

SAHRAOUI Belgacem Integrating Digital Literature in EFL Classrooms: Theory and the Impact of Practice

Integrating Digital Literature in EFL Classrooms: Theory and the Impact of Practice

دمج الأدب الرقمي في أقسام اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية: النظرية وأثر التطبيق

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Abstract

Digitalization produces increasingly multimodal and interactive literary forms. However, the incorporation of digital literary texts in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms is a major challenge to English teachers and EFL students as moving from printed to digital texts calls for developing new reading skills, like finding relevant information and combining it in meaningful ways. This research investigates the challenges of integrating digital literature in teaching English as a foreign language and how it can be incorporated successfully in EFL classrooms. The study also aims at identifying the impact of incorporating digital literature in English language classrooms on English language teaching and learning, and teaching learning achievements. The findings of the study showed that the used of digital literature facilitated EFL learners' understanding to literature and literary texts' content. Meanwhile, EFL teachers should adapt themselves with today's digital-based information era.

Key words: Challenges, Digital literature, EFL Classrooms, Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), Literature instruction, New reading literacies.

ملخص

الرقمنة تنتج أشكالاً أدبية متعددة الوسائط وتفاعلية بشكل متزايد. ومع ذلك، فإن إدماج النصوص الأدبية الرقمية في أقسام اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية (EFL) يُعدّ تحديًا كبيرًا أمام معلمي اللغة الإنجليزية وطلبة اللغة، لأن الانتقال من النصوص المطبوعة إلى الرقمية يتطلب تطوير مهارات قراءة جديدة، مثل القدرة على البحث عن المعلومات ذات الصلة ودمجها بطرق ذات معنى. تبحث هذه الدراسة في التحديات المرتبطة بإدماج الأدب الرقمي في تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، وكيف يمكن دمجها بنجاح في الفصول الدراسية الخاصة بـ EFL. كما تهدف إلى تحديد أثر إدماج الأدب الرقمي في فصول اللغة الإنجليزية على تعليم وتعلم اللغة، وعلى مستوى التحصيل التعليمي. وقد أظهرت نتائج الدراسة أن استخدام الأدب الرقمي سهّل فهم متعلمي EFL لمحتوى الأدب والنصوص الأدبية. وفي الوقت نفسه، ينبغي على معلمي اللغة الإنجليزية التأقلم مع عصر المعلومات الرقمي القائم اليوم.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التحديات، الأدب الرقمي، أقسام اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، تكنولوجيا المعلومات والاتصال (ICT)، تدريس الأدب، مهارات القراءة الجديدة.

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Introduction

Technological advancements of the twenty-first century have a big influence on teaching and learning English as a second and foreign language. The development in science and technology impacted all human life aspects, including the field of education. In today's digital age, modern media tools like mobile applications are increasingly being integrated into foreign language teaching (Lutge & Merse et al., 2019). At the same time, the current generation consistently engages with technology, constantly shifting content, whether sounds, images, or texts across different platforms and devices such as laptops, smartphones, iPods, and tablets (Kaba, 2017).

The Internet has become an essential part of both everyday life and the educational process. Through the use of the Internet information can be easily obtained without restrictions. Hence, teachers should acquire and develop digital literacy to aid learners` achieve their educational needs. Digital literacy refers to the ability to effectively use technology to locate, evaluate, create, and communicate information in order to address specific problems within digital environments (Harris, 2015, as cited in Laeli, Setiawan, & Anam, 2016). In this context, language teaching and learning should incorporate a range of technologies to develop students` language skills. Teachers and syllabus designers of literature subjects need to integrate opportunities to grow digital literature into lessons, curriculum, and services (Harris, 2015 cited in Laeli, Setiawan and Anam, 2016).

As technology has become a tool used in almost all aspects of life, digital literature is one of the various ways in teaching English as a foreign language. Digital literature is simply literary texts in a form of e-texts. University students should develop reading literacies of digital texts in English as a foreign language (EFL) as intending professionals should use modern information and communicate technologies in order to function effectively in a multilingual global community. Besides, English language and digital competencies can intend promote specialists to learn through life and achieve professional success. Therefore, learners should be responsible and confident users of ICT tools to interact with different literary e-texts (Ratovskaya, 2021).

Literature is a place of communication and an expression of artistic expression created via language. In this vein, teachers convey literary knowledge and receive feedback from the students, and then through the use of the Internet, this enriched knowledge is brought back to them by creating complete exchange cycle (Kaba, 2017). The integration of digital literature in EFL classrooms is beneficial as it motivates learners to learn the language and can develop their language competencies, and in particular, reading, analyzing and evaluating literary texts` content.

