

LEARNING LANGUAGE THROUGH LITERATURE: THE MOST SOUGHT AFTER PRACTICE

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Abstract

Language through literature is a highly effective way of knowing, learning and mastering any language. Today English is the language of world's largest population firmly establishing its powerful status as the language of communication in almost all sectors that includes education, computer, science and technology, business, entertainment, politics, agriculture, international and bilateral relations, economic affairs, etc. The importance of English is well recognized all over the world. Different types of methods, techniques and methods have come into existence in the field of teaching and learning English and its applications have been embarked long years ago. The present paper is an endeavour and disclosure of an old approach of learning English with new perspectives and emphasizes how this approach assists teaching-learning English language in the present scenario with a thorough explanation.

1. Introduction

In recent years, the role of literature as a basic component and source of authentic texts of the language curriculum rather than an ultimate aim of English instruction has been gaining momentum. Among language educators, there has been a hot debate as to how, when, where, and why literature should be incorporated in ESL / EFL curriculum. Many teachers consider the use of literature in language teaching as an interesting and worthy concern. In this paper, why a language teacher should use literary texts in the language classroom, what sort of literature language teachers should use with language learners, literature and the teaching of language skills, and benefits of different genres of literature to language teaching will be taken into account. Thus, the place of literature as a tool rather than an end in teaching English as a second or foreign language will be unearthed.

2. Reasons for Using Literary Texts in Foreign Language Classes

According to Collie and Slater (1990:3), there are four main reasons which lead a language teacher to use literature in the classroom. These are valuable authentic material, cultural enrichment, language enrichment and personal involvement. In addition to these four main

reasons, universality, non-triviality, personal relevance, variety, and interest are some other factors requiring the use of literature as a powerful resource in the classroom context.

1. Valuable Authentic Material

Literature is authentic material. Most works of literature are not created for the primary purpose of teaching a language. Many authentic samples of language in real-life contexts (i.e. travel timetables, city plans, forms, pamphlets, cartoons, or advertisements) are included within recently developed course materials. Thus, in a classroom context, learners are exposed to actual language samples of real life. In reading literary texts, because students have also to cope with language intended for native speakers, they become familiar with many different linguistic forms, communicative functions and meanings.

2. Cultural Enrichment

For many language learners, the ideal way to increase their understanding of verbal and nonverbal aspects of communication in the country within which that language is spoken - a visit or an extended stay - is just not probable. For such learners, literary works, such as novels, plays, short stories, etc. facilitate understanding how communication takes place in that country. Though the world of a novel, play, or short story is an imaginary one, it presents a full and colorful setting in which characters from many social / regional backgrounds can be described. A reader can discover the way the characters in such literary works see the world outside Literature is perhaps best regarded as a complement to other materials used to develop the foreign learner's understanding into the country whose language is being learned. Also, literature adds a lot to the cultural grammar of the learners.

3. Language Enrichment

Literature provides learners with a wide range of individual lexical or syntactic items. Students become familiar with many features of the written language, reading a substantial and contextualized body of text. They learn about the syntax and discourse functions of sentences. Students also become more productive and adventurous when they begin to perceive the richness and diversity of the language they are trying to learn and begin to make use of some of that potential themselves. Thus, they improve their communicative and cultural competence in the authentic richness, naturalness of the authentic texts.

4. Personal Involvement

Literature can be useful in the language learning process owing to the personal involvement that fosters in the reader. Once the student reads a literary text, he begins to inhabit the text. He is drawn into the text. Understanding the meanings of lexical items or phrases becomes less significant than pursuing the development of the story. The student becomes enthusiastic to

find out what happens as events unfold via the climax; he feels close to certain characters and shares their emotional responses. In this process, he can remove the identity crisis and develop into an extrovert.

3. Literature and the Teaching of Language Skills

Literature plays an important role in teaching four basic language skills like reading, writing, listening and speaking. However, when using literature in the language classroom, skills should never be taught in isolation. Teachers should try to teach basic language skills as an integral part of oral and written language use, as part of the means for creating both referential and interactional meaning, not merely as an aspect of the oral and written production of words, phrases and sentences.

