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## Understanding Approaches to Effective Reading

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### ABSTRACT

Teaching is a creative professional and carries more than a set of strategies. Effective teaching is carried out for a particular group of students, at a certain point in the school year, with certain resources, within a particular time frame, in a particular school and community setting (Crawford, et al., 2005:10). Reading, a skill, requires all students need to be trained. Reading English literary texts is much harder than reading in their native language. The research results show that most students, at Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu, Romania, are not interested in reading English literature books. The study looks into teaching techniques, aiming at improving reading literary skills. Two teaching techniques will be proposed to assist non-English-speaking students in reading more effectively and enjoyably. Ethnographic content analysis was applied for the entire study to examine problems, faced by the teachers and the students through the questionnaires. The teachers' problems were determined by their views on Activities Used to Teach English Literature, Instruction Models, and Common Core Teaching and Learning Strategies (Chicago 2012), and the students' problems were identified by their perceptions on Possible Strategies Used in Teaching and Learning English Literature, Teaching Approaches and Techniques, Relationships between English Literature Subject and Other English Subjects, basing on mentions, Relationships between English Literature Subject and other English Subjects, and Inter-culture Literature: Diaspora's Written Works. These problems are the formation of new teaching techniques, proposed at the faculty of Letters and Arts, Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu, Romania to enhance quality of higher education at the university.

*Keywords:* Teaching technique, effective reading, reading English literary texts, improving reading literary skills, Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu, Romania

### Introduction

Literature is built in two domains: cultures and communicative practices, presented in literary texts. Comprehension of the literary texts requires literary competence, which is in relation to communicative and cultural competence. Students, with their high communicative competence, actively participate in literary and non-literary texts. They also need cultural competence, dealing with literary knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes, to understand literary texts. There are at least four domains of the knowledge and skills: (1) specific literary knowledge and capacity to apply in the texts, (2) textual knowledge and skills needed to understand and interpret the texts, (3) contextual knowledge and skills needed to analyze and interpret the texts, and (4) the skill of writing literary texts (Pieper et al, 2007:13). Literature, therefore, has been considered important in most language in Europe as one of subject classrooms, with variations in content and teaching approaches, built in the curriculum. Chronology is neglected in primary school, but literary history is introduced in secondary school in Romania, in relation to Bildungsstandards. Bildung, within the English curriculum,

focuses on moral and social development and promoting citizenship. It is not easily assessed, for it requires Language as Subject (LS) to participate in society, cultural life, and knowledge and abilities to structure and shape one's own life (Pieper et al., 2007:7).

In the beginning much attention, under the influence of the Formalists and Structuralists, was paid to the use of literature in teaching a language. Teaching English literature and teaching English language, in the case of language teaching and learning, were considered synonymous (Abdullah et al, 2007:2). Eliminated literature from language teaching and learning, the advocators of the Functional Approach argue that the study of literature in language learning takes a long time from meeting the needs of learners and real life situations (ibid:2-3). Established in 1970s, the Communicative Approach to language teaching gained popularity in teaching and learning a language. It focuses mainly on problem solving and tasks carrying in real life situations—making enquiries, offering excuses, and meeting new friends. Its popularity did not take long, for foreign language learners did not use target language in an environment or any setting. For example, in Japan people use their native language, not the targeted language to address it (ibid:3). Additionally, the literary critics also contributed to the reawakening of interest in the use of literature in language teaching and learning by primarily focusing on the reader and the interaction between the reader and the text. Through the Reader Response Criticism, literature exists only when it is read and literary texts possess no fixed and final meaning or value. In other words, the function of literature in language learning and teaching has evolved from being the model for excellent language usage to an avenue for aesthetic reading, where readers could interact with the literary texts, read by bringing in their own experiences to create their own interpretations of the texts (ibid:4).

