

A Comparative Approach to the Teaching of English Literature

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Resumen: Esta ponencia aspira a plantear un nuevo alcance metodológico a la enseñanza de la literatura en colegios y universidades de Costa Rica donde el inglés se enseña como lengua extranjera. Motivado por la necesidad de acercar a los alumnos y alumnas de inglés al estudio de la literatura como parte de su currículum académico, y aun más provocado por el hecho de que muchos de estos estudiantes no logran apreciar la literatura en sí, el autor pretende adoptar aquí una postura comparatista y sugerir el valor de textos escritos en otros idiomas pero especialmente de formas alternativas de arte y conocimiento en la captación del interés de los y las estudiantes en el texto literario y en la expansión de su potencial para una educación de mayor nivel y crecimiento cultural. El campo de la literatura comparada se caracteriza por la lucha entre teorías y metodologías. Sin embargo, es precisamente dentro de este marco de conflicto que una mayor variedad de posibilidades críticas se desprende. En consecuencia, cualquier texto literario que esté siendo estudiado en una clase de inglés como lengua extranjera presumiblemente puede enriquecerse de un examen de sus relaciones con otras obras escritas en inglés y en otras lenguas y con otros textos artísticos como canciones, películas, pinturas o incluso edificios. A través de una serie de explicaciones acerca de las metodologías más importantes para la enseñanza de la literatura y cómo la literatura comparada puede servir objetivos pedagógicos específicos, esta ponencia propone una renovación en la experiencia y práctica de la enseñanza de la literatura mientras que trata de salvar la brecha entre la crítica literaria y el aprendizaje del inglés como segunda lengua en nuestro contexto educativo.

Palabras clave: literatura comparada, enseñanza del inglés, artes, experiencia, cultura

Abstract: This conference presentation aims at proposing a new methodological approach to the teaching of literature in Costa Rican high

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schools and universities where English is taught as a foreign language. Incited by the necessity to bring English learners closer to the study of literature as part of their academic curriculum, and further provoked by the fact that a good number of such students unfortunately fail to appreciate literature in its own right, the author here attempts to adopt a comparatist's standpoint and suggest the value of other language texts but especially of alternative forms of art and knowledge in both awakening the students' interest in the literary text and in unlocking their potential for higher education and cultural growth. The field of Comparative Literature is characterized by struggle among theories and methodologies. However, it is against this conflictive background that a wider range of critical possibilities unfolds. Thereby, any literary text that is being studied in an EFL classroom may allegedly be enriched by an examination of its relationships with other works written in other languages and with other artistic texts like songs, films, paintings or even buildings. Through a series of explanations about the most important methodologies for the teaching of literature and how Comparative Literature might lend itself to their specific pedagogical objectives, this conference proposes a renovation in the experience and practice of literature teaching while at the same time trying to bridge the gap between literary criticism and the teaching of English as a foreign language in our educational context.

Key words: comparative literature, English teaching, arts, experience, culture

I Introduction

The list of reasons for teaching literature to EFL students is long. As a matter of fact, besides the obvious benefit of bringing learners closer to their target language, especially through the reading of authentic texts (Carter & Long, 1991; Elliot, 1991), much more is gained by reading and learning about literature than an improvement of the student's lexical and grammatical skills. After a very recent study conducted on 105 Turkish learners of English as a foreign language, Celvet Yilmaz (2012) concludes that they "should be provided more exposure to literature courses thereby maximizing language learning" (p. 91). However, this is not the only benefit that literature offers to the EFL classroom. Akyel and Yalçın (as cited in Yilmaz, 2012) mention, among other advantages, an expansion of the learners' worldview, plus a developed creative and imaginative potential and a stronger appreciation of literature as a whole (p. 86). One other important outcome that should motivate teachers to teach and students to study literature in EFL programs is a better acquaintance with culture. As unsophisticated as it may sound, literature "serve[s] as a medium to transmit the culture of the people who speak the language in which it is written" (Valdes, as cited in Elliot, 1991, p. 65). It is precisely this cultural dimension that facilitates an experience of literature and language that may eventually become crucial for the integral education of the language student.

