

## **Developing Writing Skills through Literature**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The present paper underscores the need and importance of literary texts for a comprehensive attainment of higher levels of language skills. It is based on the primary assumption that teaching literature or literary texts makes language acquisition more use-focused instead of form-focused. Learning literature creates many positive attitudes in learning and acquisition of English as a foreign or second language. This paper tries to touch the benefits of the inclusion of literature or literary texts in EFL curriculum at all the stages of language learning in general.

Literary texts take into account the functions of language in different realistic situations outside the conditioned atmosphere of the classrooms. The employment of such literary components such as narratives, short stories, one person acts, fables, dialogues and short social situations, will help learners to use different forms of the language in one notion of the language. It will, more importantly, motivate and inspire the learners to know more and keep his or her interest intact. Use of literature as a technique for teaching both basic language skills (i.e. reading, writing, listening and speaking) and language areas (i.e. vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation) is very popular within the field of foreign language learning and teaching nowadays. Moreover, in translation courses, many language teachers make their students translate literary texts like drama, poetry and short stories into the mother tongue. Since translation gives students the chance to practice the lexical, syntactic, semantic, pragmatic and stylistic knowledge they have acquired in other courses, translation both as an Application area covering four basic skills and as the fifth skill is emphasized in language teaching.

In the following section, why language teachers use literary texts in the foreign Language classroom and main criteria for selecting suitable literary texts in foreign language classes are stressed and the reader will be familiar with the underlying reasons and criteria for language teachers' using and selecting literary texts.

### **KEYWORDS**

Literature; Literary Text; Culture.

### **Introduction**

If you want to write well . . . read, read, and then read some more. Read good writing. Read bad writing. Learn to know the difference. Note for simplicity of style: noun, verb, object; noun, verb, object. It worked for Hemingway, who often said that his ultimate goal was to create the

perfect sentence. Read some Hemingway, and not just his novels, but some of his early newspaper writing. There's never been better news and feature writing, ever. When you read the works of these and other fine writers, notice the simplicity of their language and how they vary their sentence structure and length. Some

sentences number two or three words; others run an entire paragraph. There are countless tips on writing well, but I leave you with this one: read first, and then write." (Bill Reed)

Before doing any study of a literary text with your learners, one idea would be to ask them what they think literature is. The study of literature and creative writing offers intellectual rewards, personal fulfilment and social, political and ethical awareness, and is a good thing in its own right. It also is a vehicle for learning an array of skills which will be essential for whatever you go on to do after graduating.

Many authors, critics and linguists have puzzled over what literature is. One broader explanation of literature says that literary texts are products that reflect different aspects of society. They are cultural documents which offer a deeper understanding of a country or countries. Other linguists say that there is no inherent quality to a literary text that makes a literary text; rather it is the interpretation that the reader gives to the text (Eagleton 1983). This brings us back to the above definition in the sense that literature is only literature if it is considered as art.

The discourse that whether literature can be helpful in the learning of foreign language has evoked divergent views. It is widely believed that the study of language has to be in accordance with and with special reference to the needs of the language learners. There have been different points of views about the place of literature or literary texts in the foreign language or second language curriculum.

Prof. Charles Blatchford from the Department of English as a second language at the University of Hawaii (1972) opines, "The study of English literature is a luxury that cannot be indulged during the limited amount of time allocated to English". Prof. Blatchford's expression is based on his understanding that the learners of EFL at the primarily and secondary levels are primarily

concerned with the acquisition of the functional skills of the target language that would help them in dealing with everyday occurrences that can be expressed through the basic skills

## **Discussion**

Literature can be a powerful and motivating source for writing in ESL / EFL, both as a model and as subject matter. Literature as a model occurs when student writing becomes closely similar to the original work or clearly imitates its content, theme, organization, and /or style. However, when student writing exhibits original thinking like interpretation or analysis, or when it emerges from, or is creatively stimulated by, the reading, literature serves as subject matter. Literature houses in immense variety of themes to write on in terms of guided, Free, controlled and other types of writing.

