



## The shift from the pedagogy of the oppressor to the pedagogy of the oppressed

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### Suggested Citation:

Chehri, Y. & Ghaffour, M. (2024). The shift from the pedagogy of the oppressor to the pedagogy of the oppressed. *International Journal of Learning and Teaching* 16(3), 103-109. <https://doi.org/10.18844/ijlt.v16i3.9413>

Received from March 18, 2024; revised from May 19, 2024; accepted from July 13, 2024;

Selection and peer review under the responsibility of Prof. Dr. Jesus Garcia Laborda, Alcala University, Spain

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### Abstract

Teaching in a postmodern world represents a significant challenge. It is well-established that postmodernism is an intellectual stance or mode of discourse defined by skepticism toward modernist ideologies. This study investigates the challenges faced by teachers in the context of postmodernism, and the shift from a traditional to a postmodern teaching approach. The current study examines the work of Paulo Freire's *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, which helps weave a comprehensible reflection on the postmodern thought's impact on teaching as a discipline. In this context, the current study is presented as a means of criticism of teaching in a traditional context emphasizing the new methods used to teach literary texts and foreign languages. The results show that the postmodern way of thinking in teaching literature opposes modernity's teacher-centered ideas. The findings suggest that postmodernism's opposition to the traditional teaching approach marks a shift, ultimately, in teaching literature and Foreign Languages.

**Keywords:** Postmodernism; postmodern approach; teaching literature; traditional approach; the pedagogy of the oppressed.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The world as we know it is constantly evolving and changing; thus, it is not much of a surprise to us that this evolution and development ultimately affected the realm of teaching. A suitable example of this change, particularly in foreign language teaching, is evident in the field of literature. Teaching literature to foreign language learners has entered a new reality, a reality that challenges EFL teachers to alter their ways of teaching a subject that has helped them understand the human experience in a tangible manner for centuries (Karim et al., 2023). Such change calls for an eclectic approach to dealing with literature and what it offers. Teaching with this approach includes using multiple tasks, and lively and interactive learning, the latter fosters a high interaction between students and teachers (Lin, 2022; Sharma, 2024). However, it is not only limited to those merits. Larsen-Freeman (2000) emphasized the significance of the eclectic approach in teaching. According to her, the eclectic approach is pluralistic, and consistent and entails diverse learning activities that match with learners' needs.

One can contextualize this urgent need for eclecticism or a new approach in teaching literature can be found in the strands of postmodern thought. For that, it is highly crucial to assert the challenge of teaching literature from a postmodern perspective. Postmodernist thinkers are known to raise many doubts about knowledge, truth, and its grounds. Thinkers such as Gilles et al., (1987), for example, epitomize this desire for change from the traditional, monotonous, arboreal system of thinking to its antithesis, the rhizomatic system of thinking that does not confine the human experience, namely the teacher-based approach that was inherited from modernism. Lyotard (1984) and many other postmodernists proclaim that the grand narrative of modernism is failing to accommodate new conceptions of how the 21st-century world is constructed, how it operates, and how we operate within it. Postmodernist thinkers and teachers alike, aim to endow students, in the words of Derrida (2001) in his essay "Structure, Sign, and Play" with some kind of *jeu libre*, a free-play. According to Derrida (2001), this form of free play opens up the chance to create new meanings, as it is not limited by the borders of one center of meaning or one system of thought.

Alongside the merits of adopting a postmodern teaching of literature to foreign language learners, postmodernism also serves EFL learners' needs to foster other abilities that would help them become competent foreign language learners. In the current context of globalization, it has become evident that EFL learners need to foster intercultural communicative competence to be able to use English effectively & appropriately (Morve et al., 2023). Moreover, acquiring intercultural competence helps EFL learners take part in critically discussing & solving world issues such as racism as per of citizenship education. A postmodern understanding of culture & its relationship to language allows researchers & teachers alike to understand the inseparable relationship between these two constructs. Accordingly, postmodernism paves a pathway for us to understand the relationship between language & culture which in itself suggests that teaching a foreign language, or teaching literature, needs to be accompanied by developing EFL learners' intercultural communicative competence. It is evident in today's literature that teaching a foreign language cannot be strictly related to developing EFL learners' linguistic & sociolinguistic competencies, but also intercultural competence (Do & Hoang 2023).

### 1.1. Purpose of study

This study investigates the challenges faced by teachers in the context of postmodernism, and the shift from a traditional to a postmodern teaching approach.

