

June 2022

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Recommended Citation

Wali, Omid and Zafir, Kishwar (2022) "A Case Study of Afghan Foreign Language (FL) Teachers' Attitudes towards Literature as a Method of Teaching," *Journal of Research Initiatives*: Vol. 6: Iss. 1, Article 1. Available at: <https://digitalcommons.uncfsu.edu/jri/vol6/iss1/1>

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A Case Study of Afghan Foreign Language (FL) Teachers' Attitudes towards Literature as a Method of Teaching

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Keywords

language teaching, foreign language (FL), literature, attitudes, tool; method

Cover Page Footnote

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Abstract

For the last two decades, teaching foreign languages through literature has been advocated as an effective method and trend. Literature also plays a vital role in the language curriculum and teaching. Many instructors believe in using literature as a remarkable strategy for teaching foreign languages effectively. However, many others argue why and how literature should be embodied in the language curriculum. Teachers' attitudes toward literature as a fundamental tool for teaching the four integrated language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) are inconsistent. Therefore, the study aims to survey the perceptions and attitudes of Afghan foreign language teachers towards literature as a tool of teaching---whether they favor of using it. The study also explores the existing literature to find out the advantages of various genres of literature for language teaching. The primary data for this paper comes from a questionnaire-based survey of (N = 59) Afghan foreign language teachers from a select (20) public and private universities and teacher training colleges. The findings indicate that Afghan foreign language teachers hold an utterly positive attitude towards literature as a method of foreign language teaching. They indicated short stories, novels, and drama as the most frequently used literary genres in their classroom instruction.

Keywords: language teaching, foreign language (FL), literature, attitudes, tool; method

Introduction

N.S. Prabhu (1990) believes that there is no best method for teaching and "that the notion of good and bad methods is itself misguided". This is because the last century has witnessed massive changes in the theory of language teaching and the trend of language acquisition, and

such changes are influenced by linguistic, educational, psychological, and political constructs (Babae & Yahya, 2014) derived from "a mixture of assertion, theory, observation, and experiment" (Hall & Cook, 2012, p. 272). However, for the last two decades, teaching foreign languages through literature has been advocated as an effective method and a significant trend in the language curriculum (Sage, 1987). Language teachers on the ground faced several critical issues, including: a scarcity of appropriate teaching materials for teaching foreign languages through literature; insufficient preparation of methodology in the field of literature; and insufficient goals to define the importance of literature in the language classroom. Hence, language teachers undoubtedly play a significant role in language education for learners (Printer, 2006).

Teaching foreign languages in the context of Afghanistan has a century-old history. Kabul University first established the Department of English in the framework of the Faculty of Education in 1923. As the second-largest public university in the country, Nangarhar University founded the Department of English under the shadow of the Faculty of Language and Literature in 2003. In addition to the Department of Arabic, the Department of German Language and Literature, and the Department of Chinese Language and Literature, Nangarhar University opened the Department of Hindi Language and Literature in 2006 to symbolize a sound and healthy political relationship in the region. The existence of various foreign languages in the language management of Afghanistan itself signifies the importance of globalization and its status as a member of the international community (Alamyar, 2012).

Moreover, employing a suitable method for teaching any of the above-mentioned foreign languages has always been a big question mark. Therefore, the present study surveys teachers' attitudes towards literature as a method of foreign language teaching—whether they favor using it or not. The paper first reviews the literature to build up a solid background that helps researchers effectively identify teachers' attitudes towards literature as a teaching method in the context of Afghanistan. The paper then discusses the method and tools used for data collection and analysis. The findings and discussion section highlight Afghan FL teachers' attitudes regarding literature as a teaching method. The last part of the paper presents the conclusion, limitations, and directions for future research.

Literature Review

One cannot separate literature from language because literature is composed of language and, as such, provides essential space for language applications (Babae & Yahya, 2014). Similarly, Brumfit and Carter (1986) considered literature as "an ally of language" (1). Hence, this can be an effective method of foreign language teaching. Historically speaking, literature played a crucial role in implementing the Grammar Translation Method (hereafter GTM) as a classical method. Target language literature was read, translated, and used as a model of good writing (Freeman, 2010; Freeman & Anderson, 2011; Richards & Rodgers, 2006) and "illustrations of the grammatical rules" (Duff & Maley, 1990, p.3). Literary text in GTM was used only for grammatical structures and samples of good writing rather than as a literary interest. Once GTM was no more the only method of foreign language teaching, literary text was also forgotten. Furthermore, the functional-notional approach, which aims to develop learners' communicative competence, does not consider literature a powerful language application tool (Walkins, 1979).

