

Vision for Teaching Communication Skills through Literary Texts in BBS Second Year

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Abstract

The article discusses the rationale and process of teaching *Vision: A thematic anthology* of literary and cultural texts in BBS second year in Tribhuvan University, Nepal. This book is a collection of multicultural literary readings that consist of poetry, fiction, prose and play. Based on the ideas that literary readings and their creative discussions in a classroom helps the learners to develop their creative, critical and language skills to be used in their professional life, the article has discussed how the texts incorporated in this textbook are appropriate to achieve these objectives of the course. The readings on the logics of using literature in the university classes form the theoretical background of this study. The study has concluded that the use of literary texts in management classes in the university helps the learners develop the basic communicative skills keeping the humanitarian aspect at focus. The article also incorporates a practical process of teaching a poem from this textbook in the real classroom and discusses how it could help students develop the expected skills.

Keywords: English for communication, literature pedagogy, multicultural literary reading

Introduction

Vision: A thematic anthology (2021) is a textbook prescribed for BBS Second Year English course (MGT 205: Business Communication) in Tribhuvan University, Nepal. This book consists of forty-three literary texts from all genres: poetry, fiction, prose and play. Lohani (2021), the compiler and editor of the book, informed that it is “a collection of multicultural readings from a wide variety of sources on different topics for different purpose”. He discussed the rationale behind the choice of literary and cultural texts for the students of business communication as “the process of thinking can be learnt by interacting with creative texts, and readers can develop their thinking ability, while simultaneously enhancing their reading and writing skills”. He further claimed that the reading of the texts compiled in this book can enhance the education of the learners as “Education to a large extent implies inculcating in the students the capacity to think clearly and logically about important ideas,

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issues, and problems, and develop a holistic as well as an analytical approach as the situation demands” (Preface). The texts, thus, aim to develop the learners into thinking individuals.

The claim of the editor matches with the objectives of the syllabus. The syllabus basically claims that “This course seeks to enhance students’ cross-cultural understanding and communicate in varied contexts.” The extended objective of this course is “to present a wide array of ideas from different spheres of human activity, which is of vital importance for success as an executive in management.” Such an objective in a communication course is deemed necessary because “Ideas are increasingly being considered an important resource just like men, machines, materials and money, and the best business schools have taken note of the importance of creative thinking in the business world.” To develop such ideas, it is necessary to read “opinions of thoughtful people ... because we learn about other opinions and ideas in the process and they help shape our ideas and prepare us to become educated citizens who can think and form their own conclusions” (p. 23). The syllabus has kept the literary texts from *Vision: A thematic anthology* (2021) under the subtitle “Discourse in Disciplines” with a hope that the learners of this course can grow to be good thinkers and idea creators.

Lohani (2021) discussed the way the learners of the texts in this book can get the ideas and develop their critical thinking capacity. He claimed:

The texts are chosen according to the discourse communities associated with different academic disciplines. The selected texts provide examples of effective writing in different disciplines and readers can see and learn how skilled writers use language to achieve their purposes. Secondly, they allow the readers an opportunity to practice close, critical reading. Thirdly, the study of the selected texts stimulates the readers to reflect on their own experiences and think about how they can use the readings to use them in their own writings. Last, but not least, interactions with texts written by professional writers help readers discover what makes for good writing and become good writers. (Preface)

Thus, the use of this textbook in the classroom should be oriented towards creative reading and discussions that would stimulate the learners to write their ideas related to their life experiences and possible professional life in future.

