



Faculty of Philology

PhD program: English Language and Literature

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***Teaching Literature of New York City at the Academic Level of Philological Studies and its Impact on the Development of Reading Skills***

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**Abstract**

*Literature is considered a promotional tool for language learning purposes. It is seen as a marketing tool of language instruction. Students can improve their academic skills by using literature as a means of self-motivation to read and write. Elaine Showalter asserts that "teaching literature is not brain surgery." (Showalter, 2003) If we are wrong about Dryden, nobody will die. We also can't give it our all every day and in every class—we can't be the most thoughtful, innovative, and best selves. By exchanging ideas about how to become better teachers and better individuals, we can raise the quality of life and morale of our pupils by thinking about why we want to teach literature in the first place." (Showalter, 2003)*

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*Fiction, poetry, and drama as parts of literature have asserted that literature has a great role in the literacy ability of developed students. This paper indicates the use of literature at the academic level and some approaches to teaching and learning literature. The paper also discusses language and literature, integrating language and literature in Anglo-American studies, the literature of New York focusing on drama, poetry, and fiction, and some techniques used to teach them.*

**Keywords:** *teaching literature, language and literature, teaching poetry, drama, and fiction*

### **Introduction**

This dissertation attempts to examine the main purposes of the teaching of American literature. The objective of the study is to incorporate The Cambridge Companion to the Literature of New York City and combine it with the methodological context. There are various ways of teaching literature. English teachers of literature have the potential to realize national curricular goals to arouse the desire and interest of their students to read books by creating a classroom atmosphere that promotes open dialogue, develops a tolerance for different cultures, and encourages the sharing of different perspectives and interpretations. So, by incorporating various teaching methodologies, we can create an engaging learning experience that enhances reading skills and encourages a deeper acknowledgement for the literature of New York City. Each of the methods used in classrooms with the students offers various perspectives through which we can analyze literary works.

Moreover, the purpose of this dissertation is to investigate the aims and objectives of teachers regarding the teaching of American literature. The methods being used to teach literature in classrooms are also described. In this dissertation, it is also suggested that an informed approach by cognitive linguistics and cognitive stylistics offers a great wealth of instructors wishing to integrate aspects of linguistic and literary studies into their teaching.

Despite this, the literature of New York is a major theme that is talked about in this dissertation. This dissertation examines the significance of New York City in students' literature,

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stressing literary, political, and societal influences on writing for young people from the twentieth century to this present day. It is in the book *The Cambridge Companion to the Literature of New York* by Waterman and Patel that writers guide us through the most beautiful parts of New York. Patel and Waterman document the fluent literary meaning of New York, with selections containing the voices of Herman Melville, Walt Whitman, Edith Wharton, Eugene O'Neill, Allen Ginsberg, and many others. Each of the volume contributors, who include Patel and Waterman, serves as tour guides, navigating the temporal and geographical exploration of the urban landscape showing the local knowledge and distinctive points of each subject. (Patell & Waterman, 2010)

Literary genres such as fiction, drama, and poetry play a great role in teaching literature. Learning Fiction enables students to understand the passage, read fluently, enrich their vocabulary, and enjoy reading and writing. This allows students to expand their knowledge of vocabulary and structures and become more proficient in the four language skills. It develops the ability to speak English accurately and fluently. (Madhavan & Sambatcoumar, 2011) Furthermore, Showalter emphasizes the importance of drama in teaching literature at the academic level: Teaching drama is also a paradigm for active learning and the reflective teaching of literature because teaching is itself a dramatic art and it takes place in a dramatic setting. (Showalter, 2003, p. 79) Khansir states that poetry is usually taught in the English classroom. Poetry as one of the products of literature can be used to develop students' knowledge of English and to learn structure, grammar, and vocabulary. (Khansir, 2012)

Moreover, reading remains an essential skill in order to acquire a foreign language. The discussion of literature is not of adequate value if it is not connected to the reader and the importance of reading. By reading literature, students enrich vocabulary, idiomatic expressions, sentence structures and cultural knowledge of the target language. So, through reading students can engage actively with the new language and culture.