After revolution 1989, Romania has undergone radical and deep transformation process of all fields, including political, economic, administrative, social, and educational system. The educational system, playing an important role in developing the country, has gone through various reforms overtimes to meet the needs of the society and to enhance quality of teaching and learning at both general and higher education (Presada & Badea, 2015:32). Our study purpose is to propose teaching techniques, aiming at improving the quality of education in Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu, Romania, by reading effectively and enjoyably more and more literary texts. Content analysis, according to Krippendoff (2004), is defined as a research technique, making replicable and valid inferences from texts to the contexts of their uses and involving specialized procedures (p.18). In the content analysis literature, there are three kinds of definitions: (1) content to be inherent in a text, (2) content to be a property of the source of a text, and (3) content to emerge in the process of a research, analyzing a text pertinent to a particular context (p.19). Additionally he points out all reading of texts is qualitative, even including numbers. There are four kinds of qualitative approaches: (1) discourse analysis—the focus on how particular phenomena represented, (2) rhetorical analysis—the focus on how messages delivered and with what effects, (3) ethnographic content analysis—quantification, categories, narrative descriptions, including situations, settings, styles, images, meanings, and nuances, and (4) conversation analysis—the focus on the recording of verbal interactions (p.16). This research study applies ethnographic content analysis, dealing with texts and numbers and Boolean's Operators for relationships between English literature as a subject matter and other English subject matters.

## Problems

Dominant language for international and transnational communication in higher education at European universities is English. It has been the language for the academic community—both international conferences and academic journals. Additionally, it is the

language for the university's recruitment of international students and temporary exchange programs (Janssens et al, 2013:6). The medium of instruction is Romanian, according to the Romanian educational law—article 135, at higher educational state institutions, where national minorities' programs already exists (ibid:17). The students, therefore, at university level are still facing problems in English reading, especially in literary texts. Ruis Zafon (2001) illustrates in "Shadow of the wind" book, leaving a permanent memory in your mind. If one's reading skills are not well developed, and if the meaning of a book is not clear to the adolescent reader, then words are the struggle for reading. Not every reader, according to literary development, is able to appreciate the same level of books, but readers can develop themselves to become more competent readers of literary texts (p.6).

### **Research Methodology**

All teachers of English and students year three majoring in English Language and Literature at Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu are the respondents. The researcher had distributed nine questionnaires to nine teachers, but only six of them had returned the questionnaire. They have been teaching multiple subjects: Core English 50%, Writing Skills 67%, Speaking Skills 67%, Cultural Studies 17%, Translations 83%, The Comparative Grammar of Germanic Languages 33%, Discourse Analysis 50%, Modernism-Postmodernism 17%, Literary Translation Techniques 33%, and the Semiotics of Non-Verbal Communication 17%. However, no one has been teaching Literature Studies, the History of Anglo-American Criticism, the Modern Polyphonic Novel, and the English Romantic Paradigm. They are holding Master's degree 17% and Doctoral degree 83%. They were asked 29 questions of Activities to Teach English Literature, 18 questions of Instruction Models to Teach English Literature, and 36 questions of Common Core Teaching and Learning Strategies (Chicago 2012). The researcher had distributed thirty four questionnaires among fifty nine students who had attended the class, but only fifteen students had answered and returned to the researcher. One of them gave incomplete answers. Totally fourteen had given complete questionnaires. These students came from different classes—English French, English German, English Romanian, French English, German English, Romanian English, and Chinese English. They were asked 13 questions relevant to Possible Strategies Used in Teaching and Learning English Literature, 16 questions related to Teaching Approaches and Techniques Used to teaching English literature, 9 questions pertinent to Relationships between English Literature subject matter with other English subject matters, and 10 questions of Diaspora's Written Works.

The research questions the researcher had in mind when administering the questionnaires were the following: How do the teachers perform in the class in terms of teaching activities, instruction models, and Chicago 2012 strategies? How much do they know those elements? How much do the students use the possible strategies in learning English literature? How much do they like teaching approaches to teach English literature? How do they know other English subjects build on English Literature? And how much do they like reading literary texts? These research questions form the foundation for the researcher to propose two teaching techniques to motivate students to read literary texts more effectively and enjoyably, at Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu, Romania.

