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The Use of Literature in Language Teaching: A Pedagogical Approach from the Nepali Perspective

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Abstract

The use of literature in language teaching is still contentious though literature occupies limited space in the language syllabi. The language teachers assume that literature has less contribution to language teaching, believing that literary materials are challenging to handle in the classroom. However, I believe that literary materials are rich in content and have the creative language use to contribute to language teaching. In this juncture, this study analyzes the use of literature in English language teaching in general and the pedagogical approaches to be practiced in particular by using qualitative and analytical research design. For this purpose, the three texts of literature: Katherine Mansfield's "The Garden Party" (story), Kamala Das' "An Introduction" (poem), and Anton Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard* (drama) have been used as the primary texts to design the activities under three levels of interaction. These literary texts are analyzed to show the use and pedagogy of literature in language teaching. The study concludes that literature in language teaching contributes to the language development and aesthetic purpose. Exploring the literary texts involves students in (preliminary) interaction to draw the information of the text for conceptualization. Likewise, the activities under reading between the lines inculcate different skills in students such as discussing, analyzing, exploring and characterizing; and literary texts in beyond the text section involve students in aesthetic purpose-based activities in which students apply the critical lenses and create their own texts. This study provides many language teachers with insights to handle literary texts more effectively to sharpen students' language, inferential and intellectual skills.

Keywords: Language teaching, literary texts, pedagogical approach, aesthetic purpose

Introduction

Literature has been serving the teaching and learning of language as a source material for a long time. Before the advent of structural approach to language teaching, literature was the undeniable source to teach language with the assumption to develop basic and intellectual abilities in the learners, and the teaching learning in the classroom was facilitated by the grammar translation method.

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Supporting this view, Kramersch and Kramersch explained that the teaching and learning of language in those days meant the study of literature (qtd. in Aydinoglu 36). However, the practice of audio-lingualism as a method of teaching a language based on the structural approach put forward the assumption that literature and language teaching are two separate entities and literature was completely taken out of the realm of language teaching.

However, the attitude to include literature in language teaching became lenient with the advent of communicative approach to language teaching. As this approach to language teaching assumes to develop communicative competence in the learners, Truong Thi My Van argues that the study of literature in the language classroom is beneficial to expose students with a meaningful context that are abundantly filled with multiple models of language use, plot, intent, theme and a profound range of vocabulary (2). Following the same vein, Alan Hirvela is of the opinion that such changes in attitude have led to a surge of interest in literature in the English Language Teaching (ELT), particularly in the context of communicative language teaching (iv). The communicative approach to language teaching with the development of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) in recent years has required the use of authentic material to teach language. In this juncture, the literary texts can provide meaningful contents and ample opportunities to carry out different interactive teaching learning activities in the classroom. In the words of Nina Daskalovska and Violeta Dimova, the literary texts as authentic materials are rich in contents, provide opportunities to carry out the communicative activities like a meaningful discussion in order to lead students to convincing inferences and interpretations (1186).

Nowadays, literature has been considered as a text, verbal and or visual, that offers the possibility for reading and responding or listening and viewing. The volume of literature can be extended to film/movie, television drama or other media by which information can be assembled, organized and transmitted effectively. Literature as a material in teaching and learning develops the potential of learners in a balanced and integrated manner, encompassing the intellectual, emotional, psychological and social aspects. A wider view about literature and its exploitation in language teaching is found in Kramersch and Kramersch. They claim that literature provides students with ample opportunities for the development of reading strategies and the reasoning skills (qtd. in Carter 7). Following the same spirit, Mustakim et al argue that literature is not only meant to enhance language proficiency, but also to expose students with the complexities of human life, culture, behaviours and other social norms (35). Literature in language teaching, particularly at tertiary level, can contribute to linguistic analysis, and high order skills, for example, analyzing, synthesizing and interpreting by employing relevant critical lenses. The aforementioned discussion in favour and against the inclusion of literature in language teaching demands further clarification about the role and pedagogy of literature in language teaching. This view is similar to Alan Maley who explains that the role of literature in language teaching is still contentious although several attempts made to keep this issue beyond the debate have not been fruitful as expected (182). The present study attempts to analyze the use and pedagogy of literature in language teaching by using the sample literary texts and existing empirical studies.

