

## IMPACT OF LITERATURE ON ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING

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### **Abstract**

*This paper aims at focusing on the use of literature as a basic component and popular technique for teaching basic language skills, i.e., reading, writing, listening and speaking and language areas i.e., vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation as well. There have been several discussions on the reasons behind the incorporation of literature into ESL/EFL curriculum during recent times. Similar studies are made on the problems encountered by language teachers in the area of teaching English through literature that include absence of clear objectives defining the role of literature in language classrooms, and lack of well designed appropriate materials that can be used by language teachers in a classroom context. This paper discusses why it is important for a language teacher to use literary texts in the language classroom to improve the literary competencies of the learner.*

*KEY WORDS: language skills, language areas, impact of literature on language, curriculum and appropriate materials, literary competencies etc.*

### **Introduction**

In Wordsworth and Dante's words, literature is the end and language is the means. Whenever we come across people with different nature and attitudes, we create some impression in our mind. We react to the situations and then it becomes necessary for us to put our ideas into words. Wordsworth once said that "all good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings". This requires a spontaneous overflow of a flowery language to make it literature. Hence Dante's verdict is more correct when he says that "poetry and the language proper for it are an elaborate and painful toil." The role of literature was already emphasized by Brumfit and Carter as "an ally of language". Literature can help the language learners improve their skills in reading, writing, listening and speaking which in turn improves their communicative and cultural competence. A literary text creates interest in the students enabling them to get familiar with the vocabulary and draws them towards the language intricacies.

Literary texts can be studied in either original form or abridged form. We can list the types of literary texts as follows.

- 1 Short story
- 2 Poems
- 3 Novels
- 4 Plays
- 5 Song Lyrics

### **Designing of the Syllabus**

It is not easy to select literature for the purpose of teaching language. The necessity, interests, cultural background, and language level of the students are of prime importance in this aspect. Collie and Slater are of the opinion that the text used by teachers must be in accordance with the capability of the students. Translation of these literary texts into other languages including mother tongue also helps students learn more of vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation. Simultaneously the novels, plays or short stories if culturally enriched bring in great curiosity among the language learners to become aware of various characters from various regional and cultural backgrounds.

We can observe that the recently developed course materials include various real-life contexts like travelogues, pamphlets, advertisements and newspaper articles. Literature is a part of a story or an article that draws the attention of the reader. It is rare for two readers to react in an identical manner to any given text. Ambiguity is created but then it creates different images among them. Here comes the opportunity for the students to discuss each one's perception that will make the class very interesting. Syllabus making forms very important aspect here. The makers of the syllabus need to take into account when selecting the literary texts or lessons to be introduced or taught in language classes, the interests, cultural or regional background and the language level of the students. Teachers can use these literary texts in a great number of ways in the classroom which may involve pre-reading tasks, and interactive sessions and follow up activities.

### **Why Teach Literature in a Language Class**

The extracts of works of masters of language like those of Wordsworth, Shakespeare, and Milton and others are powerful tools and are the most genuine source of language. A student with English as a second or foreign language finds it very significant to learn a language in different social conditions. Apart from this, a literary text may have many interpretations. A text produces varied views among the learners which lead to collaborative works such as discussions and interactive sessions.

### **Grammar and Vocabulary Knowledge**

Literature is a good source for increasing word power. Reading short stories and novels and plays can expand the students' vocabulary knowledge as they have a wide range of dialogues and prose. For example, Joseph Conrad's 'Heart of Darkness' gives an idea of many words and is already a prescribed text for Post graduate students.

John Collie and Stephen Slater hold:

"For many language learners, the ideal way to deepen their understanding of life in the country where that language is spoken – a visit or an extended stay – is just not possible. Some may start learning a language knowing that they are unlikely ever to set foot in an area where it is spoken by the majority of inhabitants. For all such learners, more indirect routes to this form of understanding must be adopted so that they gain an understanding of the way of life of the country: radio programmes, films or videos, newspapers, and, last but not least, literary works. It is true of course that the 'world' of a novel, play, or short story is a created one, yet it offers a full and vivid context in which characters from many social backgrounds can be depicted. A reader can discover their thoughts, feelings, customs, possessions; what

they buy, believe in, fear, enjoy; how they speak and behave behind closed doors. This vivid imagined world can quickly give the foreign reader a feel for the codes and preoccupations that structure a real society. Reading the literature of a historical period is, after all, one of the ways we have to help us imagine what life was like in that other foreign territory: our own country's past. Literature is perhaps best seen as a complement to other materials used to increase the foreign learner's insight into the country whose language is being learnt".

### **Literature and Language Skills**

The four basic language skills reading, writing, listening and speaking if taught in an integrated way with the literature brings in valuable effect upon the learners' linguistic knowledge. Literature helps students become familiar with the features of the written language. When reading a substantial content of the text, they learn about the syntax and gain additional linguistic knowledge. They learn the ways of connecting ideas and this enriches their critical thinking skills. The various literary forms such as novels, biographies and essays give the readers pleasure and wisdom. All human emotions like anger, happiness, anxiety and worry, love and hatred can be expressed through literature. Thus language as a method of human communication either spoken or written consists of use of words in a structured way and is not merely a matter of the oral and written production of words, phrases and sentences. Students turn adventurous when they begin to understand the richness and diversity of language that will bring out their potential in a way.

