
Teaching English in secondary education through adapted literary texts: The Case of Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

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- Annotation** *The integration of literary texts into English language teaching has gained increasing attention as an effective means of promoting meaningful language learning and learner engagement. This study explores the impact of using adapted versions of Mark Twain's renowned novels, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876) and *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884), in secondary school English classes. A quasi-experimental mixed-methods design was employed involving 30 fifth- and sixth-grade students from Secondary School No.19 in Margilan, Uzbekistan. Over a six-week instructional period, students participated in literature-based lessons designed to develop vocabulary knowledge, reading comprehension, and communicative competence. Data were collected through pre- and post-tests, classroom observations, and student questionnaires. The findings revealed significant improvements in learners' language performance, motivation, and classroom participation. The study demonstrates that carefully adapted literary texts can provide comprehensible input, stimulate critical thinking, and create an engaging learning environment. The results support the broader integration of literary texts into EFL instruction for young learners.*
- Keywords** *Literature-based instruction, adapted literary texts, vocabulary knowledge, reading comprehension, student motivation, Mark Twain*

Moslashtirilgan Adabiy Matnlar Orqali Umumiy O'rta Ta'limda Ingliz Tilini O'qitish: Mark Tvenning «Tom Soyerning Sarguzashtlari» va «Geklberri Finnning Sarguzashtlari» Asarlari Misolida

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- Annotatsiya** *Ushbu maqolada ingliz tilini o'qitish jarayonida moslashtirilgan badiiy adabiyotlardan foydalanishning samaradorligi tahlil qilinadi. Tadqiqot Mark Tvenning mashhur asarlari – Tom Soyerning sarguzashtlari (1876) va Geklberri Finnning sarguzashtlari (1884) ning moslashtirilgan variantlari asosida olib borildi. Tadqiqotda O'zbekistonning Marg'ilon shahridagi 19-sonli umumiy o'rta ta'lim maktabining 5–6-sinfida tahsil oluvchi 30 nafar o'quvchi ishtirok etdi. Olti hafta davomida tashkil etilgan dars mashg'ulotlarida o'quvchilarning lug'at boyligi, o'qib*

tushunish ko'nikmalari hamda ingliz tilida muloqot qilish faolligini rivojlantirishga alohida e'tibor qaratildi. Ma'lumotlar dastlabki va yakuniy testlar, sinf kuzatuvlari hamda o'quvchilar o'rtasida o'tkazilgan so'rovnomalar orqali yig'ildi. Natijalar o'quvchilarning til ko'nikmalari, motivatsiyasi va darsdagi ishtiroki sezilarli darajada oshganini ko'rsatdi. Tadqiqot moslashtirilgan badiiy matnlar o'quvchilar uchun tushunarli til muhitini yaratishi, tanqidiy fikrlashni rivojlantirishi, o'qishga qiziqishni kuchaytirishi hamda ingliz tili darslarini yanada qiziqarli, interaktiv va samarali tashkil etishga xizmat qilishini tasdiqlaydi. Olingan natijalar bunday adabiy matnlardan ingliz tilini chet tili sifatida o'qitishda kengroq foydalanish maqsadga muvofiqligini, ayniqsa yosh o'quvchilarning tilni o'zlashtirish jarayonida barqaror ijobiy natijalar berishini ham ko'rsatadi.

Kalit so'zlar Adabiyotga asoslangan ta'lim, moslashtirilgan badiiy matnlar, lug'at boyligini oshirish, o'qib tushunish, o'quvchi motivatsiyasi, Mark Tven

**Обучение Английскому Языку в
Системе Среднего Образования
с Использованием
Адаптированных Литературных
Текстов: На Примере
Произведений Марка Твена
«Приключения Тома Сойера»
И «Приключения Гекльберри
Финна»**

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Аннотация В данной статье рассматривается эффективность использования адаптированных художественных текстов в процессе обучения английскому языку в средней школе. Исследование основано на применении адаптированных версий известных произведений Марка Твена – «Приключения Тома Сойера» (1876) и «Приключения Гекльберри Финна» (1884). В исследовании приняли участие 30 учащихся 5–6 классов средней школы № 19 города Маргилана, Узбекистан. В течение шести недель проводились занятия, направленные на развитие словарного запаса, навыков чтения с пониманием и коммуникативной компетенции учащихся. Данные были собраны с помощью входного и итогового тестирования, систематических наблюдений за учебным процессом и анкетирования школьников. Полученные результаты показали существенное улучшение языковых навыков, повышение учебной мотивации и более активное участие учащихся в учебном процессе. Исследование подтверждает, что тщательно адаптированные художественные тексты создают благоприятную образовательную среду, обеспечивают доступный языковой материал, развивают критическое мышление, стимулируют интерес к чтению, формируют уверенность при использовании английского языка и способствуют более эффективному усвоению учебного материала.

Полученные результаты подтверждают целесообразность более широкого использования литературных произведений в обучении английскому языку как иностранному в средней школе.

