Young Adult Literature (YAL): An Analytical Study Among Selected EFL Teachers in Jordanian Public Schools

Baderaddin Yassin

Department of English Language,
Alghad International Colleges for Applied Medical Sciences,
Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

Hadeel Saed

Faculty of Arts and Science, Applied Science Private University,
Department of English Language and Translation,
Amman, Jordan

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to shed light on Young Adult literature (YAL) in Jordan. Eleven English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers and 62 EFL students in Jordanian public schools participated in this research to first measure their awareness of the YAL and to evaluate the academic benefits of integrating English YA literature into the Jordanian public school curricula. A group of EFL instructors and EFL learners were interviewed using a semi-structured guide. The instructors' interview questions focused on demographics, definitions of YA literature, age classification of YAL, benefits, and challenges of using YA novel in Jordanian English curricula. Questions for the learners centered on demographics, definition and age classification of YAL, and the use of YA novels in the EFL classroom. The study revealed that EFL teachers' reliance on the official curriculum tends to remove innovation and creativity from their teaching and limit their opportunities to adapt the curricula to the competence and interest of their EFL students. The research also revealed that EFL students who read English YA novels developed necessary competencies in both the English language and daily life experiences. The results showed that most EFL teachers in this research paper asserted that English YA novels positively affected EFL students in Jordan. This effect led to increased motivation and engagement in EFL classrooms.

Keywords: *culture, EFL (English as a foreign language), Middle East; education, (YAL) young adult literature*

1. Introduction

Readers of Young Adult literature (YAL) can simply understand the meaning of YAL from reading the name itself since it rotates around the name itself. Although the name is not that difficult and can be understood by any reader, YAL needs to be analyzed more critically and effectively. The field of YAL is expanding and developing very quickly in western countries. It is often considered to be a tradition that is an essential part of American history. This tradition of writing and designing children's books is not new but has a long tradition in American history (Garcia,2013).

According to Kaplan & Hayn (2012), YAL has become popular because of audience demands and the massive number of books written for adolescents. It has flourished in the last few years resulting in a vast number of exciting books. Libraries, bookstores, and schools have extensive collections of YA books that tackle all kinds of genres; and young adult students can easily find YA books that they prefer to read (Galus, 2014). Yet, the spread of YA books in large numbers has also created a problem. This problem somehow lies in identifying suitable age ranges for reading such books. It is well-known that young adult readers range from 10 to 14 years old, but this can change if we look at the market of young adult literature. The field has grown to include books for readers as young as ten and as old as 35. Young adult literature is no longer for teens alone. It often includes people that are up to 35 years old (Campbell,1997).

The expansion of YAL that includes the 10 to 14 age range is not a new range. It has its roots in the middle-school movement of the late 1980s in the United States. The inclusion of the 10 to 35 age range is a more market-driven phenomenon related to the YA market's ongoing shift from the institutional to the retail from libraries and schools (Campbell,1997).

The marketing emphases have now shifted to the adults, so it is not limited to young adults. It is now about markets and making financial benefits. No wonder many writers try to write in this field to become famous and gain financial benefits. Many writers who do not have any work in this field in the past are switching their field for writing to the YA readers. This field is active and has a massive number of audiences in the USA, but unfortunately, this field is not as popular in Jordan.

2. Literature Review

It is difficult to give a clear definition for YA literature because there is no specific distinction between childhood and adulthood in literary books. YA literature is supposed to offer young adults some additional aspects. It is specially written for YAs to help them identify themselves and the world around. The YA literature stories are created to help teenagers identify the present, rather than the past and highlight an individual's expertise within the same age range.

Nilsen and Donelson (2009) defined YAL as anything a young adult will "choose to read" (p. 6). Nilsen and Donelson gave students the freedom to choose any book that they prefer to read without any limitation. Kaplan and Hayn (2012) believed that YA books have a young protagonist who deals with concerns and problems that young people face daily. They also claimed that YAL can be anything that young adults prefer to read, so it is not always dealing with adolescents' problems in their daily lives. It could be anything they prefer to read.

According to Cart (2008), YAL is integrally formless, for its constituent terms 'young adult' and 'literature' are dynamic. Young adult literature changes over time, much like any culture or any society. Nilsen and Donelson (2009) supported Cart's definition of YAL. They described YAL as loosely as possible: as any literature that teens read.