This study explores the integration of digital literature into EFL classrooms and aims to examine the potential effects of incorporating hypertext in English language teaching. It is primarily focused on reviewing existing literature relevant to the topic. The review is organized around three main themes: defining digital literature, examining the influence of emerging technologies on literary forms, and highlighting the implications of integrating digital literature within English language teaching (ELT). This research work attempts to give answers to the following key questions:

- How can literature in general and digital literature in particular be incorporated in EFL instruction ?
- What impact has the incorporation of digital literature on EFL learners` language proficiency ?
- What are the possible challenges that might be faced in integrating digital literature in teaching English as a foreign language ?

1. Definitions of Digital Literature

Digital literature emerged alongside the rise of computers and digital technologies. It represents a technology-driven form of literary expression and has become a distinct field of inquiry that invites exploration from multiple disciplinary perspectives (Do Rosareo, Grimaldi and Meza, 2019). There are different possible definitions to the concept digital literature. However, without a clear definition to the term, electronic or digital literature often resists clear classification and is challenging to define precisely due to its evolving nature and diverse forms. Among the definitions given to the concept, the one given by the Electronic Literature Organization (ELO) which has assembled a scientific committee of scholars and artists to give a definition to digital literature and its features. ELO has defined a work of digital literature as it engages with a key literary element that harnesses the unique features and environments offered by both standalone and connected computers (Cited in De Vivo Fabio, (nd): 2). This definition underlines an important relationship between present and the past, between man and machine, and between digital technologies and literary traditions.

As an emerging field, digital literature has shifted and permeable borders. Hayles (2008) argues for a distinction between digital literature and digitized print literature under the rubric of born-digital works, an original digital creation designed specifically on a computer and intended to be experienced through a digital screen (p. 3). This definition places digital literature in opposition to print rather than noting the affordances of the platform itself. The rise of self-published e-books challenge this definition.

Bell et al (2010) correct this definition by defining digital literature as a type of fiction specifically crafted for digital platforms, designed to be read on a screen, and to explore linguistic, narrative, and conceptual depth through the capabilities of digital media. Its aesthetic and symbolic impact would be diminished if detached from its technological context. Based on this definition, the analysis of digital literature requires media specificity that situates it within its material context as distinct from, but not necessarily an improvement over, the book (Cited in Rowberry. 2018).

2. Digital Literature: A Remarkable Shift from Printed Text to Hypertext

Digital literature has received remarkable attention due to the advanced communicative properties of the computer technologies that offer potential transformations to the literary tradition and textuality in general. The term *hypertext* was first introduced by Vannevar Bush, often regarded as the pioneer of the concept. He envisioned a device called **MEMEX**, a kind of mechanized library or filing system capable of storing vast amounts of information and enabling connections between its various parts. However, it was Theodor Nelson who later coined the terms *hypertext* and *hypermedia*. His innovative ideas and forward-looking vision significantly shaped the development of computing and digital information systems (Kaba, 2017, p. 8).

As a result of the move from literary printed text to hypertext, hyperfiction is probably the most popular genre of digital literature, which was made popular by the famous work of Michael Joyce's *Afternoon: A story* in 1987. From that time, hyperfiction has continued to fascinate scholars together with students by its promise of dynamicity between the author, the text, and the reader (Modir, Guan and Bin Abdul Aziz, 2014: 4). In this regard, hypertext fiction creates cybernetic scenarios that offer readers a form of virtual reality, allowing their interactions to shape the unfolding of the narrative. Unlike traditional print novels, the digital reading experience alters how the fictional world is perceived and engaged with. As a result, the boundaries between author and reader are shifting significantly, particularly with the growing presence of digital formats such as hypertext fiction and literary e-books. Therefore, multimodality of digital literary works

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challenge conventional novelists to bring together different post-structural concepts, media capability, and interpretive traditions to produce completely distinguished and artistic literary works (Modir, Guan and Bin Abdul Aziz, 2014: 5).

3. The Influence of New Technologies on Literature

New technology tools provide a unique platform for literature authors to present their literary works or texts. Authors as well as ordinary people can express their thoughts in terms of ideas in full texts using electronic media. New technologies also facilitate correspondence between the author and the reader, simplifying access to and understanding of literature by students, researchers, and readers. As access to digital literature by students and academics is increasing, academic institution began to design digital platforms for online courses including literature and literature-related courses (Kaba, 2017). The development, featuring Hypertext and e-books, brought radical changes in the field of literature as they revolutionized reading and writing literacies.

Technology advancements in the 21st century influenced teaching and learning in general, and teaching and learning English in particular. One of these impacts is reading activities and skills where reading experienced a phase of change from printed text to digital text. The shift from printed literary text to digital text requires new literacies, as locating and synthesizing online information.

