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TEACHING ENGLISH THROUGH LITERATURE: AN EFFECTIVE APPROACH TO ENHANCING LANGUAGE SKILLS

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Abstract

The teaching of English through literature has become a successful pedagogical strategy which not only provides a rich source of language input but also enriches learners' experience of culture and literature, leading to the achievement of all-round language development. The current theoretical paper investigates the role and importance of literature in English language learning as well as its various contributions towards developing the four language skills in the L2 class (reading, writing, speaking, and listening) and other language skills such as vocabulary, grammatical competence, critical thinking, and cultural awareness. Based on the recent scholarly works, the paper examines the role of literary genres like poetry, short stories, novels and drama in meaningful contexts for language learning and the involvement of learners in language learning, creativity and communicative competence. It also identifies the key issues of literature-based teaching and learning such as selection of literature, language proficiency, and teacher preparation, and proposes pedagogical approaches for the effective application in the classroom. It concludes that literature can not only be used as a language-learning resource but also as an effective tool for language learning, which is a holistic process, and hence it is an essential source in the teaching of English in the present context.

Keywords: English Language Teaching, Literature, Language Skills, Literary Texts, Reading, Communicative Competence

1. INTRODUCTION

English has become the language of the world for communication, education, business, science and technology (Can 189). As a result, it has become one of the major focuses of language learning all over the world. Traditional approaches to teaching English tend to focus more on grammar and translation, memorization of vocabulary and mechanical practice of language. While these methods are good for helping learners to appreciate the language's structure, they are not always effective in developing communicative competence and meaningful use of the language in authentic contexts.

The limitation of literature is overcome by providing language in realistic, expressive, and culturally rich situations (Affendi and Aziz 318). Literary texts invite students to "be" in the language rather than just (Abdulgumhni 10) "have" it. Students meet with authentic vocabulary, natural sentence patterns, idiomatic expressions, and different styles of writing in stories, poems, novels, and plays (Albiladi et al. 1567). Literature also evokes imagination, emotion, reflection and enjoyment, and thus enriches the learning of language.

Literature-based language teaching has attracted a lot of attention from educators in recent decades since it has been found to prepare the learners to be autonomous, competent, aware and have higher order thinking skills (Ahmadi 115). Literature as a part of the English classroom shifts the dynamics of learning from a passive to an active mode of reading, interpreting, discussing, analyzing, and creating language in meaningful ways (Kurtz et al. 45).

1.1 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical aspect of this study refers to the theories of language learning which have been used in the process of using literature in the teaching and learning processes of English as a foreign language (Munna and Kalam 1). Literature is used as a source of authentic language, meaningful contexts and opportunities for active learner participation in language learning, which will be more effective and interesting (McRae). Literature enhances the learner to interpret, to express his/her idea and to communicate with confidence in real life situations, not only grammar and vocabulary.



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The main theories that support this study are Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), Reader-Response Theory and Constructivist Learning Theory (Gibson 134). Literary texts like poems, short stories, novels, and dramas are used to create authentic language usage, and this is the focus of CLT in its emphasis on meaningful communication. According to Reader-Response Theory, learners make their own meaning by making sense of the literary works based on their own experiences and understandings, which will enhance their understanding, critical thinking, and language skills (Gilakjani and Sabouri 123).

In addition, Constructivist Learning Theory provides a deeper understanding that knowledge is obtained from interaction, collaboration and reflection, which provides an extraordinary support for the use of literature-based learning activities such as discussion, storytelling, role play, and creative writing (Hwang et al. 449). These theories can offer a solid concept introduction to literature into English language teaching. They believe that literature contributes to the growth of language skills and also helps to develop communication, creativity, critical thinking and awareness of culture (Litman).

