

The Teaching of Literature in an ESL/EFL Context: The Dynamics of Change

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ABSTRACT

The last five decades have witnessed far reaching changes in English language teaching and learning. There is now greater awareness among teachers of concepts, such as learner-centeredness and task-based learning. The changes with regard to teaching and study of literature, especially in ESL/EFL situations, have been few, if any, for example the use of literature in a language curriculum. The approach to teaching literature as literature to students of English major in the ESL/EFL context has, however, seen little change. The aim of this article is to review the changes in the field of teaching literature, with a focus on key issues, such as goals of teaching literature, nature of literary discourse, role of literature in language teaching, approach to teaching literature, criteria for selection of texts and assessment of student learning. An attempt has been made to explore how our understanding of these issues has changed over the decades. A few possible directions for future study and research are also suggested to make literature teaching and study interesting, meaningful, relevant and satisfying to both teachers and learners.

KEYWORDS

Teaching ESL/EFL Literature; Study of Literature

Introduction

EFL/ESL teaching methodologies have witnessed many changes as a result of continued discussion and research. There is greater awareness and understanding of concepts, such as learner-centeredness and task-based learning. Teachers have realized the need to encourage learner participation in many ways including classroom activities. The rapid changes in business, media and communications have made English the preferred global language. This has resulted in a more positive attitude in learners towards learning English to enhance their employment opportunities as well their

social standing, especially in countries where English is a second or foreign language. Emerging new technologies have also added to the repertoire of methods and techniques of teaching and learning ESL/EFL.

The field of second and foreign language teaching has witnessed drastic paradigm shifts and is constantly in a state of change, with new curriculum frameworks being implemented (including competency based, genre based and content based models), English being introduced at primary rather than secondary level, and teachers being asked

to consider innovations (like multiple intelligences, cooperative learning, learner-centeredness and task-based instruction) (Widdowson 1983; Richards and Rodgers 2001; Richards 2002; Richards and Renandya 2002; Richards and Schmidt 2002; Perur-Nagaratnam and Al-Mekhlafi 2010).

On the other hand, there has been very little change over the past several decades in the field of teaching English literature. Current practices with regard to the teaching of literature to students of English major predominantly seem to encourage content-based and memory-oriented study of literature. A positive development, however, has been the place conceded for literature in an ESL/EFL classroom, although grudgingly. Literature is now viewed as one of the authentic resources that can be used in the language classroom along with other resources, such as newspapers, magazines, notices, information leaflets and brochures. ESL/EFL teachers now have access to a large number of publications that provide useful classroom techniques for using literature (Perur-Nagaratnam and Al-Mekhlafi 2010).

The aim of this article is to trace the major developments relating to the teaching of English literature, to explore the theory and practice in this field, and to examine the dynamics of change, if any. A few possible directions for future work are also suggested in the course of the review.

The Road Travelled

In reviewing the changes that have taken place in the teaching of literature, three basic questions need to be addressed:

1. What are some of the key issues relating to the teaching of literature, especially in an ESL/EFL context?
2. What was our understanding about these issues in the past, i.e. a few decades ago?

3. What is our understanding of those issues now?

The following key issues emerge from the discussion of teachers, teacher educators and researchers:

1. Goals of teaching literature
2. Nature of literary discourse
3. Role of literature in language teaching
4. Approaches to teaching literature
5. Criteria for text selection
6. Assessment of students' learning

It will be interesting to see how our understanding of these issues has changed (or not changed) over the last few decades in relation to each, and what our current beliefs and practices are.

Goals of teaching literature

The goals of teaching literature, according to the teachers surveyed by Akyel and Yalcin (1990:175), are: exposing students to literature to achieve a broader educational and cultural goal, and developing 'literary competence'. There is no mention of developing language competence. It is either assumed to exist in students a priori or expected to result as a by-product of literary studies.

Three primary purposes for using literature may be identified:

1. The study of literature as a cultural and social artifact,
2. The use of literature as a resource for language learning, and
3. The study of literature as literature (Perur-Nagaratnam 1992).

Correspondingly, literature may be used for:

1. Transmitting the cultural and social values embodied in them,
2. Increasing the language proficiency of the learners, or
3. Developing in the learners an adequate capacity for responding personally to literary texts, and interpreting and appreciating them appropriately.

