

## Literature in Language Learning

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**Abstract:** Literature contributes actively in language learning process because of mutual interaction emphasizing stimulate learning and cultural knowledge. Since the nineteen eighties there has been a sense of interest how a language operates both as rule-based and as a socio-semantic system. This research article analyses how literary texts can improve critical thinking skills, deepen cultural understanding. This article also attempts to explore the effects of using literature in the language classroom.

**Keywords:** Literary text, English language, approach, methods, cultural awareness, critical thinking

### 1. Introduction

Literature as a discourse can display the variety of language use. It as a source of content-rich reading materials, a model of creative language in use, a way to introduce vocabulary in context. The language of literature is not just words but it is lively and versatile means of communication. Similarly, Collie and Slater (1993) support the inclusion of literature in the language classroom that the advantages can be achieved through the solid integration between language teaching and literature. However, the integration of literature into the ELT classroom also poses challenges such as selecting appropriate texts, addressing linguistic difficulties, ensuring meaningful engagement with the material. Topping (1968) argues that the literature should be excluded from the foreign language curriculum because of its structural complexity, lack of conformity to standard grammatical rules, and remote-control perspective. Numerous teachers now believe that literature with its expensive and connotative vocabulary can expand all the language skills. This research article seeks to establish this phenomenon in promoting literature- language based acquisition and fostering a positive learning environment.

### 2. Literature Review

Literature always reflects culture, and the use of literary materials in language classes can provide students with more useful and thought-provoking language teaching. Whether we are reading for pleasure, literature has the power to enrich our lives and broaden our horizons. At the same time, literature it can be a challenging aspect of language learning for many students. English teachers are always concerned with the kind of content they are going to teach. Literature is so abundant and predictable that teachers cannot resist the temptation of using it. Language learning demands the four basic skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Literary texts such as poetry, prose, fiction, short story, drama, etc. have proved to be authentic source that can make learners acquire these skills. According to Collie and Slater (1990), there are four reasons to lead a language teacher to use literature in classroom-authentic material, cultural enrichment, language enrichment, and personal involvement.

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Nonetheless, in the last decade or so the interest in literature as one of the most valuable language teaching resources has revived remarkably. This is in consonance with the new currents within the communicative competence, that is teaching learners to communicate in the second language and accounting for real, authentic communicative situations.

### **3. Research Methodology**

A mixed methodology was applied in the study to triangulate the data. The respondents were selected from some private universities with the prior permission. Twelve EFL classrooms were observed and twelve EFL teachers were interviewed based on semi-structured questions. Classroom observation was strongly followed as a qualitative data. Relevant information was also collected by different scholars on this issue.

### **4. Reasons behind using Literature in Language Learning**

- Literature offers a bountiful and extremely varied body of written material which is important in the sense that it says something about fundamental human issues and enduring rather than ephemeral. A literary work can transcend both time and culture to speak directly to the reader in another country or a different period of history. In reading literary texts, students have also to cope with language intended for native speakers and thus they gain additional familiarity with many different linguistic uses, forms and conventions of the written mode: with irony, exposition, argument, narration etc.
- Literature exposes students to the cultural diversity. It provides a window into the historical, social, and political contexts that shaped the literature and the writer's worldview. For many language learners the ideal way to deepen their understanding of life in the country where that language is spoken. Some may start learning a language knowing that they are unlikely ever to set foot in an area where it is spoken. For all such learners more indirect routes like literary works must be adopted to understand the way of life of the country. These literary works offer a full and vivid context in which characters from many social backgrounds can be depicted. A reader can discover their thoughts, feelings, customs, possessions and this well imagined world can quickly give the foreign reader a feel for the codes that structure a real society.
- Language enrichment is one benefit often sought through literature. It presents a rich context in which individual lexical or syntactic items are made more memorable. Reading a substantial and contextualized body of a text students get familiarity with many features of written language. The formation and function of the sentences, variety of possible structures, different ways of connecting ideas enrich their writing skills. Moreover, literature helps extend the advanced learner's awareness to the range of language itself.
- Literature can be helpful in the language learning process because of the personal involvement it fosters in readers. Very often the process of learning is essentially analytic. Engaging imaginatively with literature enables learners to shift the focus of their attention beyond the mechanical aspects of the foreign language system. When a novel, play, or a poem is explored over a period of time, the results is that the reader begins to inhabit the text. The reader is eager to find out what happens as events unfold. They feel close to certain characters and share their emotional responses.

