

Recognizing the Importance of Literature and Integration in ELT Classes

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Abstract

Recognition of the importance of literature and its integration into foreign language education are the main issues of this article which are followed by some classroom activities for the enrichment of learners' language. This paper analyses how reading of literary genres such as poetry, drama or short story, helps language learners in developing critical and analytical thinking, ability to work independently and presenting their own arguments with supportive evidence texts and quotations from literature. Considering the usage of literature in English language teaching as an interesting and worthy concern, this paper proposes how to choose a literary text to use literature effectively while facilitating the skills in language learners proving it a kind of magical door to be opened for learning easily. Moreover the authenticity of literary texts, being the resources of cultural and language enrichment, leads the learners practice the real life situations by facing the actual language samples from real life.

Keywords: Literature, language, analytic, integration, recognition, culture.

I. Introduction

Most often literature is read as a free time activity to be enjoyed in leisure hours after the students finish their assignments. The attitude of the facilitator in the classroom becomes very important at this point. If a facilitator thinks that the learners should spend time in reading literature after they finish all the class assignments and home assignments from their course books and skills books, this kind of attitude leads the learners to consider reading literature as unimportant issue not to be paid consideration which is bad for long term. Language learners who are taught by the attitude that books are not important and that the enjoyment of reading is secondary to the practice of endless skills and completion of a number workbook pages, consider reading as unpleasant activity. Reading is the most important skill in language learning and as Arkan states-

"reading is the solid rock around which all other skill-based activities are situated. In fact, when used appropriately, reading becomes a gift which opens the magical doors to a world of literature". (Arkan: 70)

For some language teachers, the use of literature has been a very commonly used technique in both learning and teaching a foreign language. In recent times a renewed interest on the issue has emerged and quite a lot has been written on this subject. Many scholars like Kelly and Krishnan (1995), Gilroy and Parkinson (1997) discuss how to use literature to teach English as a foreign language and the place of literature in foreign language teaching. In the book *Incorporating Literature in ESL Instruction*, H. Sage considers, *"the use of literature in language teaching as an interesting and worthy concern"*. (Sage; 1987) Recognizing the importance of literature into foreign language education are the two important issues of this paper.

In the classroom, literature acts both as a tool to learn a foreign language and culture by improving the reading skills and it is also an inevitable source for the personal growth of the young learners. By reading a literary text students can enhance their critical and analytical thinking skills, capability to take decision independently and present their own arguments and justifications with supportive logical instances from literary texts. In his article on use of literature, Ghosn states,

"Literature can act as a powerful change agent by developing learners' intercultural awareness while at the same time nurturing empathy, a tolerance for diversity, and emotional intelligence". (Ghosn; 2002, p. 172)

Strengthened emotional intelligence helps learners to understand the feelings of others and react accordingly being perceptible and sensible. Goleman says, *"Emotional intelligence, which is essential for empathy and tolerance, is the understanding of feelings, both of one's own and others"*. (Goleman; 1995) Literature in foreign language classrooms for young learners should be taken seriously by the facilitators as it plays a vital role for the readiness for reading skills and gives them a great deal of opportunity to exercise these skills. Literary genres such as short story, poetry, and drama can be used in language classrooms by language teachers.

II. Reasons for integrating literature in ELT classes

Although the main reason behind using literature is to teach a foreign language, facilitators use literature in the classrooms for many other reasons. According to Collie and Slater (1990, p. 3), there are basically these following reasons to use literature in the classrooms:-

Valuable Authentic Material

Literature is an authentic tool to teach and learn a foreign language. In a foreign language classroom this authenticity leads the learners practice the real life situations by facing the actual language samples of real life. The speeches practiced in the newspapers, magazines, bus timetables etc. give the sense of genuineness. As literature is unaffected and good readable material therefore learners increases their language awareness while dealing with the texts.

Language Fortification

By using literary texts in a classroom situation the learners become accustomed with the characteristics of the written language.

"Learners broaden and enrich their own thinking and writing skills when they read a substantial and contextualized body of text". (Collie & Slater: 1990)

They learn about the syntax and discourse functions of sentences in addition with the range of possible structures, ways of relating ideas and thoughts. The students develop their writing skills and become more productive and imaginative in their own writings.

Literature encourages interaction between the learners as their share the ideas of each other. Literary texts contain several layers of meaning, which leads the learners use their imagination and this situation promotes discussion on their feelings and opinions. Study of literature makes the learners opinionated and perceptive.

Cultural Enrichment

Although the ideal way of learning a foreign language is to spend time in the country within which that language is spoken this is just not probable for every learner. For such learners, in order to increase the understanding of different aspects of communication, short stories, poems, plays and other literary texts become important tools for real life communication experiences. Such literary texts assist the learners in understanding how communication takes place in that country. As the characters come from many social / regional backgrounds, students find the settings and the language more colourful in a literary text. This way the learners have a better chance to understand the country whose language is being learned.