### **Findings and Discussion**

All the teachers of English were asked concerning with activities to teach English literature: averaging 46% do not use the following activities, 31% have no ideas, and 23% use the activities—Reading Skills, Narrative Writing, Stress and Intonation Pattern, Rhythm & Rhyme, Listening Exercise, Identifying Literary Elements, Group discussion, Personal

Response, Criticism, Stylistic Analysis, Discourse Analysis, Vocabulary Building, Grammar Exercise, Songs, Internet Based Activities, Mini Library Research, Oral Presentation, and Comparative Literature. It is evident that the majority of the teachers are not interested in the activities. They are confined to their own activities, pertinent to teacher talking time more than student talking time; but the minorities of the teachers are interested in these activities, concerning with student talking time more than teacher talking time (*Figure 1*).

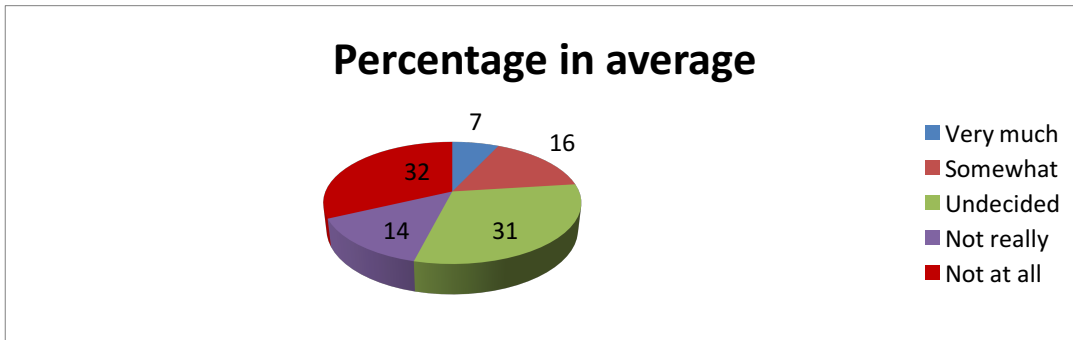


Figure 1: Teachers’ views on activities for teaching English literature

In addition to views on activities for teaching English literature, the teachers were questioned on the instruction models used when teaching: averaging 41% do not use the given instruction models when teaching English literature, 39% have no ideas, and only 20% use the instruction models: the focus on both students and instructor, the focus on language forms and structure, language use in typical situations, instructor models (interaction between students and instructor and one another), pair or group work, monitoring and correcting every student’s utterance, without constant instructor’s monitoring and feedback given when questioning, answering students’ questions about language, topics chosen by the instructor, choice of topics by the students, and evaluating students’ learning by the instructor. It is evident that minority of the teachers are more interested in using student-centered approach rather than teacher-centered approach, for they think that only class activities make students learn by themselves; and they function as facilitators, helpers, or monitors (*Figure 2*).

Concerning with Common Core Teaching and Learning Strategies (Chicago 2012), the teachers were questioned: averaging 68% do not know and use the Common Core Teaching and Learning Strategies (Chicago 2012), 30% have no ideas, and 2% know and use the Common Core Teaching and Learning Strategies: qualitative measure for text complexity, reader and task considerations, character table, and Hemlet graphic organizer.

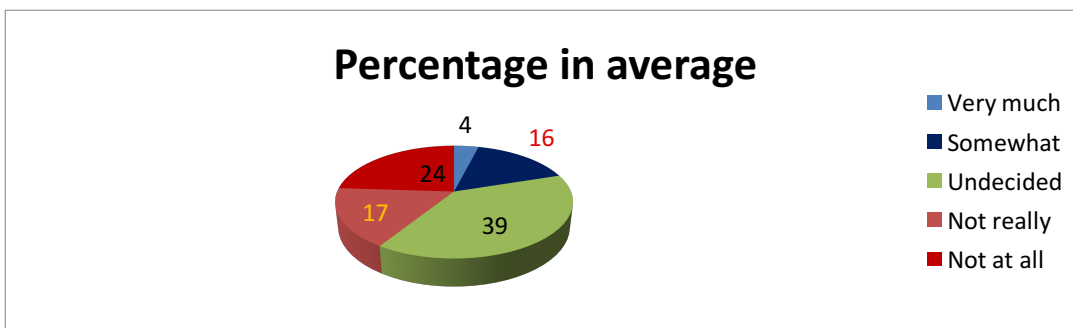


Figure 2: Teachers’ perceptions on instruction models

It means that the teachers stereotype their teaching strategies. They do not want to make themselves busy with new techniques and update teaching-learning situations (*Figure 3*).