The first of these (a) is a valid purpose for studying literature in an L1 situation,

besides other modes of cultural expression such as music, painting and other fine arts. This does not concern us here, although unfortunately literature is taught even now in many ESL/EFL situations as if it were an L1 setting. If the purpose is (b), i.e. teaching language through literature, our primary concern should be to ensure students' interactive engagement with literary texts used in regular conjunction with other discourse types, and with one another, in ways that would promote language deployment and further language learning. If the purpose, on the other hand, is (c), i.e. teaching literature as literature, the focus should be on enabling students to experience literature personally and to account for the experience inter-subjectively (Perur-Nagaratnam 1992).

Literature is generally included in ESL/EFL curricula at all levels. At primary and secondary education, literature is generally included in the context of a broader conception of reading and literacy in education. At the primary level, the reading of literature is often integrated into other fields of language learning and education and three main purposes are identified:

1. providing an opportunity to tackle a specific theme (e.g., family, friendship, adventure);
2. providing an introduction to the specifics of literature and literary reading; and
3. enhancing the motivation to read (Pieper 2006).

The central purpose of reading at this level is to introduce students to literary reading in such a way that they can enjoy it and develop regular reading habits. In secondary education, literature may develop the status of a discipline, as a distinct subject. The focus will continue to be on students' experiences with literature, but with knowledge of genres drawn in. Some literary history and other contexts of literature and literary reception are also introduced. There is a noticeable shift from

a dominant orientation towards the learner within early school years towards a strong focus on literary works and their 'adequate' reception in later grades (ibid).

At the tertiary level, however, the goal of teaching literature seems to be to transmit the cultural and social values embodied in literary works considered to be the literary heritage, a goal more valid for teaching literature in the L1 situation. The problem with this goal is that the term "culture" refers to manifold concepts and experiences of cultural life in diverse settings (Eagleton 2000). There has been a shift towards a conception of 'culture' which is more open to the variety of cultures and social existence (Pieper 2006). At the tertiary level, literary studies have been influenced by critical theory and sociology of literature.

Literature can only be understood if the student has 'literary competence'. It has not been easy to define the exact nature of this competence, which refers to the ability of a good reader of literature:

the fundamental ability of a good reader of literature is the ability to generalize from the given text to either other aspects of the literary tradition, or personal or social significances outside literature (Brumfit 1985:108; cited in Perur-Nagaratnam and Al-Mekhlafi 2010).

The process of reading is a "process of meaning-creation by integrating one's own needs, understanding and expectations with a written text" (ibid:119). The meaning of a text is conferred on it 'inter-subjectively', i.e. as a group (professional critics, academics, or the community of readers (Fowler 1986:174-180). In recent times there has been a discussion of the use of competence frameworks and statements for describing achievements in literary study (Fleming 2006). The goal of teaching literature should, therefore, be to develop in the learners an adequate capacity for responding personally to literary texts, and

interpreting and appreciating them appropriately.

Nature of literary discourse

Literature can be viewed in at least three different ways: literature as text, literature as messages, and literature as discourse. At one extreme, the linguist treats literature as text by drawing attention primarily to how a piece of literature exemplifies the language system; at the other extreme, the literary critic treats literature as messages and searches for underlying significance or the essential artistic vision the literary text embodies. There is a third and middle view of literature as discourse that shows specifically how literary texts function as a form of communication (Widdowson 1975:6).

Literary discourse is distinguished from other types of normal discourse in several ways. In conventional discourse, i.e. day-to-day communication, one counts on 'schematic knowledge' of contextual meaning and seeks to get some kind of convergence of these 'schemata' or frames of reference. Literary schemata, on the other hand, are created internally, within the literature itself, and are not projected from outside the text (Widdowson 1983: 30).

Secondly, there can be no shared meaning in literature, because we cannot refer to anything outside literature as a point of reference. Literature has no referential truth value, but only representational meaning – it is representative of meaning and does not refer to any meaning outside of itself. This implies that literary discourse is dissociated and dislocated in that sense from any normal social context, and therefore requires the reader to create his or her own schematic information obtained through interpretative procedures different from those required for making sense of texts in the normal reading process (ibid: 31).

