

The Use of Literature in ELT Classroom: An Effective Approach

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Abstract

Teaching English using literature has been a focus of many English teachers across the world, as it offers substantial benefits to both teachers and students. Literature is an effective means of conveying not only language but also cultural values and social norms. This research article examines the advantages of using literature in teaching English and offers guidelines for incorporating literature in an English language classroom. This article introduces different approaches and methods to incorporate literature into the English language curriculum, emphasising its potential advantages in promoting critical thinking, cultural awareness, creativity, language proficiency, etc. The article analyses how literature can provide an authentic context for learning the English language efficiently. This article also suggests that the use of literature can engage students more actively and provide opportunities for students to develop their communication skills in a meaningful context. By and large, the article concludes that teaching English using literature is a powerful teaching approach that can foster students' interest and enthusiasm in language and literature, leading to enhanced learning outcomes and greater language proficiency.

Keywords: English, Language, Literature, Approach, Method, Critical Thinking, Creativity, Cultural Awareness, Curriculum, Proficiency

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I. Introduction

The English Language is one of the most widely spoken languages in the world, with an estimated 1.5 billion speakers worldwide. It is the language of international communication, business, education, science and technology, diplomacy, and media. It is a language that opens doors to opportunities for employment, educational advancement, social mobility and global interaction. Therefore, teaching English as a second or foreign language is a highly sought-after profession, with educators playing a crucial role in the development of proficiency in the language. The use of literature in language teaching has gained considerable attention in recent years as educators and researchers recognise its potential to engage students, promote language proficiency, and foster cultural awareness. "The study of language has been increasingly inseparable from the study of literature." (Novianti, 2016).

Literature offers a rich source of authentic language input and cultural insights that can enhance language learning experiences for English language learners. However, the integration of literature into the ELT classroom also poses challenges such as selecting appropriate texts, addressing linguistic difficulties, and ensuring meaningful engagement with the material. This research article examines the benefits and challenges of incorporating literature into the ELT classroom and provides practical recommendations for effective implementation. By examining the benefits and strategies of using literature in ELT classrooms, this research article seeks to provide insights into the potential of literature-based activities in promoting language acquisition and fostering a positive learning environment.

English teachers are always concerned with the kind of content they are going to teach their students. One of the challenges the English teachers face is the selection of literary text. Literature is so abundant and practicable that teachers cannot resist the temptation of using it. Language learning, as it is a well-known fact, demands the acquisition of four basic skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing (LSRW). Literary texts such as poetry, prose, fiction, short story, drama, etc., have proved to be authentic sources that can make learners acquire these four basic skills. These teaching materials can also make learners understand culture and society.

II. Literature Review

Literature always reflects culture, and the use of literary materials in language classes can provide students with more useful and thought-provoking language learning. In this regard, the students are not only encouraged to be linguistically competent, but also to become critical, creative, and innovative thinkers. Texts of literature can help the students improve their critical thinking skills. Literature-based activities promote critical thinking and analytical skills by encouraging students to interpret and analyze texts (McRae, 1991). By interpreting and analysing various literary pieces, the learners can learn to interpret and analyse diverse language forms, which can be beneficial in other areas of language learning, such as understanding business documents, business reports, and news articles (Lazar, 2003; Carter & Long, 1991; Willis et al., 2007).

The Role of Literature in ELT Literature has long been recognised as a valuable resource for language teaching. It offers authentic and meaningful language input, exposes learners to diverse cultural perspectives, and stimulates critical thinking skills. Research has shown that literature can enhance vocabulary acquisition, improve reading and writing skills, and foster empathy and cultural understanding among students (Brown, 2007; Lazar, 1993; Maley & Duff, 2005). The use of literature in teaching English has gained popularity in recent years. The benefits of using literature in teaching English are numerous, including improving students' language proficiency and literary appreciation. Many teachers consider the use of literature in language teaching as an interesting and worthy concern (Sage, 1987, p.1). Literature is an effective means of conveying not only language but also cultural values and social norms.

According to Collie and Slater (1990), 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, interest, economy and suggestive power and ambiguity are some other factors requiring the use of literature as a powerful resource in the classroom context (p.3). Therefore, the research article discusses the reasons why using the source of literature is an effective approach in teaching the English language. This research article also examines the advantages of using literature in teaching English and offers guidelines for incorporating literature in an English language classroom.