According to Nilsen and Donelson (2009), the YA stage is the period that transfers children from childhood to adulthood. According to the American services association's YA library service, this period could range from 12 to 19 or 11 to 22. This YA stage is different in Jordan due to cultural differences. Literary books that are intended to be read by children in Jordan are divided into four categories. Books for age (0-4), (5-8), (9-12), (more than 13). All of the books are titled under the name of children's books and divided into age categories. When analyzing children's books intended to be read by the last category (more than 13), the reader can notice that this kind of literature is written for young adult children. The term of YA literature is not common in Jordan, but people look at this kind of literature as an age category (Safi,2009). (Safi,2009).

Campbell (1997), Aronson, senior editor of Henry Holt's Edge imprint, suggested that YAL is an accumulation of instabilities; this means that there are no clear boundaries for YAL. It also means that YAL is all inherently unstable.

These age boundaries of YAL have always been ill-defined and are subject to negotiation. In other words, there is no clear definition of YA literature, and the age level is also not clear. It is said that YAL

ranged from 12 to 19 or 11 to 22 years old. Children and adults' titles in Jordan are not infrequently finding their way into this category. Therefore, young adults themselves read both above and below their official age abilities. Even the fiction that is supposed to be specifically for YA is now read by people that range from 19 to 35 years old.

According to Bucher and Manning (2009), educators need to remember the importance of the uniqueness and divergence of readers. A range of characteristics can be easily observed, physical and developmental. For example, some 15-year-olds look like 19-year-olds, while others look as if they are 10-year-olds. Psychosocially, some adolescents place a priority on friendships and maybe as social activities as they can, while others may be shy and avoid social activity. Cognition levels can vary between young adults. The phase between childhood and adulthood can be on different speeds and paths, but all lead to maturity. Thus, it is crucial to identify adolescents of each individual and act accordingly in the selection process of the YAL.

2.1 YA literature development through time

Young adult literature is currently considered the highest-selling books of all genres, mainly because the target audiences are teenagers. It has become a subject of many issues that concern today's youth. These issues affect today's young adults, which is why today's YAL is different and more developed, such as the social, physical, and knowledge development that created a more awakened YA society (Bushman and Haas,2006).

The issues are currently injected into most of today's YAL, including eating disorders, crash diets, alcohol, drugs, and tobacco, not to mention depression, anxiety, and mental illnesses. All of which are issues that have become common in contemporary society. Modern authors and publishers use these controversial issues to create a bridge between these issues and modern society.

Most of today's YAL views the characters included in the books as either a window to show the world that has become a mirror to what they go through or feel. It is pointed out that publishers are now using this development to their advantage, knowing that the more they include these issues, the more YA would be more curious to read (Nimon,1998). It is a debatable matter to decide whether or not young people should absorb these issues. Still, given that 'Generation Y' is a society that develop faster than all the other generations, it seems that there is no way to specify what YAL should or should not include(Nimon,1998).

To provide a common and popular example, the Harry Potter book series, were one of the most successful books in YA literature history. The Potter books made a new outbreak in a new era of speculative fiction. The statistics generated by the series had a huge impact, as all Potter books sold more than 375 million copies and they were translated into more than sixty-five languages, making J. K. Rowling, the author, one of the wealthiest people in the UK (Car and Michael, 2016).

The fourth title in the series, Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire, was printed into 3.8 million copies, the largest for any book ever printed. By the time the seventh book in the franchise, Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows, was ready to be published, the first printing included 12 million copies. The book sold a crushing number of 8.3 million copies in the early 24 hours of its publication.

In his research, Cart used Harry Potter as an example illustrating the escalation in YA literature and the development in its ideas. He also discussed that since the outbreak of Harry Potter, YA literature needed to develop more in different aspects, thus, requiring more diversity and edgy content. YA literature is the most challenging genre to keep up with because time is the move, and teenagers are growing more and more aware of their surroundings.

Simpson (2018) discussed that a book like Harry Potter seem as though YA is only now reaching its golden age. She also addressed a stage of life between childhood and adulthood, which we call adolescence. It is often portrayed as a time of turmoil in a person's life in which identity is unraveled and the transition into adulthood is created. To which, the mindset in this level requires certain subjects that draw attention. This adds a new realization to YA literature that intersects between two very sensitive stages: childhood and teenage years.