## **5. Challenges of using Literary Texts**

Despite the potential benefits of using literary texts in language course materials, there are also several challenges that teachers should be aware of. One primary factor to consider is whether a particular work is able to stimulate the kind of personal involvement by arousing the learner's interest and provoking strong reactions from them. If it is meaningful and enjoyable, reading is more likely to have a lasting and beneficial effect upon the learner's linguistic and cultural knowledge. It is important to choose the texts which are relevant to the life experiences. In this article a literary reference is given -Robert Frost's *The Road Not Taken* because of its thematic value. This poem is closely associated with human life, their struggle to make choices and uncertainty. Language difficulties should be considered as well because they have both a linguistic and cultural gap to bridge, foreign students may not be able to enjoy the text. Therefore, it is much better to choose a work that is not too much above the students' normal reading proficiency.

Another noticeable challenge is cultural misunderstanding. Pardo-Ballester (2007) discusses this challenge in language education. She explains that literature often reflects the culture and values of the society in which it was written and students from different cultural backgrounds may not be familiar with these cultural references. Teachers may need to provide additional context to help students understand the text. Time and resources are also required to effectively incorporate literature into language learning.

## **6. How to Face the Challenges in Language Classroom**

The prominent problem of how to teach languages has in recent years become increasingly guided by the dominant aim of promoting the learner's communicative competence. Sometimes the teacher falls back upon a more traditional classroom role in which they see themselves as imparting information about the author, the background to the work, the particular literary conventions and so on. Often the sheer difficulties of detailed comprehension posed by the intricacy turn the teaching of literature into massive process of explanation by the teacher. At more advanced levels of work with literature, the teacher may resort to the metalanguage of criticism and this may both distance learners from their own response. Even if the teachers hope to do more to sharpen students' own response to the literary work, there is often a little guidance on how to do so. The time-honored technique of question-and-answer can provide some help.

Establishing a number of ways to explore the literary text can turn classroom graphic. For example- role plays, improvisation, creative writing, discussions, questionnaires, visuals, and many other activities. The availability of a variety of activities enables the teacher to concentrate on meeting students' weakness in particular skill areas.

Learning can be promoted by involving as many of the students' faculties as possible. By itself the printed pages can be fairly part of the reader's visual sense and to the intellect. The words can create a new world inside the reader's imagination, a world full of warmth and color.

Pair and group works are now well established as a means both of increasing learner's confidence with the foreign language. In the creative endeavor of interpreting this new universe, a group with its various sets of life experiences can act as a rich device to enhance the individual's awareness of the world created by literary text. With the group's support they will have the greater freedom to experience own reactions and interpretations. Using the target language with the range of activities will be more effective approach in classroom. It

can be facilitated if, instead of trying to transpose it into their own language and cultural experience, they try to put themselves imaginatively into the target situation.

### **7. Activities in the Classroom**

There are the views that the language of literature, mainly of poetry, follows the deviated patterns and is different from the language of daily communication. Poems offer a rich, varied repertoire and are a source of much enjoyment for teachers and learners. There is the initial advantage of length many poems are well suited to a single classroom session. They often explore themes of universal concern and embody of life experiences, observation and feelings evoked by them. Moreover, poems are sensitively turned to what, for language learners, are the vital areas of stress, rhythm, and similarities of sound. Reading poetry enables the learner to experience the power of language. In the classroom, using poetry can lead naturally on to freer, creative written expression as it has the capability of producing strong response from the reader.

The teachers need to select poems that are suited to students' interest, language and maturity levels. There are poems written in a complex way and some are in a lighter vein. Both types are well-suited to a language learner, especially at their earlier stages. At the same time the teachers should not be too hesitant about working with more challenging poems. Learners can be given personal and linguistic resources to attain the fuller enjoyment of a poem that comes from a sense of sharing the poet's created world becoming as a reader, a new creator of meaning. Before a poem is read or listened to for the first time, it is very important to plan a substantial warm-up activity to arouse the learner's curiosity and involve them in the poem's themes. The aim ultimately is to individualize each students' experience of literature through language.