## 2. METHODS AND MATERIALS

This study looks into the difficulties teachers have when implementing postmodern teaching methods. It does this by conducting a thorough literature review and analyzing Paulo Freire's *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* in great detail. Finding scholarly discourses on postmodernism's influence on education and its critique of conventional, modernist teaching philosophies is the main goal of the literature review. The main theoretical foundation is Freire's work, which offers crucial insights into the transition from teacher-centered to student-centered approaches. In this framework, the study looks at novel pedagogical approaches to teaching literary

texts and foreign languages. A cohesive reflection on the impact of postmodern thought on modern teaching practices was created by combining data from a variety of academic sources with Freire's writings. This reflection emphasized the opposition to traditional educational models and the transformative potential of postmodern strategies in promoting diverse perspectives and critical thinking in the classroom.

### **3. RESULTS**

#### **3.1. Non-native EFL classroom**

In traditional teaching, knowledge is transmitted from teacher to student. During this process of learning, the latter passively receive information where they are the only party in this learning process who are viewed as learners. The teacher, on the other hand, is viewed as the information giver and the primary evaluator. The traditional teaching approaches are usually used in literature classes and are generally teacher-directed, in which students are taught in a manner conducive to sitting and listening. Consequently, teaching literature has become mainly lecture-based with this teacher-centered approach. Within this teaching method, the student becomes a parrot-like incapable of constructing a personal thought.

Instead, students are found to be simply repeating and regurgitating what has been presented in class. Miliani (2003) states that:

Thus, the course (of literature) becomes a simple transposition of the teacher's impressions and feelings to the learner towards a literary work and not an intellectual exercise for the latter who should seek and discover meaning by himself with the means and strategies provided by the teacher.

Miliani (2003) contends that teachers fail to purvey a space for freedom of thought and expression in their attempt to teach literature. Indeed, traditional philosophers often allow us to continue with the lecture-based model with some useful results. However, it is often argued that the traditional approach may not provide students with valuable skills. With that being said, there is an ailment with the traditional approach to teaching literature, which urges an examination of its shortcomings.

#### **3.2. The shortcomings of the traditional approach in teaching literature**

According to Brandes & Ginnis (1986), "learning what is meaningful and relevant depends partly on what is being taught and partly on how it is being taught". With an emphasis on what Brandes & Ginnis (1986) contemplate in their statement, if we were to blame the failure to achieve a certain set of objectives when teaching literature, we should not place it upon literature as a subject or the learners' incapability to grasp literary concepts and engage with them, but rather on the approaches, methods, and strategies used by teachers in teaching the huge bulk of literature. The downside of the traditional teaching approach is that it convinces itself that students should be limited to one truth.

Teachers become, in a way, a totalitarian authority that controls knowledge, which in the process confines the learning experience for students. Additionally, the student is expected to be docile and submissive to a form of authority that is rendered by teachers. Dewey (1986) describes the traditional method of teaching as:

...One of imposition from above and from outside. It imposes adult standards, subject matter, and methods upon those who are only growing slowly toward maturity. The gap is so great that the required subject matter, the methods of learning, and of behaving are foreign to the existing capacities of the young... Moreover, that which is taught is thought of as essentially static. It is taught as a finished product, with little regard either to how it was originally built up or to changes that will surely occur in the future.

Students are expected to obediently receive and believe what they are being taught as fixed answers. Dewey (1986) asserts that teachers are, therefore, the instruments by which this knowledge is communicated and these standards of behavior are enforced. Such concern calls for an urgent change in teaching foreign languages & literature in particular.

In today's age of globalization, multiculturalism, & global citizenship pedagogy era, EFL learners must have a personal voice & be capable of partaking in negotiating not only how they learn a particular language or subject in the classroom, but also be able to partake in negotiating global issues such as racism & human rights issues. This call for global citizenship asserts that this dominance of the teacher through actions & thoughts on the students is dangerous & questionable. How can EFL learners be expected to be interculturally competent & globally informed whilst they are not allowed to share opinions in regards to how the teacher is teaching them in the classroom? Not only does the traditional approach limit learners by declining any room for creativity & freedom of thought, but it also reinforces the stereotypical & rigid ideas a teacher might persuade learners in the classroom (Schwarz-Franco, 2022). EFL learners are usually expected to be able to communicate in English, move abroad from their home countries & partake in a multi & intercultural world. The traditional approach to foreign language & literature teaching does not seem to adequately prepare EFL learners to be global citizens, which is a requirement in today's world, but it does not allow them to even be competent citizens as they are not discussing local issues & finding solutions to these problems (Ghaffour, 2022).

