers may vary depending on the writers chosen. Sarah McKay (1982) believes that it is preferable to use books written with ease in mind rather than to use abridged versions of more complex works. Literature for young adults or even children’s literature may be a resource for teachers. These pieces are brief and use elementary grammar and vocabulary. Teachers of English who are interested in incorporating literature into their classrooms are likely to have these traits. Christian Jones and Ronald Carter (2012) found that a frequent reason why instructors do not employ literature in their courses is that they are not interested in it themselves and are afraid that their disinterest will rub off on their students. Teachers must have a genuine interest in literature and enthusiasm for the material they are teaching to inspire their students to develop the same enthusiasm. Still, when educators opt to include literary works in their courses, they should always keep in mind the criteria above and that they are using the literature for the benefit of their students and not simply because it is something they love.

Implementing Children's Literature into the English Language Teaching (ELT) Classroom

Stories have always played a significant role in the lives of all people. It began originally with cave drawings and continues to modern flicks infatuation. We use tales in our daily talks to express various parts of our life. However, kids are the ones that actively seek out tales and have the greatest need for them. Through storytelling, children not only learn their native language but also develop a perspective on the world. Through experiences like learning right from wrong, youngsters appreciate life’s innate harmony and predictability. They do it unwittingly and while participating in something they like. Therefore, one may assume that tales and children’s literature might be a terrific sources for learning a second language

and gaining an awareness of that country's culture via a learning method that is intimately acquainted with them. (Pinto & Soares, 2012). "Children's literature' as a term is generally used to cover all literature for children and adolescents, including oral literature, such as fairy tales and nursery rhymes, graphic narratives and young adult literature, reflecting the eclectic interest of children" (Janice Bland, 2012, p. 1).

Students of all ages may benefit from the wide variety of subgenres within children's literature, which can be utilised to foster a love of reading and writing and an appreciation of art, language, intelligence, and emotion. (Pinto & Soares, 2012).

Using *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* in ELT

About the Book and Its Author

Charles Lutwidge Dodgson, better known as Lewis Carroll, created *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, a unique children's book, during the Victorian period. For the last century and a half, this book has continued to astound its target audience of young readers. (Lemos, 2009). Mathematician Lewis Carroll enjoyed games of logic and riddles. Along with being an enthusiastic inventor and photographer, he (Warren, 1980). Possibly due to Carroll's analytical nature, the novel has elements of absurdity and craziness, earning it the label of so-called nonsense literature and Lewis Carroll the title of master of nonsense. Another major language of this literary work is Lewis Carroll's playful and inventive use of language. His love for young females was another questionable interest of his that still had an impact on his creative works.

Nonetheless, there is no proof that this adoration was motivated by sexual desire. Instead, Martin Gardner writes in *Annotated Alice* (1999) that "little girls appealed to him precisely because he felt sexually safe with them." (p. 11). The inspiration for Lewis Carroll's magnum opus, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, came from this fascination. He met Alice Liddell, the daughter of the university's dean when he was teaching mathematics at Oxford. Soon he was spending all his free time with her and constantly snapping pictures of her. According to legend, Lewis Carroll conceived *Alice in Wonderland* to occupy the actual Alice on a boat ride. (Gardner, 1999).

Alice's adventures begin when she encounters a peculiar being—a white rabbit who can talk and is also carrying a pocket watch in his waistcoat. She decides to investigate more and finds herself tumbling into a rabbit hole. She is transported to a strange new world populated by bizarre beings and sites through this chasm. The Cheshire Cat, the Queen of Hearts, and the caterpillar are just a few of the characters Alice encounters. She goes to a tea party with March Hare, the Mad Hatter, and Dormouse. She undergoes a size-changing roller coaster and finds herself on trial after being accused of a crime. Alice is put in settings that make no sense to her but are perfectly reasonable to the other animals. During the crazy tea party, Alice is

astonished and baffled to see a watch that displays the date and not the time of day. When Alice is woken by her sister on the riverbank where she had fallen asleep, the bizarre events that have been happening to her seem like something out of a strange dream, but they are real. (Carroll, 1865/2018).

The book's intriguing and original narrative is certainly a selling point, but that is not all it offers. There are recurring patterns, symbols, and ideas throughout the narrative. For this reason, numerous academics have analysed this literary work to decipher its symbolism, motifs, meaningless elements, and hidden meanings in the language. It is a classic work of literature, but it is not just linguists and literary historians interested in it. This work is motivating and full of elements fundamental to mathematics, neuroscience, psycholinguistics, and political science (Warren, 1980). People throughout the globe take an interest not only in the narrative and features but also in the backstory of how it came to be. There will always be certain mysteries about this story, no matter how much we try to solve them.

