

Impact of Literature-Based Instruction on Vocabulary Acquisition and Critical Thinking Skills in Intermediate Level English Learners

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Abstract

This study investigates the impact of literature-based instruction on vocabulary acquisition and critical thinking skills in intermediate level English learners. The primary objective is to evaluate how integrating literature into the curriculum influences the students' language development and cognitive abilities. The research hypothesizes that literature-based instruction significantly enhances vocabulary acquisition and critical thinking compared to traditional methods. The population for this study comprises intermediate level English learners in urban educational institutions. A sample of 100 students is selected using stratified random sampling to ensure representation across various demographics. Employing a quasi-experimental design, this study adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative data. Data collection tools include standardized vocabulary tests, critical thinking assessments, and structured interviews. Quantitative data is analyzed using statistical methods such as t-tests and ANOVA to measure vocabulary and critical thinking improvements, while qualitative data from interviews is thematically analyzed to gain insights into the students' experiences and perceptions. The findings aim to provide empirical evidence on the effectiveness of literature-based instruction, potentially informing curriculum development and teaching strategies to foster comprehensive language skills and critical thinking in English learners.

Keywords

Educational Research - Vocabulary Acquisition - Critical Thinking Assessments - Curriculum Development - Language Skills

Introduction

The integration of literature-based instruction in language education has garnered significant attention for its potential to enhance various linguistic and cognitive skills among learners. This study focuses on intermediate level English learners, aiming to explore how exposure to literary texts can improve vocabulary acquisition and critical thinking abilities. Literature provides a rich context for language use, presenting complex vocabulary and diverse sentence structures, which can aid in vocabulary development. Furthermore, engaging with literature encourages learners to analyze, interpret, and critically evaluate texts, fostering higher-order thinking skills. Despite the theoretical benefits, empirical evidence on the effectiveness of

literature-based instruction in intermediate language education remains limited. Therefore, this research seeks to fill this gap by systematically examining the impact of literature-based teaching methods on vocabulary growth and critical thinking enhancement in intermediate level English learners, ultimately contributing to more effective language teaching practices.

Research questions

- How does literature-based instruction impact vocabulary acquisition in intermediate level English learners compared to traditional language teaching methods?
- How does effect literature-based instruction have on the development of critical thinking skills in intermediate level English learners?
- How do intermediate level English learners perceive the use of literature in their language learning process?

Literature Review

The impact of literature-based instruction on vocabulary acquisition and critical thinking skills among intermediate level English learners is a multifaceted subject that spans several domains of educational research, including second language acquisition, cognitive development, and instructional methodologies. This literature review synthesizes relevant studies to provide a comprehensive understanding of the theoretical and empirical foundations underpinning this research topic.

Vocabulary Acquisition

Vocabulary acquisition is a critical component of language learning, directly influencing reading comprehension, communication skills, and overall academic success. Extensive research has explored various methods to enhance vocabulary learning, with literature-based instruction emerging as a particularly effective approach. Graves (2006) argues that exposure to rich and varied vocabulary in literary texts provides learners with contextual clues that aid in the understanding and retention of new words. Furthermore, Nation (2013) emphasizes the role of extensive reading in vocabulary acquisition, suggesting that consistent engagement with literature can lead to substantial vocabulary growth.

The theoretical framework supporting the use of literature in vocabulary instruction includes Krashen's (1982) Input Hypothesis, which posits that language learners acquire vocabulary more effectively when exposed to comprehensible input slightly above their current proficiency level. Literary texts, with their complex language and varied contexts,

serve as an ideal source of such input. Empirical studies by Horst (2005) and Paribakht and Wesche (1997) have demonstrated that learners who engage with literature show significant improvements in vocabulary acquisition compared to those using traditional vocabulary exercises.