Researches on the use of literary readings for the development of communication skills also have similar findings. Mishra and Mishra (2020) claimed that developing communicative competence with the use of English “has always been deeply indebted in our subconscious as non-native speakers.” They further claimed that “Self-confidence, knowledge, sincerity, emotional intelligence, accuracy, fluency, reasoning, sympathy, open-mindedness, humility, humor, spontaneity, tact, intelligence and common sense, etc. are some of the key-features required to be an effective and efficient communicator” (p. 80). They argued that “Effective

communication helps us to understand a person or situation and enables us to resolve differences, build trust and respect, and create environments where creative ideas, problem-solving, affection, and caring can flourish.” Thus, the students of business communication need to learn the above-mentioned skills in the classroom. They quoted Canale and Swain’s opinion about the four important components of communicative competence: grammatical competence or systematic competence, socio-lingual competence, discourse competence, and strategic competence; and they stress on the fact that “Proper communication skills can have numerous dimensions and intricacies. It increases proficiency, improves the attitude and gives a willingness to stand apart and make an impression” (p. 82). Their focus is on the power of literature to improve the readers’ communicative competence.

There are other benefits of reading literature as well. Parlette and Howard (2010) discussed how literature as a pleasure reading helped the college goers to improve their communicative capacity. They argued that “pleasure reading can play a positive role in their academic performance, enhancing their range of background knowledge as well as their active vocabulary” (p. 53). Thus, “Pleasure reading has been the focus of several national studies in the first decade of the 21st century” (p. 54). All these researchers found that literature course in the college helped students to be better communicators.

Vision: A thematic anthology (2021) has set its reading strategy and exercises that can lead the learners to this direction. In doing the activities set in the textbook, the learners get the opportunities to focus on the use of impressive language. On this background, this article answers the following research questions:

1. Why is it necessary to use literary texts in management classes?
2. How is *Vision: A thematic anthology* (2021) an appropriate textbook to develop students’ communication skills?

Review of Literature

One of the goals of management education is to help the learners grow good communicators in their business life. “Learning literature provides a platform to improve the communication skills of students” (Deepa & Ilankumaran, 2018, p. 619); and “teaching English through literature today has evolved around the primary emphasis on its viability as a communication skill to help acquire jobs, promote business interests or provide various forms of entertainments” (Noaman, 2013, p. 124). This is the reason behind the revival of the inclusion of literature in language learning curriculum: “literature nearly vanished from the language learning curriculum in the mid-twentieth century” (Isariyawat, Yenphech & Intanoo, 2020, p. 1320). Incorporating literature into “a foreign language teaching program as a powerful source for reflecting the sociolinguistic aspects of the target language” (Hişmanoğlu, 2005, p. 56) gained importance only in the third quarter of the 20th century.

Deepa and Ilankumaran (2018) recounted the history of this revival of literature in language classes:

The linguists were against the inclusion of literature in the syllabi for language teaching. They ignored literature as it was not relevant to language curricula and it gave an impression of flying in fancy and imagination. This is regrettable that literature was banished in the language curriculum. Later, the same linguists, gradually, started realizing the use and worth of literature as it could provide a resource for enhancing the ability of language learners to use literature as knowledge for interpretation. (p. 619)

Hişmanoğlu (2005) mentioned four basic reasons for the inclusion of literature in language learning classes: “These are valuable authentic material, cultural enrichment, language enrichment and personal involvement.” He also mentioned “universality, non-triviality, personal relevance, variety, interest, economy and suggestive power and ambiguity” as “some other factors requiring the use of literature as a powerful resource in the classroom context” (p. 54). The same four basic reasons have been discussed in the following paragraphs.

Literary writings are authentic texts for the students to learn language. Literary writings make “a basic component and source of authentic texts of the language curriculum rather than an ultimate aim of English instruction”. Thus, many teachers think “the use of literature in language teaching as an interesting and worthy concern” resulting into “the place of literature as a tool rather than an end in teaching English as a second or foreign language” (Hişmanoğlu, 2005, p. 53). Mittal (2016) also argued that literature is “valuable authentic material” and so it promotes “cultural enrichment, language enrichment and personal involvement” (p. 53) of the language learners.