Reasons for Selecting *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* to Teach English at Secondary Schools

Even though, as was just said, this literary work receives considerable interest from adults and academics, it is classified as children's literature, and young readers find it just as enjoyable as their older counterparts; the labelling has no effect on the popularity of the work. Whether or not it is an acceptable text for use in a secondary language, ESL programmes remain open. There are several grounds for believing that the incorporation of this material into classes for English language learners would be very beneficial. The next sections provide a more in-depth explanation of these factors and their consequences for how the book is now being used to teach English as a foreign language.

Language Games

“ ‘Curiouser and curiouser! Cried Alice’ (She was so much surprised that for the moment she quite forgot how to speak good English)” (Carroll, 1865/2018, p. 23)

The above-quoted passage from the book provides the first argument in favour of utilising this literary material to teach English. Since the correct English construction of the word in question is only “curious,” there is no such thing as “curiouser.” There are several examples of such language and linguistic play throughout the book. One language for these verbal shenanigans is that “figurative meanings are often taken literally, producing ludicrous situations and funny altercations” in the tale. (Lemos, 2009, p. 26). Lewis Carroll spent much time experimenting with homonymy. Homonyms contribute to several instances of miscommunication between Alice and other characters. This is because many words

have the same spelling but distinct meanings; these are called homonyms. In chapter three, the Mouse describes Alice's life story using the term tale, but Alice interprets it as the tail. Saying, "Mine is a long and tragic story!" The Mouse sighed and turned to Alice. Wondering at the mouse's tail length, Alice replied, "Why do you call it sad?" Throughout the Mouse's story, she continued wondering about it, leading her to conclude that the story must have gone something like this. (Carroll, 1865/2018, p. 34)

The scenario shown above illustrates homophones and might be used to help students learn new words and the proper way to pronounce them. Carroll also had fun experimenting with polysemy or puns, as seen by the abundance of phrases with multiple meanings that lead to comical ambiguity and miscommunication throughout Alice's Adventures in Wonderland. Nevertheless, Carroll's deft use of language was not limited to idioms and other figures of speech. He also enjoyed toying with syntax and illogical reasoning (Gardner, 1999). In order to remind students of the distinction between more and less, encourage them to utilise their imaginations or get them thinking, and the following example might be used in English classes.

"Take some more tea," the March Hare said earnestly to Alice. "I have had nothing yet," Alice replied in an offended tone, "So I cannot take more."

"You mean you cannot take less," said the Hatter: "it is very easy to take more than nothing." (Carroll, 1865/2018, p. 74)

"Most of the time, when you use the word more,' it means that something has already taken place" (Lemos, 2009, 5). By her reasoning, if Alice has already had a drink, then she must be able to take another. The March Hare counters that although more, nothing is feasible, less, nothing is, and vice versa.

The novel is littered with language problems that may be used as language starters or in-class exercises. However, it is not only the clever wordplay but also the rudimentary linguistic constructions, such as "Down the Rabbit-Hole", for the language of the first chapter. In this instalment, Alice makes her way to Wonderland after taking a tumble down the rabbit hole. The English term "falling down the rabbit hole," meaning "to find ourselves in a surreal, strange, or chaotic situation" or "to become immersed in something complex and confusing and be unable to detach from it," comes from this concept (rabbit hole, n.d.) These parts of the book may help students learn about many components of language, such as grammar, phonology, and vocabulary.

Cultural Consequences

This novel was written in London's Victorian era, during the industrial revolution, political changes, poke bonnets, petticoats, top hats, and moustaches.

There are a lot of Victorian events and traditions in Alice that modern American and even British readers will not be acquainted with (Gardner, 1999, p. 14). Therefore, it has much to offer in terms of cultural and historical understanding, even to international students of English as a second or foreign language. Students studying a new language should also try to learn about its culture and history. Because “language reflects the worldviews, the thought processes, and the lifestyles of its people; each culture places its imprint on a language” (DeCapua & Wintergerst, 2016, p. 29). As a result, students need at least a familiarity with the topic. In the case of Alice in Wonderland, the narrative provides nearly limitless materials for educators to employ in presenting specific cultural practices of England in the Victorian era. The Mad Tea Party is a great illustration of this. In this instalment, Alice attends a tea party where proper British decorum is not observed. The fact that the tea party is held outdoors is already somewhat uncommon. Traditionally, tea parties have been held inside, often in formal drawing rooms. Alice would also be unacceptable to show up for the tea party without an invitation.

In addition, standard Victorian tea-party etiquette required that all surfaces be spotless and that visitors act their best. But in the instance of the crazy tea party, this was not the case. Some of the individuals behaved rudely, and there were dirty dishes on the table. (Layla Eplett, 2015). An excerpt from this chapter might be utilised to teach students about proper British behaviour in the classroom. It might also be utilised to highlight why tea parties are significant, where they came from, and what they typically include. Students might put their newfound knowledge to work by reenacting an important moment from the novel in a role play while observing proper etiquette. They would improve their communication abilities while learning more about the other culture.