In the same vein, it should be noted that the use of the Internet has become a necessity in daily life and education in particular. Information can be easily obtained through the Internet without restrictions. Literary writers are now aware of the importance of the Internet to promote their literary works. In the context of teaching, EFL teachers of literature and literature related subjects are invited to use digital literary texts to enhance EFL learners' motivation and aid them to achieve the set objectives of literature and literature related courses.

4. The Pedagogical Value of Incorporating Literature in EFL Classrooms

Brumfit and Carter (1986) described literature as "an ally of language," while McKay (1982) emphasized that it "presents language in discourse." Literary texts offer valuable support for language teaching and learning, as they highlight the creative potential of language and foster a deeper understanding of oneself and others. Through its expressive use in literary contexts, language becomes a means of exploring human experience and cultural insight.

Literature plays a multifaceted role in the development of various English language skills. It contributes to expanding learners' vocabulary, familiarizing them with idiomatic expressions, and reinforcing grammatical knowledge. Moreover, it enhances language awareness, pragmatic and sociolinguistic competence, as well as educational, linguistic, and psychological development. Integrating culturally authentic literary texts into the EFL curriculum enriches the learning experience (Alasmari & Rabb Khan, 2018). In EFL classrooms, literature is essential not only for language acquisition but also for achieving broader educational objectives, as it is often regarded as the most refined form of target language expression (Alasmari & Rabb Khan, 2018).

Khatib et al. (2011), as cited in Whitener (2019), outlined several key reasons for integrating literature into EFL instruction. Firstly, literature offers authentic language input, making it a valuable resource for real-world language exposure. It also serves as a motivational tool, as students often find literary texts engaging due to their authenticity and rich subject matter. Additionally, literature fosters cultural and intercultural understanding by addressing universal human experiences and values. It supports both intensive and extensive reading practices and enhances learners' sociolinguistic and pragmatic competence by presenting language use within meaningful

and context-rich situations. Moreover, literary texts introduce a broad range of grammar and vocabulary in natural contexts and support the development of all four core language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Literature also contributes to the growth of emotional intelligence, encouraging empathy and emotional engagement through interaction with fictional characters. Finally, it stimulates critical thinking by prompting learners to reflect, analyze, interpret, critique, and make meaningful connections.

In summary, literature plays a key role in enhancing learners' reading abilities, fostering creativity, and nurturing values such as tolerance. Literary texts serve as powerful tools for developing imaginative comprehension and strengthening learners' communicative competence. Integrating literature into English language teaching offers multiple benefits, including raising language awareness, supporting language acquisition, improving interpretive skills, and contributing to holistic education (Alasmari & Rabb Khan, 2018). Furthermore, literature supports all four language skills: it improves listening, encourages speaking, enriches reading, and inspires writing.

5. Integrating Literature into EFL Instruction: Strategies and Approaches

While many scholars acknowledge the numerous benefits of using literature in language education, there remains considerable debate over how best to integrate literary texts into English language teaching. Reaching a consensus on a single, universal approach is challenging, as instructional preferences and goals vary widely among EFL teachers. For example, some educators prioritize grammar and vocabulary development, whereas others emphasize the stylistic and aesthetic dimensions of literary works (Bobkina & Domínguez, 2014).

McKay (1982) emphasized that literature used in EFL instruction should be carefully selected to ensure it aligns with learners' linguistic proficiency. Choosing texts that are beyond students' language level may result in a disconnect from the literary experience. Therefore, thoughtful selection of appropriate literary materials is essential to help mitigate challenges related to language complexity and unfamiliar cultural references.

After selecting the appropriate literary text to the learners' needs, implementing sound pedagogical practices would of paramount importance. A literary text can be integrated in EFL classrooms in several ways. These methods of incorporating literature in English language teaching are crucial for EFL instructors to determine the best approach to use the resources provided by literary texts with the purpose of improving EFL students' mastery of the language (Bobkina and Dominguez, 2014).

This study adopts the framework proposed by Van (2009), which outlines six distinct approaches for incorporating literature into language instruction. These approaches include:

1. The Stylistic Approach,
2. The Reader-Response Approach,
3. The Language-Based Approach,
4. The Critical Literary Approach,
5. New Criticism, and
6. Structuralism

(as cited in Alasmari & Rabb Khan, 2018).