Thirdly, the writer of literature is in a way deliberately trying to keep the reader in suspense, so the reader has to be constantly searching for meaning. The literary writer creates realities which engage people's interest and attention (and interpretative abilities) without them participating in those realities in the 'real-world' sense. In essence, the writer of literature is in the problem-setting business, and the reader of literature is in the business of problem-solving par excellence (ibid: 32-33).

Role of literature in language teaching

Literature was removed from most language syllabuses as linguistics increasingly became the point of reference for language teaching. Linguists and applied linguists dismissed literature as irrelevant to language curricula because it did not seem to be down-to-earth and practical (i.e., based on flights of fancy and imagination), or related to the everyday world of the language users and hence did not offer good models for language learners. This was regrettable and literature was banished from language curricula as a result of such "hasty decisions about language teaching methodology", based on "very facile grounds, ill-considered grounds" (Widdowson 1983:34).

Gradually, however, it was realized that, if literature of its nature could provide a resource for developing in learners an important ability to use knowledge of the language for the interpretation of literature as discourse, then it ought to be one element of the language curriculum. In other words, literature is an authentic discourse, readily available to be exploited in the language classroom in a variety of ways (see the section on the approach to literature). This is not to imply that a 'literary approach' to language teaching should replace other approaches like the functional or structural approach.

At present, literature is not treated as a separate and optional entity in the language classroom, but as an integral part of it. This is the result of consistent efforts of applied linguists for over three decades (including but not limited to, Brumfit 1982, 1985; Gower and Pierson 1986; Rodger 1983; Sage 1987; Maley 1989, 1993, 1995; Carter et al. 1989; Brumfit and Carter 1986; Short 1996; Collie and Slater 1987; McRae 1991; Carter and McRae 1996; Carter et al. 1997; and Falvey and Kennedy 1997). This is evident in the integration of literature with skills work, the use of media with literature and the way in which recent developments in understanding discourse (both spoken and written) are drawn upon (Paran 2000:87).

Some underlying issues emerge from the literature on the language-literature interface in relation to using literature for language teaching (Paran 2010; cited in Perur-Nagaratnam and Al-Mekhlafi 2010): First, the role of literature within the mainstream of EFL/ESL is still not firmly established. In spite of the sincere and commendable efforts of the applied linguists mentioned above, there are those who argue against a special and specific function for literature in language teaching and learning, dismissing claims for such a specific role for literature as serving merely an external justification for learning modern languages, an educational rationale tied up with a historical tradition, suggesting that such extraneous goals, aspirations and traditions be abandoned (Edmondson 1997).

That the role of literature in language teaching is still not firmly established is also evident in a number of ways. For instance, the fear of using literature in the language classroom is still prevalent (Bouman 1983; Paran 1998). The number of hours devoted to literature on university courses for English majors is cut down, thus minimizing or reducing its importance. A majority of EFL/ESL teachers are not convinced that literature

is a useful and integral element within language teaching and learning. Many teachers seem to have some resistance to, or misgivings about, incorporating literature in English language teaching (Falvey and Kennedy 1997; Paran 2000). Thus, there is a need to view both language teaching and the part that literature has to play within it as part of the whole educational process and endeavour, and not apart from it (Paran 2000).

A second major issue is the understanding of what 'literature in language learning' actually means. At one extreme, it is understood as the transmission of knowledge about literature and the literary canon; at the other extreme, literature is given no special status, but it is used as just a resource like any other texts to further students' communicative competence. Between these extreme positions, there are those who interpret it as the study of literature as literature, with a focus on developing students' literary competence; there are also those who 'use' literature (rather than 'teach' it), but nevertheless acknowledge its special status within the language. It is thus clear that 'literature in language learning' is interpreted and understood in different ways (Paran 2000:76). There is also a:

tension . . . between an instrumental view of literature as beneficial to the learners' language and a more general, humanistic view of the role of literature (including literature in a foreign language) within a public education system (ibid: 78; cited in Perur-Nagaratnam and Al-Mekhlafi 2010).