In other research by (Hanson, Leah, 1996) she argued that a good version of YAL is a doorway to the world of a teenager and other new worlds. Even the classics can be windows to teenagers in a way, but they can hardly connect with teenagers' lives like YAL can. Hence, they are not capable of teaching other times, cultures, and people, and even have a way of shaping new ideas that will follow them through their lives. She also added that YA novels have the ability to connect with the reader through familiarity and open new windows through novelty. Young adult literature needs to deliver the understanding of giving YAs a sense of belonging to a certain novel. Because of this belonging, YAs will be attached to the novel itself and to the entire genre, as it has the ability to portray the ideas that teenagers are trying to transform into thoughts, aspects, and ideas. Other YAL genres have developed, such as romance, historical fiction, thriller, mystery, science fiction, espionage, earth future, realistic fiction, and stories of war. All of which discuss the problematic and controversial behaviors and issues that have grown rapidly within the passing of years, such as relationships, alienation, loneliness, multiculturalism, drug use, social order threats, personal values search, and the environment's destruction.

2.2 Marketing of YA books

Young Adult literature novels have always been affected by the way novels are sold. According to Garcia (2013), YA markets in the United States emerged around new American wealth, and adolescents were catered to in such a way that American society had not experienced before. The commercial starts parallel other emerging publishing genres such as comics and graphic novels. For this reason, YAL is now more specific than sole adolescents. But who decides that a certain book relates to the YA literature field? For example, Harry Potter, Goblet of Fire, The Perks of Being a Wall, The Buffalo Tree, The Facts Speak for Themselves, and Smack are categorized as children's books, but if a reader goes to a book store in the United States, he/she will find these books in the YA shelves. Moreover, these novels are not only read by children or young adult boys, but they are also read by adult people who range over 20 years old. It is believed that it has to do with the way books are placed in bookstores, shops, or school libraries.

If a book is on a kids' list and it gets sold to a kid's buyer, that's where it's going to end up, whether that's the only place in the store it belongs or not (Campbell,1997). This process is applied in the USA, and it is somehow similar to the process applied in Jordan. According to Safi (2009), a huge number of children's books in Jordan are directed to gain financial profit. This process is involved with the markets and how these markets categorize such books.

2.3 Age boundaries of Young Adult literature

The age span of YAL is not specific, and the reason for this confusion leads us to markets and young adult readers themselves. If publishers try to specify the age for reading young adult literature, the confusion will be more complicated and larger than it is now.

According to Campbell (1997), during the 1970s, the YA literature audience was perceived as high school age. As early as the late 1980s, the category of YA literature that was called YA had already begun unofficially expanding its borders to include middle-school literature; that is, books for 10 to 14 year-olds. Currently, the YA field's expansion is going forward to include more categories that range from 18 years old and even older. According to Cart (2005), some people believe that young adulthood is an artificial construct rooted more in consumer behavior than in any physiological, biological, emotional, or intellectual realities. Cart argued that the middle-school literature books that start from 10 to 14-year-olds are called Middle School books, not YA books. The age that ranges from 13 to 19 or 12 to 18 is called Teen Literature (TL), not YA literature. The age that ranges from 18 to 25, or even 16 to 24, is categorized as "Young Adult. Cart claimed that these groups do not rigidly define the demographic categories since there are lots of overlaps, but he argued that they work.

This author believes that the overlaps in deciding the level of the literature books and the overlaps

in deciding how to categorize groups depend on the people who read such books, and it depends on the experience of those people. According to Cart (2005), people who are in charge of judging such books should have enough experience and extensive knowledge of the YAL field.

Cart (2005) believes that it is very important, and it is an immediate interest to focus on adolescent development. Cart expressed concerns that the brain is not fully formed in childhood, and it continues to grow until the mid-twenties. This is very important to be noticed, significantly when the brain's last area to mature is the one governing judgment and the ability to evaluate risks.