Theoretical Framework

This section presents the theoretical bases related to the roles and pedagogy of literature in language teaching. As literature is an example of language use and a discipline that manifests several diverse themes, students read the literary texts for the informative or/ and for aesthetic purpose. Rosenblatt as a pioneer figure of reader-

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centred approach to teaching literature discussed that literature contributes to the readers' responses through efferent and aesthetic reading (qtd. in Kathryn 14). In efferent reading, the reader/learner comprehends the literary text for conceptualization whereas in aesthetic reading, the learner puts forward the views creatively on the issues existed in the literary text applying the critical lenses.

In relation to the development of students' proficiency, which ultimately means the command of language, John McH. Sinclair argues that the notion 'command of language' involves linguistic and literary considerations and such proficiency can be achieved analyzing the functional role of literary language (10). It means that the literary texts are authentic materials, and they have communicative value. Christopher Brumfit claims that literature as a content-rich and widely appealing material contributes not only to language development, but to expose students to aesthetic works, literary perceptions and is an attempt to develop or extend literary competence through a student centered approach to teaching literature (38).

Ronald Carter and Michael Long have discussed how literature can be an integral part of language teaching. They argue that literature as a legitimate and valuable resource can supply many linguistic opportunities to the teaching of language and allow more valuable language-based exercises (17). Later, Carter presents an expanded/ a wider view about literature and its status in language teaching. He contributes to develop the pedagogy of literature and acknowledges literature as a material to teach high order skills. His approach to teaching literature assumes the reader/student as an "active respondent in classroom, and an explorer of language and culture in literary text" (8). Likewise, Maley has mentioned that literature in language teaching can contribute in two different ways, for example, literature as a resource and literature as a study (181). The former one is related to literature for language development whereas the latter regards literature as a subject to study. This explanation about literature in the teaching of English has created a dichotomy to date. The teachers of English are still in chaos, for example, whether literature even at university level is taught for language development only or should be expanded for the aesthetic purpose.

There are some studies related to the role and pedagogy of literature in language teaching. The study of Sonia Zyngier and Oliva Fialho has focused on the use of critical pedagogy that links literature teaching and pedagogical stylistics to develop a critical reflection and self-awareness in students (13). The international institution, for example, the Common European Framework of References for Languages (CEFR) projects the standard of English and such projection is widely accepted. The study of Christian Jones and Ronald Carter in the context of CEFR found that literature as a useful resource develops a language and cultural awareness but have some doubt about how useful students can perceive it to be (80). The seminal work was carried out by Hulya Kucukoglu and Arda Arikan and their study revealed that the literature courses help learning about the target culture, lexis and language skills, but they had doubt that literary materials were less relevant to foster learners' speaking skills (1718).

The exploitation of literary texts in the language classroom allows teachers to design the language-based and other exercises and exposes students to the multiple models of creative language use. Chnara Khdir and Mariwan Hasan have selected "The Waste Land" as a primary text and their study is based on the theory developed by Maley and Duff, Carter and other existing literature. The study concluded that the literary text like "The Waste Land" offers incredible pedagogical opportunities to achieve linguistic enrichment and cultural competence in students and it further exposes them to the existed philosophy of the text (6). The literary texts occupy an important space in English language teaching and learning, especially in enhancing communicative competence,

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promoting cultural awareness and generating motivation among students. In their study, Shamsur Khan and Ali Alasmari have analyzed the previous studies on literature in English language teaching from various countries, including the Arab world. Their study showed that literature facilitates in fostering the learners' language skills, and focused on the adoption of different approaches to the teaching of literature (174).

Literature has been accepted as a meaningful component for the university curriculum of English language teaching. The objectives of teaching literature in the language courses have been extended to the development of intellectual performance although it was captivated to the development of acquisition in yesteryear. Cecilia Alvstad and Andrea Castro; Elham Hussein and Aida Emami; and Bazimaziki Gabriel have analyzed the candid views, particularly of the university English language teachers along with the existing university syllabi of literature in language teaching. Their study with a thorough careful analysis concluded that literature is an integral part of language teaching to enhance language, literary and high order skills although it is challenging to handle (qtd. in Gabriel 223). Meanwhile, their study emphasized on employing assimilation as students' strategy of learning literature.