The third major issue is the methodology used with literary texts and its role in language learning. With the explosion of interest in the use of literature in EFL/ESL teaching, there has been a corresponding explosion of interest and enthusiasm in the use of language teaching

techniques and methods in teaching literature. Such overenthusiastic attempts have, however, come in for sharp criticism. For example, the use of stylistics on literary texts within EFL has been questioned (Gower 1986); techniques like jigsaw reading cannot be automatically applied to literary texts, which are representational by nature (McRae 1991:111); the use of cloze technique, specifically with poems, has been rejected as 'lexicide and goblin-spotting' (Mackay 1992). (See the section on approaches to teaching literature for a detailed discussion on teaching methodology.)

The pros and cons of using literature in an ESL classroom have been widely discussed (McKay 1982; Widdowson 1983; Elliott 1990; Lazar 1994). The common arguments against using literature in an ESL/EFL curriculum have been summarized as follows:

1. One of the goals of ESL/EFL teaching is to teach language usage and literature cannot help in achieving this goal because of its structural complexity, archaic and unique use of language.
2. The focus in ESL/EFL teaching is on enabling students to meet their academic and occupational goals and needs, and the study of literature will not contribute in any way towards this end; any attention to literature is therefore unnecessary and wasteful.
3. Literature reflects a particular cultural perspective and thus will pose unnecessary difficulties for students at the conceptual level.

Understandably, a rationale for including literature in the ESL/EFL curriculum has also been provided:

1. Literature, being an incomparably rich source of authentic material over a wide range of registers, is an ideal vehicle for illustrating and developing an awareness of language use.

2. Literature will provide attitudinal, affective and experiential factors, which can motivate students to read in English. By fostering an overall increase in students' reading proficiency, literature will contribute to their academic and/or occupational goals.
3. Literature is also an ideal vehicle for introducing cultural assumptions to students. Reading a work of literature can at best be a new experience, deeply felt and personal, and can lead to growth in emotional awareness and maturity, as well as critical thinking.

In the context of reading instruction, literary texts offer possibilities for developing language awareness, because it "encapsulates language in its most subtle and intricate forms where nuances of meaning and ambiguity have to be embraced" (Fleming 2006). Reading of literary texts, however, forms a separate dimension of reading literacy and continues to be hard work, especially with students from backgrounds where reading is not part of the family life style. For such students, there are some problem areas, such as the following:

- stylistic features with which the students do not identify;
- rhetorical features such as metaphor, symbol and allegory;
- structural features – understanding of fictionality and polyvalence, equivalence and variation;
- archaic aspects of language use (i.e., absence of contemporaneity); and
- motivational aspects and the ability to communicate about the texts read (Pieper 2006).

Approaches to teaching literature

Despite these sporadic efforts, however, the teaching of English literature at the undergraduate level as the Literature Major has remained essentially the same throughout this long period –

teacher-centred and teacher-directed, the literary texts being presented to students through lectures, summaries and paraphrases, with little or no involvement of students in understanding and appreciating those texts on their own.

The situation fifty years ago was not different. Traditionally, the language teacher was educated in its literature, who often forced particular works of literature on pupils who were not yet ready for them and attempted transmission of irrelevant information about books and authors, i.e. knowledge about literature, and has nothing to do with the ability to profit from reading the literature itself (Pattison 1963).

The methodology has been confined almost to lectures. Classroom teaching usually consists of a long monologue by the teacher on a piece of literature, this monologue taking the form of the teacher primarily attempting to explain the meaning of the text (often several meanings!) preceded by a 'brief' introduction to the author and his works. Teachers are not adequately trained to teach literature in innovative and creative ways. The teacher may be much admired for his erudition or scholarship, but his lectures are little understood. As a result, students rely almost exclusively on guidebooks and resort to rote learning. In other words, there has been very little reading and study of literature with clearly spelt out objectives and methodology.

Teachers who belong to the 'literature establishment' tend to follow teacher-centred activities, such as informative background lectures, reading the text (mostly aloud) in class, paraphrasing the content, presenting the critical views of established scholars and critics, leading and loaded questions for 'understanding' the text, and requiring students to produce text-related essays (Akyel and Yalcin 1990:176-177).

This 'old' or traditional method of teaching English literature as a body of

received knowledge to be learnt largely through the lecture mode is frequently criticised as being too product-centred, tending to impose the meaning of texts (established by academics and professional critics) on the student (Elliott 1990:192).