2.4 Incorporating literature in EFL classrooms

The debate on incorporating literary works into the EFL curriculum was highlighted by Bobkina and Dominguez (2014). They also shed light on the advantages and disadvantages of utilizing the literature in classrooms. They divided the aspects of introducing literary works into language curricula into three groups: aesthetic, socio-moral, and psycholinguistic. The aesthetic aspect focuses on the aesthetic involvement of students in the process of reading. The psycholinguistic aspect is centered on the identification of students and the internalization of certain behaviorism. However, the socio-moral aspect sheds light on the issues of content and theme. The study concluded that literature could be very effective to utilize in EFL classrooms. It also indicated that in language acquisition, success is determined by the interest and enthusiasm of students for what is being used in the classrooms, their persistence, and concentration.

In line with Bobkina and Dominguez's (2014) research, Ivey and Johnston (2013) examined the students' perceptions of the processes and outcomes of engaging reading in classes. The study utilized a compilation of young adult literature that was self-paced and self-selected by the students. The data selected for this research was of 71 students. Its outcomes were of great importance as they changed the students' identities and in their moral, intellectual, and relational lives. This type of change affects perception and intellectual growth, which can raise awareness and create a sense of maturity, which will increase the students' enthusiasm and persistence to learn.

The pros and cons of utilizing literature in EFL and ESL were discussed thoroughly in Khatib, Rezaei and Derakhshan's (2011) research. The pros were listed as nine different areas, namely, authenticity, motivation, cultural or intercultural awareness and globalization, intensive or extensive reading practice, sociolinguistic and pragmatic knowledge, grammar and vocabulary knowledge, language skills, emotional intelligence, and critical thinking. On the other hand, the cons we listed as eight, namely, syntax, lexis, phonetics and phonology, semantics, selection of materials, literary concepts and notions, literature and academic English, and cultural barriers. The study concluded that despite some weak points, literature motivates language teaching and learning. The absorption of knowledge can be intensified through motivation. The YA learners' motivation derived from their interests should be used in teaching EFL.

The importance of engaging literature in language acquisition was stressed by different scholars over time. The most prominent aspects highlighted by Sell (2005) are the enhancements that literature could bring to language acquisition. The study shed light on learners' cultural value-added due to being exposed to different literary works. The third aspect was about the quality of content brought by the literature, which can be relatively close to real life.

Young adult literature is considered one of the most critical aspects to shed light on when we come to real-world situations. Because it can motivate language learners, especially in the adolescent stage, to relate to what they can feel, hear, or see. The interpretation of situations and how to act or react is of great importance in this stage. Thus, introducing YAL as a means of learning English is of significant influence. It can enrich the learners' cognition of global issues and teach them the language norms by motivating them to read more. This goes hand in hand with what Too (2017) argued after examining the incorporation of YAL in classrooms. The argument held in conclusion stressed the importance of utilizing the YAL as a means of education because it has all what learners need. And that can motivate them to learn and acquire knowledge.

3. Purpose of the Study

Young Adult literature can play an immensely important part in the lives of teenagers. Therefore, the purpose of this research paper is to collect several perspectives from Jordanian EFL teachers and students on the YAL and its perceived benefits and challenges if it is used in EFL classrooms. Jordanian society is considered to have a high percentage of adolescents, 40% of the total population (UNICEF, 2012). The researchers believe that YA literature has the ability to affect a huge target group of young adults in Jordan. This research focuses on the definitions of YAL, the age boundaries of YAL, and the benefit of integrating YAL in the English language curricula in Jordanian public schools. The goal of this research is to measure Jordanian EFL learners' awareness of the YAL and to evaluate the academic benefits of integrating English YAL into the Jordanian public school curricula.

4. Study Method

A group of EFL instructors and EFL learners were interviewed using a semi-structured guide. The interview questions for the instructors focused on the following: demographics, definitions of YAL, age classification of YAL, and benefits and challenges of using YA novel in Jordanian English curricula. Questions for the learners centered on demographics, definition and age classification of YAL, and the use of YA novels in the EFL classroom.

4.1 Procedures

Interviews were conducted at the target schools. The researchers explained the objectives of the present study to EFL teachers and students both verbally and written. The anonymity of participants was guaranteed before conducting the interviews. The researchers got informed consent from the teachers and students. After conducting the interviews, the researchers encouraged the participant to provide their comments and feedback. The length of the instructors' interviews ranged from 20 to 30 minutes, while the learners' interviews took 15 to 20 minutes. The interviews of the two groups were recorded and transcribed before being verified by the two researchers.

