BEYOND COMMUNICATION: THE ROLE OF HUMANISTIC TEACHING AND LITERATURE IN EFL CLASSROOMS

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Abstract*: Humanistic teaching emphasizes the development of the whole learner—emotionally, intellectually, socially, and morally—placing the student at the center of the educational process. In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) settings, literature offers rich opportunities to engage learners in meaningful, reflective, and empathetic exploration of language and culture. While Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) focuses primarily on fluency and communicative competence, this article argues that humanistic approaches through literature provide deeper personal engagement, cultural literacy, and transformational learning. By integrating literature into EFL classrooms through humanistic pedagogy, teachers foster emotional intelligence, critical thinking, and intercultural understanding, which are essential for holistic language acquisition in the 21st century.*

Key Words*: Humanistic Teaching, Literature, Communicative Language Teaching, Emotional Intelligence, EFL, Empathy, Cultural Awareness, Reflective Learning*

1. Introduction

Over recent decades, CLT has dominated EFL pedagogy, prioritizing interaction, real-life communication, and learner autonomy. However, as global challenges demand more emotionally and culturally aware individuals, there is a renewed interest in humanistic approaches that emphasize learner identity, personal growth, and empathy. Literature, with its emotive and narrative power, aligns naturally with humanistic education, offering a powerful alternative or complement to the task-based, utilitarian focus of CLT. According to Ghosn (2002), literature

enhances emotional and moral development in language learners, making it a valuable pedagogical tool.

2. Understanding Humanistic Teaching

Humanistic teaching draws from educational psychology and philosophies of Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow. It values:

- Learner autonomy and self-expression

- Emotional safety and trust

- Empathy and mutual respect

- Self-actualization as a goal of education

In language teaching, this means prioritizing personal relevance, reflective practices, and a safe space for expression. Students are seen not just as language learners but as whole individuals with thoughts, emotions, experiences, and values. Mezirow (1991) highlights the transformative potential of such reflective engagement in adult learners.

3. Literature as a Tool in Humanistic EFL Teaching

Literary texts offer narratives filled with human emotions, ethical dilemmas, cultural nuances, and psychological depth. These texts provide a platform for learners to explore their own values, beliefs, and identities while developing language skills. Poetry, short stories, novels, and drama can evoke emotions, provoke discussions, and inspire creativity—elements often missing in CLT materials.

Example approaches include:

- Reflective journals based on character experiences (Kember et al., 1999)

- Role-playing emotionally rich scenes (Ferradas, 2009)

- Debates on moral questions in stories (Umarova, 2024)

- Creative rewriting from a character's point of view (Mourão, 2009)

Such tasks promote not just linguistic proficiency but also emotional literacy and cultural competence. Christie (1992) emphasized that literacy in language education is a cultural and emotional process as much as a linguistic one.

4. Humanistic Literature Teaching vs. CLT: A Comparison

Aspect	Humanistic Approach with Literature	Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)
Focus	Personal growth, empathy, cultural understanding	Communication, fluency, real-life language use
Content	Literary texts, emotions, identity	Dialogues, tasks, simulations
Method	Reflective, expressive, learner-centered	Interactive, task-based, function-oriented
Outcomes	Emotional intelligence, critical thinking, intercultural competence	Oral fluency, negotiation of meaning, functional language use

While CLT prepares students for transactional language use, humanistic literature-based teaching develops the learner's inner world, promoting deeper motivation and lasting learning (Crandall, 1987; Davison & Williams, 2001).

5. Practical Benefits of a Humanistic Literature-Based Approach

- **Deeper Engagement**: Students connect emotionally with texts and topics, enabling better retention and meaningful discussions.

- **Vocabulary Retention**: Literature offers rich linguistic input that supports long-term memory and contextual understanding.

- **Critical Thinking**: Literary narratives require learners to interpret, analyze, and evaluate diverse perspectives (Kolodner & Guzdial, 1999).

- **Empathy Building**: Learners are exposed to different lives, values, and social contexts, fostering greater global awareness (Denham & Figueras, 2009).

- **Motivation**: Literature inspires curiosity and relevance, increasing intrinsic motivation to learn (Ferradas, 2009).

6. Challenges and Solutions

Challenges:

- Language complexity of literary texts

- Teacher preparedness and training

- Assessment difficulties for subjective learning outcomes

Solutions:

- Choose age- and level-appropriate literature (Ghosn, 2002)

- Offer pre-reading support and vocabulary scaffolding (de Guerrero, 2005)

- Provide teacher training on humanistic pedagogy (Akhmadullina & Kattabayeva, 2023)

- Use portfolios, self-assessments, and reflective writing for evaluation (Mezirow, 1991)

7. Conclusion

Humanistic teaching through literature offers a powerful alternative to CLT in the EFL classroom, one that fosters emotional depth, empathy, and holistic learning. While CLT remains valuable for communicative competence, it is limited in addressing the affective and moral dimensions of language learning. Literature, when used with a humanistic lens, bridges this gap—cultivating not just competent language users but thoughtful, emotionally intelligent global citizens. As literacy is redefined in broader social and cultural terms, literature becomes not merely a resource for language input, but a vital pedagogical tool for human development.

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