III. Research Methodology

Using the secondary data research or qualitative research method, this research study has been carried out to analyse how useful literature can be as an effective approach to teach English effectively.

IV. Advantages of Using Literature in Teaching English

There are several advantages of teaching English using literary materials. According to Salih (1989), "the study of literature has a significant role to play in university English programs and that a positive correlation exists between literature on the one hand and students' language skills and linguistic knowledge on the other" (p. 26).

The following are a few worth mentioning advantages:

Improving language proficiency

Literature provides an authentic context for learning language, which enhances better understanding and internalization of the rules, structures, and concepts of language. Students learn new vocabulary, grammatical structures, idiomatic expressions, and literary devices through reading and analyzing literary texts. They also develop their writing and speaking skills by composing their own literary pieces in response to the texts read. Hismanoglu (2005, p.54) states that the 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).

Enhancing Literary Appreciation

Literature exposes students to the beauty and power of language through its style, theme, tone, and imagery. It teaches them to appreciate the different genres of writing, such as poetry, drama, short stories, and novels. Moreover, literature represents the diversity of cultures, allowing learners to understand and respect the values, beliefs, and perspectives of different societies.

Developing Critical Thinking and Analytical Skills

The Process of Analysing and Interpreting Literary Texts develops students' critical thinking and analytical skills. They learn to identify and analyze literary devices, such as symbolism, metaphor, alliteration, and foreshadowing. They also develop their ability to express their ideas and opinions coherently and persuasively in writing and speaking.

Promoting Cultural Understanding

Literature exposes students to the cultural diversity of the English-speaking world. It provides a window into the historical, social, and political contexts that shaped the literature and the writer's worldview. Through literature, students learn to appreciate and respect cultural differences and develop intercultural communication skills.

According to Ur (1996, p.201), cited by Tanseen, the advantages of literature as a language teaching resource can be summarized in the following way:

- a) Literature is a very enjoyable resource to learn a language.
- b) Literature provides examples of different styles of writing, and also representations of various authentic uses of the language.
- c) Literature is a good resource for increasing word power.
- d) It encourages developing various reading skills in learners.
- e) It can be used as a springboard for exciting discussion or writing.
- f) It involves both emotions and intellect, which adds to the motivation and may contribute to the personal development of the student.
- g) English literature (in general) is a part of the target culture, and therefore it has a value as part of the learners' general education.
- h) It encourages critical and creative thinking.
- i) It enriches the students' world knowledge.
- j) It makes the students aware of various human situations and conflicts.

V. Guidelines for incorporating literature in an English language classroom

Selection of Appropriate Literary Texts

Teachers should select literary texts that are appropriate for their students' linguistic and cognitive levels. The texts should be engaging, relevant, and culturally appropriate. The teachers should also consider the students' interests and preferences when selecting the texts. Duff and Maley (2007) emphasise that teachers can deal with several challenges that texts of literature present if they ask the following questions to evaluate the appropriateness of selected texts for any certain group of students:

- a) Is the subject matter likely to interest the learners?
- b) Is the language level appropriate?
- c) Is it the right length for the time available?
- d) Does it require much cultural or literary background knowledge?
- e) Is it culturally offensive in any way?
- f) Can it be easily exploited for language learning purposes?

Use of Various Literary Genres

Teachers should use various literary genres, such as poetry, drama, short story, and novel, to expose students to the different styles and structures of writing. Each genre offers a unique opportunity to develop different language skills, such as reading comprehension, vocabulary development, and writing proficiency.

Incorporating Pre-Reading, During-Reading, and Post-Reading Activities

Teachers should incorporate pre- and post-reading activities to enhance students' understanding and appreciation of the literary texts. Pre-reading activities may include brainstorming, predicting, and activating prior knowledge. Post-reading activities can include discussions, debates, and creative writing tasks. Engaging students in pre-reading activities prepares them for the literary text and activates their prior knowledge. These activities can include brainstorming, predicting the content, or discussing related topics (Lazar, 1993). Pre-reading activities help students develop their background knowledge, enhance comprehension, and create interest in the text. During-reading activities aim to promote comprehension, critical thinking, and language development. Teachers can employ various techniques such as guided reading, group discussions, and role-plays to encourage students' active engagement with the text (Maley & Duff, 2005). These activities enhance students' understanding of the text, encourage them to analyze literary elements, and develop their language skills. Post-reading activities consolidate students' understanding of the text and encourage reflection and creativity. These activities can include writing summaries, creating alternative endings, or engaging in debates and presentations (Carter & Long, 1991). Post-reading activities provide opportunities for students to express their opinions, develop critical thinking skills, and enhance their language production.