Learning a language through literature engages students in creative activities. Alison Koushki argued that literature in general is beneficial to foster language skills, and fairy tales in particular, appeal to students' innate curiosity, language skills and life skills: communication, creativity and critical thinking, collaboration and confidence (144). One of the reasons of teaching literature is to promote interpretative skills in the learners. Wisely selected texts of literature encourage the learners to interact and respond to the text critically and creatively. Noraini Shukri and Jaykaran Mukundan in their studies concluded that the literary texts, if wisely chosen and tactfully instructed, facilitate the learners in fostering critical thinking skills (4).

Nowadays, literary analysis is extended to the study of images, symbols and socio-cultural aspects embedded in the text. Gary Fogal incorporates such study under pedagogical stylistics and concept-based instruction and his analysis showed the significant changes in students' performance before and after the intervention of such pedagogical scheme (iv).

Among the aforementioned studies, Rosenblatt, Sinclair, Brumfit, Maley and Carter have discussed the roles and pedagogy of literature in language teaching from the theoretical perspectives and their views have been supported or countered by other empirical studies. The contribution of Rosenblatt and Carter is more important to widen the pedagogy of literature, which attempts to establish student as an explorer of linguistic and other elements existed in the literary text and their analysis in relation to the socio-cultural context. Both Rosenblatt and Carter stood in the same line that they acknowledge literature as an undeniable material for intensive and extensive reading, but the stance of reading literature put forward by Rosenblatt such as the efferent and aesthetic reading conveys the message that these two stances are poles apart and ignore the step 'reading between the lines.'

The studies such as Alvstad and Castro; Zyngier and Fialho; Jones and Carter; Kucukoglu and Arikan; Shukri and Mukundan; Hussein and Emami; Khan and Alasmari; and Gabriel have regarded literature as complementary to language teaching. In relation to the use of literature in tertiary level language teaching, their studies show literature as material to teach language and literary skills along with critical thinking skills. The study of Fogal (2015) is a potential pedagogical model in the field of teaching literature although that gives less attention to students' engagement. The concept put forward by Maley is still followed thoroughly at university English language teaching. The majority of the aforementioned studies seem unconvincant about the role of literature for the

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aesthetic purpose. Although Rosenblatt discusses about aesthetic reading as one of the stances of reading, she treats it separately from efferent reading. Such treatment of Rosenblatt, Maley and Carter in essence has clearly created the gap and chaos about the use of literature in language teaching among the stakeholders. The aforementioned studies do not link a literal interpretation of the literary text with aesthetic reading in order to show the integrated roles of literature in language teaching and its pedagogy. Several queries related to this issue need to be addressed by carrying out an empirical research. The present study employs the three texts of literature as the primary texts and analyzes the use of literature in language teaching. For this, the teaching and learning of each literary text is presented with a balanced focus and linkage among the levels of interaction practiced while dealing inside the classroom, for example, exploring the text, reading between the lines and beyond the text.

Methodology

The study based on descriptive and analytical research design has used both primary and secondary sources of data in order to answer the issues raised in the objectives of the study. The three literary texts: “The Garden Party” by Katherine Mansfield, “An Introduction” by Kamala Das and *The Cherry Orchard* by Anton Chekhov have been used as primary texts. For the convenience of the study, the last part of “The Garden Party,” the last section of “An Introduction,” and the last scene of *The Cherry Orchard* have been used while developing the tasks. The teaching learning of each text is facilitated by the three levels of interaction: exploring the text, reading between the lines and beyond the text. Likewise, each level of interaction is enriched by a task having allocated tasks. The activities have been drawn with the help of tasks and discussed accordingly to show the use of literature in language teaching. As secondary sources, Rosenblatt, Brumfit, Carter and Long, Maley and Carter have been consulted to develop theoretical bases and their studies have been supported by other studies of Alvstad and Castro, Zyngier and Fialho, Kucukoglu and Arikan, Fogal, Hussein and Emami, Khan and Alasmari, and Gabriel.

Results and Discussions

The study of literary texts avails teachers and students with opportunities to carry out different activities. For this purpose, the last scene of “The Garden Party,” the last section of “An Introduction” and the last scene of *The Cherry Orchard* have been used as the primary texts. This section presents how such pieces of literary texts support to carry out different activities under the three levels of interaction: exploring the text, reading between the lines and beyond the text in order to show the use and pedagogy of literature in language teaching. Exploring the text section presents how these literary texts involve students in preliminary interaction, reading between the lines section shows how students explore the implied meaning of the text, and beyond the text presents how the literary texts help students interpret them applying the critical lenses. For each text, a separate task under the three levels of interaction has been developed and activities are drawn and discussed below.