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Thereafter, literature is widely used in teaching and learning English nowadays. Learning literature improves our language proficiency, enhances our understanding of other cultures, and helps us grow personally and intellectually. Some theoretical discussions and case studies support the importance of using literature for foreign language teaching. Literary exploration can be used to increase the effectiveness of language learning programs and also gives some benefits in the classroom. (Van, 2009)

However, there is no exact meaning to what literature is. According to Meyer, understanding the term literature has always been challenging, when in fact, sometimes someone seems to be reduced to saying: *I know when I see it or everything is literature if you want to read it in that way.* (Meyer, 1997) Literature is history, poetry, and performances especially those that are considered to have value as art and not just entertainment. (Clandfield, 2003) It is consistent with Purves et al (1990 in Mustafa, 1994) which define literature as a work of art for the person who creates and the person who pursues it to seek contentment. According to Parkinson and Thomas, literature is a creative and imaginative written or verbal product that fulfills certain socially and culturally approved functions. (Parkinson & Thomas, 2000) The meaning of literature sometimes relies on various factors. Literature as a subject means an activity that involves and uses language. Literature in language teaching highlights the use of literature to promote language learning that requires tripartite interaction, with teachers, readers, and textbooks. (Abdullah, 2007) Therefore, the activities in language classes are based on the text which has been adapted to suit the students' level of skills.

As Showalter in *Teaching Literature* states: *In the past, most educators agreed that teaching literature was a way of making people better human beings and better citizens. When English literature became a course of study at University College London in 1820, its purpose was to moralize, civilize and humanize.* (Showalter, 2003, p. 22) In addition, Showalter says that teachers believe that the teaching of literature is not only important in education but also in

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life. Other long-time teachers have shown the joy that teaching literature has brought to their lives. Showalter points out *Whether or not we can offer a rigorous definition of 'literature' we could make teaching it our common cause, and teaching it well our professional work.*

(Showalter, 2003, p. 24)

Furthermore, Showalter claims that methods can be overrated supporting the idea of Marshall Gregory when he says that there exists no appropriate method that will solve all the problems. *The first step in teaching method is preparation, both of the course and the individual class.* (Gregory, 2003, p. 42) Showalter in her book emphasized the importance of modeling, practicing, close reading, and the use of new technology practice by saying that we as teachers should not only explain what skills we expect from our students but also show them models and examples. (Showalter, 2003)

So, through literature learners will obtain, and improve language learning and most importantly develop other essential skills that would make the overall achievement in education easier such as reading and critical thinking. In general, this paper presents in detail the teaching of literature and the benefits that it has in classrooms, especially at the university level.

## 2. Literature Review

To determine the positive impact that literature has on student achievement, a lot of books and research articles that emphasize its importance have been researched.

*The Cambridge Companion to the Literature of New York* by Patel and Waterman portrays the beautiful parts of New York and the diverse literary cultures of the city from its beginnings as a Dutch colony to the present. (Patell & Waterman, 2010)

Collie and Slater in their book *Literature in the Language Classroom* emphasize the reasons for including literature in the language classrooms. They also describe some activities

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that teachers can use and which can be applied at different stages when using literary works.

(Collie & Slater, 1987)

On the other hand, Widdowson in his book *Literature as Subject and Discipline* writes about the aims and objectives of teaching literature. He further explains the nature of literary communication and gives some exercises in literary understanding. (Widdowson, 1975)

*Teaching Literature* by Elaine Showalter is another book that gives us a lot of knowledge about theories and ways of teaching literature. The importance of teaching genres of literature is also highlighted in this book. It is concluded with a very interesting title *The Joy of Teaching Literature* that talks about the good ways a teacher should begin and end a class. (Showalter, 2003)

