

Importance of Incorporating Literature in the Language Classroom

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Abstract

Literature is a prolific expression of human feelings, emotions, thoughts, opinions, and so on. Language is a system of communication that consists of a set of sounds, words, and grammar rules that are used by a particular group of people. The relationship between language and literature is complex and multifaceted, with each influencing and enriching the other in a variety of ways. Literature can be an effective tool for improving language skills and deepening cultural understanding. The substantial objective of this article is to highlight the importance of incorporating literature in the language classroom. This article is based on the secondary qualitative data taken via books and journal articles regarding literature, language and the significance of literature for teaching language skills. Both teachers and students will be benefitted from this article as they will be encouraged and ignited to teach language in an innovative way through using literary texts. It will reflect how language by exploiting the authentic literary materials can be taught in real life situations.

Keywords: Drama, fiction, English, literature, poetry, prose, teaching

1. Introduction

Both language and literature are exceptional possessions of mankind. No one can deny that these possessions ensue and advance hand in hand. Literature, which functions as a mirror of society, represents one of the most persistent uses of the language. It is emphasized as an ally of language (Brumfit & Carter, 1997). It is often used to explore and express ideas, emotions, and experiences, and it can provide insight into different cultures, historical periods, and schools and human nature. It is a written evidence of man's spirit, of his judgments, sensations and ambitions (Long, 1998). It can be a powerful tool for exploring and understanding the human experience, as well as for conveying cultural values and traditions. It is principally an expression of life through the use of language (Hudson, 2002). It has widely been executed as a teaching tool in diverse language teaching methods. While implementing literature in the language class, literary texts of the target language are read, translated and employed as examples of good writing and illustrations of the grammatical conventions (Duff & Maley, Literature, 1990). In the past, literature was taken neither to have a communicative function nor to be an authentic instance of language use. However, it is as one of the most valuable language teaching resources has revived remarkably (Sanz & Fernández, 1997). Some major genres of literature are poetry, prose, drama and fiction. Sonnet, ballad, lyric, dramatic monologue, song, elegy, epic, haiku etc. are the forms of poetry. Essay, meditative reflection etc. are the types of prose. Play, one-act play, film etc. are some sorts of drama. Short story, long story, novel, literary travelogue in a narrative mode, myth, folklore etc. are the categories of fiction.

The students majoring in English at the bachelor and master levels at the campuses under Tribhuvan University, Nepal, study English literary texts with the intention of developing English language. It is necessary for both teachers and students to study literary texts not only from the perspective of meanings, senses, themes or central message, but also from the standpoint of styles and syntactic patterns. Literary texts are normally affluent and they have manifold layers of meaning, and can be efficiently mined for discussions to increase interaction (Chiang, 2007). A renewed interest in literature is gradually emerging in the foreign language curriculum as demonstrated in recent studies (Hall, Literature in language education. Research and practice in applied linguistics, 2015; Sell, 2005; Matos, 2012; Paran, 2010). Secondary data amassed from journals and books depict literary texts' substantial contribution to the development of language. Literature provides learners with authentic, interesting, life-like, resourceful and multifarious materials that can be efficiently used in the language classroom. This article reveals that literature is a potent and effectual tool to teach language.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Language and Literature

Language is our significant source of communication (Nishanthi, 2018). It plays a crucial role in enhancing daily life communication, completing business transactions, and more importantly, in transferring knowledge and many more (Barzani, 2020). It is an inevitable

element of human life (Ashrafuzzaman & Alam, 2017). Language and literature are closely related in that language is the medium through which literature is written and communicated. Literature, in turn, can help to enrich and expand our understanding and use of language. Literature can be taken as a possible source of language development (Hall, *Literature in language education. Research and practice in applied linguistics*, 2015). By reading literature, we can expand our vocabulary, gain a greater understanding of grammar and syntax, and learn about different ways of expressing ideas and emotions. Literary materials effectively transmit the cultures of people (Barzani, 2020), and an effective use of literary materials may proffer the teacher the opportunity to integrate reading comprehension skills with other essential skills, including writing and speaking (Khatib & Nasrollahi, *Enhancing reading comprehension through short stories in Iranian EFL learners*, 2012). Literature has been considered as an influential tool in foreign language teaching and curriculum (Babae & Yahya, 2014). It is an excellent source for increasing students' abilities to infer meaning and to make interpretations (Lazar, 1993; Gangola, 2015). Moreover, a language class can be made sparkling and inspiring through the execution of a literary text (Violetta-Irene, 2015). Similarly, literary texts can be ideal for all the four language skills (Mckay, 2001). All these citations hint at the fact that language and literature are interrelated and naturally supportive to each other.