1.2 Objectives of the Study

- To examine the significance of literature in English language teaching.
- To explore the contribution of literary texts to language skill development.
- To discuss the educational benefits of teaching English through literature.
- To identify the challenges associated with literature-based language instruction.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Arafah (2018) Explored the ways by which literature can be incorporated into innovative teaching of English and explained that literature could help in making real and authentic learning experiences for language learners. The results revealed that literature could contribute towards motivating, communicating, building vocabulary and thinking skills of the learners through their exposure to real language situations. It was noted that literary works like poetry, short stories, novels, drama etc. made it possible to learn all four language skills integratively (Arafah 28).

Lazar (2015) looked into the relationship between literature and language teaching and mentioned the importance of literary texts in terms of language teaching. It was said that literature might serve as an authentic source of language input for the students and help develop their vocabulary and cultural awareness skills. Another idea put forward by the researcher is that literary approach encourages creative language learning (Lazar 472).

Zakarneh and Mahmoud (2021) explored how the practice of reading was exploited in teaching English and its effect on students' language acquisition. From their findings, it emerged that the students who were reading the text benefitted tremendously in reading, writing, speaking, and vocabulary acquisition from the traditional way of language instruction. What the researchers discovered was that the use of literature in instruction was very effective in improving students' communicative competence through involvement and language use (Zakarneh and Mahmoud 217).

Litman (2016) analyzed how Natural Language Processing (NLP) technology could be used to improve the teaching-learning process. From the analysis, it was discovered that NLP technologies facilitated personalized learning, automated evaluation, intelligent tutoring system, and feedback generation, thus making learning easier for the learners. NLP technologies also helped teachers to analyze the performance of learners, identify challenges faced by learners, and offer adaptive instruction to the learners. The study concluded that NLP has the capacity to improve teaching and learning (Le Menestrel and Takanishi 56).



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3. TEACHING ENGLISH THROUGH LITERATURE AND LANGUAGE SKILL DEVELOPMENT

Literature has been a part of English language teaching since the beginning of the 21st century because of its authentic, meaningful and culturally rich language, which is hard to be fully captured from conventional textbooks. Literary text forms (poems, short stories, novels, essays, dramas), provide the language in realistic contexts, in which learners can observe how words, structures and discourse work naturally. Literature provides students with language that captures real human experience, feelings, and interactions, as compared to isolated grammar exercises or artificial dialogues.

The use of literature in teaching English fosters the students' active involvement in the process of learning, reading, interpreting, discussing and responding to texts. This process is interactive and promotes language development, as well as cognitive, emotional and intercultural development. Literary works inspire learners to ask questions, imagine and be creative in their expression of ideas. Learners are not passive recipients of grammatical rules, but active participants in making meaning. As such, literature plays a role in the overall development of language skills by promoting simultaneous development of reading, writing, speaking/ listening, word knowledge, grammatical competence, critical thinking and cultural understanding.

3.1 Reading Skills

One of the most important language skills acquired by reading is the ability to read literature. Literary texts provide opportunities for learners to go beyond what is explicitly stated in the words and engage in interpretation, prediction, analysis and evaluation. As students read stories, novels, poems, or plays, they slowly develop their ability to determine the main idea, author's purpose, character development, symbolism, and context clues to make inferences. These activities reinforce higher order reading comprehension skills which are critical to academic success.

Learners are also introduced to the various styles, genres, and registers of the written language through literature, so that they can be flexible readers, capable of understanding a variety of texts. Students' reading rate, fluency and understanding improve markedly as they read regularly books which are literary. They learn complex sentence constructions, cohesive devices, and context specific vocabulary, further developing their comprehension of literary and non-literary texts. Furthermore, reading extensively develops a habit of reading that will help children read for the rest of their lives, and encourages them to read a wide variety of authors and styles, and read in different cultures and different ideas.

3.2 Writing Skills

Learners can find some good examples of effective writing in the literature that they can learn from, and that can help them to develop their own writing skills. As students read literature, they will be given opportunities to see how effective writers organize their thoughts, write paragraphs, describe in detail, develop characters, and keep their story together. These writing techniques facilitate the learning of the students to enhance their own writing skills.