Literature has emerged as a practical language teaching method (Duff & Maley, 1990). Within the new communicative approaches that "found in reading literature their desired principles, namely communicative competence that asks foreign language learners to communicate in the foreign language and to consider authentic communicative conditions." (Sanz & Fernández cited in Babae & Yahya, 2014, p. 81). Hence, literature makes the task of language teaching easy through a communicative approach (Babae & Yahya, 2014). Communicative language teaching (CLT) is a recent trend that focuses on teaching foreign languages while keeping the development of the communicative competence of learners in mind (Richards, 2006). Building upon the same thought, Lazer (1993) and Brumfit and Carter (1986) believed that using a literary text does not mean the existence of a particular literary language. It is the ordinary language, including linguistic attributes such as simile and metaphor. They further believe that texts with the mentioned linguistic traits (i.e., poetic lexis) appear in common and ordinary language applications.

The existing literature provides enough cases that teaching a foreign language through literature is interesting and motivating. For instance, Scott (2004) expressed his personal teaching experience: "When I teach my advanced French grammar course, students engage in a

semi-traditional, systematic study of grammar and must read a novel." The novel is selected for its relevance to students' experiences to engage them in extensive reading for pleasure. " (p.278). Similarly, Mason (2004) stated that teaching through literature is more pleasant and exciting than the traditional way of teaching. As a result, students will explore various other aspects of language. Furthermore, other studies (Zengin et al., 2019; Irwansyah1, 2017; Kayaolu et al., 2012; Baba, 2008) show language teachers' more positive and encouraging attitude towards the inclusion of literature in English language teaching.

Methodology

This portion of the paper contains the key features of the study, such as the objectives of the study, research questions, sample of the study, and tools used for data collection and analysis. Researchers used a case study method. Bell (2003) stated that "the great strength of the case study method is that it allows the researcher to concentrate on a specific instance or situation to identify the various interactive processes at work" (8). Since the researchers aimed to find out the attitudes/perceptions of Afghan foreign language teachers towards using literature as a method of teaching, this method became helpful for the researchers focusing on groups of people and situations. The method even helped researchers get in-depth information about the target audience (Afghan foreign language teachers).

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study was to survey the attitudes of Afghan foreign language teachers towards literature as a method of language teaching. Therefore, the study aims to answer the following key research questions:

1. What are the attitudes/perceptions of Afghan foreign language teachers towards literature as a method of teaching?
2. What kinds of literary genres (i.e. poetry, drama, prose, short stories, and novels) are likely used in teaching language?
3. Are there any significant differences between the old-aged (senior) and young-aged language teachers in terms of their attitudes/perceptions?

Sample of the Study

This study was conducted with (N=59) instructors of English, Arabic, German, and Hindi languages from the twenty (20) Afghan public and private universities and teaching training colleges. They represent the five urbanized (i.e., central, northern, western, eastern, and southern) centers/areas of Afghanistan. This sampling procedure follows the rationale of the past study conducted by the WAK Foundation of Afghanistan (WAK Foundation of Afghanistan "WFA" July 1999). Besides this, the participants' age, qualifications, and academic rank were also considered.

No.	Name of University	No.	Name of University
1	Nangarhar University	11	Paktia University
2	Alfalah University	12	Laghman University
3	Kabul University	13	Sayed Jamaluddin Afghani University
4	Kandahar University	14	Nangarhar Teaching Training College
5	Paktika University	15	Parwan University
6	Khurasan University	16	Khost Teacher Training College
7	Nuristan Teacher Training College	17	Bamyan University
8	Kardan University	18	Pamir Institute of Higher Education
9	Shaikh Zayed University	19	Ghazni University
10	Shaheed Prof. Rabani Education University	20	Herat University

TABLE 1: TABLE 1: LIST OF AFGHAN UNIVERSITIES/INSTITUTIONS

Tools of Data Collection and Analysis

The study's primary data were collected using a self-administered questionnaire developed after an extensive literature review and adaptation of studies by Zengin et al. (2019), Ahmad et al. (2018), Gürsoy (2013), and Karahan (2007). The questionnaire had two parts. The first part collected the respondents' demographic data, such as age, gender, and qualification. The

second part consisted of statements to find out (1) the attitudes of FL teachers towards literature as a teaching method, keeping in mind the significant differences between the old-aged and young-aged teachers; and (2) the various kinds of literary genres most often used for language teaching. The statements were based on a five-point Likert scale rating from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree. Version 26 of the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) was used to analyze the data.