To grow good communicators management students need to understand the culture of the listeners and the value of culture in a communication. Literary readings help them grow such understanding and cultural sensitivity needed in communication process. Literature “adds a lot to the cultural grammar of the learners” (Hişmanoğlu, 2005, p. 55). Reading literature helps the learners “improve their communicative and cultural competence in the authentic richness, naturalness of the authentic texts” (Noaman, 2013, p. 126). At the same time, language competence is related to culture. So, there are many benefits of “utilizing literature and literary texts as integrating students' cultural awareness and language skills” (Isariyawat, Yenphech & Intanoo, 2020, p. 1320). Matos (2005) reported that “The conjunction of literature and intercultural competence has been suggested by authors who give the utmost importance to the role of literature in education” (p. 57). But one challenge of reading is that “FL learners may feel a greater difficulty in identifying potential meanings in a given (con)text” (58). There comes the role of a FL teacher whose task is “using skills that will assist him/her in understanding the explicit and implicit meanings in a given (con)text” (p. 60). This is also a process of developing critical awareness in the learners.

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The most beneficial aspect of the inclusion of literature in communication courses is learners' development of rich language. It is found that "Students who studied literature and read for joy have a higher vocabulary, better perusing cognizance, and better relational abilities, for example, composting capacity" (Isariyawat, Yenphech & Intanoo, 2020, p. 1322). "They learn about the syntax and discourse functions of sentences, the variety of possible structures, the different ways of connecting ideas, which develop and enrich their own writing skills" (Hişmanoğlu, 2005, p. 55). At the same time, literature "plays an important role in teaching four basic language skills like reading, writing, listening and speaking" (p. 57). It is because "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" (Noaman, 2013, p. 125). "Both literature and language teaching involve the development of a feeling for language or responses to texts" (p. 126). Thus, those who study literature become competent in language use.

A good communicator needs good logical capacity as well. Literature course for communication development can provide this opportunity as well. Isariyawat, Yenphech and Intanoo (2020) claimed that "when students dissect literature, they figure out how to recognize circumstances and logical results and are applying basic reasoning aptitudes" (p. 1322). They reported that "Numerous instructors pick literature-based educating in light of the fact that they feel that they center around higher-request thinking abilities than essential educating" (p. 1322). Thus, literature helps the learners to develop critical thinking capacities.

The greatest benefit of learning communication skills through reading literature is to learn life. "Literary texts are the piece of human life" (Isariyawat, Yenphech & Intanoo, 2020, p. 1321); and "irrationalities in life can best be explored by reading of literature which paints on its canvas, life in its multiple facets" (Kaul & Pandit, 2008, p. 1). Those who understand different aspects of life can be good leaders with sensitive communicative skills and the capacity to understand the next human being. At the same time, "literature helps us understand the nuances governing human conduct in all situations, be they managerial or non-managerial" (p. 2). The managers need to deal with the multiple types of people. Here comes the role of their understanding of the human world.

Noaman (2013) summarised the benefits of using literary texts for developing communication skills: "Literary texts will help not only to improve reading but listening, speaking and writing skills as well" (p. 131) and "Literary texts will help to realize the individual and societal development. They make the readers to improve themselves culturally and educationally in accordance with their emotional features" (p. 132). The editor of *Vision: A thematic anthology* (2021) has hoped that the texts in the collection will be able to help its readers to develop these essential capacities of a communicator in English.

Materials and Methods

This is qualitative research. The texts from *Vision: A thematic anthology* (2021) are the primary data for the analysis; and the readings on the logics of using literature in the university classes form the secondary sources that help develop the concepts and rationale of teaching literary texts for management students. The main theoretical logic of this study is that “We learn and teach how to overcome the mental barriers, the time and space barriers, semantic barriers, perpetual barriers, distrust, inhibition, etc. in order to create a better impression while expression.” It is possible in the classroom as “Authors and actors, preachers and teachers are professional communicators” (Mishra & Mishra, 2020, p. 80-81). This study has also incorporated my experience of teaching this course in the real classroom setting in the academic year 2079BS in one of the TU affiliated colleges in Nepal. So, I have also discussed how effective the course was to enhance students’ capacity of creating ideas and using appropriate language in their writings. Finally, I have provided an example of dealing with a poem incorporated in the course.

