

A Research Synthesis of Using Young Adult Literature in College English Literature Class

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Abstract: Incorporating literature in English language classrooms is believed by the scholars to have multiple merits. For example, its inherent authenticity offers reliable input for language learning. As an important genre, young adult literature can be a potential teaching tool to improve motivation and engagement among students by arousing their interests with the content and text and provides the scaffold to bridge the instruction content with students' personal feelings and experience. This study aims to investigate the current use of YAL, the selection criteria of instructors and the potential challenges in college English literature classrooms, hoping to find some effective suggestions and shed light on using YAL in college English literature courses.

1. Introduction

Literature is considered to be an applicable and promising tool for language learning. It helps us to understand people, societies, events, culture [1][2]. Besides, literary texts hold great motivational value owing to the meaningful context they offer [3]. What's more, one of the main benefits of literature is that it acts as a stimulus that creates interest and motivates the student by involving them on a personal, emotional level [4].

As an important genre of literature, young adult literature, known as YAL, has struggled to gain relevance and legitimacy within the larger academic community [5]. Hall (2019) emphasizes adolescents' need for a literature that they can not only relate to but that also challenges their thinking, and pushes them to look beyond themselves, to see the world beyond their own extremes of drama and struggle. While it would to some degree influence the way people look at young adult literature, the genre is also an important focal point for young readers, deserving of English language educators' attention [6].

In recent years, YAL has shown great benefit for the teaching process and continue to appeal to its readers. Due to its definition, many scholars in the field focus on studies of using YAL in younger learners of primary and secondary education, while few noticed its application in college students [7][8][9][10].

2. Method

2.1 Research Questions

Concerning this topic, in order to guide this study and form a systematic synthesis, five research questions are proposed:

- (1) What kinds of YAL were popular among college students?
- (2) What criteria did instructors use when selecting YAL in college English literature class?
- (3) How did instructors use YAL in college English literature class?
- (4) What were the challenges of using YAL in college English literature class?
- (5) What suggestions and recommendations of using YAL were made in the literature?

2.2 Synthesis Framework

For this study, Patricia Cronin's framework was adopted, which was proposed in the year 2008 [11]. According to this framework, there are five steps in the literature review process:

The first step is to select a review topic. It is recommended by the authors to identify what exactly is of interest.

Step two is to search the literature. Electronic databases are used to get access to the vast quantities of information.

Step three is analyzing and synthesizing the literature. An initial overview is taken of the articles collected while classifying them into different groups.

Next step is to write the review. The findings are presented to demonstrate the knowledge in a clear and consistent way.

The last step is reference. The research synthesis should include a full and complete list.

2.3 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion criteria

(1) The topic of this research synthesis is focus on the college students, therefore the age defined should be cover the age group of older adolescents of 18-20.

(2) The articles should focus on the application of young adult literature as a teaching tool or teaching material in college English classrooms.

(3) The articles should be published within the time span of 15 years from 2008-2023.

(4) The articles should be included in either SSCI or ESCI journals.

Exclusion criteria

(1) The literature review or research synthesis on the topic of young adult literature are excluded.

(2) Editorials, book chapters, guides, thesis, dissertations or papers that are not journal articles are excluded.

(3) Articles that are not focusing on college students are excluded.

(4) Articles that published without the time span of 2008-2023 are excluded.

(5) Articles that not included in SSCI or ESCI journals are excluded.

3. Findings

3.1 Popular YAL among College Students

Among the collected 15 articles, 9 of them mentioned popular YAL among learners, and 7 of them maintained that the most popular kind of YAL is fiction [12][13][14][15][16][17][18], while 1

mentioned picture books and 1 mentioned mystery [19][20].

According to the literature, fiction was by far the most popular among college, followed by mysteries, classics, and nonfiction [13]. The reading preference also varied with gender, grade and major as well. For example, males were more likely to read science fiction, but females were more favourite fantasy and romance. As for majors, humanities majors were overwhelmingly more likely to read classics, natural science majors were more likely to read science fiction.

3.2 Selection Criteria Used by Instructors

Based on the collected articles, 3 of them selected the material based on the its connection with learners' age and personal story[16][17][21]. Three papers selected the material because of the various perspectives and depictions [14][18][22], and 2 articles selected the material of YAL because it was award winners or best sellers [12][20].

Developing and improving the selection criteria of choosing the proper YAL material that is appropriate for the college English literature class seems to be essential in the incorporation of YAL in a more scientific and effective way [23].

3.3 Teaching Activities Used in the Classrooms

Among the 11 articles that mentioned the instruction activities when using YAL in the classroom, 5 of them used classroom discussion as the main activity[14][19][16][21][24], 2 articles assigned the learners with literary response essay [16][21], 1 article demanded the learners to watch the multi-modal adaption of the chosen book before class [14], and 1 article used online resources to facilitate learners' comprehension (an online book club and twitter summaries [18] .

3.4 Challenges of Using YAL in College English Literature Classes

From the collected papers, only one thirds of them, that is, 5 articles mentioned the potential challenges of using YAL in the classroom. 3 of them deemed the stereotypes and biases of characters depicted in the books would be a main threat [20][22][25], 1 article mentioned that teachers tend to have sole focus when teaching YAL [26], and 1 article claimed that teachers' deficit assumptions of YAL would impede the instruction process [17].

3.5 Suggestions of Using YAL in College English Literature Classes

As much as 10 articles mentioned the suggestions of instruction process. 4 articles recommended to include multiple types of texts, such as picture books and multicultural literature [12][18][21][26], 3 papers emphasized the significance of students' own choice [15][22][24], one article attached great importance on creating a welcoming and safe classroom atmosphere [19], 1 article suggested to include the multimedia adaptations in classroom [14], and 1 research recommended to design activities which would relate to the students' own life experiences [16].

4. Conclusion

In a word, YAL is valuable for adolescents who are in a stage of discovering their identity while slowly becoming adults and can become a powerful means to bring them into an intimate relationship with reading [27]. It serves as a helpful means that prepares teenagers for adult life while rekindling their love for literature reading. All these highlight the great potential of YAL when introduced to the classroom because it offers the educators multiple opportunities for meaningful

engagement of teenage learners of English with authentic literary texts and language structures [28]. Future research should continue to investigate the real effects of using YAL and useful strategies for its incorporation into diverse contexts.

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