Critical Thinking Skills

Critical thinking skills, encompassing analysis, evaluation, and synthesis of information, are essential for academic success and lifelong learning. Literature-based instruction has been shown to foster these skills by encouraging learners to engage deeply with texts. Facione (2011) defines critical thinking as purposeful, self-regulatory judgment, which manifests through activities such as interpreting, analyzing, and evaluating information. Literary texts, with their inherent complexities and ambiguities, naturally lend themselves to such intellectual engagement.

Paul and Elder (2008) argue that critical thinking development is facilitated through questioning and discussion, both of which are integral to literature-based instruction. When learners interpret literary texts, they are prompted to consider multiple perspectives, draw inferences, and substantiate their interpretations with textual evidence. Research by Pellegrino and Hilton (2012) supports this, indicating that students who participate in literature-based discussions exhibit higher levels of critical thinking compared to those engaged in other forms of instruction.

Instructional Methodologies

The instructional methodologies employed in literature-based instruction differ significantly from traditional language teaching approaches. Traditional methods often focus on rote memorization and isolated skill practice, whereas literature-based instruction emphasizes holistic language use and critical engagement with texts. Rosenblatt's (1978) transactional theory of reading highlights the interactive nature of reading, where meaning is constructed through a dynamic relationship between the reader and the text. This theory underpins literature-based instruction, advocating for student-centered learning environments where learners actively construct meaning.

Brown and Campione (1996) introduce the concept of "communities of learners," which aligns with literature-based instruction. In such communities, learners collaboratively engage with texts, sharing interpretations and building collective understanding. Studies by Daniels (2002) and Almasi (2003) have shown that collaborative discussions around

literature not only enhance comprehension and vocabulary but also promote critical thinking and metacognitive skills.

Empirical Evidence

Empirical evidence supporting the efficacy of literature-based instruction in vocabulary acquisition and critical thinking development is robust. For instance, a study by McKeown, Beck, and Blake (2009) found that students who participated in literature-based instruction demonstrated significant improvements in vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension. Similarly, a meta-analysis by Swanson, Howard, and Sáez (2006) concluded that literature-based instructional approaches were more effective in promoting reading achievement and cognitive skills compared to traditional methods.

Research by Applebee, Langer, Nystrand, and Gamoran (2003) provides further evidence, showing that literature-rich classrooms foster higher levels of critical thinking and interpretative skills. Their study revealed that students engaged in literature-based discussions were more adept at making inferences, identifying themes, and evaluating arguments. These findings are corroborated by Langer's (2001) research, which highlights the cognitive benefits of engaging with complex literary texts.

Major domains explored in this literature review encompass second language acquisition, cognitive development, and instructional methodologies. The primary variables of interest include vocabulary acquisition, critical thinking skills, and instructional methods. Vocabulary acquisition is measured through assessments of word knowledge and usage, while critical thinking skills are evaluated based on learners' abilities to analyze, interpret, and evaluate information. Instructional methods are categorized into literature-based and traditional approaches, with the former characterized by the use of literary texts and student-centered discussions.

In intermediate level English education, the integration of literature-based instruction holds immense potential for fostering a holistic approach to language learning. By immersing students in authentic literary texts, educators provide them with a rich linguistic environment where they can explore language nuances, cultural contexts, and diverse perspectives. As emphasized by Johnson and Smith (2019), literature offers a window into the complexities of language usage, presenting students with real-world examples of vocabulary, grammar, and discourse. For instance, reading literary works exposes learners to a wide range of vocabulary that extends beyond everyday conversational language, thereby expanding their lexical

repertoire (Brown & Davis, 2017). Additionally, the narrative structures and stylistic elements inherent in literature challenge students to engage critically with texts, fostering deeper comprehension and analytical thinking skills. Through guided discussions and activities centered around literary texts, students not only enhance their language proficiency but also develop the cognitive abilities necessary for effective communication and interpretation.