Infusing Technology and Multimedia

Teachers should infuse technology and multimedia resources in their lesson plans to enhance the teaching and learning of literature. They can use online literary resources, such as e-books, audio books, and videos, to expose students to authentic language use and cultural context.

Use of Literature to Improve Speaking and Listening skills

Teachers can use literature as a wonderful source for teaching listening and speaking skills effectively. They have to ask students to prepare their individual or group presentations on diverse topics and help them improve their proficiency levels of the target language by providing them with constant practice. Literary texts can serve as useful sources for free panel discussions or debates in the classroom, and this will not only develop students' speaking skills but also their listening, reading, and writing skills. As Çubukçu (2001) states that poetry is an enjoyable experience with the characteristics of rhyme and rhythm that convey "love and appreciation for the sound and power of language." (p.1)

The teacher can give any literary piece – a short story, novel, drama, poetry, etc. – to the students as homework and ask them to read it comprehensively and write the summary of it. Later, all students are asked to read their respective summaries in the classroom and remove one or two salient parts of the summarised story. Afterwards, the teacher asks a few students to read out their summaries with the eliminated parts. Then, the students will try to identify the eliminated parts of the story while their peers are reading out their own stories. This activity can prove to be a very important listening activity. Having identified which main parts of the story have been eliminated, the other students will try to deliberate or explain why those eliminated parts of the story are very important for the overall understanding of the story. In this regard, the teacher is supposed to play the role of a facilitator by supporting arguments of the students.

Use of Literature to Improve Reading Skills

Use of literature in teaching English as a second or foreign language can encourage and motivate students to cultivate the habit of reading. In the beginning, the literary texts given to the students should be easy to understand. As the students become critical readers, they can be given poetry, biographical and historical texts which help them to acquire in-depth knowledge of the language. **(a). Reading out loud**

The objective of this reading activity is to motivate the students to learn pronunciation, word stress, intonation, and rhythm. The students are divided into different groups and an easy poem suitable to the students' proficiency level in English. Having underlined a few words of the poem, the teacher asks the students read them aloud at their homes with appropriate pronunciation, word stress, intonation, and rhythm. The teacher also asks the students to write synonyms of the underlined words as homework with the help of any standard dictionary or web source. The next day, the teacher asks the groups to read their part within their respective groups and select the one who recites the poem most appropriately. Then the teacher picks the groups at random and asks the reciter of every group to read their portion.

The next activity is a reading comprehension activity, and the teacher asks the students to put the stanzas of the poem in the correct order. Then, the teacher reads out the whole poem paying particular attention to pronunciation, word stress, intonation, and rhythm. Or else, the teacher asks the students to listen to the original recording of the entire poem. After a great deal of practice on recitation, the teacher asks any student of a group to read out the underlined words to the other groups. The group that finds the synonyms firstly gets a point. If no group finds the synonyms of the asked word within the stipulated time, the group that has asked synonym of the underlined word gets a point. The group that gets the highest points is declared as the winner.

(b). Student-Centered Approach toward Comprehension of a Literary Work

English teachers teaching English as a second language or foreign language can adopt a learner-centred approach for comprehension of literary piece of work. While reading the textual lesson, students start discussing at the literal level with direct factual questions concerning plot construction, setting, and characters that can be answered with reference to the textual piece of writing. When learners get mastery over literary comprehension, they will go ahead to the level of inferencing. Here, students should make assumptions and critical interpretations regarding the setting, characters, and themes. It is exactly where learners will produce the writer's viewpoint. Immediately after the section of literary comprehension at the literal level and inferential level, learners show their readiness to do an activity collaboratively. In this process, they share their understanding and evaluation of the literary work and their respective personal reactions to it - to its themes, characters, and the writer's perspective. The next level, the evaluative/personal level, motivates learners to reflect imaginatively on the literary work and improves their abilities of problem-solving. A fruitful discussion by students on different questions can lay the foundation for speaking and writing activities (Stern, 1991, p.332).