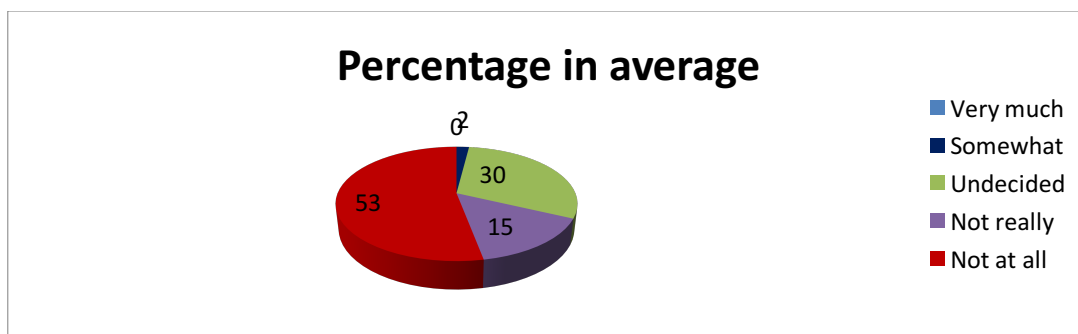


Figure 3: Teacher’s views on common core teaching and learning strategies (Chicago 2012)

When all the students were asked, averaging 81% like using a bilingual dictionary when reading a literary text, giving them opportunities to choose favorite literary texts, using some brainstorming in explaining literary content, being encouraged to use some brainstorming to understanding literary texts when reading, being allowed to use some brainstorming in the activities or exercises during English literature lessons, and the learning English literature through games, discussions with friends, watching movies or plays, and relating it to their lives. However, averaging 8% do not like the aforementioned and 11% have no ideas. These evidences show that most of the students like being independent in their studies, in which teachers are facilitators and helpers. They think that the more activities they have, the more they learn, and the better they become (*Figure 4*).

Concerning with students’ perceptions on teaching approaches and techniques used to teach English literature, averaging 7% do not like, 12% have no ideas and 81% of the students like being explained the content of the English literature lesson in details, using a lot of own prepared materials to teach English literature, being followed the text closely during the lessons, being given regular feedbacks to their performance in the English literature lessons, considering their cultural background in designing their English literature lessons, being allowed to learn English literature at their own pace, being motivated to learn English literature, using the different teaching techniques, being given opportunities to relate the literary content to real life situations or happenings, learning English literature by doing things in class, being asked for their views of the lessons in class, relating their prior-knowledge to teach English literature lessons, and being paid attention to the discipline, feedback, activity management, and time management.

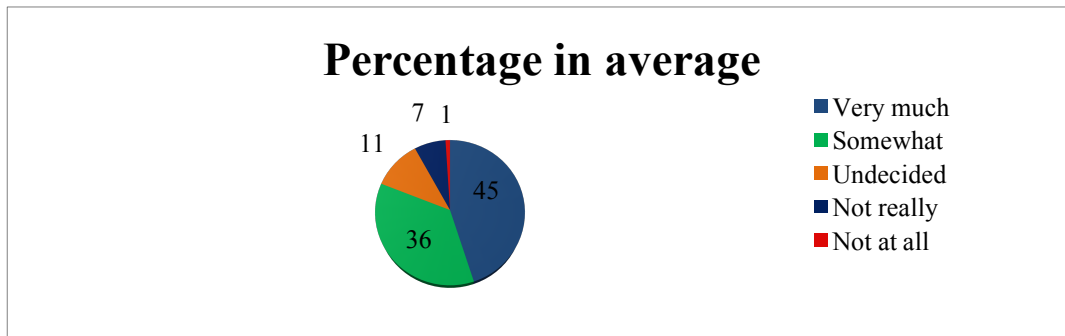


Figure 4: Students’ Views on Possible Strategies Used in Teaching and Learning English Literature in average

These results show that most students like studying English literature in a way that the teachers should assist them in explaining the content in depth, using enough teaching materials, giving feedback to their performance, using diverse teaching techniques to assist understanding, asking for their own views on the lessons, and participating in all class activities, for the students in one class have different levels of English proficiency. Therefore, the teaching strategies, the lessons and teaching materials must be well organized before the class taking place (*Figure 5*).