Results and Discussion

Texts and Teaching

The BBS syllabus (2021) has specified the two-fold method of teaching the texts in the course: “introduce the theme of the texts and lead students to the writing task i.e. guide the students to practice specific skills of language knowledge to produce their own writings” (p. 23). It has detailed out the logic behind it:

The recommended approach is to view the book not as mere language texts but to introduce students to many disciplines in order to expand their intellectual horizon. It is important to discuss what it means to be educated through the ideas of great thinkers and help students to become educated through thoughtful writings on different disciplines. The method, therefore, is to engage students in a dialogue about the questions and ideas raised in each 43 texts by exploring through different perspectives and voices of others, and also sharing respectfully their own experiences and thoughts. (p. 23)

Thus, the objective of the course is not to teach the students about literature, but to help the learners develop their abilities for the use of language for a variety of communicative purposes.

Here, the purpose is not merely teaching literature, but teaching language through literature. So, it is necessary to keep in mind, while teaching this course, that “By reading a piece of literature, learners can understand the diverse use of words, phrases, phrasal verbs, multiple meanings, idioms, etc. They learn to use familiar words in new contexts with new meanings” (Noaman, 2013, p. 125). But all these language skills need to be developed

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indirectly. For this, while selecting the texts, the focus should be on “interest, appeal and relevance” of the texts for the students who are supposed to deal with the texts. Similarly, the focus on the learners’ “needs, motivation, interests, cultural background and language level” is equally necessary matter of consideration. At the same time, one major factor to consider is “whether a particular work is able to reveal the kind of personal involvement by arousing the learners’ interest and eliciting strong, positive reactions from them.” It is because “Reading a literary text is more likely to have a long-term and valuable effect upon the learners’ linguistic and extralinguistic knowledge when it is meaningful and amusing” (Hişmanoğlu, 2005, p. 57).

Noaman (2013) stressed on the need of the careful choice of the texts as even in terms of the difficulty level of grammar and vocabulary for the certain level the learners. He reminded the teachers that “Literary texts should include the structures and vocabulary previously learned. In that there should not be difficult and ambiguous structure” (p. 131-32). Deepa and Ilankumaran (2018) argued that literature should be used “for the development of the four skills of language as well as for providing knowledge of the world” (p. 620). The texts presented in *Vision* have maintained these qualities.

The 43 texts have been put under six thematic headings: culture and society; money and management; science and environment; gender and women; life, death and beyond; and art and philosophy. These are the burning issues of the world that the students in the bachelor’s level need to be acquainted with. In the selection of these texts, the geographic, linguistic and cultural variations have been maintained. The texts are from Europe, America, Africa and Asia. Some texts are from Nepal as well. At the same time, they belong to all genres of literature: poetry, fiction, drama and non-fictional prose. As these texts are the creations of great literary writers of the world, they maintain a certain level of linguistic difficulty that challenges the students of this level.

To obtain the course objectives, Deepa and Ilankumaran (2018) recommended the use of personal growth model of teaching literature for language and communication skill development. In this model, the focus is “on the particular use of language in a text ... placing it in a specific cultural context. Learners are encouraged to express their opinions, feelings and make connections between their personal and cultural experiences and those expressed in the text.” With this process, “this model ... helps the learners to develop knowledge of ideas and the language through different themes and topics.” As a result, “learning takes place when readers are able to interpret texts and construct meaning on the basis of their own experience” (p. 620). The model prescribed by BBS Syllabus is similar in its intention.

