

The Art of Teaching English Language through Literature

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Literature is an art form dealing with the needs of the students. A literary piece is not an end in itself but the means of beginning a creative process in the minds and emotions of the students. For many students literature can be a key to motivate them to read in English. It encourages the students to exercise their sensitivity and imagination. So literature is an ideal vehicle for illustrating language use and for introducing cultural assumptions.

In the literature-based classroom, literature can be the primary material of teaching the target language, providing authentic and real contexts of communicative situations which enhance the communicative competence of the students. It also provides the pleasure of learning a new language with and through interesting stories. Students can extend their knowledge and experience of the world by reading literature. The language teacher should encourage students to read literature for their own meanings and experiences instead of being forced to accept the teacher's perception of the text. Literature provided examples of effective and appropriate usage of the language for the students to learn. Literature also shows students new ways

to view the world around them by constructing meaning from the text.

Maley (1989) distinguishes the purpose of teaching literature into two. The first one focuses on the study of literature which emphasizes the "special" status of literature. On the other hand the second one is for the use of literature as a resource for language learning. Maley (1989) puts it:

(a) The first approach is the literary critical approach in which our primary concern is the "literariness" of the text we study. In this traditional approach we concentrate on aspects of the text such as plot, characterization, setting, point of view, motivation, value, psychology, etc. In order for this approach to be successful, students should both be competent enough in the language, and familiar with the literary conventions. However, disregarding very few exceptions, EFL/ESL students rarely are at the desirable level of competence for this purpose. The result is what is called a "pseudo-competence" in which students memorize technical critical terms without deep understanding and merely repeat the opinions they had been exposed to in exam by rote. Therefore, application of literature

in this manner needs a great amount of preparation and work both on students language and literary competence.

(b) The second approach is the stylistic approach in which we focus on literature as “text”. The starting point for this approach is the text itself and then we concentrate on textual discoveries leading to interpretations of the text. Because language is in priority in this approach, it is certainly more relevant to EFL/ESL contexts. Unlike the first approach, linguistic elucidation and description precedes interpretation. (10-11)

Maley points out if the second purpose is the focus of attention, literature can be considered as a source of teaching and learning language.

Arthur further says that using literature in language classes should be filled with the concept of literary experience. He also emphasizes that the special interaction that exists between the book and the reader. Arthur points out that “if literature is to provide a useful vehicle for the teaching of second language skills, it must first succeed as a literary experience. There are some factors which play crucial role in encouraging the students to experience literary experience while reading a piece of literature”.

Literature is inherently authentic and provides authentic input for language learning (Ghosn, 2002; Shrestha, 2008). So the teachers can exploit literature as authentic material through various genres like drama and novel. In drama one can find

conversations, expressions of feelings, functional phrases, and contextualized expressions. Novel is the readiest and most acceptable way of embodying experiences and ideas in the context of time. So novel is a vehicle for extensive reading purposes. The teacher can allow the students a week to go through a novel without referring to the dictionary. Such practice will improve reading speed and also encourage the students to understand the meaning guessing in reading. Subsequently learners are able to learn how to read a lot in a short period of time.

On the other hand, for intensive reading the best literary form is poetry which is good for close analysis. The teacher can assign a poem to read each stanza closely to analyze the poem through literary elements such as metaphor, simile, allegory, etc. So that it enables the students to develop interest to read between the lines and get the hidden meaning expressed through literary elements. This intensive reading can lead the learners to extract deep meanings embedded in texts. Poetry is not only useful for intensive reading but also a good source for practicing grammatical structures. The teachers can ask the students to change the complex structures in a poem to the Standard English structure. Literary texts are the major sources where complex structures such as structure, inversion, subjunctives, etc occur.

Quite in line with the principles of CLT (Van 2009), literature is rich with innumerable authentic tokens of language for the development of reading, writing, speaking

and listening skills. According to Alexander Baird, "Literature is the use of language effectively in suitable conditions." (Baird 1969, 203) To him literary texts can be used in language teaching, because the language used in literary text is suitable for the contexts of the events. These literary texts further enable the students not only to use English for genuine communication but pay more attention to the features of spoken language. For speaking purposes, the events in a poem, novel, or short story can be associated with the learners' own experience in real life. Such a practice paves the way for hot topics for discussion in language classes. Having the students freely reflect on the events and having them critically comment is also facilitative for advancing speaking proficiency.