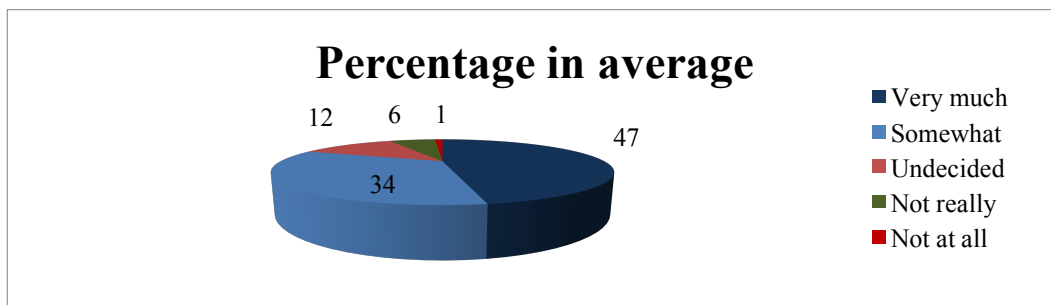


Figure 5: Students’ Perceptions on Teaching Approaches and Techniques Used to Teach English Literature in average

Regarding the students’ views on relationships between English literature subject matter and other English subjects, 34% of the students have good results, 50% fairly good, 8% fair, and 8% poor on the Modern Polyphonic Novel; 64% good results, 28% fairly good, and 8% fair on the Translation; 42% good results, 36% fairly good, 14% fair, and 8% poor on the Modernism-Postmodernism; 50% good results, 21% fairly good, 21% fair, and 8% poor on the English Romantic Paradigm; 86% good results and 14% fairly good on Discourse Analysis; 64% good results, 14% fairly good, 14% fair, and 8% poor on the Literary Translation Techniques; 72% good results, 14% fairly good, 7% fair, and 7% poor on the Semiotics of Non-verbal; and other two, good results lower than the Modern Polyphonic Novel, are the History of Anglo-American Criticism—28% good, 28% fairly good, 36% fair, and 8% poor and the Comparative Grammar of Germanic Language—20% good, 58% fairly good, 8% fair, and 14% poor. According to Boolean Operators<sup>1</sup> by Krippendoff (2004), Modern Polyphonic Novel has relationship with the other subject matters. It means other

<sup>1</sup> Boolean operators are AND, OR, and NOT. Example: A and B, A and B and C, A and B and C and D

subjects build on it. These evidences show that those who have good results in literature those who also have good results for other subject matters. Under Formalists and Structuralists, therefore, English literature was used in teaching a language (Abdullah et al 2007:2) (Figure 6a).

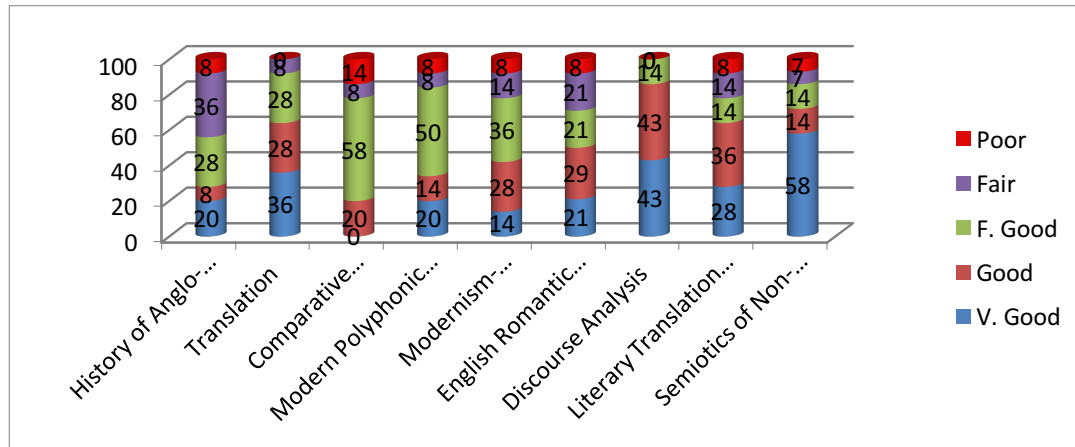


Figure 6a: Students’ Views on Relationships between English Literature Matter and Other English Subjects in average, basing on mentions

