

The advantages of using literature in the language learning classes

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Abstract

Literature is no doubt a great media for teaching and learning language owing to the fact that the language of literature is very rich in vocabulary, well-organized and consistent. Literary classes not only enhance language abilities, but also foster the progress of better reading and writing skills. Moreover, there are myriads of grammatical structures and lexicons wittily demonstrated and used in the literary texts, which indubitably influence students to better understand the grammar and enrich their resources of the language, particularly English language. Further, focusing merely on the linguistic resources and grammatical rules for teaching students will probably limit and hinder their ability to speak fluently and naturally, as they will not have sufficient room to practice their written and spoken skills broadly. Therefore, the aim of this paper is arguing that literature is an essential key to deciphering all the codes and secrets of foreign languages and it also promotes general linguistic awareness among the students along with rendering them to speak the language with more proficiency.

Key words: linguistic awareness, literature, vocabulary, foreign language, codes, proficiency, written and spoken skills

Introduction

Literature is the perfect place where all the elements of language are properly governed and used. Literary classes lead to thorough understanding of foreign languages and provide ample opportunity for practicing the critical skills for learning language. Consequently, language is more fluently and naturally learnt through literature (Shazu, 2014). Recently there have been ongoing debates and arguments whether literary classes are more beneficial and instructive than the linguistic components within the syllabus of teaching English. Most of the English teachers of foreign language learners genuinely believe that teaching literary classes are interesting and very enriching technique within the academic institutes and ought to be taken to serious consideration of the academics and school organizers (Hişmanoğlu, 2005).

A huge amount of studies underline the important role that literature plays in learning foreign languages and appreciate the potency of literary classes upon the learners on one hand, and the teachers on the other. (Kim, 2004). Moreover, Literature is a vital support for the teachers as it invariably opens new windows through which the teachers can approach their materials. Further, by bringing up living examples or alluding to literary events and occurrences rather than abstract class discussions about rules and grammatical structures, students are able to grasp the contents of the class effortlessly and remember it for quite a long time. It has been proven that vocabulary obtained in literary classes is easily grasped and well-remembered than the list of words learnt in the linguistic classes. (Mart, 2016)

The general concern for teaching literature in language learning classes arose more encouragingly in the early 1980s. Previously, as suggested and claimed by most of the language scholars and researchers, including (Duff, 1990), (Brumfit, 1986) and (Hill, 1986) using literature as a useful tool for teaching Language materials was almost completely ignored by the teachers and researchers. Many other scholars, on the other hand insist upon the fact that language of literature is not significantly different from everyday language and it does not have crucial linguistic differences, therefore they definitely have to be included within the class syllabus (Carter, 1990). However, the process of teaching languages varies not only from country to country, or society to society but also amongst the individuals, and thus it is absolutely

teachers' choice to decide what or what not to include in their literary classes of teaching languages (Shazu, 2014).

Thus, the objective of this paper is emphasizing the fact that literature as a supporting resource for grammar and linguistic components has a very influential role in the English learning classes and had better be expanded in terms of material and coverage. The paper also aims at displaying other significant functions of literature, such as expanding student's horizons about general knowledge and commonsense along with bringing multiculturalism and its manifestations in to the language teaching classes, which is too very useful means in learning the language.

View of Literature

There undoubtedly have been myriads of definitions and various approaches to literature from different scholars and sources. The most general definition of literature is probably that of H. Moody, which claims that literature is like an umbrella covering all and offering insights about every single business (Moody, 1971). Accordingly, literary classes, which are concerned about every sorts of business, be they oral or written, can also be used as one of the best means for expressing and explicating every specific subject. Such as literature for language learning, in the first place, literature for teaching psychology, literature for bringing children up, literature for medicinal purposes, literature for making entrepreneurs, literature for creating deep-rooted relations with the glorious past and lastly as (Zyngier, 1994)puts it, as an example of "aesthetic communication".

Further, Alexander Baird as cited in (Turker, 1991) defines literature as using language properly in the most suitable conditions and in a very formal and polite ways to better convey the messages and ideas. It is, yet again using language to deliver messages i.e. to communicate well, which is also an undeniable fact that literature can be used in language teaching. Amongst various functions and roles of literature as depicted in the previous definitions, the most essential one is the use of language, which inevitably suggests and confirms the fact that it is

plausible to the teachers of foreign languages to have recourse to literary examples and texts in their language classes to foster the process of language teaching and learning.