Activity 1: Mansfield’s “The Garden Party”

Task 1: Exploring the Text

1. How do people in your society respond when someone dies?
2. Present briefly, the dress up the family members adopted in the garden party.
3. Describe the class prejudice or class difference reflected in the text.
4. Discuss the narrative style that Mansfield employed in this story.

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5. Explain in brief, the perception of life that Laura develops in her mind.
6. Describe the setting of the story.
7. Summarize the story in your own words.

The aforementioned task includes seven different items under exploring the text. Items 1, 3 and 6 support to describing the fact; items 2, 4 and 5 support to presenting/stating, discussing and explaining. Likewise, students develop a summary in item 7. The teacher, for the purpose of literal comprehension of the text, asks students to accomplish these tasks, and the students either in group or individually respond to them. It shows that literature under exploring the text contributes to carry out the activities: describing, discussing, explaining and summarizing.

Task 2: Reading between the Lines

The teacher can divide students into different groups and provide them with the task given below. After the discussion, students present/share the substance of their discussion.

1. The value of the garden party in the Sheridan family
2. The aristocrat's treatment to poor
3. The consequences of class discrimination and domination in the story
4. The theme of the story
5. Laura and her status in the story
6. The substance evocated in the last lines – She stopped and looked at her brother. “Isn't life,” she stammered, “isn't life- -.” But she couldn't explain. “Isn't it, darling?” said Laurie.

As mentioned in the task above, students discuss either in pair or in group and interpret the gist of the given task. For this, students can read, discuss, write and share. In item 1, they discuss the value of the garden party in the Sheridan family; and about the space of poor among the aristocrats in item 2. Likewise, the results of class difference and domination in item 3, the substance of the story in item 4, the status of Laura and her family in contemporary society in item 5, and the substance of the last lines in item 6.

Here, the literary text (the story for our purpose) provides a wider space to students' engagement/discussion on different items that ultimately fosters the interpretative skills in students. Such discussion can be a group discussion or a discussion in pair. Students can employ the strategy: read, discuss, write and share. Moreover, the discussions on different issues existed in the story make students acquainted with other cultures, the culture of Sheridan, the aristocrat and the value of the garden party in their community. At the same time, Sheridans' indifference to the death of neighbor makes students aware that sympathy to someone's death should be beyond the wall of class prejudice.

Task 3: Beyond the Text (Engaging Students for Aesthetic Purpose)

1. How does the story present the Sheridan family's superficiality and obsession with status? Give an example of such family phenomena occur in your society? Present the similarities and differences between your own and of Sheridan. Analyze these phenomena critically.
2. Critically analyze the aesthetics of class discrimination in “The Garden Party.”
3. Select a story with the theme of segregation composed by a Nepali author and critically present the intent of the text.
4. Apply one of the relevant literary approaches to analyze this story.

The aforementioned task includes four different items. In item 1, the teacher asks students to describe/ analyze the facts about the Sheridan family, explore similar family

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in their context, compare and contrast them and analyze the similarities and differences critically. In item 2, students critically analyze the beauty of class discrimination existed in the story. Likewise, in item 3, the teacher asks students to explore the story of similar theme in Nepali literature and critically serve the main message of the story, and item 4 encourages students to analyze the text employing one of the critical lenses.

It shows that using a story in language teaching helps students to carry out the activities: comparing and contrasting, exploring and critically analyzing. The story in this level of interaction (beyond the text) is supportive to carry out the activities to develop intellectual skills, for example, exploring, analyzing, assimilating and interpreting. This finding is similar to Chi-An Tung and Shu-ying Chang who conclude that literature reading encourages students to think critically, to assimilate their life experiences with the themes of literary texts (287).

Activity 2: Das's "An Introduction"

Task 1: Exploring the Text

1. Describe the language features in this poem? Do you find such features in other forms of discourse? Explain.
2. Does the poet feel that her married life is fragile? How?
3. Describe the picture of a man she portrays in this poem.
4. What arguments does she put forward to present the equal status of woman to man?
5. Paraphrase the poem in simple English.
6. Predict the theme of this poem.

The above task shows that the literary texts in the classroom help students to carry out different activities. The queries mentioned in items 1, 3 and 4 avail students with the opportunities to describing and explaining; item 2 to arguing; item 5 to paraphrasing and item 6 to predicting.

