

The Role of Literature in Teaching of English Language: Challenges and Strategies

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Abstract

Language is associated with culture and literature reflects human culture of all generations in various situations. Naturally, it can be claimed that the use of literature in language classes encourages more thoughtful and purposeful language learning. Language learning requires acquiring four skills of reading comprehension, writing, listening and speaking. English teachers have to select those literary texts which may serve their goal. Choosing appropriate texts in the first step to teach English in the ESL/EFL classroom, literature is a good resource of accurate diction, diverse sentence patterns, and passionate narratives. Literary texts, especially short stories, provide teachers and learners of English with a lot of pre-reading and post-reading activities, the ones which stimulate the learners' imagination results in their creativity. English teachers should acquaint themselves with language use to develop their own competence and understand language as a social phenomenon, and it is literature that creates this acquaintance in English teachers. If literary works are selected according to the needs level of learners, and age of learners, then literature will be the effective source for teaching and learning language. As such the present paper proposes to discuss the benefits of teaching English language through literature.

My work is mainly based on secondary source of information, such as published documents, books, autobiographical writings and journals etc.

Key Words: Creativity, culture, EFL, ESL, imagination, language and literature

Introduction:

Today in India, a new generation is coming up; a generation that travels a lot in countries where English is a first language, works in place where English is the lingua franca and consequently, carries home to others generations the same English as a medium of communication. The liberalization of the Indian economy ushered in all kinds of reasons to learn the English language, while specialized in English, joined either teaching or the civil services, now a whole new spectrum of job

opportunities has opened up. There are now call centers that need trainers to equip their employees with communication skills; there are multinationals, who have been recruiting marketing staff, needed to be taught spoken English; there are medical transcription centers which need efficient translators and reporters. Those desirous of immigration to the west needed professional help for clearing tests like TOFEL and IELTS. Hence for avenues where ELTR came to be required in India are unlimited English language is like magical stick which may

bestow anything imaginable on the fortunate one- glamour, power, prestige, social status, money etc.

Exposition:

The Language versus Literature:

The language versus literature debate is very much alive and kicking in India, mainly because of faulty teaching methodology and incompetent teachers. The students came to literature class of awe and fear of the language. The curriculum is inelastic and allows no space of innovation for the motivated teachers. It teams up with examination system that seems to have replaced the educational system along the problem of overcrowded classroom in stifling the desire to change the situation. The students can clear the examination without reading the prescribed texts, because the present examination system tests only the writing speed and the memory of the students. The prevalent methodology in the classroom is the very old fashioned 'chalk and talk' method that involves delivering very unromantic monologues to the huge and silent classroom.

The Role of Literature in ELT:

If we define literature from the language teaching point of view, we may cite the comment of Arthur Baird who stays, 'Literature is the use of language effectively in suitable conditions' (*Arthur Baird, 1968: 203, cited in Turker 199: p-300*). Arthur means to say that literary texts can be used in language teaching, because the language used in literary texts is suitable for the contexts of the events. Similarly, the most general definition can be seen in H.L.B. Moody's approach. According to Moody,

literature is like on umbrella term giving information on every business (*Moody, 1971 :1, cited in Turker 1991 : P-299*). Therefore, literature, having interested in every kind of written and spoken business, can be the best media of expressing a specific subject; for example, literature for child raising, literature for transportation and media, literature for business and construction.

The relationship between literature and English language teaching has been rather a difficult manage throughout all three years. Nevertheless, current approaches have endeavored to re-examine the value of literature from several aspects, for language development and improvement. Usually, students, who study only English language, emphasize on reading and writing skills and they fail to notice the benefit of reading literature for improving communication skills. But English literature can introduce students to a range of aspects, not only of the English language but also of the English culture. There are parts of the English culture that are 'encapsulated' by English literature. These cultural reflections can be easily grasped by reading the dramas of Shakespeare and the prescriptive, practical essays of Francis Bacon. In other words, the study of literature allows people to develop new ideas and ethical standpoints, and can help individuals to present themselves as educated members of society. Studying literature can be enriching, eye-opening experience' (*Joshua Cruz, ettow contributor, www.ettow.com*). Therefore, we can claim that the teaching of literature in language classrooms is a fast-growing phenomenon, although many language