Findings and Discussions

The below table shows the age, qualification, academic ranks, and teaching experience of the respondents.

Age	%	Qualifications	%	Academic Rank	%	Teaching Experience	%
Under 30	28.8%	Post-Doctorate	0%	Professor	0%	Under 5 yrs.	20.3%
30-40 years old	69.5%	Ph.D.	10.2%	Associate Professor	3.4%	5-10 yrs.	61%
41-50 years old	1.7%	Master's	22%	Assistant Professor	35.7%	11-15 yrs.	16.9%
51-(over) years old	0%	Bachelor's degree	78.8%	Senior Teaching Assistant	18.6%	16 (Over) yrs.	1.7%
Total	100%	Total	100%	Junior Teaching Assistant	18.6%	Total	100%
				Teaching Assistant	22%		
				Adjunct/Tenure	1.7%		
				Total	100%		
					%		

Table 2: Participants' Demographic Information

The above table evokes interesting but distinguished demographic information of the respondents. (28.8%) The respondents are under 30 years old and considered young-age instructors in Afghanistan. At the same time, (69.5%) of the participants in this research were in the age range of 30 to 40. This is a middle-age consideration in Afghanistan. Only one out of 59 respondents were in the age range of (41 to 50). This signifies that most respondents are middle-

aged teachers who share the border with near young-age instructors. (78.7%) of the respondents are teachers with only bachelor's degrees in their respective foreign language departments. This further signifies that most of the teachers who participated in this study started teaching at a young age after graduating from their undergraduate programs.

Regarding the academic rank suggested by the Afghan Ministry of Higher Education, (35.7%) a high percentage of the respondents are assistant professors. At the same time, none of them has a full professorship. This even justifies that English and other foreign languages' teaching are young disciplines. Finally, the remarkably high majority (61%) of the teachers in this survey have teaching experiences from five (5) to ten (10) years.

Statements of Attitudes/Perceptions	Mean	Std. Deviation
Literature should benefit in foreign language teaching.	4.372881	0.517435
I often use poetry when teaching a foreign language.	1.20339	1.189888
Poetry is a significant genre for teaching the four integrated language skills.	3.322034	1.048658
Poetry provides the learners with different viewpoints on language application.	3.840909	0.824157
Poetry motivates the learners for personal interpretations and explanations.	4.118644	0.738407
Poetry makes the learners familiar with various figures of speech (i.e., metaphor and simile).	4.322034	0.852527
Different types of poetry, such as epic and lyric, can be used in foreign language teaching.	4.627119	0.22996
I often use short stories when teaching a foreign language.	4	0.73646
A short story can facilitate the learners' reading task because of being short and more straightforward than other literary genres.	4.311111	0.550645

A short story can promote the learners' attitudes and knowledge of different cultures.	4.372881	0.517435
A short story can develop the learners' critical thinking ability.	4.305085	0.560092
A short story makes the learners feel comfortable and free.	4.779661	0.323653
Like other genres, a short story can develop the learners' cognitive analytical ability.	4.101695	0.542902
I often use drama when teaching a foreign language.	3.423729	1.092399
Drama is considered an enriching source of language teaching.	3.813559	0.87284
Drama can raise the learners' awareness of the target language.	3.949153	0.768528
Drama can promote the learners' comprehension of life experiences.	4.169492	0.641834
Drama can stimulate imagination and promote learners' creative thinking.	4.117647	0.32219
Drama can develop the learners' critical thinking.	4.101695	0.705785
Drama can heighten the learners' practical listening skills.	4.135593	0.675419
Drama can provide the instructors with a fresh perspective on teaching.	3.898305	0.656
Drama can develop the learners' creativity, originality, sensitivity, flexibility, cooperation, and communication skills.	4.135593	0.566213
Drama can help the learners develop their level of competence for their receptive and productive skills.	4.084746	0.645405
Drama can help the learners develop new opinions and thoughts.	4.237288	0.697185
Drama can be a significant way in communication-based language teaching.	3.932203	0.660365

I often use novels when teaching a foreign language.	3.271186	0.953682
Novels can be a rich source for developing linguistic structure and learning the target language.	3.762712	0.697185
Choosing the appropriate novel can motivate the learners to learn the target language.	4	0.637793
Novels can develop the learners' knowledge of different cultures, traditions, societies, and people.	4.338983	0.750371
A novel gives the learners the chance to use their creativity.	4.118644	0.690977
Novels can improve the learners' critical thinking ability.	4.254237	0.727038
Novels can stimulate the learners' imagination.	4.338983	0.599722
Novels can even develop both spoken and written skills.	4.152542	0.777078