Similarly, Matos (2005) argued that the teachers who worked “within a reader response framework that privileges an aesthetic reading of literary texts” can achieve the objectives very well (p. 62). The term response, in his conception, “refers to the interaction that develops between reader and text and between different readers of a common text (p. 63). He further <https://doi.org/10.3126/jom.v6i1.58888>

discussed the value of this process: “Meaning will grow from this collective process. Instead of being a disadvantage then, reading literary texts in a FL has the value of mobilising ‘linguaging’, a critical awareness of self and other” (p. 68). In this model of dealing with literary texts in a language and communication class, “Critically questioning the text and addressing issues of social and political significance may be challenging for students and, above all, prepare them to meet and interact with otherness taken in its multiple cultural identities” (Matos, 2005, p. 67). Here is the role of the teachers to facilitate them. Hişmanoğlu (2005) had similar argument: “when using literature in the language classroom, skills should never be taught in isolation but in an integrated way (p. 57). Based on these logics, we can argue that Lohani’s (2021) argument about the use of literary texts in BBS English course is appropriate.

Hişmanoğlu (2005) proposed the following process of using literary texts for language and communication skill development:

“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 theme(s), 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. Discussion deriving from such questions can be the foundation for oral and written activities. (p. 57)

This sounds to be a well-crafted process. Thus, I used the same process in teaching the texts in the class.

Poetry in Language and Communication Classes

Hişmanoğlu (2005) strongly argued in favour of using poetry in a language and communication class. He believed that “poetry can pave the way for the learning and teaching of basic language skills” (p. 60). There are two basic benefits: “The appreciation of the writer’s composition process, which students gain by studying poems by components” and “Developing sensitivity for words and discoveries that may later grow into a deeper interest and greater analytical ability” (p. 61). He concluded that

poetry employs language to evoke and exalt special qualities of life, and suffices readers with feelings. It is particularly lyric poetry which is based on feelings and provides still another emotional benefit. Poetry is one of the most effective and powerful transmitters of culture. Poems comprise so many cultural elements - allusions, vocabulary, idioms, tone that are not easy to translate into another language. (p. 61)

Deepa and Ilankumaran (2018), too, argued for the use of poetry in language and communication classes. They claimed that

Poetry is an effective way of language teaching. It helps the people to understand culture and to know the language. It also gives pleasure to the readers and gives them new models in their life to follow.... When the students read poetry, it improves their vocabulary, sentence formation, syntax, fluency and the creative skills. The genre poetry not only improves the communication skills but also improves the four skills ... Listening, Speaking, Reading and writing. (p. 619)

They connect poetry classes with the feeling and motivation of learners as well: "In poetry classroom, students can feel liveliness, pleasure, imagination, knowledge about natural things" because they "can compare one poem with another in the same context". Here the role of a teacher is significant: "In order to explain the poems, the teacher has to take more strain and take the students to an imaginary world". Thus "Incorporating literature in language classroom can make the students feel lively and motivating. It provides an interactive circumstance which can prove communication competence of the learners" (Deepa and Ilankumaran, 2018, p. 622).

Mittal (2016) also believed that poetry "promotes literacy, enhance emotions and build communication among peer group.... Poetry inspires students to read more, imagine more, think more, discuss more and write more" (p. 52). Deepa and Ilankumaran (2018) stressed that "poetry has more chance to develop speaking skills than any other genres" (p. 619).

The researchers have also discussed the methods of using poetry for the development of language and communication skills. Reeves (1963) argued that "in the teaching of poetry basically there are four factors to be considered. The students, the poems to be taught, the methods adopted, and the personality of the teacher" (p. 20).

A Practical Example

This practical example of using the poem "Root Cellar" composed by Theodore Roethke from *Vision* (2021) has been based on Hişmanoğlu's (2005) proposed process of teaching a literary text for the development of language and communication skills. The discussion on the poem can be divided into four steps.

Root Cellar
Theodore Roethke

Nothing would sleep in that cellar, dank as a ditch,
Bulbs broke out of boxes hunting for chinks in the dark,
Shoots dangled and drooped,
Lolling obscenely from mildewed crates,
Hung down long yellow evil necks, like tropical snakes.
And what a congress of stinks!
Roots ripe as old bait,
Pulpy stems, rank, silo-rich,
Leaf-mold, manure, lime, piled against slippery planks.
Nothing would give up life:
Even the dirt kept breathing a small breath.