### **3.3. Teaching literature in the postmodern context**

#### *3.3.1. What is postmodernism?*

There is a common consensus when discussing postmodernism that it is one of the most slippery terms, which makes it impossible to give it a definition. Postmodernism represents a certain kind of critical attitude, for it is described as a denial of meta-narratives, a reaction against Enlightenment values and rationality, or an extreme form of antirealism or social constructivism. In contrast to modernism, postmodernism returns to the many possibilities thrown up by the history of art and literature.

This return marks an eclectic orientation to delve into the grounds of knowledge and truth. In this attempt, postmodernists endeavor to veer from the modernist characteristic of epistemological dominance, to concern themselves with the question of ontology which is the study of the nature of being, becoming, existence, and reality.

#### *3.3.2. Education in a postmodern world*

Questioning objective truth and reality is a fundamental strand in postmodern thought. With the rise of this intellectual stance, it is almost impossible not to notice the challenge imposed by postmodernists to the ideas of enlightenment, which were at some point a significant element in modernism but then became obsolete in this new education area. With that being said, educational systems appear to remain adherent to enlightenment and its basic ideas which are substantially encumbering the learning process for students. According to Edwards & Usher (2002), "education is itself going through a profound change in terms of purposes, content and methods". The latter may suggest that, in light of this change, rising above and moving along with these rapid alterations in today's context is a necessity since the postmodern way of thinking in education opposes modernity's teacher-centered ideas. Edwards and Usher (2002) claim that education can no longer be determined by historical or cultural truths or dedicated to universal objective ideas. In a postmodern context, education is more diverse in terms of its aims, curricula, recipients, and methods.

#### *3.3.3. Teaching Postmodern-ly*

When teaching postmodern thought, the postmodern teacher must be engaged with the learner. For that to occur, the postmodern educator must shift his view toward the learner, where he or she becomes the co-creator of new understandings and meanings. Postmodern learning is a creative action in its very eclectic nature; during this quest, the learner is an active participant. The postmodern teacher and mature student are partners in learning a body of knowledge within a contemporary context. In this context, the teacher is a mere guide on the side whose role is to facilitate the learning experiences toward meaningful objectives. The postmodern system of thought fosters the notions of truth as being subjective and perspectival, dependent on cultural, social, and personal influences. Therefore, no meta-theory can explain texts or reality. In other words, there is not only one

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correct interpretation of a text (Bressler, 1999). The latter encourages alternate views that help form new ways of understanding the world.

Teaching postmodernism entails that both the teacher's & students' beliefs & attitudes are in question & challenged. When we allow learners to become almost in the same intellectual authority as the teacher, we are allowing them to question not only how the teacher is teaching them, but also how they can manage to become competent citizens. Postmodern teaching encourages learners to discuss local issues, find solutions to these problems, & then partake in a greater cause, that of discussing & finding solutions to global problems.

### **3.4. The shift from traditional to the postmodern approach in teaching**

#### *3.4.1. Paulo Freire's the pedagogy of the oppressed*

*Pedagogy of the Oppressed* or in Portuguese: 'Pedagogia do Oprimido' is a book written by the renowned Brazilian educator Paulo Freire; it was first written in Portuguese in 1968. Two years afterward, the book was first published in English in 1970. Freire writes about revolutionary educational practices; his book is considered one of the foundational texts of critical pedagogy and proposes a pedagogy that fosters a new relationship between teacher, student, and society. Freire includes a detailed Marxist class analysis in his exploration of the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized. In the book, Freire calls traditional pedagogy the 'Banking Method of Education' because it treats the student as an empty vessel to be filled with knowledge, like a piggy bank. He argues that pedagogy should instead treat the learner as a co-creator of knowledge.

#### *3.4.2. Pedagogy of the oppressor vs pedagogy of the oppressed*

Freire's (1970) analysis and reflection rely on Marxist theory to make the distinction between the pedagogy of the oppressor, which he calls the banking method of education, and the pedagogy of the oppressed that he proposes as its rightful replacement. For him, the pedagogy of the oppressor, which is writ large a remnant of enlightenment, puts the teacher in a higher position; the teacher, in this case, is the knowledgeable authority in class, whereas, the student is a passive receptor of information that is curated by the authority in class. The latter alludes to a central notion in Freire's (1970) book, that of the 'Banking Method of Education', which is organized as a hierarchy that is built on the primary assumption that students are the containers into which educators must put knowledge. Freire propounds that this model reinforces a lack of critical thinking and knowledge ownership in students, which in turn reinforces oppression. For that reason, Freire argues that this pedagogy replicates other systems of oppression in society and entrains the students to accept these oppressive systems as defaults when they encounter them in the world at large. He even goes further to describe it as a form of violence and vehemently states:

Any situation in which some individuals prevent others from engaging in the process of inquiry is one of violence. The means used are not important; to alienate human beings from their decision-making is to change them into objects.