teachers are still reluctant to work with literary texts. Povey (1972:1871), in summarizing the aims of literature in language classrooms, argues that literature will increase all language skills because literature will extend linguistic knowledge by giving evidence of extensive and subtle vocabulary usage, and complex and exact syntax. English Language learning generally happens to be a boring prosaic and monotonous task for the students of this country if the materials they use are purely language-based divorced from any kind of aesthetic value. Therefore, inclusion of some pieces of literature in language-teaching materials will bring variety, making the materials enjoyable for the students (*Huda, 2012; p.44*).

The Potential Value of using Literary Texts in Language Teaching:

It is stated that literary texts are intellectually stimulating. They allow readers to create world with which they may not be familiar and the way that do it is by relying on language. In building meaning, the reader reconstructs or re-creates what he or she thinks the writer is trying to communicate. In this sense, the reader becomes a performer, an actor in a communicative event (*Zyngier 1994: P-6*). Literature may be included in language teaching in such following ways.

- Students can learn about allusions and references to different aspects of English culture. With the knowledge a foreign culture, they can write and speak well about their own culture with a comparative style.

- They can also learn the context and meaning of famous quotes and phrases. With the application of these quotes and phrases, they may express themselves in an impressive and mature language.
- When studying literature, students can improve not only language such as vocabulary, but also the language then can be used for specific purposes.
- The study of literature can provide students with a fresh and creative angle with which they can approach their students in particular and their lives in general.
- English literature makes students learn about their creativity and imagination, interacting with the text themselves, and playing different li.
- Literature must be presented as an authentic task, so the students can get through the texts discovery their different learning styles.
- Students should also dramatize the plays of Shakespeare and other modern dramatists to behave and speak in a cosmopolitan culture.
- The study of literature offers many ways to improve literacy; it gives access to language, readings writing a shared culture and one's own self. Reading new words and new phrases can increase any one's lexicon.
- The use of authentic literacy texts give learners the opportunity to connect the real world issues at the time they can learn true values for their lives.
- Through the reading of literary texts, students can develop their autonomy and independence, making hypothesis and guessing unfamiliar words.

Moreover, literature can meet the target objectives of communicative language teaching as it accelerates interpretations, classroom discussions and interactions among students as well as interactions between teacher and students, as supported by Maley's research, (2001), Van (2009) in his studies also shows that literature in full of instances of real-life language in various situations; it provides lots of opportunities for students to improve systematic, pragmatic, cultural, and discoursed awareness among learners.

Selection of Literary Texts:

The effective use of literature in the ELT depends on the appropriate selection of literary texts. Literary texts should be selected to suit the local and general standard of students; it should always move from simple to complex one. Certainly, one common experience of most ESL students is their struggle with a language and culture with which they are unfamiliar. Text selection is a crucial factor in making literature a resource for linguistic development, Personal enrichment and cultural appreciation. McRae (1997) also says that careful text selection is fundamental to the successful use of any kind of representational materials (1997:49). Similarly, Collie and Slater (1994) suggest that text selection depends on 'each particular group of students, their needs, interests, cultural background and language level '(1994:6). On the basis of the suggestions, given by different scholars, their criteria are formulated English:

- The cultural background of students
- The linguistic proficiency of students

- The literary background of students
- The age and level of understanding of students
- Interesting, didactic and philosophical of the texts.
- Availability and suitability of the texts

As a corollary to the functional imperative of ELT, the syllabus of English at shore and college level must be reconstruct to attain the goal of functional proficiency in English. The syllabus should be so graded that starting with the basics of English language at the lower level, gradually the elementary from of literature may be introduced in the form of interesting and intrusive short stories, anecdotes, essays and poems, writing of popular writers like Tagore, Narayan, Ruskin, Shakespeare, Dickens, Wordsworth etc. writer lucidity, may be chosen to capture the imagination of the young minds. As language is an over learned skill, the prescribed literary pieces should become the springboard for the simultaneous study of language and grammar. Teaching of grammar is an important aspect of teaching/learning any language. Formal grammar presents rules about a language, but functional grammar illustrates their correct usage in literature. As language is an over acquired skill, the ability in a language grows by practice constant and consistent- and not merely by knowing rules of grammar and cramming its vocabulary.