This study advocates for the application of the first three approaches to integrating literature into English Language Teaching (ELT). The Stylistic Approach views literature as a form of discourse, analyzing it from a linguistic standpoint. It explores how literary texts reflect the structure and function of language, with the goal of understanding how linguistic resources are employed to construct meaning. In contrast, the Reader-Response Approach focuses on the dynamic interaction between the reader and the text. Rather than treating literature as static language on the page, this approach emphasizes the reader's personal engagement and the cognitive and emotional responses elicited during the reading process. The most practical and pedagogically beneficial method, however, is the Language-Based Approach, which treats literature as a valuable tool within the

framework of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). This approach promotes the development of the four language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing, through active strategies such as group interaction, peer collaboration, role play, poetry analysis, storytelling, debates, cloze exercises, prediction activities, and ranking tasks. By fostering learner autonomy and engagement, the Language-Based Approach proves to be both effective and adaptable to classroom practice.

6. The Influence of Digital Literary Texts on EFL Instruction

Since the emergence of computers in the field of education, it was recognized that computers could improve reading comprehension in three ways: 1) controlling what and how long readers saw something digitally to develop reading strategies, 2) providing reading comprehension tasks, and 3) offering comprehension aids (Ebrahimi, 2016: 3). Yet, more research should be conducted on digital reading of literature because of the widespread usage of digital facilities aids (Ebrahimi, 2016: 3).

Digital reading refers to the act of reading texts on technological devices such as smartphones, tablets, or computers, whether connected to the internet or not (Ebrahimi, 2016, p. 3). This mode of reading can enhance literary comprehension by offering learners greater access to engaging and diverse reading materials. Digital literature in teaching reading different types of literary texts can also enhance the students' critical thinking skills to be fully responsible on their learning. Critical thinking is the capacity to work with complex ideas that improve the learners' interpretation and evaluation of texts' content (Friatin and Handayani, 2018).

Arkorful and Abaiido (2014) claimed that there are several functions and benefits of using digital literature in EFL classrooms. These benefits and functions are as follows:

- (1) The teacher was involved the flexible time and place in learning activity when each student chose a luxury facility.
- (2) The teacher enhances the effectiveness of students' knowledge to access huge information, then students find the qualification of the reading of literary texts by using digital literature in learning activity.
- (3) The teacher motivates students to communicate with each other and improves the relationship of work.
- (4) The teacher can suggest on the students to exchange their answers while responding to different activities related to analyzing digital literary texts (Cited in Friatin and Handayani, 2018: 96).

Through the integration of digital literature, EFL teachers can post different literary teaching materials that EFL students can study them independently and individually. Via using new technologies, literary texts can be more intensified. For instance, by turning literary texts into literal hypertexts by adding different notes in a form of information, open questions and main ideas, and establishing relationships with relevant texts. These literary digital texts are very effective and provide solutions that simulate thought and encourage cooperation (Kaba, 2017: 10).

7. The Study Findings, Recommendations and Implications

Based on a critical review and analysis of relevant literature, this study highlighted the significance of involving EFL learners in reading and engaging with literature to support the development of their literacy skills. Nonetheless, the findings emphasized the need for EFL teachers to carefully choose literary texts that align with students' prior knowledge of literature and their educational level.

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The study concludes with several key recommendations. First, EFL course and syllabus developers across various subjects should treat literary texts as vital components of English language teaching. Second, effective collaboration is encouraged between literature-specialized EFL teachers and instructors from other disciplines to ensure appropriate literary text selection for classroom use. Moreover, learners' needs, deficiencies, proficiency levels, and expectations should guide the process of choosing suitable literary materials for English teaching and learning. Finally, it is recommended that a collection of literary texts, spanning genres such as short stories, novels, poetry, and drama, be made readily accessible to both EFL teachers and students.

It is undeniable that the complexity of literary discourse presents challenges in reading, analyzing, and interpreting literary texts. To address this issue and facilitate the integration of literature into EFL classrooms, teachers are encouraged to deepen their understanding of various approaches to teaching literature. They should then adopt instructional methods that align with the goals of each particular lesson.

Conclusion

This study has illustrated how literature and literary texts can effectively contribute to the development of language skills. In addition, it offers EFL teachers practical guidance for selecting suitable approaches to integrate literature into English language instruction. Based on the findings, literature significantly enhances the quality of English language teaching and supports EFL learners in advancing their language proficiency.

The current study also investigated the theory and challenges of integrating digital literature in EFL classrooms. In this regard, the study's findings revealed that integrating digital literature into English language classrooms motivates and enhances EFL learning and learning achievements. It also stressed the importance and significance of integrating electronic literature in EFL classes environment as the use of digital literary texts in teaching literature and literature-related subjects permitted EFL learners to achieve their learning perceptions.

This study recommended that English teachers and students need to be provided specific knowledge associated with reading online and digital literacies. Besides, universities' administrations should organize and provide workshops as a sort of professional development for English teachers to equip them with the necessary technical skills that enable them to integrate literary digital texts in teaching literature.

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