Evidently, much may be said about the paramount role of literature in the teaching of English as a foreign language, and it actually is very encouraging to have witnessed lately a fundamental revival in the use of authentic literary texts in the EFL classroom (Hall, 2005; Belcher & Hirvela, 2000). Nevertheless, the question still remains of how literature should be approached and how it should be taught to language learners. Teaching literature is not like teaching grammar, composition, or even reading. It requires a unique treatment of the subject matter inasmuch as such subject matter is in itself unique and provides myriad possibilities for examining not only linguistic but also cultural realities. The literary text asks for a full experience of its content and interpretive suggestions, for a thorough exploration of its rough tracks and winding paths, a task that many language learners seem unwilling or unprepared to undertake but that might instill in them a heightened sense of knowledge and culture. Hence, a comparative approach to the study and criticism of literature offers a possibility to potentiate the role of literature in the teaching and learning of English as a foreign language since it will propel the cultural and linguistic experience to a level of fuller acquisition. Here, such approach is suggested and endorsed, yet not without having been confronted first with the existing methodologies for the teaching of literature and with the very nature of the comparative studies of literature as a discipline.

2 Problems in Teaching Literature

One of the main problems of teaching literature in English to Spanish speakers in Costa Rica lies in their literary background. As a rule of thumb, Costa Ricans are not avid readers. In an informal interview to a group of twenty second-year students enrolled in the Associate's Program of English at Universidad Nacional in Pérez Zeledón, only two admitted having read more than one book to completion in their lives (August 2012). Such response may be regarded as indicative of a generalized reluctance among educated Costa Rican young adults to read literature willfully. A positive perception and approach to literature in the native language, however, underlies the reception of literary studies in other languages (Yilmaz, 2012, p. 92). It is clear that the teaching of literature in Spanish is not a viable practice among Costa Rican learners and teachers of English inasmuch as their focus is always the acquisition of a foreign language. Nevertheless, a general appreciation for literature should be encouraged at all costs, and an open mind regarding the role of the native language in such an endeavor might prove beneficial.

Another obstacle that hinders the teaching of literature effectively is the difficulty with which EFL students regard and approach literature in English. Evidently, a certain command of the language is needed in order not only to comprehend but also to appreciate a literary text to its fullest. According to Yilmaz (2012), "most of the students [of literature] feel frustrated with its unusual linguistic styles and elements such as complex characterization, plot, theme, and setting" (p. 91). This is a reality that many Costa Rican students of English as a foreign language also have to face. Some experts suggest, among other solutions, choosing texts that fit the students' level of linguistic competence in order to deal with this issue (Carter & Long, 1991; Showalter, 2003), and such should be the course to follow in almost all the cases in which a literature in a

foreign language is being taught. However, there is also a need to teach students to regard the literary text not simply as an encrypted piece of writing but as a personal and academic challenge out of which true knowledge may be gained. Vietnamese scholar Truong Thi My Van suggests that EFL teacher-training programs focus too much on “language teaching methodology and offer little guidance on the analytical methods that are essential to interpreting literature and designing effective classroom activities” (2009, p. 2). The same is true for Costa Rican EFL teachers, who lack themselves training in literature and literary analysis and know little about how to teach them. To promote a true, more effortless learning of literature among EFL students, certainly texts must be more carefully chosen but without detriment to the use of analytical methods for approaching those texts.

One last problem faced by English literature teachers is the wide gamut of interests that students have and that might and should be taken into account when choosing texts for reading and analysis. Yilmaz (2012) suggests that students “should be introduced to the wide range of literary texts suited to their individual needs and interests,” yet he also admits that their tastes are so diverse that this ends up discouraging teachers (p. 87). Making literature enjoyable to learners is perhaps the major concern of committed teachers, and it is also one of the most challenging and demanding tasks that they have to undertake. Jenny Elliot de Riverol (1991), from the British Council of Valencia, stresses the value of motivating literature learning among EFL students:

...the need to use the imagination when discussing literature “enables the learners to shift their attention beyond the more mechanical aspects of the foreign language system” (Collie & Slater, 1987, p.5). The learner may find himself completely absorbed by the work and this will lead to a high motivation level making the activity memorable and enjoyable. (p. 66)

The “use of imagination” to which Elliot makes reference clearly suggests a search for alternative methods and resources that may bring students closer to literature. Such resources are infinite, especially if the various interests of students are effectively taken into account, yet an exploration of the comparative relationships that exist between literatures in different languages and between English literature and other forms of art might render substantial possibilities for success in the literature classroom.