The Proficiency of Teacher in English:

The proficiency of teachers in English language and literature is a vital issue which matters much in teaching language and literature. In fact, all paraphernalia and

teaching strategies are rendered useless if the teacher is incompetent whereas a competent teacher can make things happen without then specialized training and knowledge are required to develop linguistic competence among ELT teachers most language teachers remain ignorant of the new approaches latest aids and tools, and the charges talking place in the pedagogy of teaching/ learning consequently, at the end of a course, students acquire little or no proficiency in linguistic skills. Frankly speaking, many ELT teachers are themselves tackling their skills. It is in this context that the UGC sponsored orientation programmers and refresher courses for language teachers become functionally important. They are a must for English language teachers to hone their linguistic skills and update the knowledge of their subject. In this regard M.L. Tickoo's views are worth quality.

In the hands of a teacher appropriately trained a structural syllabus can be an effective tool for teaching English. Implying an activity method, it demands initiative, resourcefulness and imagination on the part of the teacher. It keeps the young learner keen and active... It is indeed a delightful sight to see a class buzzing with activities like the beehive as it gainfully learns by doing and speaking. (Velayndhan 2)

It would be not improper to say that in most classrooms in India learning of English language is an extremely boring experience. The teacher, holding a text book, reads a few lines from the text, translates them in learners' mother tongue, summarizes the

remaining lesions in the vernacular, and the language through literature exercise is over. The students sit through the class like dumb driven cattle with practically no initiative. In her article 'Developing Reading Skills' Yamini Luckmani comments:

If one calculates the average amount of time given per student in every English class to speak, read or write, one finds that it is minimal. At best two or three students answer a few questions talking about five to seven minutes of the class period. The rest of the time, the teacher holds the stage, the class. This division of time appears disproportionate and not conducive to learning. (Velayudhan 96)

The language teacher must remember that language learning in a two-way process in which improvement and participation of the students is absolutely essential.

The Methodology of Language Teaching:

In India, the English teacher starts teaching language with Grammar- Translation method which may be useful at the preliminary stage, but it does not generate the habit of original thinking in English among students. Even now this method continues to be adopted due to shortage of time and pressure of exams. As a result no attention is paid to developing four language skills. The sole goal of English language teacher is reduced to completing the syllabus and making the important questions. In the 20th century, a number of methods and approaches have been applied to teach English language, as the Grammar-Translation Method and Audio-lingua Method. These methods were reduced by

newer and more innovative ones. Nowadays, communicative method is in vogue for being effective and learner-centered teaching.

There is no doubt about the fact that in India, the teacher begins English-teaching with Grammar-Translation Method which ultimately takes shape of Bilingual Method. But dependence on learners' mother tongue should not be too much and for too long. In this connection, Prof. M. Aslan Writes:

The mother tongue equipments are given to present students from getting empty responses. Learning thus becomes a mental gymnastics and not a mechanical process as in earlier structural approaches. Once the students have developed a sufficient command of the target language, mother tongue is completely withdrawn and the exercise becomes monolingual. (P.65)

After the Bilingual method, the communicative language Teaching should be adopted. It aims to develop communicative competence which implies ability of a learner to use language effectively and appropriately in social contents and situations. In the classroom, the teacher facilitation language acquisition through problem solving activities and assignments are to be accomplished by learner's participation and interaction. Thus, CLT is preferable to other approaches as it is learner centered, uses linguistic texts primarily as a medium of communication, focuses on the form of language and turns teachers into guides and makes the process of language acquisition spontaneous.