4.2 Participants

Eleven EFL teachers and 62 EFL students from two Jordanian high schools participated in this research. The first school was a high school that has a total of 23 teachers and about 600 students. The second school has a total of 31 teachers and about 900 students. Five EFL teachers in the first school, six in the second school, and sixty-two EFL students participated in this research in both schools, as shown in table 1.

Table 1: Population of participants

School	Public school 1	Public school 2
Students	600	900
Teachers	23	31
EFL T	5	6
EFL S	30	32

Both schools range from 6th to 12th grade. The interviews consisted of seven questions beginning with students and ending with teachers. Most of the questions were open-ended questions, and students were encouraged to tell about their experience of reading YAL.

4.3   Questions

Both EFL teachers and students were asked the following questions:

What is YAL?

Do EFL teachers have the freedom to choose YAL books?

What are the reasons that make EFL students read a YAL book?

Do EFL students pay attention to age classification when they read YAL books?

Do EFL students receive guidance from EFL teachers when they choose YAL books?

Can integrating YAL in the Jordanian curriculum improve the level of EFL students in the English language?

4.4   Data analysis

Both EFL teachers and students enthusiastically answered all questions during the interviews. The researchers asked both EFL students and teachers to define YAL. Both the teachers and their students gave different definitions for YAL. None of the definitions were specific. Most of them were information about literature in general. One teacher defined YAL as stories, poems, and plays that have value as art. Another teacher defined YAL as literary texts that reflect different aspects of different societies. Some of the students said that YAL is anything that has a relationship with art. Other teachers defined YAL as books that are written for children regardless of age. Both EFL teachers and their students did not have specific definitions for YA, but they agreed on two types of literature: one that is written for children and one that is written for adults.

When EFL students were asked about how they choose to read literary books, fifty students (80.6%) said that they choose to read literary books based on the cover of those books, and ten students; (16.1%) said that they choose literary books based on the EFL teachers' advice and two students (3.2%) showed no preference as shown in table 2.

Table 2: Books preference

Students	No	%
Book cover	50	80.6
Teacher's advice	10	16.1
No preference	2	3.2

EFL students were asked if they pay attention to age in choosing literary books that they prefer to read. Fifty-nine students (95.1%) said they choose books without paying attention to age classification, as shown in table 3.

Table 3: Paying attention to age classification

Students	No	%
Not paying attention	59	95.16
Paying attention	3	4.83

The majority of EFL students, fifty-five students (88.7%), said that they do not know if there is a classification that can tell them if a certain book is YAL or if it is suitable for their age, as shown in table 4.

Table 4: Age classification of YA books

Students	No	%
No pre-knowledge	55	88.7
Pre-knowledge	7	11.3

EFL students were asked if there was guidance from the school librarian in choosing literary books. Thirty students (48.38%) said that they simply go to the school library and borrow the novels they find interesting based on those novels' covers. Whereas 51.61% of the students said that they get the guidance, as shown in table 5.

Table 5: School librarian's guidance

Students	No	%
No guidance	30	48.38
There is guidance	32	51.61

EFL teachers were asked if integrating English YA novels in the curricula is beneficial for EFL students. Ninety percent of them agreed on integrating YA novels in the curricula. They said that this step would help Jordanian EFL students to improve their English language level. One EFL teachers were not in favor of the integration process because of challenges such as the cultural gap and the Jordanian ministry of education strict rules, as shown in table 6.

Table 6: Integration of English YA novels in curricula

EFL Teachers	No	%
In favor of	10	90.9
Not in favor of	1	9.1

The data analysis showed that both EFL teachers and students did not have a specific definition of YAL. Most of the definitions of YAL given by the teachers were mostly information about literature in general. According to EFL teachers, they do not have enough knowledge about YAL due to challenges such as the cultural gap between Jordanian and American society. Both cultures differ in history, religion, and traditions. These differences can be noted for the most part in people's behavior, attitudes, and interests.

Ten of the interviewed EFL teachers (90.9%) agreed on integrating YAL into the Jordanian English curriculum. They said that the process of integration of YA literary stories is vital to motivate and engage students with fascinating English stories that EFL students can enjoy and stories with which they can identify. According to EFL teachers, most EFL students who were assigned to read English YA short stories were very motivated students, and their English level was improved. According to one of the teachers, reading YA stories helped students gain a huge number of new vocabularies and develop language skills and structures. It also helped EFL teachers with rich reading materials that improved reading, communicative, and writing skills as well as critical thinking of Jordanian EFL students.