In addition to views on relationships between English literature matter and other English subjects, 43% of the students can relate English literature to other subject matters, whereas 36% cannot relate. The others 21% have no ideas whether they can relate or not. It means more students than not agree that English literature is being used as a foundation for learning other English disciplines, for English literature provides students with everyday used words, jargons, and social reality. When all the students were asked about the subjects—the History of Anglo-American Criticism, the Translation, the Comparative Grammar of Germanic Language, the Modern Polyphonic Novel, Modernism-Postmodernism, the English Romantic Paradigm, Discourse Analysis, Literary Translation Technique, and the Semiotics of Non-Verbal Communication, averaging 32% of the students said that these subjects help in writing, 40% in speaking, and 36% in reading. However, averaging 31% said that these subjects do not help in writing, 36% in speaking, and 40% in reading. The others 37% in writing, 25% in speaking, and 24% in reading have no ideas. It is evident that the abovementioned subjects do not help much in studying writing, speaking, and reading English language. These disciplines, therefore, should be developed based on the needs of the society in global communication and business, and the students, who are living in that society (Figure 6b).

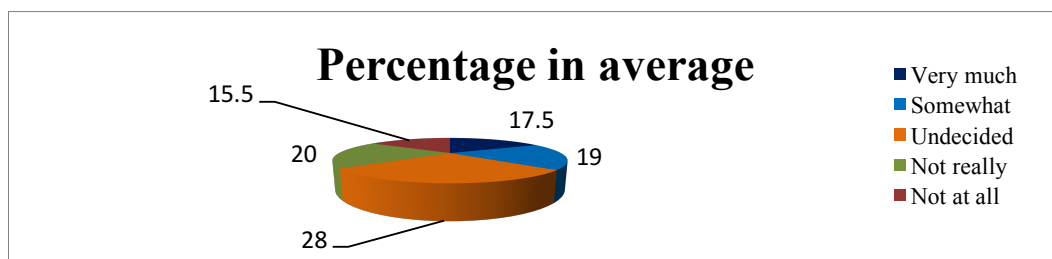
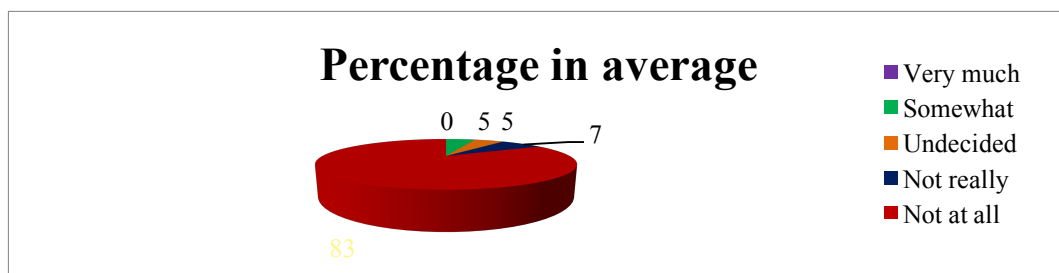


Figure 6b: Students’ Views on Relationships between English Literature Matter and Other English Subjects

Concerning with inter-culture literature (diaspora's written works), the students said that they averagely read diaspora's books—Five Faces of Modernity by Matei Callinescu, History of the Literary Cultures of East-Central Europe by Cornis-Pope Marcel, Imperfection and Defeat: The Role of Aesthetic Imagination in Human Society by Virgil Nemoianu, The Hooligan's Return by Norman Manea, read Train to Trieste by Domnica Radulescu, Property Rights by Leakthina Chau, Golden Bones by Sichan Siv, Sunset in Paradise by Bo Khaem Sokhamm Uce, When Elephants Fight: A Memoir by Vannary Imam, and The Price We Paid: A Life Experience in the Khmer Rouge Regime by Vatey Seng—somewhat 5%, undecided 5%, not really 7%, and not at all 83%. It is evident that most of the students are not interested in reading those books, which are not their subject matters. They read only those are used as the subject matters in their studies (*Figure 7*). Therefore, the students should be encouraged to further reading as many books as possible during their university's lives.