*A book guide for teachers and trainers, Literature and Language Teaching* by Lazar discusses some issues of using literature in the language classroom, approaches to using literature with the language learner, selecting and evaluating materials, reading literature cross-culturally, materials design and lesson planning, poetry, plays, reflecting on the literature lesson and literature and self-access. (Lazar, 1993) Lazar states that literature is motivating and fosters language acquisition and apprehension, an approach to other cultures, and a path for the development of aesthetic, critical, and creative thinking. According to Lazar, literature helps in educating a person as a whole. (Lazar, 2005) Fakrul Alam's opinion is that literary texts improve students' reading skills and give many examples of vocabulary use. (Alam, 2002) This is supported by Erkaya who claimed that the use of short stories in a language classroom would enlarge students' vocabulary and embed reading habits. (Erkaya, 2005)

In *Teaching and Learning American Literature* by Chambers and Gregory, the first chapters are designed for the new literature teachers. After that, some seminar class activities and a tutorial on an approach to teaching literary theory and criticism are demonstrated. Also, some of the main issues involved in teaching literature are explored. Thereafter, planning the

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In addition, Langer in his book *Literature Instruction* provides an overview for student-response-based literature instruction from elementary grades through college. This book is offered to create educational environments in which students' responses can grow and develop. (Langer, 1992)

*Literature in the University* by Daniel Green also indicates that *over the course of the 20th century the role of literature in the academic study was transformed from being a source of philological analysis to being a "subject" in its own right, a source of distinctive knowledge to be pursued for its value.* (Green, 2020)

All of these books indicate that teaching literature sometimes may be difficult but with the use of different activities, methods and approaches it will be easier for the teachers and more enjoyable for the students. However, using literature appropriately in the classroom requires time and engagement and teachers need to plan their lessons and choose the most suitable materials for the students.

Many books and studies demonstrate the role that literature plays in the curriculum and the importance of including a variety of genres in literary studies. When being an instructor, it is crucial to understand that students vary in their approaches to study and teachers need to create instructional opportunities that are adaptable and meet the needs of different learners.

Moreover, a variety of instructional strategies must be used when teaching literature to encourage students' development of critical thinking, problem-solving, and performance skills. Instructors must be able to implement a variety of culturally diverse literature selections in a classroom and use different assessment strategies to evaluate and modify the teaching/learning process. Finally, reviewing all of these books and research articles has been

of great help to me to understand the methodological context of literature and its impact on students' learning.

### 3. Research Methodology

The methodology used in this dissertation is based on the qualitative and quantitative type of the analysis. The qualitative data is used to determine the best methods or approaches that the instructors use when teaching literature that is considered suitable for adult learners. Moreover, the documentary analysis is used to obtain data from existing documents. Thereafter, the quantitative research collects information from students at the academic level by using questionnaires. The purpose of this questionnaire is to discover how while teaching the literature of NY at the academic level, we can develop the reading skills at the philological level with the students of English language. The aim is to find clear, detailed answers to the research questions.

- How to teach literature at the academic level?
- Which are the efficient strategies of teaching literature to the English language students?
- Which are methods and techniques that are used for teaching literature at the academic level?
- How does the application of chosen methods and techniques affect the development and skills of reading?
- Why and how is the literature of NY important for the students?

The researcher aims to achieve the objectives through these hypotheses:

H1. The literature must be thoroughly developed by using diverse teaching methods, approaches, and techniques that help professors realize their full potential and engage and motivate the students in the teaching process.



H2. In teaching literature at the academic level, diverse strategies are used and methods and techniques of teaching. Still, it is always possible to make innovative new usages of those above.

H3. Fiction, poetry, and drama are used as techniques for enriching our lives and enabling us to see life from other perspectives. It teaches us a lot about communication, expressing ourselves, psychology, and it gives us a broader perspective.

H4. Poetry, fiction and drama motivate students to read. Reading literature builds reading comprehension, enhances background knowledge, enhances students' vocabulary skills, enhances our understanding of human behavior and helps us feel empathy with the others.