### **Factors to Consider when Selecting Literary Texts**

The text which is selected here to work with is *The Road Not Taken* by Robert Frost. It provides a rich analysis of various linguistic elements including metaphor, imagery, ambiguity, and the subtle nuances of language used to convey the speaker's internal conflict about making a decision, which can lead to deep discussions about the power of language and critical thinking. The following criteria was determined during the session:

Gender: Mixed

Age of students: eighteen to nineteen years old

Educational background: First year(honors)

Social background: Middle class

Literary background: sufficient

### **Types of Activities used**

There are many effective ways to follow for the activities related to a poem. Lazar (1993) recommended a classification to provide a communicative classroom activity:

Pre-reading activities

While-reading activities

Post-reading activities

This research is designed following the above activities to help students appreciate the lyrical and melodic quality of poetry as well as its metaphorical richness.

At the very beginning the students are asked to build up a picture of the literary work by knowing the title of the poem following individual's hard copy. Once they have done this, they make a note of what they feel. They are also encouraged to guess the socio-economic background of the poem to enrich the critical thinking. To run the thinking, a brief and truthful introduction of the author Robert Frost is delivered. Here, every sentence adds a new detail about the author's life. It is essential for the students to have some biographical information before the final reading, otherwise guesses will be completely blind.

After the guessing part, they start reciting the poem and point out the linguistic structure of that:

*Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,  
And sorry I could not travel both  
And be one traveler, long I stood  
And looked down one as far as I could  
To where it bent in the undergrowth;  
Then took the other, as just as fair,  
And having perhaps the better claim,  
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;  
Though as for that the passing there  
Had worn them really about the same,  
And both that morning equally lay  
In leaves no step had trodden black.  
Oh, I kept the first for another day!  
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,  
I doubted if I should ever come back.  
I shall be telling this with a sigh  
Somewhere ages and ages hence:  
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—  
I took the one less traveled by,  
And that has made all the difference.*

The poem has a strict ABAB rhyme scheme which carries additional meaning. The subtlety is drawn out by encouraging the students to read the poem loud. The following procedure is an enjoyable way of involving the whole class:

The class is first divided into four groups—one group per stanza. Each group is allotted a stanza and examines it in detail. One group analyzes the literary devices of one stanza (assonance, metaphor, anaphora, simile) which helps them to acquire an ornamented

language. The other groups examine the symbolic representation of the words (yellow wood, road, claim, wear, trodden, claim, diverged, undergrowth). They also focus on the ambiguous tone of the applied language particularly in the concluding lines.

After the poem has been read with plenty of feeling and eye contact, the students are asked for their reaction. Here, the poem is examined in more detail through a range of questions, for example:

Why did the speaker choose the road he did?

What connection can we make between the lines and the title of the poem?

What do the two roads symbolize?

What does the divergence in the road signify in real life?

How does the poet resolve the dilemma?

Why do you think the poet sighs in the last stanza of the poem?

Imagine you are faced with a similar situation as the poet in this poem. Which path would you choose, and why?

Through this process students are encouraged to guess the unfamiliar meaning of familiar words. They are reminded that the actual words of the conversation do not seem to reflect the emotion words that they have already identified. Finally, a short documentary of the poem is presented for their vivid analysis.

As a post reading activity, they are instructed to write their own interpretation. They reveal the assumptions about the choice which is implicit in the poem. They imagine themselves in the real context for better feedback. The situation is informal. The prior notes, handwritten make the process of analysis visual and concrete. The jotted-down, open-ended nature of the comments gives students the feeling that they can be more easily explored and challenged. In short, this format builds initial confidence in the analysis of poetry in a foreign language, and heightens appreciation.

It is clear from these that student both understood the poem and responded to it with imagination. After comparing their solutions, they feel the eagerness to read the poem with stylistic analysis. There are cries of delight as students realize that they have come very close indeed to the spirit of the poem, but satisfaction too at the vivid metaphorical expression of the original.

## **8. Conclusion**

Literary text can be an authentic resource for English language learners as it justifies multiple levels of meaning for developing interpreting and interpretational skills that students need to understand all kinds of representational materials. A literary language is patterned creatively that involve students emotionally, awakens their classroom language learning by developing skills they can apply in different situations and contexts.

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