**Figure 7:** Inter-culture Literature: Diaspora's Written Works in average

### Proposed Teaching Techniques

As a crucial element of elementary and secondary school curricula, the definition of 'literature' has no consensus from researchers. The English term of literature, due to the validity of today observation, is notoriously fluid. Most researchers, however, have identified literary works as genre (the function or format of text), linguistic factors, and the nature of the transaction between reader and text (DeKay, 1996:2). The explicit assessment of good literature does not exist in the current research, but the actual classroom practices gives implicit guidance concerning the notion of goodness, and linguistic elements contribute to the quality of literature (ibid:14). The teaching techniques can be classified into four major groups: (1) Peer Group Discussion, (2) Cognitive Modeling by Teacher, (3) Adopting an Aesthetic Approach to Literature, and (4) Reading Aloud/Dramatization/Audiobooks (ibid:15-18).

### Teaching Strategies

Teaching takes part in a continuous analysis of one's own work, the experiences of other teachers, and the search for new methods to enhance teaching. The history of education mainly contributes to the great future, in which we cannot ignore the past, contributing to understanding the present and holding a view for the future (Tamura, 2006:170).



**Technique 1: Discussion/Decision/Debate (3Ds)**

Strategy/Lesson Suggestion Aim: Improving Reading Skills	Assessment for Learning Suggestions
<p><b>Discussion: (1<sup>st</sup> Session)</b> Using a list of core texts and partner texts, small-group discussion is made to find out the matches between the core texts and the partner texts and then each group reports to the class.</p>	<p>A teacher should prepare a list of core texts and partner texts before the 1<sup>st</sup> session taking place. S/he should explain the phrases ‘core texts’ and ‘partner texts’ to the class.</p>
<p><b>Decision: (2<sup>nd</sup> Session)</b> After the matches have been found, both the students and the teacher decide which partner texts should be used with the core texts.</p>	<p>The teacher should make notes of key information for making decision. Next, s/he should designate which parts of the texts to be first read with a thesis statement for each part.</p>
<p><b>Debate: (On-Going Session)</b> The debate can be made with the whole class or in two groups: Pro-group and Con-group. The students give reasons or evidences to agree or disagree with the thesis statement(s).</p>	<p>The teacher should write the thesis statement(s) on the board. All key reasons or evidences given by the students should be written on the board as well. The reasons or evidences can be taken from both inside and outside the texts. The teacher should collect all reports for grading at each part. Finally, next part(s) with thesis statement(s) are given for next session(s).</p>
<p>Notes: On-Going session, a continuous session, is adopted until the end of each book. A written or an oral summary is required for each book before going to a new story.</p>	

**Text study.** Core texts the students must study in details. Below is an example of described list of core texts.

Core Texts	Authors
Oliver Twist (1 <sup>st</sup> semester)	Charles Dickens
Romeo Juliet (2 <sup>nd</sup> semester)	William Shakespeare

Partner texts the students study in brief to assist understanding the core texts. They must be selected with the same or different authors of the core texts within a time frame. Below is the example of Core Texts and Partner Texts with a time frame.

Core Texts	Partner Texts
Oliver Twist by Charles Dickens	Fagin the Jew by Will Eisner (2003)
Romeo Juliet by William Shakespeare	Tum Teav by Ven. Botumthera Som (Translated by George Chigas 1915)
<p><b>Note:</b> Partner texts can be chosen more than one for each core text, depending on time available in each semester.</p>	

**Managing coursework.** To achieve this, the teacher must do the following: (1) planning stage (hours/week, weeks/semester) to cover four texts or more, (2) discussing the plan with students to avoid any irregularities/mistakes, (3) giving advice/guidance to partner texts (avoiding detailed annotation), (4) giving detailed annotation to core texts, (5) collecting

all stage and final reports of core texts and/or partner texts for grading, , and (6) giving more time to core texts than to partner texts.