For listening purposes, the learners can be exposed to the audio versions of the poems, short stories, or novels. Also the musical elements in poetry stimulate the learners' desire for approximating their speaking patterns to the native speaker norms by adhering to the principles of rhythm, rhyme, and intonation.

For reading purposes, as above-mentioned, novel and poetry can provide good opportunities for extensive and intensive reading. Also it is good for practicing reading sub-skills including skimming, scanning, and finding the main ideas. Reading literary texts foster emotional intelligence (Ghosn, 2002). Daniel Goleman is the pioneer in EQ which is specifically related to human ability to control and manage their emotions and feelings in difficult situations. Since

literature deals with affections, feelings and emotions, it is a good source for nurturing one's EQ. Reading in literature is a combination of reading for enjoyment and reading for information. Therefore, it bridges the lacks in non-literary texts. In fact, literature is not only facilitative for language learning purposes in general but it can also accelerate language learning in content-based instruction (Shang, 2006).

Oster mentions the benefits of literature to writing skill such as encouraging creativity, learning richer vocabulary and using them in students' writing and learning how to use figurative language to make the writing more affective. For writing purposes, literature shows to set a good ground for writing practice. Having the learners complete a poem or short story in cloze form is very encouraging. Also we can have the students write the end of a story in their own words or narrate a story from the point of view of another character in a short story, novella, or novel. Other similar creative activities can be developed for writing practice.

Arthur (1968) believes that syntactic knowledge and vocabulary enrichment can be accelerated through literary texts. In other words, literature involves a profound range of vocabulary, dialogues and prose (Van 2009). Similarly in novels, descriptive writing along with other types of writing adds to the imaginative nature of human and hence language is easily etched on our mind. Maley says that literature deals with a potpourri of language types and varieties from slang to formal and various subject matters. Vocabulary knowledge can be

expanded through considerable exposure to literary texts which treat both formal and informal language. Reading short stories and novels is a good exercise for enlarging your vocabulary domain of knowledge. The authors' own experience of reading novels such as 'Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness' which is replete with so many new words was very beneficial and it can be prescribed for intermediate and upper-intermediate language learners.

In the era of globalization, there is a growing concern of universally shared needs and wants rather than individual needs. Since literature deals with universal concepts (Maley), there is an urge to grab on literature as an input source for flourishing language learners' competence. Globalization cries for joining hands not only in economy, politics, and sociology but also in language-related fields such as ELT. According to Maley, literature deals with universal concepts such as love, hatred, death, nature, etc that are common to all languages and cultures. The similarities and even differences between cultures and languages can further our understanding of the whole world.

Literary texts are resources for grammar teaching and developing language awareness. The teacher can use "pre-literary activities" such as cloze, multiple-choice, jig-saw reading and practical stylistics. The general consent is that the integration of language and literature has a positive effect on the teaching and learning of both components: Carter and Long (1991:101) suggest that the integration of literature and language studies can do "as much for the

language development of the student as for the development of capacities for literary understanding and appreciation".

Literature is indeed the most explicit record of the human spirit. It's a medium through which the essence of our living is made paramount by linking it to imaginative experience. So literature is useful for teachers to create motivation in students so that they interact with the text. By devising suitable activities the teachers can also improve the proficiency level of the students through language learning. Hadaway, Vardell and Young (2002) opine that there three advantages of using literature. The first advantage is the contextualization of language where learners are exposed to the use of language in different situations when they read different genre of literature. The second one is social in function in which learner are familiar with the different formats of literature embedded in literary texts such as such as picture books, news papers, short stories. So literature can be suitable for students with different styles and takes into account individual differences. The third advantage refers to the natural and meaningful use of language which is accomplished by illustrations and use of descriptive language in literature.

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