2.1 Current Methodologies for Teaching Literature

Certainly the methods and techniques that a teacher uses to teach anything have a strong impact on how his or her students react to the subject matter and even on whether or not they actually learn. The teaching of literature is no exception to this rule; what teachers do and how they do it exert “a considerable influence on students’ motivation to study literature” (Yilmaz, 2012, p. 88). Much of the writing about teaching literature focuses greatly on instructional methods; however, the possibilities are so many that they may be rather overwhelming. Famous literary critic and feminist writer Elaine Showalter (2009) explores her and other literature teachers’ experiences and methods in their classrooms only to advise, “Make use of whatever will do the job” (p. 37). Of course, such a suggestion is grounded on the conviction that an eclectic methodological approach to

teaching literature may prove enlightening and open the gate to new and fresh outcomes. The proposal offered here responds to this spirit but also draws from a number of methods that have been deemed of value by various experts.

Professors Mohammad Khatib, Saeed Rezaei, and Ali Derakhshan (2011), from Allameh Tabataba'i University in Iran, summarize several methodological models for the teaching of literature. Some of these approaches focus on language and structure and attempt to promote literature as a means to acquire linguistic competence. Maley's stylistic approach and Carter and Long's language-based model are examples of these (p. 205). Some other options bestow a greater emphasis on the reader and its relationship with the text, for example Maley's critical literary approach and Amer's story grammar and reader response approaches (p. 205). However, there are two important sources which the proposal outlined here most directly exploits in its attempt to delineate a new methodology for literature teaching.

Firstly, besides their language-based model, Carter and Long (1991) describe two other specific methods, also mentioned by Khatib et al. (2011, p. 205), which they consider of greater value to the teaching of literature. The first one, "the cultural model" (p. 8), perceives literature mainly in terms of its content and the opportunities for cultural learning that it provides. Showalter (2009) conversely favors a movement *away* from content and towards the very practice and process of reading (p. 17), but in actuality students are undeniably motivated by content, hence the necessity of choosing texts that both pique their interests and help them expand their horizons of expectations. Nevertheless, on account of the teacher-centeredness of the cultural model, Carter and Long (1991) seem to be more inclined towards their last option, the "personal-growth model" (p. 9), which intends to connect the literary text with the actual experiences of those students who read it. According to the authors, its main purpose is "to motivate the student to read by relating the themes and topics depicted in a literary text to his or her own personal experience" (p. 9). From this point of view, the learners' individual experiences are responsible for their motivation to read literature (p. 17). Yilmaz (2012) endorses this perspective and supports it upon the basis of a study made by Davis, Gorell, Kline and Hsieh in 1992, but he also proclaims the role of content in sparking the interest of students in reading literature. He explains, "...pedagogy that takes into account individual interpretations and responses to a literary text treated in EFL class, that emphasizes the content of a text, and that allows some freedom to choose selections has been found to improve student motivation" (p. 92). In sum, both the content of a literary text and its connections with the experiences of the individual readers are to be regarded as powerful tools for the improvement of literature teaching.

A second source weaves a narrower way towards the methodological proposal for the teaching of literature in EFL programs that is sketched here. Also cited in Khatib et al. (2011, p. 206), Van (2009) urges English literature teachers to subscribe to a more analytical view of literature and to sustain the use of critical approaches to teaching literature among EFL students. Even though some "anti-analytical" methodologies like Carter and Long's personal growth model have proven quite valuable for motivating students to read and study literature (1991, p. 9), Van insists on discussing six critical

approaches and “the benefits and drawbacks [that] they offer for teaching literature in the EFL classroom” (p. 3). She explores, among others, New Criticism, Structuralism, and Critical Literacy, yet it is her description of the use of Stylistics as a method for teaching literature that inspires a most significant scheme for combining student motivation and relevant literature learning. “One useful model of Stylistics,” she explains, “is Widowson’s (1983) comparative approach to teaching literature, in which excerpts from literature are compared to excerpts from other texts, such as news reports, tourist brochures, or advertisements” (p. 5). Van’s affirmation of Widowson’s contribution suggests the networking of significant elements for designing a new method for teaching literature to EFL students. Several pieces are falling into place as an emphasis on content and students’ experiences combines with the vindication of literary criticism as a viable tool for teaching literature.