### **Literature and Language Areas**

Belcher and Hirvela (2000) hold that 'literature is rich with innumerable authentic tokens of language, for the development of reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills'. Teachers can instruct the learners to write the climax of a story in their own words or narrate a story or novel orally. This technique enhances the learner's skill in writing and speaking. Allowing the students to comment critically also improves their speaking proficiency. For listening purposes, the learners can be exposed to the audio version of short stories, novels and poems. Here the learner learns the pronunciation and speaking patterns. The learner learns the technique of adhering to the principles of rhyme, rhythm and intonation while listening to the poems through audio versions. When it comes to reading, novel and poetry gives good opportunities for extensive and intensive reading. Reading a novel or poetry is a combination of reading for enjoyment and reading for information. The learner can get enriched in the sub-skills of reading that include skimming, scanning and finding the main ideas. All these techniques allow the learners to think critically, and also read and write critically.

Poems are a great source of enjoyment for both the teacher and learner. Reading poetry enables the student to know the power of language in a better manner. Poems indeed are capable of producing a strong response from the reader probing him/her to know more about poetry. Learners take deeper interest to express in perspective manner and go ahead to learn rules of grammar, syntax and vocabulary. This also enables the students with figures of speech like simile, metaphor, personification, and oxymoron and so on.

### **Role of Comics and Stories in a Language Classroom**

Using comics and stories in a language class is one of the oldest ways to address literacy development. It is a universal means of communication of cultural values and traditions and is a vehicle for passing on the treasures of history, science, government and so on. Regardless of the origin of stories whether new or drawn from ancients, storytelling is a powerful interaction between the teller and listener. Same is the case with reading of comics in a language classroom. These are informal techniques that get the learners hooked on reading and writing. Panchatantra, a very ancient text written by Pandit Vishnu Sharma is a book which can be read and taught in any manner, be it a fable or a parable. He chose animals and birds as his characters that spoke their dialogues. For children it is merely a fable for entertainment that teaches them the behavior of characters, and the simple words chosen for the formation of the story. When the child listens to it or reads it, he tries to put it into his own words while narrating the same to his parents or others. The same text can also be used for Intermediate and Graduate students to teach soft skills. Each story in the book teaches a particular soft skill. On one hand, the learner learns the soft skill that includes verbal and non-verbal communication; on the other hand the learner also learns the other soft skills like managerial abilities, time management and team spirit and many more. 'A Tale of Three Fish' from Panchatantra teaches the learner the quality of being adaptable.

### **Different tasks of the teacher in a language classroom**

It is not an easy task for teachers to make the learners read the full text of a lengthy literary work. It is therefore the prime duty of the teacher to introduce the main characters and also the plot of the text. The teacher must help the students discuss in small groups about what is taught in an interactive manner. The learners can be asked to comment on the lesson or text and then can be asked short questions related to the lesson. This task can help students develop their oral presentation skills.

A small scene from a play or novel may be chosen by the teacher to make it interesting and innovative. Students may be asked to enact it in classroom or discuss the topic in groups. This will enhance both the speaking and listening skills of the learner. The teacher can take the help of audio visual aids to explain certain scenes from a novel or a play. This will help the students to become familiar with accurate articulation of words with proper stress and intonation.

J. D. O Connor holds in this regard:

If speech depends on hearing, and books don't talk, what are you to do? Fortunately there is a lot of English spoken about the world. On films, on the radio, on tapes, on gramophone records; most people can get the opportunity of listening to English in some way, and this is what you must do. You must hear English. But just hearing it is not enough; you must listen to it, and you must listen to it not for the meaning but for the sound of it. Obviously when you are listening to a radio programme you will be trying to understand it, trying to get the meaning from it; but you must try also for at least a short part of the time to forget about what the words mean and to listen to them simply as sounds.

### **Literature and Speaking**

Keith and Morrow say “Speaking is an activity to produce utterance to oral communication”. Speaking requires two or more people, one the hearer and the other the speaker. Professor Henry Widdowson, an internationally acclaimed authority in applied linguistics and language teaching says that it involves not only the production of sounds but also the use of gesture, the movements of the muscles of the face, and indeed the whole body.” (Widdowson,1990). He further adds, “Learning to speak in English means agreeing to speak in a way which is different from that of the mother tongue, by means of a game imitation, supported from time to time by reflection, but with the same desire to be understood.”

### **Literature and Reading**

It is a great responsibility of the teachers teaching English as a second language to employ a dynamic student-centered methodology. The teacher should put in sincere effort to make the students read the text comprehensively in a literature based language classroom. This helps the student learn about setting, characters and plot. Repeated reading of the text gives a command on the text verbatim and then helps the student develop critical understanding of the given text. Reading a literary text enables the student frame his/her viewpoint. One of the problems encountered by the learner of English as a second language in India is that they lack in self-confidence. As a result they fail to express their views freely. Constant reading of a literary text boosts the confidence of the learner. They learn not only new words but also new structures.

### **Literature and Writing**

Literature can be an effective source for the learners learning to write in an ESL classroom. The student initially begins to analyze the literary works, and then develops his own thought. He becomes well aware of the work by delving deep down into the text. A new panorama would be opened as they try to express their views and interpretations in writing. The teacher should be careful enough while giving writing assignments to the students and even while going through their works. Literary works like novels and short stories can be of a great help to the students to develop their writing skills.

### **Conclusion**

Our success in using literature greatly depends on the selection of texts that are authentic. Literature is not new for the learners but is a new material in teaching and learning communicative competence of the language. In a literature based language classroom, literature is the primary material of teaching the target language. It is important for the language teachers to encourage students to read literature and not simply force them to accept their own perception of the text. It is concluded hence that literature has a strong place in the ESL/EFL curriculum and teaching language.

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