H5. NY City is a study of contradictions; it gives us the possibility, cultivation, self-knowledge, and fear of corruption and despair. Literature of NYC presents the American national identity and unique nature of metropolitan, urban experience. NYC is a city that changes with various American literary and cultural history movements.

In addition, the objective of the study is to incorporate *The Cambridge Companion to the Literature of New York City* and combine it with the methodological context. The study reviews previous literature. The primary and secondary data are used for the research. The primary data is collected from the book: *The Cambridge Companion to the Literature of New York*. Whereas, the secondary data is collected from other books, journals, reviews and research articles related to the research topic. It also uses descriptive analysis to show how literature affects students' learning and improves the four basic skills and communication.

Gathering the data was not very difficult because many online sources could be used and with the use of questionnaires is found out that literature develops students' reading skills. However, it still calls for particular attention to how literature is used at the university level. It is important to emphasize that literature is being taught in different ways by

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instructors with different approaches. So, a fair and careful reading of various books and other sources is needed. This dissertation should give deeper insights into how literature could be taught at the university level, what are the best methods, techniques and strategies teachers use.

#### **4. Results and Discussions**

The data gathered in this research has provided me with information about the role of literature in facilitating language learning and the methods used to improve reading and language communication skills. Thus, incorporating the book *The Cambridge Companion to the Literature of New York* into the methodological context with the students includes integrating the content of the book with several teaching methodologies to boost learning, such as: Psychoanalytic Approach, Feminist approach, Marxist approach, queer theory, and Reader-Response approach, Close Reading and Textual Analysis, Interdisciplinary Approach, Role-Playing and Dramatization, Comparative Analysis, Field Trips and Experiential Learning, and Thematic Units. (Mega, 2024, p. 8) The examples demonstrate how different literary analysis approaches can give different insights into the literature of New York City. Each approach provides a distinctive perspective, improving our understanding of the texts and their wider cultural importance.

The instrument that has been used in this study was analyzed deeply in order to get specific results and describe the relevance of my findings in relation to what was already known about the research problem being investigated and to explain any new understanding or knowledge that emerged as a result of my research. The only tool used is the questionnaire. Questionnaires were used to provide information, from students' side. It consisted of questions that examine students' attitudes towards the teaching of literature of New York City at the academic level and their perceptions about its impact on the development of reading skills. The questionnaire consisted of twelve questions with multiple choice and open-ended answers. The

questions in general were easily understood by the students, but since there were many questions some of the students did not take the time to fill all of them, especially the open-ended questions. The questions were in English and the questionnaire was anonymous, so that students answered more freely.

## 5. Conclusion

In this paper, some suggestions about the reasons for teaching literature and some methods/approaches used in the classroom at the academic level were discussed. The basic skill that is developed by the reading of literature is that of reading. Students can improve their communication skills through reading literature. By using different literary analysis approaches can give different insights into the literature of New York City. Each approach provides a distinctive perspective, improving our understanding of the texts and their wider cultural importance. Also, by doing a lot of discussions with peers, students can practice vocabulary and this learning approach is more convenient for them rather than studying alone. Moreover, student-centered learning is much more enjoyable by students rather than teacher-centered approach.

Thereafter, educators have several reasons for using literature in their classrooms, such as: valuable authentic material, cultural enrichment, language enrichment and personal involvement. Even though literature is difficult, it is memorable because words stick in one's mind without much deliberate effort such as songs and poems.

Poetry, fiction and drama are also used in the classroom to develop students' knowledge of English, to teach structure of the sentences, practice grammar and vocabulary. They help students in understanding different perceptions. By learning poetry, fiction and drama students can understand the perspectives of people around the world. So, this is a hugely important education. Thus, it is the instructor's duty to encourage students to learn poetry, fiction and drama by using different engaging methods every day.

In conclusion, we can say that when students study literature, they understand their own culture and others' and also comprehend the complexity of human nature. Moreover, learning literature can help students develop creativity and teaches them to pervade life with beauty and meaning.

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