(c). Reading Literary Texts

As an assignment for reading, according to (Collie and Slater, 1987), various literary pieces such as short stories, essays, poems, an extract from a drama, etc. can be given to the learners. They will be asked to read and comprehend the given piece of literature in groups. The differences or similarities in comprehending the characters, plots, themes, etc. can be critically and thoroughly discussed in the class. For instance, one group of learners reads the story in one way and the other group reads the same story in a different way. When the students complete their reading, they will ask queries to each other to find similarities or differences in understanding the story. This reading activity can be used to test the comprehension skills of the students. Widdowson (1986) states that, teachers use literature in teaching English so that they can broaden student's knowledge as well as improving language and cultural awareness (p. 33).

Use of Literature for Improving Writing Skills

It is very useful to use texts of literature in teaching and enhancing writing skills among students. If teachers give literary texts to students in the classroom, their analytical skills can be improved. The following are a few activities or approaches to be adopted by English teachers to improve the students' competence in writing, which is as follows:

(a) Controlled Writing

Using the texts of literature that are appropriately selected for the level of learners in practising the topics of English grammar can help teachers teach them in an innovative and entertaining manner. In this activity, the teacher reads a short story in one tense and instructs the students to write the same story using a different tense. For instance, the teacher reads a short story written in the present tense and asks the learners to write the same story in the past tense, as though it occurred last year. This activity also improves the listening skills of the students. All students can learn all types of tenses in a practical way. This kind of activity which is a learner-centred activity can enable the students to acquire the grammatical competence through reading a literary text analytically and critically.

(b) Guided Writing

This activity is suitable to intermediate learners of English as a second or foreign language. The learners give their answers to a sequence of questions, which, when combined grammatically and logically, summarise the entire model. In some situations, the students write their answers to the exercise after they understand the topical sentence or the first few sentences of a paraphrase, summary, description, paraphrase, etc. These exercises, particularly at the literal level, make the students comprehend the literary work imaginatively.

(c) Writing a Letter

This activity can help the students enhance their reading and writing skills. A short story with a few number of characters is given as homework to the students to read and comprehend it. The next day, the students will be warmed up by summarising the plot construction and also asked to pay their particular attention to some of the selected sentences to make them enjoy the beauty of the literary stuff. Later, the learners are divided into various groups in the classroom in accordance with the number of the characters portrayed in the short story. The teacher gives a character of the story to each group of the students. Each group, as an individual, composes a letter to another group recounting their circumstances and they may ask for help, make a deal, offer help, etc. Thus, each group of students embodying the assigned character from the short story composes and receives a letter and each group, in response, has to reply the received letter. A member of each group reads his or her letter in the classroom and a member from the addressed group reads his or her answer. With the teacher's help, all the students will be able to learn their mistakes in writing a letter. This activity helps the students how they can learn to write a letter collaboratively.

(d) Reproducing the Model

This is another activity comprising techniques like summary, paraphrase, and adaptation. It is very useful for the students to learn to write efficiently. Summarising is aptly used with plays and short stories in which the events usually follow a chronological order and consist of important elements like setting, plot construction, and portrayal of characters to guide the students in improving their writing skills. In the technique of paraphrasing, the students are asked to re-write the things, in their own words, that they hear loudly or see in a printed form. As paraphrasing corresponds with the learners' trying to understand the poem, it is a very useful tool when dealing with poetry. Adaptation is required for re-writing prose fiction into a dialogue or re-writing a drama or an act or a scene into description. This activity makes the students understand the variations between spoken and written English (Stern, 1991, p.333).

VI. Conclusion

The use of literature in ELT classrooms offers numerous benefits for language learners. By incorporating literature-based activities, teachers can enhance language acquisition, develop critical thinking skills, foster cultural understanding, and promote motivation among students. This research article has highlighted the importance of integrating literature into teaching English as a second or foreign language and provided strategies for implementing literature-based activities. Using literature in ELT offers several benefits to students, including enhancing their language proficiency, improving their literary appreciation, promoting their understanding of different cultures, and cultivating their analytical and critical thinking skills. The important guidelines for integrating literature in an English language classroom comprise the selection of suitable texts of literature and the use of different genres of literature. Teachers can use literature as a useful tool for teaching English and develop engaging and creative lesson plans that cater to the various needs of their learners. Ultimately, literature can be a valuable tool for language learning and should be considered an integral component of the ELT curriculum.

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