2.2 Introduction to Comparative Literature

One superior way of understanding anything is by comparing it to something else. The study of literature and literatures across the world, especially in recent decades, has given way to such a thought and so has taken unexpected turns towards a post-modern view of its subject. An academic field in its own right, comparative literature continues, even today, to build and rebuild itself; the result is vastness and variety beyond measure. After an initial conception of comparative literature as “a branch of literary study which traces the mutual relations between two or more internationally and linguistically different literatures or texts” (Hussein, n.d., p.12), the field has experienced so much movement that it would be futile to try to delineate its boundaries and explain its nuances. Comparative literature has grown to encompass much more than the relationships between literatures written in different languages or different countries. It is today, as Professor Henry H. H. Remak (1961) puts it, also “the study of the relationships between literature on the one hand and other areas of knowledge and belief... on the other. In brief, it is the comparison of one literature with another or others, and the comparison of literature with other spheres of human expression” (p. 3). Among these “spheres,” Remak includes philosophy, history, science, and religion, but his emphasis, as has been the one for thousands of comparatists over the last century—and as is laid here for exploration—is on the arts: painting, sculpture, architecture, music, and as of late, film.

The work of comparatists, especially of those who follow the steps of the twentieth-century American School, focuses mainly on intertextuality, which is “the relation between two or more texts at a level which affects the way or ways of reading the new text” (Enani, as cited in Hussein, n.d., p. 43). Here the definition of a text, as was suggested before, is supposed to include any form of structured human communication. Therefore, it is the concern of comparative literature to explore the connections that may be found between a literary text and any other text—literary or not. Intertextuality incites comparatists and inexperienced readers alike to relate a story or a poem to whatever text they may bring to enrich the understanding and analysis of the work in question. After all, the possibilities for learning that literature offers are endless. Professor Ahmed Hussein (n.d.) puts it in a rather evocative way: “Literature, in a sense, resembles a body

of water on whose surface are reflected various forms of knowledge” (p. 47), and Wellek and Warren also declare, “Literature is one; as art and humanity are one” (as cited in Bassnett, 1993, p. 4). Accordingly, literature should never be viewed as isolated from the rest of human thought and production, and especially not in separation from other forms of art. Rather, it should be compared to as many other artistic texts as it cares to suggest, if only to partake of the superb experience of learning.

2.3 Teaching Literature through Comparison

The value of literature for teaching English as a foreign language can hardly be contested. However, the teaching of literature in itself raises a lot of questions, the most vexed of which simply being how literature should be taught. A few current methods have already been discussed above, but another possibility, inspired by the comparative studies of literature, is suggested here in an attempt to bring EFL learners closer to a more substantial and academically productive relationship with the literature that they read in English. This proposal aims at establishing dialogues between the literary text being studied and other nonliterary texts that, via intertextuality, may contribute to both the experience of reading and the advancing of learning. It is a dynamic model that emphasizes discursive practices and feeds on reinventions, adaptations, and reconfigurations of the original text upon the basis of comparative criticism.

Another key component of this formula is an emphasis on the cultural dimension of literary texts, which in this case becomes ignited by the intertextual occurrences that are stressed in the comparative analyses of texts. Elliot (1991) shares this view: “Cultural implications should also be considered when planning teaching materials which involve literature. Shared history, religion or literary tradition make cross referencing easier” (p. 67). She indirectly justifies, therefore, the comparative practices in the EFL literature classroom. “When choosing literary texts for use...,” she confesses, “I have tended to choose works which also might be read in Spanish translation or which perhaps have been made into films and shown in cinemas...” (p. 67). Although Elliot is not specifically suggesting a comparative approach to the teaching of literature, her view is one that supports the use of alternative texts—even in the native language—to reinforce the cultural learning of EFL students of literature.

The personal growth model that Carter and Long (1991) advocate also communicates an inclination towards using alternative texts to potentiate the study of literature. The enrichment with which they promise that the experience of the reader will load his or her study of literature can be achieved naturally by resorting to intertextuality. Literature is made better by life itself, which in turn is richly enhanced by experiencing all sorts of texts which lie within and without other texts, that is, by “the relationship between your own experience and the way experience is conveyed by the cultural products which surround you,” of which the literary text is only one (p. 12). Carter and Long further propound that the reader experiences literature necessarily through the “connections” that he or she makes with other texts while “reading between the lines” of the text being studied (p. 12). Consequently, the experience of the reader is essentially an intertextual one, which calls for a better design and understanding of comparative

practices that might facilitate the teaching and learning of literature, especially in the EFL classroom.