According to Jordanian EFL teachers, they encouraged the idea of integrating English YAL into the curriculum in order to expose students to another culture that can help them expand their thinking and views and at the same time engage students and assist them in knowing the relationship between English forms and their meanings which can help them improve their English language level.

5. Findings

Young Adult literature is a category of novels that are supposedly written for readers from twelve to eighteen years of age, but a high percentage of YA readers are adults. The distinction between children's literature, YAL, and adult literature is flexible and loosely defined. In Jordan, all kinds of literary books written for children fall under the section of children's books without paying attention to age classification. In Jordan, a high percentage of the YA books are shelved based on the cover and titles of such books, and most of these YA books go to the children's book sections. Most YA books are shelved

in the USA based on the percentage of growth in sales numbers. As a result, the age boundaries for reading YA English literary books are still problematic in both Jordan and the United States of America.

The interviews' analysis revealed that the educational system used in Jordan is still more traditional and more teacher-centered than the educational system used in the USA. According to teachers, EFL students' needs and interests are different from those that are experienced by American students. But most of the teachers agreed on integrating English YA literature into the curricula in order to provide EFL teachers with the opportunity to help students develop necessary competencies in both the English language and daily life experiences. Integrating English YA literature will be the cure for both students and teachers many learning and teaching problems.

EFL teachers in the target schools were aware of the YAL genera and its benefits for their EFL students. Eight teachers (72.7%) asserted that most of the EFL students who had the chance to read some English YA novels during the semester had the chance to experience the universality of the human experience regardless of background, culture, language or religion; and they had the opportunity to develop personal connections with YAL and the characters within them and the same time they were able to improve their English language skills.

Mastering the English language in Jordan is considered important. Therefore, most parents in Jordan emphasize the importance of mastering the English language. They believe that the English language would be of tremendous value to their children's education since most university majors require a strong English command. Yet, several research shows show that a high percentage of Jordanian students struggle with English and do not enjoy English classes. During the interview, all students talked enthusiastically about reasons that make them struggle with the English language and found it not interesting. One student talked about the English curriculum noting that the curriculum does not meet the students' needs and interests. Another student talked about the lack of exposure to the English language outside classrooms and how these YA stories, suggested by his teacher, helped him gain English language competence. One of the teachers commented on how YAL can help his students. He said that the lack of English language exposure outside the classroom could be fixed by suggesting YA English stories. According to him, YAL is considered a rich source of the needed information about the English language and the culture. EFL students proceed through these texts; therefore, they pay attention to the way language is used. They come to grips with the meaning and increase their general awareness of the English language. Extensive reading of YA novels is one of the best strategies for improving their English language skills. According to one of the students, reading English YA novels helped him expand his vocabulary, which led him to develop other language skills and grammar.

6. Conclusions

There is a strong relationship between literature and language learning. Consequently, English YAL specifically has the ability to connect with EFL students through the familiarity and sense of belonging to certain subjects in YA novels. Because of this sense of belonging, EFL students will be able to increase their knowledge of English vocabulary and grammar. The results showed that most EFL teachers in this research paper asserted that English YA novels positively affected EFL students in Jordan. This effect led to increased motivation and engagement in EFL classrooms. They pulled learning of the English language from the classical teaching method and made it fun, engaging, and interesting. YA novels that EFL teachers suggested to their students provided EFL students with opportunities to improve their language skills, understand YAL genera, and motivate in English classrooms that were missing with the English classical curriculum.

7. Limitation of the Study

Although this study met its aims, the sample size was small since only sixty-two EFL students and eleven EFL teachers participated in this research. The study was conducted on only two secondary

schools. The population of the experimental groups is a small number of teachers and students. The study would be better if it is done in a larger sample size.

8. Future Steps

1. EFL teachers should encourage and support ELLs to read English books based on the age limitation and student's preference but not on the cover of the YA books.
2. EFL teachers' positive feedback regarding YA novels helps ELLs improve their reading and writing skills.
3. EFL teachers should give ELLs the freedom to choose one of the subjects in a novel linked to their society and write a project about it. This helps ELLs improve their communicative skills since it is associated with something real and authentic.

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