TABLE 3: STATEMENTS OF ATTITUDE/PERCEPTIONS

The study's most important research objectives are (1) whether Afghan foreign language teachers favor using literature for their classroom instruction and (2) what literary genres they most likely use for teaching their language classrooms. Hence, the above table shows that a remarkably high majority of the respondents show a positive attitude towards literature as a method of foreign language teaching. In the table, the most robust agreements occurred with the following cues:

1. With a mean value of (4.372881), respondents strongly agree with the statement "Literature should benefit in foreign language teaching." Furthermore, it has a (σ of 0.517435), making the statement close to a solid agreement.
2. "Short stories can promote the learners' attitudes and knowledge of different cultures." with a mean value of (4.372881); overall, the respondents strongly agree with the

statement. In addition, it has a (σ of 0.517435), making the statement close to a solid agreement.

3. "I often use short stories when teaching a foreign language," with a mean value of (4) and a (σ of 0.73646) demonstrates that the entire sample agrees with the statement.
4. "Novel can develop the learners' knowledge of different cultures, traditions, societies, and people." with a mean value of (4.338983), which means that all the respondents strongly agree with the statement. Furthermore, it has a (σ of 0.750371), making the statement close to a solid agreement.
5. "Novel can even develop both spoken and written skills." received a mean score of (4.152542), indicating that all survey respondents strongly agreed with the statement. Moreover, it has an (σ of 0.777078), making the statement close to strong agreement.
6. "Drama can help the learners develop new opinions and thoughts." with the mean value of 4.237288, which means that the entire study participants show their strong agreement with the statement. Furthermore, it has an (σ of 0.697185), making the statement close to strong agreement.
7. "Drama can develop the learners' creativity, originality, sensitivity, flexibility, cooperation, and communication skills." with a mean value of (4.135593), which means that the respondents strongly agree with the statement. Furthermore, it has an (σ of 0.566213), making the statement close to strong agreement.
8. "Drama can help the learners develop their level of competence concerning their receptive and productive skills," with a mean score of (4.084746), meaning that all the respondents strongly agree with the statement. Furthermore, it has a (σ of 0.645405), indicating that the statement is close to strong agreement.

In short, the study found that short stories, novels, and drama are frequently used literary genres as procedures and activities for literature as a method of foreign language teaching. The study further found that short stories, novels, and drama promote students' knowledge of the target language's culture, which is interconnected. The study even found that the mentioned literary genres as a classroom procedure/activities can develop students' level of communicative competence in both receptive and productive skills.

On the contrary, the most disagreeable statement in the list is, "I often use poetry when teaching a foreign language." It suggested a mean score of (1.20339), which borders the statement on substantial disagreement. However, the standard deviation (1.189888) makes the statement decisively close to disagreement. The study found that poetry is not the only preferred literary genre often used for target language teaching.

Conclusions, Limitations, and Suggestions

This paper studied the attitudes/perceptions of Afghan foreign language teachers towards literature as an effective method of teaching with three crucial research questions: (1) What are the attitudes/perception of Afghan FL teachers towards literature as a method of teaching? (2) What literary genres (poetry, drama, prose, short stories, and novels, for example) are likely to be used in foreign language teaching? (3) Are there any significant differences in attitudes toward literature as a teaching method between old-aged (senior) and young-aged language teachers? The study was conducted with (N = 59) foreign language teachers from the departments of English, Hindi, Arabic, and German languages within (20) public and private universities and teachers' training colleges. The study indicated an utterly positive attitude/perception towards literature as a method of language teaching. The study further indicated that short stories, novels, and drama are the most frequently used literary genres as classroom procedures/activities.

However, the study was limited to receiving responses from old-age (senior) foreign language teachers. There are two reasons behind this. First, the Department of English and the Department of Russian are the only foreign language departments in Afghanistan with senior professors. Hence, the mentioned senior professors have limited knowledge of technology and the internet to participate in an online survey. Secondly, teaching foreign languages has received more attention since 2001, when a new government was installed in Afghanistan and the international community came to the country with investment in different sectors, especially education. Hence, the study leaves this to future researchers to explore if there is a significant difference between the attitude/perceptions of young and old-aged language teachers in Afghanistan.

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