The alternative, linguistic approach to literature, i.e. stylistics, it is claimed, will help students 'appreciate' literature more, because 'linguistic analysis' will help make students' 'intuitions' about literary texts more conscious, which will in turn help students talk about texts more articulately and convincingly (Carter 1982; Cummings and Simmons 1983). This approach to literature through stylistics has also come in for criticism similar to the one on the traditional teacher-centred approach: stylistics also tends to focus narrowly on the words on the page as a self-enclosed system, requiring complex linguistic analysis (which is beyond the ability of most EFL/ESL students) for discovering a fixed meaning (Elliott 1990:192). Stylistic activity, instead of aiding students' reading as it is often claimed, may actually impede it. It may run counter to reading, impeding students' reading potential. Analysis can help only if it is totally subservient to reading, as a supplementary tool that helps greater understanding and promotes better reading. "If we are talking about helping students to read, we need to look at what we are talking about in the classroom from the teacher's, not the academic's point of view" (Gower 1986).

It thus becomes clear that neither the traditional approach (transmission of knowledge about literature) nor stylistics approach (linguistic analysis) directly helps students develop literary competence, because both of them tend to impose meaning from without, the literary critic's or the linguist's meaning, as the case may be. Literary competence, on the other hand, comes from the student's ability to confer meaning from within. It is therefore essential that the approach to

literature and the classroom activities should help students with the process of developing this ability of a good reader of literature discussed earlier (Brumfit 1985). The essential requirement for an effective approach to literature from this point of view is to create conditions for students to discover the meaning of texts from within themselves, develop genuine personal response to them, define and articulate their response, and negotiate their meaning as a group (i.e., intersubjectively), rather than having to receive meaning imposed from without (Elliott 1990).

Having recognized the need to focus on the student, literature teachers are increasingly using techniques and classroom activities associated with a communicative approach to language teaching that provide possibilities for adopting a student-centred approach, such as pair work, group work, problem-solving, information gap, attitude gap and opinion gap activities as a supplement to, and sometimes instead of, the traditional lectures, tutorials and seminar discussions (Mackay 1992:199). Such techniques and activities will help to foster a greater level of interaction between the student-reader and text, and between and among students. Such interactions, which are of great importance, are precisely absent in the traditional teacher-centred, lecture-dominated literature classroom.

The activities should get the learners involved at the procedural level of making sense of literary discourse through interaction of some sort and get the learners to relate this procedural activity to their knowledge of the language and of the world. Activities presenting a piece of literature as a problem to be solved provide plenty of scope for discussion and interaction among learners because there is no single right solution to the problem presented (Widdowson 1983).

The main problem teachers face when using literature in an EFL / ESL

situation is not finding suitable texts but rather devising appropriate tasks for them (Paran 2000:83). Presenting literature in regular conjunction with other discourse types helps students identify and understand the use of English for different communicative functions (Widdowson 1983; Short and Candlin 1986). Teachers should get students tuned in to what they are about to read by activating their background knowledge of the content area of the text (e.g., through classroom discussion), plan what assistance the students are likely to need when they are reading, improve students' awareness of the linguistic and rhetorical structure of the text, and devise follow up activities / tasks to develop their sensitivity to the text (Maley and Moulding 1985; Gower 1986; Gower and Pearson 1986; Carter and Long 1987; Collie and Slater 1987; Akyel and Yalcin 1990).

Nevertheless, the overuse of EFL techniques and activities when using literature in the classroom, such as the ones proposed by Maley as 'generic activities' (1993, 1995) and Short (1996), is a matter of serious concern (Gower 1986; McRae 1991:111; Mackay 1992; Paran 2000). By treating literary texts as though they were similar to newspaper articles, teachers would be effectively destroying the very quality that made them choose literature in the first place. This is because when we move into the world of the literary text, the normal criterion of semantic-grammatical appropriacy no longer applies (Mackay 1992). While such activities may be process- rather than product-focused, they are often more difficult for EFL/ESL learners than they appear to be and the possibility of success is very low (Paran 1999).