Literature can be used as a starting point for a range of different writing tasks such as essays, book reviews, reflective writing, character descriptions, summaries, continuing a story, writing dialogue, and creative writing. These activities stimulate students to think logically, broaden their vocabulary, cultivate their grammatical skill and develop their own style in writing. Literary writing that involves creative tasks also encourages imagination, originality and the ability for learners to use newly learned language structures in meaningful contexts. Literature-based writing activities over time boost students' confidence, coherence, clarity and overall writing competence.

3.3 Speaking Skills

There are many opportunities for oral (English) communication in literature in language classrooms. Students are not just memorizing dialogues but are actively involved in discussions, debates, storytelling, presentations, role-playing, interviews and dramatic performance based on literature. These communicative activities result in the learners expressing opinions, justifying interpretations, posing questions and expressing themselves confidently with their peers.



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Drama is especially useful in enhancing students' speaking skills as students use true language to communicate feelings and enact characters in dialogues. Role-play activities allow the learners to learn pronunciation, intonation, stress, rhythm and conversational fluency in real-life situations. Literary discussions in class also help pupils to express their opinions clearly, listen attentively to other opinions and have meaningful conversations. Through repeated involvement in such interactive activities, students are gradually freed from hesitation and become more confident in speaking in English.

3.4 Listening Skills

In the acquisition of the language, listening is of great importance, and there are many opportunities in the literature for developing good listening comprehension. Poems read, stories told, audio book, dramatic performance and readers theatre can be used to introduce students to authentic spoken English for the teacher. These activities enable students to identify natural pronunciation, intonation, rhythm, stress patterns and speech variations.

Students listen to literary texts to experience emotions, tone and meaning through voice modulation. It also enhances the concentration, memory and accuracy of spoken information processing. Listening activities are used in class followed by discussions and/or comprehension exercises to promote active listening and improve learners' listening skills in identifying main points, summarising and interpreting implied meanings. Literature-based listening therefore makes a great contribution to learners' communicative competence.

3.5 Vocabulary and Grammar Development

Literature is one of the best sources for learning vocabulary and grammar in its context. Students are not presented with isolated words lists or grammatical rules but with the language as used by good writers. Literary texts expose learners to a vast array of vocabulary, such as academic words, idiomatic language, collocations, phrasal verbs, figurative expressions and context specific words.

Exposure to vocabulary in multiple contexts helps students master words' definitions and where and how they can be used. In the same way, grammar is learnt by students when they notice grammatical structures, tenses, clauses, passives, direct/indirect speech, and other grammatical patterns in authentic texts. Since the learners are presented with grammar in the context of real communication and not in separate exercises, they are able to apply the grammatical knowledge correctly in both their oral and written English. Contextual learning also makes the longer term retention of vocabulary and grammatical structures easier.

3.6 Critical Thinking and Cultural Awareness

Books play an important role in the intellectual and personal growth of learners by instilling an awareness of culture and critical thinking. Literary texts are used to expose students to a variety of societies, historical events, traditions, customs, values, beliefs, and views from around the world. Learners develop a deeper understanding of human behaviour, social relationships, ethical issues and cultural diversity through interactions with characters and narratives.

Interpretation of literary texts involves learners analysing themes, making inferences about the choices made by characters, comparing interpretations, determining the hidden messages in the text and providing textual evidence to support their analysis. The analytical activities foster reasoning, problem solving and decision-making skills and promote independent thinking. The use of literature also helps foster empathy by allowing students to experience the feelings and experiences of others. This helps to open student minds, sensitize them to other cultures and enable them to communicate in multicultural environments. Literature is one of the most powerful resources for a comprehensive approach to English language learning, because of the language development and critical cultural awareness it can provide.



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4. ROLE OF DIFFERENT LITERARY GENRES IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING

The various genres of literature have a significant role in English language teaching due to the fact that each of them provides different opportunities for learning the language, thinking and culture. Literary texts present learners with real language that represents authentic communication, emotions and social interaction, which is not found in traditional textbooks. Poems, short stories, novels and drama offer a variety of vocabulary, sentence forms and discourse structures which are appropriate to the natural use of English.