3.1. Literature and Reading

ESL / EFL teachers should adopt a dynamic, student-centered approach toward comprehension of a literary work. In reading lesson, discussion begins at the literal level with direct questions of fact regarding setting, characters, and plot which can be answered by specific reference to the text. When students master literal understanding, they move to the inferential level, where they must make speculations and interpretations concerning the characters, setting, and theme, and where they produce the author's point of view. After comprehending a literary selection at the literal and inferential levels, students are ready to do a collaborative work. That is to state that they share their evaluations of the work and their personal reactions to it - to its characters, its themes, and the author's point of view. This is also the suitable time for them to share their reactions to the work's natural cultural issues and themes. The third level, the personal/evaluative level stimulates students to think imaginatively about the work and provokes their problem-solving abilities.

3.2. Literature and Writing

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.

3.3. Literature, Speaking, and Listening

The study of literature in a language class, though being mainly associated with reading and writing, can play an equally meaningful role in teaching both speaking and listening. Oral

reading, dramatization, improvisation, role-playing, pantomiming, reenactment, discussion, and group activities may center on a work of literature.

Oral Reading

Language teachers can make listening comprehension and pronunciation interesting, motivating and contextualized at the upper levels, playing a recording or video of a literary work, or reading literature aloud themselves. Having students read literature aloud contributes to developing speaking as well as listening ability. Moreover, it also leads to improving pronunciation. Pronunciation may be the focus before, during, and / or after the reading.

Drama

Needless to say, literature-based dramatic activities are valuable for ESL / EFL. They facilitate and accelerate development of the oral skills since they motivate students to achieve a clearer comprehension of a work's plot and a deeper comprehension and awareness of its characters. Though drama in the classroom can assume many forms, there are three main types, which are *dramatization, role-playing, and improvisation*.

Dramatization:

Dramatization requires classroom performance of scripted materials. Students can make up their own scripts for short stories or sections of novels, adapting them as closely as possible to the real text. Based on the story, they must guess what the characters would say and how they would say it. Scripts written by students are also probable with plays. Poems comprising one or more personae may also be scripted by students. Students should attentively read assigned sections of dialog in advance and be able to answer questions about characters and plot. They should indicate vocabulary, idioms, or dialog they don't understand and words they cannot pronounce. Students next rehearse the scene with their partners. Although they don't memorize it, they learn it well enough to make eye contact and say their lines with meaning and feeling. Moreover, they discuss semiotic aspects of staging the scene (i.e. facial expressions, gestures, and the physical aspects). At last, the dramatization is presented before the class.

Improvisation and Role-Playing:

Both improvisation and role-playing may be developed around the characters, plot, and themes of a literary work. Improvisation is a more systematic activity, i.e., a dramatization without a script. There is an identifiable plot with a beginning, middle, and end in improvisation. However, in role playing, students picture characters from the work being read and join in a speaking activity other than a dramatization, such as an interview or panel discussion.

Group Activities

Making each student responsible for facts and ideas to be contributed and discussed, group activities stimulates total participation. All students are involved and the participation is multidirectional. When teaching English through literature, some of the group activities used in language classroom is *general class discussion*, *small-group work*, *panel discussions*, and *debates*. All of these group activities both develop the speaking abilities of the students and give importance to pronunciation practice. Teachers indicate pronunciation errors of the students during the act of such activities so as to correct such errors (Stern 1991:337).

5. Conclusion

Literature plays an important role in the English programs of many non-English speaking countries. However, there are some problems encountered by language teachers within the area of teaching English through literature. First, there are very few pedagogically-designed appropriate materials that can be used by language teachers in a language classroom. Second, there is a lack of preparation in the area of literature teaching in TESL / TEFL programs. Third, there is the absence of clear-cut objectives defining the role of literature in ESL /EFL. Many instructors try to include literature in their classroom, but lack the background and training in that field.

The teacher has an important role in teaching English through literature. First, he should determine the aim of language teaching in relation to the needs and expectations of the students. Giving a questionnaire or interviewing with the students orally, the teacher can set up the aim and the objectives of the language teaching. Second, he should select the appropriate language teaching method, teaching techniques, and classroom activities. Then, the teacher should select the literary texts relevant to the aim and the objectives of his teaching. While selecting literary texts to be used in language classroom, the students' language proficiency, interests, age, sex, etc should be taken into account in order not to bore students with inappropriate materials. At elementary levels, for example, students should be given simplified or specially written stories. At advanced levels, however, students are given literature in its original form so that they can develop their literary competence in the target language. To put it another way, students learn practically the figurative and daily use of the target language in the literary texts and encounter different genres of literature (i.e. poems, short stories, plays, etc.) at advanced levels.

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