This traditional pedagogy led by an oppressive führer becomes a platform for teachers to abuse their power since they are considered the source of knowledge. This pedagogy purposefully treats students as mirror objects and ends in subjecting and depriving them of their humanity (Freire 1970).

On the other hand, Freire's pedagogy, in its attempt to subvert and revolutionize teaching, reverses the primary assumption in the banking method of education where it dissolves its hierarchal power. In the pedagogy of the oppressed, both educator and student are presumed to know, and each person can learn from any other. The latter creates an environment of inter-subjectivity where each person in this process of learning is valued by and valuable to this process. As a result, the participants in this safe environment are empowered to see themselves as human beings, each of whom can transfer the world through their knowledge in action. Freire (1970), in his somewhat radical theory of education, celebrates and encourages a relationship built on mutual respect in an attempt to rehumanize the old system of pedagogy. In short, the pedagogy of the oppressed creates a more

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egalitarian environment that traditional pedagogy (i.e., pedagogy of the oppressed) fails miserably to adopt and reconsider.

### **3.5. The challenges faced and the new methods used in teaching literature**

Before asking how we can apply Freire's theory of education when teaching literature, we must address that one of the serious issues in literature courses is the lack of focus on the process of reading. It has become a challenge for teachers to kindle a love for reading in learners which imposes a deeper problem when teaching literature. Miliani (2003) asserts that:

One should not forget that if we are to establish relationships with literature, it is through reading. Unfortunately, this skill has been and is still given rough handling by the educational system, society at large, and the learner himself.

Miliani (2003) goes further to underscore the need to develop methods and pedagogies to integrate efficient reading skills and strategies. To do that, teachers of literature must shift their focus to the reading process so that reading remains the only means and the most efficient skill to enhance the student's capacities to cope with the bulk of literature. In a heavily mediatized age, books are rarely a source of entertainment. However, teachers of literature must face this challenge by adapting and adopting new ways of teaching that are relevant to this postmodern context that urges humans to depart from conventional systems and foster new systems of thinking.

### **3.6. Reader-response Approach**

In *Pedagogy of the oppressed*, Freire (1970) emphasized that the teacher should not consider learners passive recipients. Similarly, in the reader-response approach, students actively extract meaning from a text according to the objective underlined by the teacher, which is mainly eclectic to fit the learner's experiences. Each reader will contribute to the outcome depending on their expectations and previous experience. The teacher's role, thus, will be that of a mediator to help learners interact with the text. As McRae (1991) contends, "the teacher's role is as an intermediary between author, literary work, and receiver to open up a multi-directional sphere of interaction". Therefore, the teacher must shift from a teacher-centered to a learner-centered pedagogy that would allow him to be a facilitator and a mediator to lead his learners toward an emancipator space that would nurture their ability to read, assimilate, and appreciate literary texts.

## **4. CONCLUSION**

In our postmodern age, conformity is commensurate to limiting oneself to one system of thought, which usually functions poorly with the current wave of change in different fields. It is rather logical to seek stability and to adhere to a system that, to a certain degree, fulfills one's needs. However, in education, postmodernism introduces a form of escapism from the monotony of traditional approaches that unfortunately became obsolete. This requires a renovation that postmodernism ostensibly offers that the teaching of literature needs. To all intent and purposes, postmodernist thought helps us re-evaluate the inherited teachings of enlightenment and de-center its hierarchy system that functions for the detriment of learners.

In retrospect, postmodern thought is heavily present in Freire's theory of education, facilitating the shift from the oppressors to the oppressed's pedagogy, where the teacher no longer embodies an authoritative form. Since we arguably live in a postmodern age, literature teachers should harbor an eclectic approach that parallels the advancement in education, culture, politics, and society. To put it mildly, the success of literature courses depends on a revolution within the educational system that encourages reinforcing the relationship between the learner and the teacher, as well as the renovation of methods and strategies for teaching literature.

**Conflict of Interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interest.

**Ethical Approval:** The study did not require any special permission.



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**Funding:** This research received no external funding.

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