Furthermore, literature-based instruction in the intermediate English classroom serves as a catalyst for cultural exploration and empathy development. As students engage with stories from diverse cultural backgrounds, they gain insights into the lived experiences of others and broaden their worldview. According to Lee and Kim (2020), exposure to literature from different cultures promotes intercultural competence by encouraging students to reflect on their own beliefs and values in comparison to those depicted in the texts. For example, studying literature from various regions allows students to recognize and appreciate cultural differences in language use, social norms, and historical contexts. Moreover, by empathizing with the characters and situations presented in literary works, students cultivate empathy and sensitivity towards diverse perspectives, contributing to their overall personal and social development (García& González, 2018). Thus, literature-based instruction not only enhances language skills but also fosters global citizenship and intercultural understanding among intermediate English learners.

In addition to its linguistic and cultural benefits, literature-based instruction plays a crucial role in promoting critical literacy skills essential for navigating today's complex informational landscape. With the proliferation of digital media and online content, students must develop the ability to critically evaluate and analyze information from various sources. Literature provides a structured platform for honing these skills, as students engage in close reading, interpretation, and evaluation of texts. According to Harris and Jones (2019), literature-based instruction encourages students to question assumptions, challenge interpretations, and construct meaning collaboratively. By examining themes, characters, and authorial intent, students develop a critical lens through which they can assess the validity and reliability of textual information. Moreover, by exploring contemporary issues and societal concerns through literature, students develop a deeper understanding of the complexities of the world around them and become more discerning consumers of information. Thus, literature-based instruction equips intermediate English learners with the

critical literacy skills necessary for academic success and informed citizenship in the 21st century.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics and Independent Samples t-Test for Vocabulary Acquisition Scores

Group	Mean	S.D	t	df	Sig.(2 – Tailed)
Literature-Based Instruction	82.3	8.4	2.45	98	0.016
Traditional Methods	76.1	9.2			

Sample =100

Interpretation

The results of the independent samples t-test indicate that there is a statistically significant difference in vocabulary acquisition scores between students who received literature-based instruction (M = 82.3, SD = 8.4) and those who were taught using traditional methods (M = 76.1, SD = 9.2), $t(98) = 2.45$, $p = 0.016$. Since the p-value is less than 0.05, we reject the null hypothesis. This suggests that literature-based instruction has a significant positive impact on vocabulary acquisition in intermediate level English learners compared to traditional teaching methods.

Table 2
Descriptive Statistics and Independent Samples t-Test for Critical Thinking Skills Scores

Group	Mean	S.D	t	df	Sig.(2 – Tailed)
Literature-Based Instruction	85.7	7.5	3.12	98	0.002
Traditional Methods	79.2	8.1			

Sample =100

Interpretation

The results of the independent samples t-test indicate that there is a statistically significant difference in critical thinking skills scores between students who received literature-based instruction ($M = 85.7, SD = 7.5$) and those who were taught using traditional methods ($M = 79.2, SD = 8.1$), $t(98) = 3.12, p = 0.002$. Since the p-value is less than 0.05, we reject the null hypothesis. This suggests that literature-based instruction has a significant positive effect on the development of critical thinking skills in intermediate level English learners compared to traditional teaching methods.

Table 3
Descriptive Statistics and Independent Samples t-Test for Perception Scores

Group	Mean	S.D	t	df	Sig.(2 – Tailed)
Literature-Based Instruction	4.3	0.5	4.56	98	<0.001
Traditional Methods	3.8	0.6			

Sample =100

Interpretation

The results of the independent samples t-test indicate that there is a statistically significant difference in perception scores between students who received literature-based instruction ($M = 4.3, SD = 0.5$) and those who were taught using traditional methods ($M = 3.8, SD = 0.6$), $t(98) = 4.56, p < 0.001$. Since the p-value is less than 0.05, we reject the null hypothesis. This suggests that intermediate level English learners have significantly more positive perceptions of the use of literature in their language learning process compared to those taught using traditional methods.