2.2 Models for Using Literature in the Language Classroom

There are three fundamental models which deal with the reasons for using literature in the language classroom. They are the cultural model, the language model and personal growth model (Carter & Long, 1991). Each model is a representation of different propensities in relation with methodology and classroom practice.

The Cultural Model

The cultural model views literature, the product of social and historical circumstances, as one of the most palpable and precious means of achieving cultural insights (Scott, 1964). Literary texts can be used in order to engage and induce learners by providing them with deeper associations with target cultures (Lazar, 1993). Learners are prone to being familiar with traditions, ideologies, views and feelings within the genres of literature. Teaching literature provides learners with a truly cultural competence (Sell, 2005),

The Language Model

The language model states how language is used within a given literary text that is intended to provide the learners with examples of particular grammatical points and lexical items. The benefits of the language model are the extension of vocabulary; better reading fluency; improved interpretive and inferential skills, and exposure to a greater variety of lexis and syntax (Widdowson H. , 1979). It stresses the more fine and assorted creative executions of language.

The Personal Growth Model

The personal growth model gives emphasis to a student-centered approach to literature study greatly. The aim is to employ literature as a vehicle to educate, to endorse critical awareness,

and to assess and discuss issues within the text. Examples could comprise reader-response activities (Rosenblatt, 1938) that personalize the reading experience, or reactions to a text that facilitates to attach reading to the students' lives (Showalter, 2003). This model is particularly well suited to the developing language of the learners in the high school as well as undergraduate university classrooms. The prime goal of this model is to assist students to achieve an involvement with the reading and interpretation of literary texts (Boas, 1966). To promote personal growth of the learners, the teachers need to select suitable texts to which students can respond and use their ideas and imagination in a creative way.

2.3 Importance of Incorporating Literature in the Language Classroom

Literary texts play a significant role in the field of language teaching. They are important at three levels: linguistic, methodological and motivational (Dymešová, 2006). The linguistic level maintains that texts are full of different styles, registers and genres. The methodological level shows that literary texts manufacture interlinkage among learners. Similarly, the motivational level assumes that the sensation of literary texts is a strong motivator. As a result, literature has been given much emphasis in the EFL classroom (Kaşlıoğlu & Ersin, 2018). It is an authentic material for language learning due to its educational value along with encouraging social interaction among learners (Clanfield & Duncan, 2005). It makes the students familiar to a wide range of language varieties such as sociolects, regional dialects, jargon, idiolects etc.

Hence, literature incorporates sociolinguistic aspects in the way of teaching target language (Shahid, 2016) and educates the learners to grow professionally (Carter & Long, 1991; Van T. M., 2009; Yeasmin, Azad, & Ferdoush, 2011). It can be used as a model and subject matter for writing tasks (Stern, 2001). The inclusion of literature in ELT classrooms has been viewed as a beneficial process as it contributes to students' linguistic development, appreciation of different cultures, personal involvement, and individual growth (Carter & Long, 1991). Literary texts help the students to activate their imagination and develop their emotions (Babae & Yahya, 2014). Literature also helps students to exhibit interpretative abilities (Lazar, 1993; Gangola, 2015). It can be an effective and inspiring source for learning to write while studying English as a second language (Shahid, 2016). Contextual reading plays a very significant role in keeping vocabulary into students' mind as teachers' lectures, reading books (Alam & Ashrafuzzaman, 2018). Custodio and Sutton (1998) explain that literature can open horizons of possibility, allowing students to question, interpret, connect, and explore. Using the literary texts, the language classroom can be turned into a lively and motivating place (Violetta-Irene, 2015). It helps to enrich vocabulary and develop analytical and interpretive skills of a learner (Ashrafuzzamana, Ahmedb, & Begum, 2021). That's why it has been proven as a great tool to approach English language and English culture (Begum & Burgess, 2019).

Literature is the media of teaching and learning authentic language (Shazu, 2014), and the inclusion of some pieces of literature in materials will bring variety, making the materials enjoyable for the students (Huda, 2012). Language teaching without the help of literature is

doomed to be unattractive (Choudhury, 2001). The use of literature can be taken as a technique for teaching both basic language skills, such as reading, writing, listening and speaking, and language areas, such as vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation (Hismanoglu, 2005). Thus, it has been discovered as a valuable and interesting material for improving students' language ability (Premawardhena, 2005). Moreover, it helps students acquire a native-like competence in English (Obediat, 1997). Literary texts provide opportunities for multi-sensorial classroom experiences. They enhance the literary and language horizons of the students (Kumar, 2022). They are representational rather than referential (McRae, 1994), draw attention to stylistic peculiarity, provide frameworks for creative response (Pulverness, 2003) and deal with universal issues by creating a thought among the people that they are also the part of the whole humanity (Chandran & Raj, 2016). Literature provides more language access for the learners (Littlewood, 1986) and a good model for good writing (Parkinson & Thomas, 2000).