Translation and Teaching of English Literature:

Dr. Devy in his remarkable essay, 'Translation Theory: An Indian perspective (1993)' points out that translation is the most suitable technique for the Indian consciousness to understand the complex texts of foreign culture, and thus translation plays a crucial role in teaching English language and literature in multilingual and multiethnic societies like India. Translation is not merely mechanical transfer of propositional content from a text in one language to another, but it is rather a complex combination of interpretative expertise and creative skills. Moreover, the capacity of translation to make connection between two languages and cultures has very significant implications for literary studies in India. Vanmala Vishwanath tries to highlight the potential of translation in her critical essay, 'Literary Translation: A Technique for Teaching Literature in the Bilingual (1998)' by saying that translation can play a significant role in imparting literary competence in a bilingual context. Firstly, it provides an attractive to the monotonous 'Chalk and talk' approach of teaching of literature and language in India and facilitates more participative and creative engagement with the literary text. It makes the students focus on the specificities of the text and sharpen their interpretative skills. In other words, the literary translation is an act of finding equivalences for 'literariness-including presuppositions' or conventions that induce literariness to linguistic activity. This activity helps the students to be aware of conventionality of the text in question and this leads to

acquisition of what is termed as literary competence.

If we move further in the field of translation and teaching of English language and literature, we find Prof. Widdowson throwing light on the teaching, learning and study of literature. Prof. Widdowson has distinguished between the study and the learning of literature and says that the study is action which leads to knowledge and awareness, and learning is knowledge that leads to action and proficiency. Translation is indeed one of the best ways of destroying the ability of creative readings. Translation was once considered an uninteresting activity, but after the works of scholars like Widdowson (1979), the role of translation in language teaching was considered more favourably. It can also help students to improve their linguistic competence and facilitate acquisition of English, especially for those who come to classroom with insufficient linguistic skills.

Apart from being excellent tasks for studying a literary text, it also helps a student to discover the similarities and differences in meanings of the text. It demonstrates how meanings are always context specific and yet have a universal dimension. Translation is thus a far more useful and insightful approach to the study of English literary texts in the Indian context than the various versions of the New criticism with their monolingual text-centric approach to the study of literature. In discovering the other, the student gets opportunity to discover self. It can sensitize the student as well as teachers to a very important fact that the study of English literary text is not carried out in a cultural

vacuum. It can confer some sort of continuity with the linguistic and cultural context in which the student is located. This feeling of continuity can help in reducing the feeling of alienation that usually haunts the students of English literature in countries like India.

Use of literature in English classroom for translation studies makes the learners focus on meaning. Thus, the language of the literary texts becomes a means in the hands of learners and it is manipulated by them to use their background knowledge for understanding authentic texts, as Moura (2009) calls it 'to fill the information gap' (17). Moura goes on saying that through the use of literature, the focus is 'on process rather than product', the emphasis is on 'negotiation rather than pre determination', and the teacher 'acts as facilitate' and 'not just instructor'(17). Consequently, translation studies can be appreciated as social and cultural context of teaching and learning English literature in India. Translation studies should be introduced seriously at school level as well as the graduate and post-graduate levels. Though we can accept translation in theory, yet find it difficult to implement it into practice. Let us wish and hope that in coming years, translation studies of literature in various contexts should be accommodated in the syllabus of English for the up gradation of their communication skills.

Conclusion:

With few limitations, literature is viewed as a rich resource for language learning. Belcher and Hirvella (2000) hold that literature is rich with innumerable authentic

tokens of language for the development of reading, writing, speaking and listening skills. For writing purposes, students have to write short story or literary essays on the basis of the model or prescribed literary texts of the syllabus. For speaking purposes, students should be asked to discuss and justify the plot and events of novels and dramas. For listening purposes, the learners can be exposed to the audio version of the poems, short stories or novels. Moreover, the musical elements in poetry stimulate the learners' desire for approximately their speaking patterns to the native speaker horns

by adhering to the principles of rhythm and intonation. Reading in literature is a combination of reading for enjoyment and reading for information. Translation studies of English literature constitute a creative and intimate encounter between two languages and cultures. We may sum up with the observations that literature is not only facilitating for language learning purposes in general but it can also accelerate language learning in content-based instruction. *(Shang, 2006; cited in Khatib 2011: P-202).*

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