Table 6
Descriptive Statistics and ANOVA Results for Vocabulary Acquisition Scores Across Literary Genres

Literary Genre	Mean	Std. Deviation
Novels	83.2	8.9
Short Stories	81.5	7.6
Poetry	79.8	6.8
Drama	82.1	8.2

N=100

ANOVA: $F(3, 196) = 2.12, p = 0.098$

Interpretation

The results of the one-way ANOVA indicate that there is no significant difference in the vocabulary acquisition scores of intermediate level English learners exposed to literature-based instruction across different genres of literary texts ($F(3, 196) = 2.12, p = 0.098$). Since the p-value is greater than 0.05, we fail to reject the null hypothesis. This suggests that the type of literary genre used in instruction does not significantly impact vocabulary acquisition in intermediate level English learners. However, it is important to note that there is a trend towards significance, indicating the need for further exploration with a larger sample size or different methodology.

Table 7
Descriptive Statistics and Repeated Measures ANOVA Results for Critical Thinking Skills across Literary Analysis Tasks

Literary Analysis Task	Mean	Std. Deviation
Character Analysis	85.2	7.3
Theme Identification	83.6	6.9
Textual Interpretation	84.1	7.1

N=100

Repeated Measures ANOVA: $F(2, 98) = 1.45, p = 0.236$

Interpretation

The results of the repeated measures ANOVA indicate that there is no significant difference in the critical thinking skills of intermediate level English learners exposed to literature-based instruction across different types of literary analysis tasks ($F(2, 98) = 1.45, p = 0.236$). Since the p-value is greater than 0.05, we fail to reject the null hypothesis. This suggests that the type of literary analysis task does not significantly impact critical thinking skills in intermediate level English learners. However, it is important to note that while not statistically significant, there may still be practical implications or trends that warrant further investigation.

Table 8
Descriptive Statistics and Moderation Analysis Results for Vocabulary Acquisition Scores

	Mean	Std. Deviation
High L1 Proficiency	84.2	7.6
Low L1 Proficiency	80.5	8.3

Moderation Analysis: $F(3, 96) = 3.21, p = 0.028$

Interpretation

The results of the moderation analysis indicate that there is a significant interaction effect between literature-based instruction and students' proficiency levels in their first language (L1) on vocabulary acquisition scores ($F(3, 96) = 3.21, p = 0.028$). This suggests that the effect of literature-based instruction on vocabulary acquisition in intermediate level English learners is moderated by their proficiency levels in their first language. Further post-hoc analysis revealed that the effect of literature-based instruction on vocabulary acquisition is stronger for students with high proficiency levels in their first language compared to those with low proficiency levels. These findings highlight the importance of considering students' linguistic backgrounds and proficiency levels when implementing literature-based instruction in language learning contexts.

Findings

The study found that literature-based instruction significantly enhances both vocabulary acquisition and critical thinking skills among intermediate level English learners. Students exposed to literature-based instruction scored higher on vocabulary tests ($M = 82.3$) compared to those receiving traditional instruction ($M = 76.1$), with a significant t-test result ($t(98) = 2.45, p = 0.016$). Similarly, the critical thinking skills of students taught through literature-based methods were superior ($M = 85.7$) to those taught traditionally ($M = 79.2$), supported by a significant t-test result ($t(98) = 3.12, p = 0.002$). Additionally, learners' perceptions of literature-based instruction were notably more positive ($M = 4.3$) compared to traditional methods ($M = 3.8$), with a highly significant result ($t(98) = 4.56, p < 0.001$).

Recommendations

Based on these findings, it is recommended that educators and curriculum developers integrate literature-based instruction into intermediate level English programs. Training teachers to effectively utilize literary texts can further enhance vocabulary and critical thinking skills. Future research could explore the long-term impacts of literature-based instruction and its effectiveness across different proficiency levels and educational contexts. Additionally, investigating specific elements of literature-based activities that contribute most significantly to these improvements could provide deeper insights for optimizing instructional strategies.

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