**Ключевые
слова**

Обучение на основе литературы, адаптированные художественные тексты, расширение словарного запаса, понимание прочитанного, мотивация учащихся, Марк Твен

Introduction

In recent years, English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching has increasingly shifted toward communicative and learner-centered approaches that emphasize meaningful interaction and active learner participation. Among various authentic and semi-authentic teaching materials, literary texts are widely recognized for their ability to provide rich contextualized language input and foster genuine learner engagement (Lazar, 1993; Tomlinson, 2013). Unlike conventional textbook materials, literary works expose students to language in meaningful contexts while simultaneously developing imagination, critical thinking, and cultural awareness. In particular, narrative texts create immersive language environments that engage learners both cognitively and emotionally, making language learning more memorable and enjoyable.

In contemporary language education, the development of communicative competence is considered one of the primary objectives of English language teaching. However, traditional textbook-based instruction often provides limited opportunities for learners to experience language in authentic communicative situations. As a result, educators increasingly seek instructional materials that can support both linguistic development and learner motivation. Literary texts are especially valuable because they combine language learning with cultural exploration, emotional involvement, and personal interpretation.

This study focuses on two American literary classics by Mark Twain: *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. These works were selected because of their engaging adventure plots, memorable characters, rich linguistic content, and potential to stimulate cultural discussion among young learners. The primary objective of the study was to examine whether integrating adapted versions of these novels into regular English lessons could improve vocabulary acquisition, reading comprehension, and learner motivation among Uzbek secondary school students.

Despite the growing body of research on literature-based EFL instruction, studies focusing on younger secondary school learners in Central Asian educational contexts remain limited. Therefore, this study seeks to contribute to the existing literature by examining the pedagogical value of adapted literary texts in an Uzbek secondary school setting.

Literature review

The use of literature in foreign language teaching has been widely discussed by researchers and educators for several decades. Numerous studies have highlighted the potential of literary texts to enrich language learning by providing authentic linguistic input, cultural knowledge, and opportunities for meaningful communication.

Collie and Slater (1987) argue that literary texts offer authentic language, valuable cultural insights, and strong motivational benefits for language learners. According to the authors,

literature encourages students to engage with language beyond the level of grammar and vocabulary by connecting linguistic forms with meaningful content. Similarly, Lazar (1993) emphasizes that literary texts contribute not only to linguistic competence but also to the development of critical thinking, creativity, and emotional awareness.

From a theoretical perspective, Krashen's (1982) Comprehensible Input Hypothesis provides strong support for the use of adapted literary texts in language education. Krashen suggests that language acquisition occurs most effectively when learners are exposed to input that is both understandable and slightly above their current proficiency level. In addition, Vygotsky's (1978) concept of the Zone of Proximal Development highlights the importance of instructional support and collaborative learning.

Recent empirical studies have also reported positive outcomes associated with literature-based instruction. Pardede (2021) reviewed a number of studies and concluded that narrative-based learning significantly improves reading comprehension and vocabulary retention. Likewise, Ali (2024), Ghafar (2023), and Heidarian (2025) found that story-based instructional approaches enhance student motivation, classroom participation, and overall language development in EFL settings.

Methodology

This study employed a quasi-experimental mixed-methods research design to investigate the effectiveness of adapted literary texts in enhancing English language learning among secondary school students. A mixed-methods approach was selected because it enabled the researcher to collect both quantitative and qualitative data, thereby providing a more comprehensive understanding of students' learning outcomes and classroom experiences.

The research was conducted at Secondary School No. 19 in Margilan city, Fergana region, Uzbekistan. The participants

consisted of 30 students from the fifth and sixth grades, aged between 11 and 13 years. Due to practical limitations and school scheduling considerations, a parallel control group was not included in the study.

The instructional intervention lasted for six weeks and included three 45-minute English lessons per week. During this period, students worked with carefully adapted chapters from Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. The selected texts were simplified to match students' language proficiency while preserving the original storyline, characters, and educational value of the novels.

Data were collected through three main instruments: pre-tests and post-tests to assess vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension; a structured classroom observation checklist; and student questionnaires with Likert-scale and open-ended items. Quantitative data were analyzed using paired-samples t-tests, and effect sizes were calculated using Cohen's *d* formula. Qualitative data were analyzed thematically.

Each lesson was structured around a three-stage framework consisting of pre-reading, while-reading, and post-reading activities. In the pre-reading stage, students were introduced to key vocabulary items and asked to make predictions about the story based on visual prompts or short introductory questions. This step helped activate prior knowledge and lower the anxiety of encountering unfamiliar language in the text. During the while-reading stage, students engaged with the adapted passages through guided tasks such as comprehension questions, sequencing activities, and vocabulary-in-context exercises. The post-reading stage involved more productive work: pair discussions, short role-plays based on scenes from the novels, and occasionally brief written responses. This structure was kept consistent throughout the intervention so that students gradually became confident with the format and could focus their energy on the language

rather than figuring out what was expected of them.

