

## DETECTIVE STORIES AS A MODERN METHOD IN TEACHING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE (BASED ON JACK RITCHIE'S STORIES)

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**Abstract.** *This article examines the use of detective fiction in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms with particular reference to the short stories of Jack Ritchie. The study focuses on how narrative suspense, ambiguity, and unexpected endings contribute to the development of reading comprehension, critical thinking, and communicative skills. Classroom observations based on selected stories such as *The Midnight Strangler* and *The Absence of Emily* demonstrate that students engage more actively when literary texts require interpretation and problem-solving. The findings suggest that carefully selected detective stories create a meaningful learning environment where language is used purposefully rather than mechanically.*

**Keywords:** *detective fiction, Jack Ritchie, EFL teaching, communicative competence, literary texts, critical thinking.*

**Introduction.** The growing emphasis on communicative competence in foreign language teaching has encouraged educators to reconsider the role of literary texts in the classroom. Rather than being treated as purely aesthetic objects, literary works are now seen as sources of authentic language input and opportunities for meaningful interaction. In this context, detective fiction offers particular advantages because it combines narrative interest with intellectual challenge.

The short stories of Jack Ritchie are especially relevant for language teaching. His writing is concise, stylistically clear, and often built around a single surprising idea. Unlike more complex literary texts, his stories can be read within a limited time frame, which makes them suitable for classroom use. At the same time, they demand active interpretation from the reader.

For instance, in *The Midnight Strangler*, the narrative gradually leads the reader to form assumptions about the identity of the criminal. Students often become confident in their predictions, only to discover at the end that their interpretation was incomplete or incorrect.

This moment of surprise encourages reflection and discussion, as learners attempt to understand how the author guided their expectations.

Similarly, *The Absence of Emily* presents a situation where what is not explicitly stated becomes as important as what is described. Students must pay attention to subtle details and infer meaning from limited information. Such tasks naturally develop inferential reading skills, which are essential for advanced language proficiency.

This study seeks to demonstrate that detective stories are not only engaging but also pedagogically valuable. By examining classroom practices based on Ritchie's works, it explores how narrative structure can be used to support both linguistic and cognitive development.

**Methodology.** The research was conducted with intermediate-level university students studying English as a foreign language. The teaching materials consisted of selected short stories by Jack Ritchie, including *The Midnight Strangler* and *The Absence of Emily*. These texts were chosen because of their manageable length, clear structure, and potential for interpretation. The lesson design followed three interconnected stages, though in practice these stages often overlapped depending on student responses.

At the beginning of the lesson, students were introduced to key vocabulary through contextual examples rather than direct translation. For example, words such as “suspect,” “evidence,” and “alibi” were presented through short scenarios. Students were then asked to imagine a crime situation and discuss possible explanations. This initial discussion created a sense of curiosity and prepared them for the narrative. During the reading phase, the text was presented in segments. After reading the first part of *The Midnight Strangler*, students were asked who they believed the criminal might be and why. Their answers varied, and each group provided different interpretations based on the same information.

As the story progressed, some students changed their opinions, which led to spontaneous debates in the classroom. In the case of *The Absence of Emily*, students initially found the story confusing because of its indirect style. However, when they were encouraged to focus on small details, such as descriptions of the setting and the behavior of the characters, they began to construct possible explanations. This process required careful reading and collaborative thinking.

After completing the stories, students participated in follow-up activities. One group was asked to rewrite the ending of *The Midnight Strangler* from the perspective of another character.

Another group acted out an interrogation scene based on *The Absence of Emily*. These tasks required students to use language creatively while staying consistent with the logic of the story. Classroom observations and student feedback were used to evaluate the effectiveness of these activities. Particular attention was given to how students interacted with the text and with each other.

**Results.** The use of Jack Ritchie’s stories produced noticeable changes in student behavior and performance. One of the most evident outcomes was the improvement in reading comprehension. Students became more attentive to details, often returning to earlier parts of the text to check their assumptions. In *The Midnight Strangler*, several students pointed out clues they had initially overlooked, demonstrating a deeper engagement with the text.

Critical thinking skills also developed significantly. Instead of accepting information at face value, students began to question the reliability of characters and the intentions behind their actions. In discussions of *The Absence of Emily*, students proposed multiple interpretations, some of which were unexpected but logically supported.

Another important result was the increase in classroom interaction. Students who were usually reluctant to speak became more active when discussing the stories. The need to explain and defend their ideas created a natural context for communication.

In addition, students showed greater motivation. Many expressed interest in reading similar stories outside the classroom, which suggests that the material had a lasting impact beyond the lesson itself.

**Discussion.** The findings indicate that detective fiction can play a meaningful role in language teaching when used thoughtfully. The stories of Jack Ritchie are particularly effective because they require readers to engage with the text at multiple levels.

One of the key advantages of these stories is their ability to create a sense of uncertainty.

Unlike traditional textbook materials, which often present clear and predictable information, detective stories invite learners to explore different possibilities. This encourages a more active approach to reading.

At the same time, the success of this method depends on the teacher’s ability to guide the process without limiting it.

If too much explanation is provided, students may lose the opportunity to think independently. On the other hand, if guidance is insufficient, some learners may feel lost. Another important aspect is the balance between language difficulty and narrative complexity. Ritchie's stories are generally accessible, but certain passages may still require clarification. In such cases, selective support is more effective than full translation.

It is also worth noting that these stories often reflect aspects of human behavior that are universal, such as deception, curiosity, and moral ambiguity. This makes them relevant to students from different cultural backgrounds and opens the door to broader discussions.

**Conclusion.** The integration of detective stories into EFL teaching offers clear advantages in terms of engagement, comprehension, and communication. The works of Jack Ritchie demonstrate how even short texts can provide rich opportunities for language learning. By encouraging students to think, interpret, and interact, these stories transform the classroom into a more dynamic environment.

They show that language learning is not only about mastering rules but also about understanding meaning and expressing ideas. Future studies may explore how similar texts can be combined with digital tools or adapted for different proficiency levels. However, even in their traditional form, detective stories remain a valuable resource for teachers seeking to make their lessons more effective and engaging.

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