Task 2: Reading between the Lines

1. Discuss the author's feelings about her first encounter with a man.
2. What does the author mean when she says, "I am a saint, I am the beloved and the betrayed?"
3. If you read closely, you will see that the poem can be divided into three thematic parts. What do these thematic parts deal with?
4. What does the author ignore/miss to project about males and females in the text?
5. Appreciate the poem in your own words.

As shown in item 1, students, while reading literary text, can discuss about the author's first encounter with a man who had the pride of being male; as shown in item 2, the teacher asks students to interpret a particular line/s; the third and fourth items help students to predict the themes of the text and the parts about males and females that she ignores to project. In item 5, students appreciate the poem. It means that the literary texts are the authentic materials to carry out the activities: discussing, describing, predicting and appreciating.

Task 3: Beyond the Text

1. Critically examine the theme of this poem from the female perspective.
2. Select any two (English) poems of gender discrimination composed by Nepali author(s) and discuss how these selected texts portray the picture of women in our context. Also suggest some measures to improve the situation.

As hinted in query 1 and 2, the literary texts and their use in language teaching provide students with opportunities to examine the main message of the text critically in which students can express their candid views in favour or against the theme of the text or they can draw their own theme on the basis of the teacher initiated discussion. Likewise, students select two or more texts dealing with the gender issues from their context, and analyze them and finally present their creative recommendations.

Activity 3: Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard*

Task 1: Exploring the Text

1. Why does Trofimov get angry at Ranevskaya in the last scene of the drama?
2. What do the ruin of Madme Ranevskaya and the destruction of the cherry orchard refer to?
3. Summarize the drama in your own words.
4. Comment on the language and style of *The Cherry Orchard*.
5. Give two examples of realistic plays in Nepali literature and compare one of them with *The Cherry Orchard* in their intent.

As shown in item 1, students describe the factual information; in items 2, 3 and 4, they predict, summarize the given text and comment the language style used in drama; and in item 5, they identify the realistic plays from Nepali literature and compare and contrast the theme of *The Cherry Orchard* with the intent of Nepali drama. It shows that the literary texts support to carry out the activities: predicting, summarizing, commenting, exploring/ identifying, comparing and contrasting.

Task 2: Reading between the Lines

The teacher holds a group discussion and asks students to do the following task.

1. Discuss the plot of *The Cherry Orchard*.
2. Sketch the characteristic features of Madme Renevskaya.
3. Explain with reference to the context- "My friends, my ear, cherished friends. Leaving this house forever, can I pass over in silence, can I refrain from giving utterance, as we say farewell, to those feelings that now fill my whole being."

In item 1, the teacher asks students to discuss the plot of drama in group or in pair and such discussion develops students' oral skills; in item 2, they can describe a particular character from different angles; and in item 3, students explore the context of the given text and explain the message.

Task 3: Beyond the Text

1. Analyze *The Cherry Orchard* as a social and political play.
2. Find any Nepali play of great power that has brought awareness and change in the society and elaborate the intent of it in detail.

In item 1, the text of drama encourages students to analyze the drama on the basis of social and political ground; in item 2, students explore/identify the drama of seminal substance and explain/elaborate the intent of it. It shows that drama is a useful material to carry out the activities: analyzing, exploring/ identifying, explaining and elaborating.

Conclusion

The above analysis and interpretation reflect the extensive use of literature in language teaching. The use of literature in language teaching is shown by drawing and analyzing different activities under the three levels: comprehension, analysis and interpretation. The activities: describing, explaining, predicting, paraphrasing, summarizing, arguing, and commenting and connecting language use have been carried

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out under exploring the text section. The different activities under the reading between the lines section inculcate different skills in students such as discussing, analyzing, appreciating, exploring and characterizing. The different activities set under the beyond the text section help in developing critical and creative thinking skills: analyzing/ examining critically, illustrating, synthesizing and interpreting. The activities under these levels of interaction are inter-related to each other: some may occur under more than one level. It can be concluded that the literary texts as rich resources of creative language use and different issues of human life contribute to intensive and extensive/critical reading. This conclusion is similar to Dascalovska and Dimova who synthesize that literature helps students develop skills and strategies and make the learning of language justifiable through its tactfully woven structures and meaningful social interactions.

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