These genres also foster critical thinking, meaning making, opinion giving, and confident interactions in English. Furthermore, literary texts help learners to be engaged by giving meaning to classroom activities, making it enjoyable and student-centered. Reading, discussion, storytelling, role-play and creative writing provide learners with opportunities to build reading, writing, speaking, listening and cultural awareness as well as creative thinking skills. Hence, in English language learning, the integration of the various genres of literature into the English language classroom is an integrative course that can lead to an integrated language learning process for the development of language skills as well as personality development.

- **Poetry:** Using poetry is an effective way of developing pronunciation, rhythm, vocabulary and expressive language. The rhymes, images and figurative language it employs enable learners to grasp the aesthetic and emotional content of English, and to enhance their skills in reading, speaking and listening. Recitation, interpretation and creative poetry writing promote confidence, creativity and fluency of language.
- **Short Stories:** language is provided meaningful contexts by a simple yet engaging short story. They enhance students' reading comprehension, vocabulary, grammar, and thinking ability, and invite students to engage in storytelling, summarization, discussion, and character analysis. They are short and can be used by students of all levels.
- **Novels:** Novels provide a lot of exposure to authentic English, with clear narratives, realistic conversations and a variety of vocabulary. They assist students to build regular reading habits and strengthen their writing competency and critical thinking through the activities of book reviews, reflective writing, and classroom discussions. Novels also enhance pupils' cultural knowledge and awareness through their introduction of different societies and human experiences.
- **Drama:** Drama is used to teach communicative language learning through role play, dialogue and performance-based activities. Enhances learners' speaking, listening and pronunciation skills and confidence, as well as teamwork skills, through strengthening interpersonal communication. Through active involvement in dramas, students get to see and hear the language in real-life scenarios, and thus experience the learning of English in an interactive, engaging and memorable way.

5. CHALLENGES AND PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

Literature-based language teaching has advantages in terms of its educational value; however, it has some drawbacks. A major challenge is to choose literary texts with respect to the language level and interests of the learners. It is easy for beginning learners to be disheartened by reading classic literature, due to the archaic vocabulary, complex sentence structures, and unfamiliar cultural references.

One difficulty is that most English teachers are not well versed in literature-based pedagogy. Literature classes, if not appropriately planned, can turn teacher-centred and too much attention can be devoted to literary analysis and not to language learning. Short time periods in the curricular framework also limit the interactive literary activities.

To tackle these issues, teachers need to choose texts that are appropriate in terms of content for the student's age and proficiency level. Short stories, simplified novels, children's stories, and modern poetry are frequently good sources of English language learning materials. Literary texts can be made more accessible and engaging through pre-reading activities, vocabulary support, collaborative learning, role plays, literature circle, project-based learning, or multimedia resources.

Technology also provides creative ways to teach language using literature, such as through the use of digital stories, audiobooks, online discussions, interactive reading platforms and virtual dramatic performances. Teacher training programs



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should provide special training with respect to incorporating literature into the communicative approach to language teaching thus enabling the teacher to integrate the literature with language skills development.

6. CONCLUSION

Using literature in EFL teaching is an all-embracing and learner-oriented method that supplements grammar teaching with literature teaching. Literary texts offer authentic language input, meaningful contexts and a variety of cultures that have significant impact on the development of reading, writing, speaking and listening skills. In addition to this, literature helps students develop their vocabulary, grammatical knowledge, critical thinking, creativity, empathy and intercultural understanding. Some implementation issues like text difficulty, lack of classroom time, and lack of teacher preparation may arise, but can be addressed carefully via text selection, interactive teaching and instructional strategies, and effective technology use. Hence literature should be seen not only as an object of study but as a very effective pedagogical tool that fosters communicative competence, lifelong learning and language development in general.

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