Personality Development

Language motivates and educates a whole persona. The learners observe the moral values in the literary texts and form positive attitudes towards life. These values and attitudes relate them to the world outside the classroom in the public sphere where they are going to play a bigger role further in life.

While reading highly appreciated literary texts, they try to understand and feel accomplished by those studies. Moreover learners find literature texts in classrooms more interesting and thought-provoking than the ordinary reading texts found in their text books. It helps in developing their personality with positive attitude.

Personal Involvement

Personal involvement of the learners is another important reason for using literature in ELT classes. While reading a literary text the learner feels enthusiastic by that text and focus on the story rather than the form used. The learner deals emotionally attached with the story and the characters which go on in her/his mind for long time. Such repercussions usually have long-term effect in shaping their personality and leading the whole learning process.

III. Selection of a literary text for language classrooms

Choosing the appropriate material for the class is one of the most important things while using literature in the language classrooms. In order to do this there has to be criteria for selecting literary texts. The nature of the course should be considered while choosing. Nature of the syllabus is decided according to the levels of the learners and their reason for learning the language. Nature of the learners is also equally significant. Here, the age of the learner is an important factor. If the learner is not mature enough to understand the text then the facilitator should find a text which fits the maturity level of the learner's mind.

While selecting a literary text for the classrooms, learners' cultural and educational background also plays the role of very important factors. The language teacher should try to choose appropriate texts taking the cultural and educational background of the learners into genuine consideration. In order to do this a facilitator can make necessary changes in order to make the text fit for his teaching environment where students can learn the language in the best way.

The interest of the learners becomes one of the important factors in the selection of a literary text. It's a difficult task to find a literary text in accordance to the flair of each student. In order to do this, there are couple of methods which can be used. In the book *Literature and Language Teaching*, Lazar tells that a facilitator can-

- *give a list of names of the literary texts and ask them to choose one.*
- *give learners a list of topics and ask them to choose five that they find interesting.*
- *prepare a questionnaire designed to find out their areas of interest.*
- *let the students choose their own literary texts and study on it individually if the teacher wishes to personalize the study.* (Lazar: p. 56)

To teach English effectively and for keeping the learners enthusiastic and lively to learn the language some interesting activities should be taken to perform in the classrooms. Cameron says about young learners-

"they want to please the teacher rather than their peer group. They also lose interest very quickly and they are less able to keep their motivation compared to adult learners. In order to get away from this handicap, teachers may design some simple activities using literature to use for their young learners. (Cameron: 2001)

IV. Some simple activities to teach with English Literature

Some simple activities are given to give an idea to the teachers of English for young learners.

Activity 1

Level	Elementary
Language Focus	Word order
Skill Focus	Listening

Procedure:

- The students are given a song lyric that are scrambled.
- Then the teacher makes the students to listen to the song.
- While listening to the song, the students are asked to put the song lyrics in the right order.

Activity 2

Level	All levels
Language Focus	Creative writing
Skill Focus	Writing

Procedure:

- The students are asked to listen a well known tale.
- After listening the tale the students are asked to write a different ending to the story.
- The teacher asks the students to try to write an ending which is different from the original.

Activity 3

Level	Advanced
Language Focus	Drama, Role play
Skill Focus	Speaking

Procedure:

- The teacher gives the students a handout of a play and asks them to study the different chapters of the play in groups and rehearse their part of the play until the following lesson.
- During the following lesson the teacher asks the students to perform their part on the stage.
- After the stage performance is over, the teacher asks the audience to evaluate their performance by giving reasons of their evaluation.

Activity 4

Level	Elementary
Language Focus	Creative thinking, Scrambled text
Skill Focus	Listening, Speaking

Procedure:

- The teacher reads the short story in class.
- Teacher divides the class into two groups and the story into two parts.
- The teacher asks the first group to draw pictures about the first part of story and the second group to draw last part of the story.
- After drawing, they tell the story again using their own pictures.
- This activity may be more suitable in less crowded classes.

Activity 5

Level	All levels
Language Focus	Drama
Skill Focus	Writing

Procedure:

- The teacher writes down enough number of scenes for two people and put into a box.
- Then ask the students to choose a pair to work with. The pairs pick one of the scenes from the box.
- The students are asked to write a dialogue between the two people they have picked.
- After the students write their dialogue, the teacher gives number to each pair and once again.
- This time the groups act the dialogue they pick from the box.

Activity 6

Level	Upper Intermediate
Language Focus	Collecting the information
Skill Focus	Reading, Writing

Procedure:

- The teacher brings a short story to the class and asks the students to read it silently.
- The teacher walk in the class and helps the students who have difficulty in understanding the story.
- After the students finish reading the story, the teacher asks to write a summary of the story they read.

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