**Assessment**

Core Text	Partner Text	Total
60%	40%	100%

**Technique 2: Experience/Discovery/Results/Debate (E-D-R-D)**

Strategy/Lesson Suggestion Aim: Improving Reading Skills	Assessment for Learning Suggestions
<b>Experience</b> The students go quickly through the title/subtitle and contents/main points of the book/chapter and then tell the class what they generally know about the book/chapter.	The teacher draws E-D-R-D chart on the board for writing key notes from the students. To help the students, the teacher should give some clues.
<b>Discovery</b> The students discover to get what more about the text by making question(s).	The teacher must prepare a list of questions. The students work individually or in groups to think of questions of what they want to get more about the text.
<b>Results</b> The students must discuss and share the answers of the made questions with the class.	The teacher calls out some students to get the answers and writes them on the board in the right column. Alternatively, the students can write the answers on the board themselves.
<b>Debate</b> The students must give reasons to agree or disagree with a thesis statement of the text.	The teacher gives the thesis statement to the students. If the time is unavailable for the debate, it will be done in next session. The students must give reasons or examples from the text to support or not to support the statement, with the whole class or in two groups: Pro-group and Con-group.

*Adapted from Crawford et al (2005)*

**Procedures and example**

**A** The teacher draws the E-D-R-D chart on the board.

**B** Both teacher and students fill in the ‘Experience’ column with the guide: What is your experience in the topic/title/contents?

**C** The students make questions to complete the ‘Discovery’ column with the guide: What is your discovery of the topic/title/contents?

**D** The students answer all the questions to fill up the ‘Results’ column with the guide: What are your results of the discovery?

**E** The students give reasons or examples to support or not to support the statement to fill in the ‘Debate’ column with the guide: What and how are you going to debate?

**Elephant Conservation**

<b>Experience</b>	<b>Discovery</b>	<b>Results</b>	<b>Debate</b>
<p>Elephants are endangered. People shoot them for ivory and sometimes destroy their habitats. Shooting Elephants is not allowed, for they serve tourists and in transportation. Some of them live near farms and might harm farmers' crops. They are classified into African and Asian elephants. The African elephant is the largest animal walking the earth. Elephants live up to around 70 years. Local elephants are bigger than forest elephants, but forest elephants are darker than local elephants.</p>	<p>Do elephants destroy crops? How much damage do elephants do?</p> <p>How do people who live near elephants feel about them?</p> <p>Who should decide whether to protect elephants?</p> <p>How do people conserve them?</p>	<p>Yes!</p> <p>The destroy farms and houses. They make big farms lose money. Farmers fear elephants. They also want to make money from killing them. We need to decide who should decide. That is, who should determine if some elephants are to be hunted or not? Everyone shall obey the laws. Educating people is important to conserve forest elephants. Offenders shall be sentenced seriously. People no longer cut down the forest.</p>	<p><b>Statement:</b> <i>Elephants useful to human beings</i> What do you think? Support or not to support.</p> <p><b>Support:</b> Elephants make much money for owners in a tourist place. They transport heavy cargos in difficult places. They are also used in the military.</p> <p><b>Not support:</b> Elephants destroy crops, houses, and other things when they get angry. They are not used in agriculture. Elephant conservation takes much money for both local and forest elephants.</p>

**Assessment**

<b>Each Debate Report</b>	<b>Class Participation</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>60%</b>	<b>40%</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Conclusion**

Most of the students are more interested in student-centered approach than in teacher-centered approach. They are satisfied with studying English literature in a manner that the lecturers play many roles—helpers, facilitators, material organizers, feedback givers, teaching technique developers, and participants—to assist them learn effectively and enjoyably. They, however, are generally not interested in reading English literature; especially those literary texts are not used as disciplines. They are confined to university routines, in which they do properly the assigned works, not others to extend further readings for self-development. According to the research results, if they have received good results in English literature, they also have obtained good results in other subject matters. They should

be motivated to further reading during their university lives. The two proposed techniques, therefore, should be introduced at the university and others in Romania, aiming at improving reading skills and quality of higher education.

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