Language and drama activities can be integrated with literature in a mutually supportive way, as literature provides advanced language learners with highly motivational material of an incomparably rich nature and hence the aim of such an

integration is to enable students to discover the meaning of texts from within themselves, and to negotiate that meaning as a group, rather than have the meaning imposed from without. In this specific situation, literature is being used primarily to develop language skills, but the approach is also applicable to teaching literature in its own right. The essential factor is to create conditions in which students can develop genuine personal response to literary texts (Elliott 1990).

During group discussions, the teacher can take notes on areas of misunderstanding in student's inferences and assumptions on the text. They can give the necessary background information about the author and the text to help students understand the text and its meaning. They can also clarify the underlying meaning of the text by devising guided group discussion, thus bridging the gap between student's content schemata and the underlying meaning of the text (Carrell 1984:47).

The teaching of English literature to students majoring in English, however, has seen very little change over the past few decades. In many classrooms, the teaching of literature has remained unchanged with emphasis on teacher-centred and text-directed approaches and methods (e.g., lectures; period and genre surveys; biographical summaries; teacher's explication and 'critical analyses' of canonical texts; stereotyped exam questions requiring stereotyped answers). Teachers continue to teach literary texts "as finished products, to be unilaterally decoded, analyzed, and explained" (Kramsch 1985: 356; cited in Harper 1988).

Such an approach tends to minimize learner involvement, engagement and participation, and undermines the value of learners' responses to literature as readers in their own right, resulting in frustration and a lack of interest and motivation on the part of learners. Most of our

undergraduate students also have limited linguistic and critical-analytical skills for responding to literary texts as works of art and for articulating their experiences of reading such texts when asked to do so. For them, the course in English literature may become a "painful lesson in deciphering" (Santoni 1972: 434; cited in Harper 1988).

Literature teaching has thus been carried on unchanged in the transmission mode, overemphasizing knowledge about literary texts and authors rather than personal and sensitive response to literature. It is assumed that, while reading literature, students would acquire some competence in reading literature, "as if by osmosis" (Lazar, 1993). Students are blamed unfairly "for difficulties that essentially stem from our own methodological weaknesses and unrealistic expectations" (Scher 1976: 56; cited in Harper 1988).

The teachers of English at the undergraduate level and above have also maintained that applied linguistics cannot make inroads upon literature teaching as such studies are essentially subversive and felt to be a threat to the aesthetic and humanistic dimension of literature. These teachers would maintain that application of linguistic principles or language teaching insights would only amount to 'murdering to dissect' aesthetic artifacts and hence the whole exercise would be demotivating to students. This is not a valid assumption, as it only tends to mystify literature and thus make it inaccessible to a majority of students. Teachers and educational policy makers have not made sincere attempts to maximize output from the educational enterprise by clarifying to themselves what exactly they are seeking to develop in learners except by making vague statements, such as 'sensitizing students to great literature and developing their literary competence'. This is the central problem with literature teaching at the undergraduate level; that is, to specify the particular function of literature in the

educational system in terms of specific objectives and, consequently, to spell out in no vague terms what is meant by the notion of 'literary competence' (Perur-Nagaratnam 1989). Besides, principled ways of matching appropriate methodologies to texts have still not been found and educational and methodological concerns are thus still very much alive (Paran 2000:87).

The role of the teacher in such an educational endeavour needs to be clarified. It has been compared to that of a midwife (Moody 1971:21), or described as an educationalist's in the broadest sense (Rodger 1969:89; Tomlinson 1986:34). He must first and foremost be a teacher and take full responsibility for a truly educational process (Pattison 1963).

Criteria for text selection

The literature syllabus has been hitherto spelt out only in terms of texts and historical periods; learners' needs and interests are neither documented nor considered at the time of preparation of English literature syllabuses. If literary texts are to be used successfully in the language classroom, they must be carefully selected and approached in a manner which promotes an aesthetic interaction between the reader and the text (Gower 1986).

Most teachers (or curriculum planners) choose a text because it is 'good' or 'great literature' and because they like it. Much of the confusion in the selection of literary texts in an ESL/EFL situation stems from a failure to be clear about the goal and purpose of literature in the curriculum, i.e., whether literature is to be used for developing the language skills or for developing students' literary competence. A conflation of these purposes in an ESL/EFL situation will result in students not really benefiting from their exposure to literature because the texts would have been selected for the wrong purpose.