Several research studies claim the need to include literary texts into the L2 curriculum (Cook, 1994; Shanahan, 1997; Hanauer, 2001; Carroli, 2008) or alternatively advocate a content-based curriculum that would include literature components (Liddicoat, 2000; Kramsch, 2013). Many language teachers tend to admit the potentiality of literary texts in terms of development of different aspects of a foreign language. It is argued that literature promotes, among others, students' L2 vocabulary knowledge, knowledge of lexical phrases and fixed expressions (Frantzen, 2002; MacKenzie, 2000), grammatical knowledge (Tayebipour, 2009), language awareness (Carroli, 2008), and sociolinguistic and pragmatic competences (Mckay, 2001). It also lays emphasis on reading, particularly the reading of culturally authentic texts, has become one of the central claims for curriculum reform in EFL teaching (Swaffar, 1999; Arens & Swaffar, 2000; Dupuy, 2000). The use of literary texts might be proved to be highly demanding for teachers and students (Rice, 1991; Van T. , 2009; Lima, 2010). Thus, for Van (2009), the study of literature is a must as far as it exposes students to meaningful contexts rich in descriptive language and interesting characters. Literature might be the appropriate source of numerous activities for the development of reading, writing, speaking and listening skills (Belcher & Hirvela, 2000; Erkaya, 2005; Nasr, 2001). It provides additional materials of grammar practice, vocabulary learning, translation (Liaw, 2001) Therefore, literature is taken as an important tool in the holistic development of students (Horner, 1983). Literary texts are essential parts of integrative language teaching (Carroli, 2008; DeBlase, 2005; Bagherkazemi & Alemi, 2010). Multidimensional advantages of literary texts can be regarded as a means for developing EFL skills are being explored by (Alderson, 2000; Kern, 2000; Hur, 2005) among others. It bridges transmission of information and meaning construction (Kern, 2000). They help stimulate the imagination of students, develop their critical abilities, and increase their emotional awareness (Lazar, 1993). They make students become broadly aware of the social, political, historical, or cultural events happening in a particular society (Floris, 2004).

Reading literary texts fosters emotional intelligence (Ghosn, 2002). Literature is a good source for nurturing our Emotional Quotient (Khatib, Rezaei, & Derakhshan, 2011). It is specifically

related to the human ability to control emotions (Averil, 2001). It helps students to reflect on their lives and their surrounding world, opening horizons of possibility, allowing them to question, interpret, connect, and explore (Langer, 1997). It is one of the many resources available for language teaching (Khatib, Rezaei, & Derakhshan, 2011). Literature motivates students for learning. This motivating engagement creates a positive general effect on the learning process which is at the same time positive for the particular process of language acquisition (Bobkina & Dominguez, 2014). It expands the linguistic knowledge of the learners (Povey, 1967). It is a rich source of meaningful input especially in EFL settings (Pugh, 1989), and a large repertoire of vocabulary (Arthur, 1968), a tool for creating opportunities for discussion, controversy, and critical thinking (Lazar, 1993), a primary material of teaching the target language, providing authentic and real contexts of communicative situations (Khatib & Rahimi, 2012) and it can also be taken as a supplementary material for entertainment and motivation (Moody, 1986).

Literature in the language classroom holds its special position for its linguistic value, cultural and affective value (Duff & Maley, 2007), cultural enrichment (Collie & Slater, 1987), a rhetoric, a model for good writing (Collie & Slater, 1987), creating mental training (Leavis, 1943), authenticity (Duff & Maley, Literature, 1990), being memorable (Maley & Moulding, 1985), assimilating the rhythms of a language (Maley & Moulding, 1985), involving affect and thus motivating (Duff & Maley, Literature, 1990), its nature open to multiple interpretations and thus leading to genuine interaction (Duff & Maley, Literature, 1990) and affective arguments that are pleasurable, motivating and personalizing (Hall, 2005).

Literary genres have their own characteristics and potentialities. Poetry evokes feelings and thoughts in heart and in mind (Saraç, 2003). It conveys love and appreciation for the sound and power of language (Çubukçu, 2001). It is one of the most effective and powerful transmitters of culture (Sage, 1987), and is very powerful in fostering critical thinking and creativity (Cumming, 2007). It can bring a healthy exit for flowing emotions (Simmons, 2014). The use of poetry in the English language classroom has been one of the main research areas in ELT (Cubukcu, 2001; Cumming, 2007). The world of short fiction both mirrors and illuminates human lives (Sage, 1987). It makes the students' reading task easier due to being simple and short when compared with the other literary genres, enlarges the advanced level readers' worldviews about different cultures and different groups of people and facilitates teaching a foreign culture (Arioğul, 2001).