The obvious possibility of comparing the story or poem being read and studied in English to some other literary text originally written in Spanish is only one among many. The use of native-language texts, however, carries collateral implications for the linguistic development of the EFL student which are not the focus of attention here; this is why such form of comparison is only acknowledged. Comparing the literary text to a different type of artwork like a painting, a movie, or a song, on the other hand, may prove not only harmless but highly advantageous in more than one way. Actually, there are three ways in which such a method may benefit the student. First, the exposure to other forms of art that may be situated closer to the experience of the literature learner²¹ is certain to improve their appreciation and understanding of the literary text being studied. Second, comparing literary texts to alternative artistic products will present students with other forms and usages of the English language, or else it will provide new spaces and opportunities for linguistic production, which is, in any event, a well-grounded objective of all literature teaching. Third, the teaching of culture through literature is undoubtedly improved when art is included: the interest of the students is sparked,²² their appreciation of culture is broadened, and their academic and personal growth is necessarily fostered.

Cross-referencing a literary text may prove valuable to its teaching, but opening up the possibility for students to explore other art forms and their messages in conjunction with the literature that they study may catapult their linguistic and cultural learning. From a comparative point of view, any literary text holds within itself the seed of an infinite number of other texts with which it maintains a potential relationship. Both the experience of the student and the skill and commitment of the literature teacher may unleash the necessary sprouting and growth for literature to be fully experienced. A method that leads instructors to teach literature by comparing it to other art forms purports not only to instill a new air into the available didactic models but also to restore the long-damaged relationship between the Costa Rican college student and the practice of reading literature.

2.4 Sample Plans for Comparative Literature Teaching

In an attempt to illustrate a comparative methodology for the teaching of literature in English to EFL students, here there are three very simple examples of how texts may be approached and lessons designed using a literary text and another piece of artwork.

Sample Plan 1

Text: *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley (Letters 1-4)

Objectives: Students will...

1. Learn about Romanticism and the main characteristics of Romantic literature and art

²¹ A survey conducted among thirty Costa Rican English literature students in November, 2011, reveals that music and film are the two most popular forms.

²² All except one of the subjects surveyed declared a strong-to-moderate interest in combining their literature instruction with the learning about other art forms.

2. Be able to describe and identify the sublime in a literary text and a painting
3. Recognize the value of setting in acquiring a sense of meaning of art and literature
4. Appreciate literature and art in relation to what they offer to human experience

Procedures:

Before reading:

1. Students share orally their ideas about the highest mountains and coldest places that they have visited or that they know about.
2. The teacher offers some background information about the basic characteristics of Romanticism and Romantic literature and art, especially with regards to setting.
3. The teacher guides the students to preview some vocabulary.

While reading:

Students make a list of important setting descriptions as they find them.

After reading:

1. The teacher shows to the students an image of the painting “Wanderer above the Sea of Fog” by Caspar David Friedrich (1818), and they respond informally to it.
2. In groups, the students discuss their reactions to the painting and to the text that they have read, as well as any connections that they may find between the two.
3. The teacher reviews the concepts of Romanticism, setting, and the sublime using the painting and the literary text as illustrations.

Sample Plan 2

Text: *The Art of Love* by Ovid (Book 1)

Objectives: Students will...

1. Acquire a sense of currency when studying classic literature and thought
2. Be able to discuss the concept of love as revealed by art and literature across history
3. Form an opinion about the relationship between literature and film
4. Appreciate literature and art in relation to what they offer to human experience

Procedures:

Before reading:

1. Students interview each other about their personal love experiences and their ways to seduce and be seduced by their significant others.
2. The teacher offers some background information about the classic poet Ovid and his work *The Art of Love*.
3. The teacher guides the students to preview some vocabulary.

While reading:

Students underline or highlight those pieces of advice that Ovid offers and that they agree with or like and cross out those that they dislike.

After reading:

1. The teacher shows to the students the movie *Hitch* (2005), directed by Andy Tennant and starred by Will Smith, and they react to it informally.
2. In small groups, the students complete a chart in which they compare and contrast the seduction techniques suggested by Ovid and those presented in the film.
3. The teacher reviews the conception of love and leads a discussion focused on any similarities or differences that may be found across history or across artistic genres.

Sample Plan 3

Text: A selection of Native American myths, legends, and folktales

Objectives: Students will...