The selection problems are likely to be more tricky if the level of students in terms of their language attainment is low (Widdowson 1983:31). The texts chosen should expose students to good works without frightening them or putting them off literature altogether (Hirvela and Boyle 1988:181). They should demonstrate fundamental aspects of literature, such as setting, theme, plot development, characterization and point of view. They should be contemporary, accessible and meaningful; they should also have direct relevance to the students' situation/life (ibid: 182).

Learners will be most motivated and most open to language input (even through literature), when their emotions, feelings and attitudes are engaged (Tomlinson 1986:34). Texts that are likely to engage the interests of the learners (Widdowson 1983:32) and their attention and feelings (Gower 1986:128) should be chosen. Texts which are extremely difficult on either a linguistic or cultural level will have few benefits (Vincent and Carter 1986:214). In an EFL/ESL situation, one would also look for literature which is in some sense "consistent with the traditions that the learners are familiar with" (Widdowson 1983: 32).

In other words, there should be a balanced selection of texts that cater for the linguistic level and interests of students on a variety of themes that can be exploited for group activities (Akyel and Yalcin 1990:178; Perur-Nagaratnam and Al-Mekhlafi 2010). There should also be a planned approach to the selection of a variety of texts suitable for out-of-class or 'extensive reading' (Moody 1971; Hafiz and Tudor 1989; Akyel and Yalcin 1990). Such an exposure to literature outside the classroom will provide opportunities for sustained, rapid, self-directed reading and broadening students' appreciation of literature (Akyel and Yalcin 1990:178). Encouraging students to read literary texts, especially fiction, at an early stage will help

develop stable habits of reading in their spare time and contribute to reading literacy. Extensive reading of fiction will also lead to automatization of word recognition and extensive textual knowledge on a general scale (Pieper 2006).

Literary texts are usually chosen to familiarize students with representative masterpieces of British and American literature, often referred to as the 'canon' (Akyel and Yalcin 1990). The tendency towards canonical texts still seems to prevail, as shown in the National Curriculum in Britain, which stresses the 'English literary heritage' (Goodwyn and Findlay 2002). This is generally to be expected since the introduction to genres and to literary history will rely on exemplary texts. The canon has also been reintroduced where central assessments take place (e.g., Germany) (Pieper 2006). The emphasis on the canon has, however, been often criticized. The canon of the heritage of a particular nation, such as Britain, often seems exclusive and hence inappropriate, especially in an ESL/EFL setting. Instead of following an explicit canon, criteria which reflect the learning process and its purposes should inform and direct text selection (Pieper 2006).

In countries where non-native varieties of English are spoken, wider functions can be served by the use of literary works written in those varieties (e.g., India and Africa). The use of such texts will make it easier for the teacher to enhance students' awareness of their own society, their sense of self-identity, their communicative competence within their community and their command of the standard language itself (Talib 1992). A pedagogy which recognizes that people learn things best when they want to learn them may justify using teenage novels and even pulp fiction (Ronnqvist and Sell 1994).

There is a strong case for incorporating multicultural literature

including postcolonial literature in the literature curriculum. Multicultural literature refers to world literatures either originally written in English or translated into English (including minority and immigrant literature); postcolonial literature is defined more narrowly as writing by the peoples formerly colonized by Britain (e.g., Africa, India) (the term 'commonwealth literature' is also used), but much of it is also of interest and relevance to peoples colonized by other European powers like France, Portugal and Spain.

There is a possibility that multicultural literature may be trivialized, or misused to reinforce misconceptions, stereotypes and prejudices rather than to promote understanding of the 'self' and 'other', if teachers are not oriented to teach such texts (Cai 2002; cited in Mohammadzadeh 2009). The advantages and benefits of incorporating multicultural literature, however, are many. Students will be introduced to an exciting and challenging range of non-canonical world literature, and to the relationship of culture, history and politics to the study of literature as literature. This exposure will help students develop not only a critical understanding of literary variations, but also a better appreciation and critical awareness of regional and global varieties of English (Mohammadzadeh 2009).