## **Why Use Literature?**

There are many good reasons for using literature in the classroom. Here are a few (Lindsay Clandfield):

- Literature is authentic material. It is good to expose learners to this source of unmodified language in the classroom because the skills they acquire in dealing with difficult or unknown language can be used outside the class.
- Literature encourages interaction. Literary texts are often rich in multiple layers of meaning, and can be effectively mined for discussions and sharing feelings or opinions.
- Literature expands language awareness. Asking learners to examine sophisticated or non-standard examples of language (which can occur in literary texts) makes them more aware of the norms of language use (Widdowson, 1975 quoted by Lazar 1993).

- Literature educates the whole person. By examining values in literary texts, teachers encourage learners to develop attitudes towards them. These values and attitudes relate to the world outside the classroom.
- Literature is motivating. Literature holds high status in many cultures and countries. For this reason, students can feel a real sense of achievement at understanding a piece of highly respected literature. Also, literature is often more interesting than the texts found in course books.

### **Literature as a Model for Writing**

There are two main kinds of writing that can be based on literature as a model:

- **Controlled Writing:** Controlled model-based exercises which are used mostly in beginning-level writing typically require rewriting passages in arbitrary ways to practice specific grammatical structures. For instance, students can be reporters doing a live newscast, or they can rewrite a third person passage into first person.
- **Reproducing the Model:** This activity comprises techniques like paraphrase, summary, and adaptation. These techniques are very beneficial ESL / EFL writing exercises. In paraphrasing, students are required to use their own words to rephrase the things that they see in print or hear aloud. Since paraphrase coincides with the students' trying to make sense of the poem, it is a strikingly useful tool with poetry. Summary work goes well with realistic short stories and plays, where events normally follow a chronological order and have concrete elements like plot, setting, and character to guide

student writing. Adaptation requires rewriting prose fiction into dialog or, reversely, rewriting a play or a scene into narrative. This activity enables students to be aware of the variations between written and spoken English.

### **Literature as Subject Matter for Writing**

Finding appropriate material for their writing classes is sometimes difficult for composition teachers since writing has no subject matter of its own. One benefit of having literature as the reading content of a composition course is that the readings become the subject matter for compositions. In a composition course whose reading content is literature, students make inferences, formulate their own ideas, and look closely at a text for evidence to support generalizations. Thus, they learn how to think creatively, freely and critically. Such training helps them in other courses which require logical reasoning, independent thinking, and careful analysis of the text.

There are mainly two kinds of writing based on literature as subject matter:

- **Writing "On or About" Literature:** Writing "on or about literature" comprises the traditional assignments (written responses to questions, paragraph writing, in-class essays, and take-home compositions) in which students analyze the work or they speculate on literary devices and style. Writing "on or about" can occur before students begin to read a work. The teacher generally discusses its theme or an issue it raises, and the students write about it with reference to their own life experience. This helps interest them in the work and makes them ready for reading and writing about it.
- **Writing "Out of" Literature:** Writing "out of" literature means

making use of a literary work as a springboard for composition - creative assignments developed around plot, characters, setting, theme, and figurative language.

There are many forms of writing out of literature, such as:

- **Adding to the Work:** This comprises writing imaginary episodes or sequels, or, in the case of drama, “filling in” scenes for off-stage actions that are only referred to in the dialog.
- **Changing the Work:** Students can make up their own endings by comparing the author’s ending to their own. Short stories can be rewritten in whole or in part from the point of view of a character versus a third person narrator or of a different character.
- **Drama-Inspired Writing:** It is possible to derive drama-inspired writing activities from plays, short stories, novels, and sometimes poetry. The student steps into the consciousness of a character and writes about that character’s attitudes and feelings.
- **A Letter Addressed to Another Character:** The student can write a letter to one of the characters, in which he / she gives the character personal advice about how to

overcome a particular problem or situation (Stern 1991: 336).

### Conclusion

I think all kinds of writing can come from using literary texts for example writing a letter to the author of the book, or a letter from one character to another character. Writing is a process, from gathering ideas through checking what has been written. It is also a product, a text. The process of composing starts with planning, and goes on with constant reviewing, revising and editing the work. The writing process involves also communicating (with a reader in mind- a friend, an institution) and therefore is the content and style influenced by audience. Learners can revise and edit their own work that helps them improve the writing process. According to Hancock and McDonald, the writing product is a text with a purpose (to inform, to thank, to request...). The functions and forms of written texts differ from one another. The accuracy (grammar, vocabulary, spelling, capitalization) and the appropriacy of the content (logically organized, original, and interesting) are keys to success of a written text. (Hancock, McDonald, 2000)

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