1. Be acquainted with the Mythological and Archetypal approaches to literature
2. Be able to read critically and interpret Native American myths and legends
3. Acquire a sense of American culture through its literature and art
4. Appreciate literature and art in relation to what they offer to human experience

Procedures:*Before reading:*

1. In small groups, students recall traditional Costa Rican folktales and legends and discuss their significance and contemporariness.
2. The teacher offers some background information about the Mythological and Archetypal approaches to literature and especially about the hero archetype.
3. The teacher guides the students to preview some vocabulary.

While reading:

Students identify archetypes and mythological patterns in a Native American legend or folktale of their choice.

After reading:

1. The teacher plays the song “Indian Sunset” by Elton John as students read the lyrics from a handout.
2. In small groups, students respond to the lyrics and the characteristic music of the song and relate them to the Native American folktale that they each one has read.
3. The teacher reviews the concepts of myth and hero archetype and encourages students to share their views on both the song and the legends that they read.

III Conclusions

Comparing literature in English to other literatures but especially to other forms of art with which students are familiarized promises an underscoring of the learners’ experience and therefore a better attainment of the content and linguistic objectives of the literature class. On the other hand, if the secondary text used for comparison is not well-known by the students, the promise is also of an enrichment of the learners’ experience and a propelling of their cultural growth. In any event, the gains are considerable. Employing a

comparative approach to the teaching of English literature in the EFL classroom encourages participants to get involved and motivates them to learn not only the language but also the cultural, theoretical, and analytical components that might be featured in a given content unit. Likewise, this methodology enriches the language and culture class inasmuch as it highlights students' experiences and their relationships with other forms of human knowledge and creation.

For the literature teacher, on the other hand, assuming the role of the comparatist requires much creativity and resourcefulness, but it also provides him or her with a matchless opportunity to instill newness and excitement into his or her work. Literature professor Larry Danson recommends teaching new material often, even that which is unfamiliar to the teacher himself or herself; "Try always to do something that you haven't done before," he advises (as cited in Showalter 2003, pp. 45-46). As a result, the work of the literature teacher gets refreshed and renewed when he or she induces students to compare the literary text being studied to another less known text in Spanish or to a different cultural product which does represent the teacher's area of expertise.

3.1 Afterthought

It should be safe to assume that any committed teacher of English as a foreign language is in constant search for new methodologies, strategies, and techniques that might help him or her potentiate the learning experience of his or her pupils. Assessing and using new material, exploring innovative topics, following alternative procedures, among many other equally challenging tasks, necessarily transform the work of teachers into that of researchers and authors, and the result is bound to be an exhausted but satisfied and more efficient English teacher. Within the context of Costa Rican education, numerous efforts are made daily in this direction.

Nevertheless, more attention could be paid to the teaching of literature in English as one major resource that will surely enrich the learning process. For one thing, literature offers a potential for attraction that other materials do not have. According to Khatib et al. (2011), "...it provides a motivating drive for language learning and teaching due to its spectacular features not readily found in any other texts" (p. 207). On account of its uniqueness, literature lends itself naturally to the development of EFL lessons, especially when combined with communicative activities in the search for students' involvement and motivation (Van, 2009, p. 6). Consequently, the teaching of literature is to be an integral part of any EFL program.

In spite of the role that literature already plays in the teaching of English as a foreign language, however, the question of how to teach it is still of major concern. Many methodologies have been suggested in this regard, among which the personal growth model is perhaps the most realistic and context-driven one on account of its student-centeredness. "Effective and confident reading of literature," Carter and Long (1991) explain, "is closely connected with a reader's ability to relate a text to his or her own experience" (p. 30). Accordingly, any technique or strategy that aims at involving the student's experience will most certainly produce not only greater linguistic growth but also a heightened appreciation of literature.

Finally, the problems of teaching literature in English in Costa Rica may be evident if not serious or many, but the solutions probably lie in a stronger commitment on the part of teachers to motivate students and to restructure their classes so as to incorporate their interests and experiences. Teaching a course on Victorian literature to a group of Costa Rican twenty-year-old EFL students who are not particularly interested in reading, let alone literature, may seem like little less than a herculean labor. Nevertheless, the resources available, especially in this time and age, for turning a potentially boring class into something more than an anecdote are numberless. All is needed is a creative heart and a sincere interest in the students' academic and personal growth.

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