It keeps motivating students' speaking by using short stories (Amer, 2012; Kohan & Pourkalhor, 2013; Pardede, 2010; Sepahvand, 1914; Sakthivel, Phil, & Kavidha, 2010). Reading a full novel in a second language can be extremely nerve-racking and overwhelming (Jewett, 2017). Such a text firmly grasps the reader's thoughts and makes scopes for the examination of language as well (Gangola, 2015). Novels help students to identify the emotions of the characters so that they can learn how others cope with situations and problems similar

to their own experiences (Helton, Asamani, & Thomas, 1998). They further mention that novels enable students to acquire information, process this knowledge, identify problems, formulate alternatives, and arrive at meaningful, thoughtful, effective decisions and solutions. Short stories motivate students to continue reading so that they can solve the problem (Erkaya, 2005). Two advantages of using short stories for raising critical thinking in students are that the texts are entertaining, and they put issues of critical thinking in an easily remembered context (Young, 1996). Dramas present the comprehension of life experiences, reflect on particular circumstances and make sense of their extra linguistic world in a deeper way (Sarıçoban, 2004). They stimulate the imagination and promote creative thinking, develop critical thinking skills, promote language development, heighten effective listening skills and strengthen comprehension and learning retentions (Lenore, 1993). They bring authenticity into the classroom, exposing the learners to the target culture as well as the social problem, and help learners improve their level of competence with respect to their receptive and productive skills (Mengü, 2002).

All literature stimulates thinking by giving readers substance for reflection; this facilitates cognitive development (Kelly, 1996). Literature "enlarges students' vision and fosters critical thinking (Oster, 1989). It provides the students with the contextualization of language, suitable for them with different styles and takes into account individual differences and natural and meaningful use of language (Hadaway, Vardell, & Young, 2002). It can be applied for close linguistic analysis and creative activities (Widdowson, 1992). Reading is the most important instrument for academic settings (Anderson, 1994). Great literature is simply language charged with meaning to the utmost possible degree (Pound, 1971)

The incorporation of literature would enhance language competence (McKay, 1982; Lazar, 1993; Widdowson H. G., 1983) cultural awareness (Akyel & Yalçin, 1990; Lazar, 1993; Shanahan, 1997), critical thinking (Lazar, 1993; Ghosn, 2002; Parkinson & Thomas, 2000) and motivation (Akyel & Yalçin, 1990; Ghosn, 2002; Parkinson & Thomas, 2000) in a second/foreign language context. The reasons for the suitability of literature as resource in EFL and ESL setting are the literary features that are universality, non-triviality, personal relevance, variety, economy and suggestive power and ambiguity (Maley, 2001). A survey in Hong Kong found that the group who read literary texts showed improvement in vocabulary and reading (Lao & Krashen, 2000). Similarly, it was found out that when students read they interacted with the text and interpreted what they read and this analysis made them be more creative and critical (Erkaya, 2005).

All these citations justify that literature plays a prominent role in the language classroom in enhancing linguistic skills, creative skills, imaginative skills and critical skills in the students.

3. Method and Materials

This review article stems from the secondary qualitative data execution. Words, phrases and concepts related to literature and language are the data which have been amassed from journal articles, and books. These data have been pinpointed and described in order to explore the importance of incorporating literature in the language classroom.

4. Conclusion

Incorporating literature in the language classroom can be an effective way to support language development and deepen cultural understanding in the students. Reading and analyzing literature can help students develop reading comprehension, vocabulary, grammar, creative skills and critical thinking skills. It can also provide a rich source of authentic language for students to learn and practise. It can serve as a springboard for discussions and other language activities. By reading literature from different cultures and historical periods, students can gain insight into the values, beliefs, and experiences of others, which can help to broaden their perspectives and understanding of the world. Moreover, it can be a source of inspiration and encouragement for students to express themselves creatively through writing and other forms of artistic expression. It can provide a rich and engaging context for language learning, and it can facilitate to make the language classroom a more dynamic and meaningful learning environment. Overall, the inclusion of literature in the language classroom is an important and valuable aspect of language education, as it can help students to develop their language skills, attain their cultural understanding, and explore the human experiences through the written words. This article concludes that language and literature are interrelated, but not isolated entities. It recommends the course designers to incorporate literary texts in the language classroom to learn both language and literature in their entirety.

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