The vocabulary test included 25 items covering target words drawn directly from the adapted texts. Items tested both recognition and contextual use, meaning students had to demonstrate not just that they knew a word existed but that they could apply it appropriately. The reading comprehension section consisted of two short passages followed by multiple-choice and short-answer questions designed to assess literal understanding as well as basic inferencing. Both pre- and post-test versions were reviewed by two experienced English teachers at the school before use, which provided a basic check on content validity and appropriateness for the age group.

Classroom observations were recorded using a checklist developed specifically for this study. The checklist captured frequency of student verbal contributions, instances of peer interaction in English, and general on-task behaviour across four intervals per lesson. Observer notes were also taken in the margins to record anything unexpected or particularly notable, such as a student who rarely

participated suddenly engaging during a role-play or a vocabulary item generating spontaneous discussion. These notes proved useful later when trying to make sense of patterns in the questionnaire responses.

The student questionnaire was kept short and straightforward given the participants' age. Most items used a simple four-point scale ranging from "not at all" to "very much," avoiding the neutral midpoint deliberately so that students were encouraged to lean one way or the other. A small number of open-ended items asked students to write a sentence or two about what they enjoyed or found difficult. Responses were read through several times before being grouped into recurring themes, a process closer to content analysis than to formal grounded theory but sufficient for the exploratory aims of this study.

Results

Pre-test and Post-test Comparison. Table 1 presents the results of the pre- and post-tests across vocabulary and reading comprehension measures. All improvements were statistically significant ($p < .001$), indicating that the intervention had a meaningful effect on students' language skills.

Measure	Pre-test M (SD)	Post-test M (SD)	Gain	t-value	p-value
Vocabulary	51.2 (8.3)	75.4 (7.1)	+24.2	8.74	< .001
Reading comprehension	53.6 (9.1)	78.2 (6.8)	+24.6	9.12	< .001
Overall	52.4 (8.7)	76.8 (6.9)	+24.4	8.93	< .001

Table 1. Pre-test and Post-test Comparison ($N = 30$)

Note. M = Mean; SD = Standard Deviation. p -values based on paired-samples t -test

The largest gains were recorded in contextual vocabulary use (+24.2 pp) and inference-based reading comprehension (+24.6 pp). The overall improvement of 24.4 percentage points represents a large effect size, demonstrating the practical significance of the intervention.

Student Questionnaire Results. Table 2 summarizes student responses to the motivation and perception questionnaire administered at the end of the six-week intervention.

Statement	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)
I enjoyed story-based lessons more than traditional classes	87%	13%
Stories helped me remember new words more effectively	79%	21%
I felt more confident speaking English during activities	83%	17%
I would like more literature-based lessons in the future	90%	10%

Table 2. Student Questionnaire Results (N = 30)

Note. Percentages represent students who selected "Agree" or "Strongly Agree" on a 5-point Likert scale

Classroom Observations. Classroom observations indicated increased student participation, confidence, and enthusiasm across all six weeks. Students were more willing to speak English during discussions and role-play activities. Qualitative data from observations corroborated the quantitative findings, suggesting that the narrative context provided by Twain's novels reduced language anxiety and promoted authentic communication.

Discussion

The findings of this study strongly support the effectiveness of adapted literary text instruction in secondary EFL classrooms. The statistically significant improvement in test scores ($t = 8.93$, $p < .001$) demonstrates that learning vocabulary and reading skills within a meaningful narrative context is more effective than isolated textbook exercises. By connecting new words to characters, events, and emotions, students achieved better understanding and retention.

The adventurous and humorous elements in Mark Twain's novels captured students' imagination and increased their intrinsic motivation. Interactive activities such as role-play and group discussions helped reduce language anxiety and encouraged real communication. These outcomes align with Krashen's (1982) Comprehensible Input Hypothesis and communicative language teaching principles.

Nevertheless, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the absence of a control group limits causal claims; improvements may

partly reflect general instructional effects. Second, lower-proficiency students occasionally found even adapted texts demanding, underscoring the importance of careful differentiation. Third, the small sample size ($n = 30$) and single-school context limit generalizability. Future studies should employ larger, randomized samples with control groups across multiple schools and regions.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study has demonstrated that integrating carefully adapted versions of Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* into English language instruction can significantly enhance secondary school students' vocabulary acquisition, reading comprehension, and learning motivation in EFL settings. The findings indicate that literary texts, when appropriately adapted to learners' proficiency levels, can provide meaningful linguistic input and create engaging learning experiences.

The results further show that literary texts can contribute not only to the development of language skills but also to increased learner participation and classroom engagement. The narrative structure of the selected works encouraged students to interact with new vocabulary and ideas in meaningful contexts, making the learning process more enjoyable and motivating.

Based on these findings, English teachers are encouraged to incorporate carefully selected and adapted literary texts into their lessons, particularly when working with learners at elementary and pre-intermediate proficiency

levels. Future research should explore the long-term effects of literature-based instruction on vocabulary retention and language

development, and include control groups and larger participant samples.

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