In many EFL/ESL situations, the English Major students, a vast majority of whom have low proficiency in English, are exposed to challenging and often unsuitable canonical texts, which are beyond their understanding and linguistic competence. The teacher, therefore, resorts to lecturing, explicating and translating the texts, and dictating notes. The current practices tend to promote content-based and memory-oriented study of literature; examinations also seek to test students' memory of reproducible content (Carter and Long 1990). The inevitable result of all of these is that the students

hardly feel the necessity to have a direct encounter with the texts – they are passive listeners, and are not encouraged to react to what they read, or think critically, or do any original writing on the texts. (Perur-Nagaratnam 1989; Mekala 2009).

In this context, the importance of knowing students' needs and attitudes towards studying literature in an ESL/EFL setting should be considered. Student's attitudes towards studying literature and their literary competence are not given due importance in literature curriculum design, and an analysis of learner needs is usually neglected (Hirvela and Boyle 1988; Akyel and Yalcin 1990; Perur-Nagaratnam and Al-Mekhlafi 2009). Students have many fears and anxieties about studying literature, especially poetry – poetry was found to be most difficult, problematic and intimidating. These fears are based partly on their lack of background or previous exposure to poetry, and partly on a certain mystique about literature (Hirvela and Boyle 1988; Perur-Nagaratnam and Al-Mekhlafi 2009). Student attitudes, along with teacher goals and suitable texts, will make the course satisfying to both students and teachers.

Although students may generally feel daunted by literary texts, they can be used provided they are “justified by reference to the students and their purposes insofar as these are reflected in the syllabus” (Brumfit 1982:79). The barriers can be broken if even poems are selected carefully and used intelligently, and the learners can be involved in thinking, feeling and interacting in many ways. (Tomlinson 1986:41).

Assessment of students' learning

The teaching and study of literature are largely exam oriented and the evaluation of literary learning has only been emphasizing rote memory and reproduction of borrowed critical opinions with little or no attention paid to students' spoken skills. The wash back effect is

negative. The focus is not on learning and liberal education, but solely on passing examinations and acquiring a meaningless and valueless paper qualification.

Comprehension of literary texts is often assessed with general text-comprehension tasks. Attempts are sometimes made to assess students' understanding of isolated features, such as metaphor, of narrative structures, or of genre specifics (Fleming 2006). It is more common for assessment tasks to rely on exemplary texts where students can make use of their acquired knowledge and skills

Conventional tests of students' literary and language skills include the following types of questions:

1. Context questions (what is significant in terms of plot or character) – e.g., Explain a short passage with reference to its context;
2. Paraphrase – e.g., Render this passage into modern English, summarizing the main information;
3. Questions on tropes without requiring students to analyze their significance or evaluate their effectiveness – e.g., Identify the simile / metaphor / personification / alliteration, etc. in the passage;
4. Descriptive and plot-based essay questions which require students' retrieval of information from the text, a process which puts those with a good memory at an advantage – e.g., Describe and discuss the role of women characters in Shakespeare; Discuss 'My Last Duchess' as a dramatic monologue;
5. Evaluative and critical questions (with a focus on plot or character) – e.g., Evaluate the effectiveness of soliloquies in Shakespeare's plays (Perur-Nagaratnam 1989; Carter and Long 1990).

Such conventional tests should be supplemented, if not replaced, by others

which are obviously more language-based, i.e. dealing with general comprehension, textual focus and personal response. The assessment methods should make students go back to the text and the uses of language in it as the centre of their experiences (Carter and Long 1990) and within the classroom, the teacher needs to devise activities that will assist in the process of developing the skill that might be measured finally in the literary essay. Assessment tasks, to be effective, should use literary texts which presuppose little background or contextual knowledge (Pieper 2006).

Conclusion

It will be clear from this brief account of the current status of the teaching of literature in ESL/EFL situations that a lot of work was done during the 1980s and the 1990s, and that almost all of

it was focused on using English literature in an ESL/EFL curriculum for teaching the language. It looks as though none of this work has had any impact on the practice of teaching literature as literature to the English major students. Humanistic approaches suggest that learning should take place in a stress-free, fun-filled and interesting atmosphere. It is, therefore, high time that the advocates of innovative and creative teaching methods and teachers of literature work together to make literature teaching less teacher-dominated and more learner-centred, so that the business of teaching and studying literature becomes relevant, interesting and meaningful to both teachers and students. It is hoped that such cooperation and coordinated efforts will take the field of literary studies at the undergraduate level forward.

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