Step I

In this step, the poem can be given as a reading home assignment for the students. They go through the poem and attend the next class with its paraphrase. When the students complete the paraphrase of the poem, they try to comprehend the text in the literal level. For this, they need to find out the dictionary meaning of the words used in the poem. This work demands them to use the dictionary, connect the ideas in the text in the literal level and get a picture of the place and roots the poem presents. The words ‘cellar’, ‘dank’, ‘ditch’, ‘chinks’, ‘dangled’, ‘drooped’, ‘mildewed’, ‘bait’, ‘rank’, ‘silo’, and ‘lime’ were not familiar terms for my students. They used the dictionary to find their meanings. Then they paraphrased the poem in the personal level. These works prepared them for the class discussion on the poem.

Step II

In this step, the students worked collaboratively. At first, they were given the chance of listening to classmate’s paraphrase first in their small groups and then in the whole class. The best paraphrase of each group was given the chance for the class presentation so that their level of consciousness in writing developed. As they were already familiar with this selection process, they worked on the paraphrase consciously. Then, they were taken to the discussion for the meaning of the text.

At first, they were asked to find the location the poem is set in. They were advised to look at the title carefully. With the discussions among the friends and taking the teacher’s hint, they reached to the conclusion that “Root Cellar” refers to the sprouting of the vegetable crates in a damp underground room (cellar) that is a vegetable store. Then they were encouraged to find what the poem meant. For this, they were taken to the editor’s note provided before the poem on the same page. There, the editor has mentioned that “The theme of the poem is the speaker’s celebration of the hardiness and determination of life forms—however small or ugly
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or insignificant—to survive and generate progeny even in unfriendly environments” (Lohani, 2021, p. 127). Then, they were given the time to connect the theme with human life. Some students were perplexed; while some other came with their ideas in this connection. Then the teacher led the discussion of the theme. Every image, symbol, context and other hints were used to connect poem with the theme the editor had hinted. In this level of discussion, the students could use their imagination, inferential capacity to understand the meaning making process of a literary text.

Step III

In this step, the questions in the textbook were given as the home assignment. They were divided into different groups. One group had to choose one or two questions for their task so that their writing was manageable motivating them for giving their full effort for what they were doing. The next day class began with their presentation of the writings followed by the classmate and teacher’s comment on each writing. Here, all the language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) could be used and developed. The questions in the textbook demanded the discussions on different aspects of the poem such as its style, sensation the readers feel, the world as a difficult place to live in, and even the poem as an ecological text. Involving students in these discussions, their language, thinking and communicative skills could be developed. Their focus was on the communication of the ideas so that language skills naturally came into function during these discussions.

Step IV

In this step, the students were taken beyond the text to connect the discussion on the poem with their professional life in future. The questions given to them was: How do you think the theme of the poem is connected with the business and management world? They pondered upon the question and came up with different ideas. The idea that the whole class, including the teacher, agreed upon was: In the field of business and management, problems and challenges are common. One needs to act with all efforts and one should not give up till the last ray of hope remains alive. Finally, the students were given the task of writing an essay on the same idea.

Conclusion

Using literary texts can boost the students’ learning of communication skills. For this, the course needs to comprise well-chosen literary texts that can, at first, challenge the students’ general capacity of learning language; and after overcoming the challenges, their communicative capacity should be improved. Such a course needs to be used in the classroom with an appropriate pedagogy that involves the students in the process of understanding the text, meaning making, and beyond-the-text thinking. *Visions: A thematic anthology* has been prescribed in BBS Second year English course to achieve similar objectives of the course. The pedagogy proposed in both the syllabus and the textbook has been found appropriate, in real <https://doi.org/10.3126/jom.v6i1.58888>

practice, to enhance the students' communicative competence. The tested four-step process of dealing with this course can be one of the good ways of delivering this course in the college classes in Nepal and beyond.

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