Other aspects of Victorian culture have lasting relevance in modern Britain. For instance, even though most of the other characters in the novel are hostile and nasty to her, Alice remains courteous throughout much of the narrative (Gardner, 1999). Her etiquette and demeanour are indicative of her privileged background. Alice aspires to live up to the expectations placed on her by her affluent and aristocratic London family. The standards of etiquette and language use are quite precise in such households. Alice's civility is displayed as she initiates a conversation with the caterpillar about how her size is always changing.

“Are you content now!” said the caterpillar. “Well, I should like to be a little larger, Sir, if you would not mind,” said Alice: “three inches is such a wretched height to be.” “It is a very good high indeed”, said the caterpillar

angrily, rearing itself upright as it spoke (it was exactly three inches high).
(Carroll, 1865/2018, p. 53)

There are two possible applications of Alice's manners and actions in the context of English classes. The first is to utilise it to teach students more about modern British etiquette and the value of good manners in that culture. Even though most of them are just basic principles of civility, such as not jumping the line, they might be helpful for students visiting the United Kingdom. Another use for this facet of Alice in Wonderland is to work on varying between formal and casual speech patterns. Either the students might be given a formal phrase and asked to come up with an informal version, or the reverse could be done. These two approaches could be utilised together, of course, and the students would once again learn about other cultures while expanding their vocabularies and improving their communication ability. Students are likely to be highly engaged since they will see these activities as relevant to their lives regardless of the approach used by professors. However, instructors should not rely on the traditional lecture format and instead provide students with a forum to express their interest in the material. Learning about British culture is also likely to inspire students to study more about it in their leisure time, allowing them to understand the English-speaking world's cultural traditions fully.

Relevant Information

Literature that students can identify with is crucial, as mentioned in the chapter devoted to the topic. There would be many advantages to doing so, including increased enthusiasm and commitment. Although Alice's Adventures in Wonderland was written with a target audience of 7-year-olds in mind (Gardner, 1999), the story's themes apply to and engaging for even secondary students. Lewis Carroll likely had a single idea in mind when he let Alice grow and shrink again and over again. He hoped to show children's difficulties as their bodies change and they mature into young adults (Grotjahn, 1947). Students in high school may find the physical changes they are experiencing perplexing or even unsettling. Teachers may relieve their pupils' concerns by treating this topic with care. Students of this age often have a lot to say about such a subject, making for rich classroom discourse. However, educators must remember to take measures to protect their most vulnerable students from embarrassment. A written assignment for the teacher's eyes alone is a good substitute for the conversation since it does not put the students in the limelight.

One of the story's recurring themes is that talking about anything other than a controversial issue might make everyone feel more comfortable. The author may have been trying to emphasise that life is frequently an unsolved puzzle full of unforeseen happenings by using gibberish and illogical scenarios (Grotjahn, 1947).

Students in high school, on the cusp of adulthood, may find this very unsettling. Kids may already be familiar with this at a young age, especially if they are still trying to figure out who they are and what their place in the world is. They have so many options for what they may do with their life and considering all of them can be overwhelming and lead to feelings of despair and dread. The students' preoccupation with the issue guarantees that it will spark vigorous debate once it is brought up in class. One possible foundation for a grammar discussion is a discussion of their future aspirations.

There is enormous potential for the book *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* to be utilised effectively in English language courses to assist students in building language skills and systems. However, it is well known that this literature is difficult, especially for those learning English, since it contains numerous language games and seemingly illogical scenarios. Since there is a chance that students will not comprehend everything, this book is not a good option for in-depth reading and self-directed projects. In my view, using a narrative-oriented method with this book is the greatest way to interact with it. This method gives instructors a greater say over their students' learning, allowing them to steer them toward the right answer or help them make sense of a confusing section of the text. For the causes above, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* is a great language for teachers of foreign languages. To make the most of it, however, educators need to take the time to choose an effective strategy and technique and to plan their lessons.

Conclusion

This research focused on literature, especially children's literature, since incorporating it into secondary school English curricula has increased students' language abilities and cultural awareness. The theoretical portion provided the study's foundation by examining the literature's significance and suggesting and detailing the procedures that would be used in the real world. That is why you see *Alice in Wonderland* used to demonstrate different literary devices. This chapter of the thesis concludes that literature may be helpful for language learners if approached and used properly.

Even though the research was not conducted in a secondary school setting, it provides recommendations for the use of literature that may be easily adapted. Classes could focus on language and cultural development thanks to various teaching approaches. As a result, the intended effect of offering advice on using literature to foster these two qualities has been achieved. True, what works for one text does not have to match the meat of another document. This is perhaps why there is not a single, all-encompassing set of guidelines for using literature in the English classroom.

Therefore, ESL teachers who want to include literary works into their curricula must rely on their ingenuity and language of humour and embrace the reality that they are going on a difficult journey. But this should not be a problem since, after all the effort put into developing literature-based courses, teachers have a highly rewarding experience while implementing them in their classrooms.

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