Despite the fact that the role and place of literature in the language classes in the early 1950s and 1960s declined, its importance significantly increased in the 1970s and 1980s. Since the early 1980s literature, as an important material for teaching language, has gained countless attentions and a multitude of studies in favor of teaching literature in language classes has been carried out. Most of the language scholars and researchers hold the view that teaching literature offers multitudinous benefits and advantages including; firstly, enhancing learners' linguistic knowledge for the literary texts cover wide range of vocabulary along with multiple structures of grammar. (Spack, 1985) claims that all the aspects of grammar and resources of language are wittily and entirely used and displayed in the literary works, which greatly help learners in understanding and recognizing grammatical structures along with enriching the vocabulary scale of the learners.

On the other hand, teaching literature in the language classes raises language awareness among the students. It is through literary examples that students learn how words are connected meaningfully and how vocabulary are put together in sentences. Literature, moreover presents original and real examples, which indubitably enhances learners' accuracy of linguistics and leads to efficiency and effectiveness in mastering the language, in the long run (Wales, 1990). Literature, further strengthens the communication in the language classrooms, (Collie, 1987) claims that literature and language are intertwined and inseparable. For better class activities and intensive class discussions among the learners, literature is vital. Students, will have the ample opportunity to practice their grammatical lessons through the literary subjects and classes in the syllabus. When they read the characters' speeches or see their interactions in the literary works, the learners will figure out how language can be used for various communicative functions and thus learn to make meaningful interactions with each other.

Additionally, (McKay, 1987) claims that literature encourages understandings of other cultures and traditions. It is an indisputable fact that literary texts portray the country's culture and

social conventions as accurate and thorough as possible, which as he asserts, unavoidably paves the way for better understanding the language. It also increases people's tolerance of cultures other than theirs and develops the communication skills amongst the individuals from different backgrounds. This advantageous side of literature is more conspicuously appreciated and more prevalent in the interpretation skills. The more familiar with the culture, McKay argues, the better interpretation skills and abilities you attain. Interpretive skills are essential keys in the process of learning the language as they require the learners to make their own inferences and produce similar texts or ideas, which is yet another method for improving one's linguistic skills. Nonetheless, literature develops learners' general knowledge and provides universal themes that unequivocally bridge the gap among the cultures and nations that consequently makes the process of learning language faster and easier. The contents of Literary classes often embody the international and relevant issues about the world we live in, which makes it possible for students to have their own perceptions and thus enrich the individuals' personal opinions and approaches to various topics and subjects. (Kim, 2004)

The advantages of using literary texts in language learning classes

Throughout the world, literature is an essential and most prevalent technique that teachers use in their language classes. It is also an important part for most school syllabus that teach foreign languages. Teachers use literary examples in their classes on a daily basis in order to further clarify their grammatical structures or other linguistic claims. Nonetheless, in the translation departments or classes, teachers usually assign literary texts for their students to translate into their native languages including, short stories, chapters of novels, epistles or any other literary genres that give the learners an ample opportunity to recognize all the parts of grammar, lexical, semantic, pragmatic or any other linguistic skills they have obtained in other classes, well and accurate. Thus, the following passages and sections of the paper will concentrate upon the importance of teaching literature in foreign language learning classes with providing sufficient reasons and justifications from various sources and points of views. The criteria for selecting the best examples of literary texts within the language classes is also going to be discussed in the following sections of the paper.

McKay (McKay, 1987) claims that Literature is the perfect vehicle to carry all the elements of grammar and the suitable place to practice the learnt skills in order to develop learners' linguistic knowledge. Additionally, students and learners from various levels have the natural tendency to read and enjoy literary texts, which grows their motivations to further involve with the texts and consequently bring about significant advancements in their reading proficiency. More reading, to McKay means further nourishments of one's thoughts and enlightenment, which conspicuously enhances learners' abilities to express their thoughts, more often, in the form of writing and thus providing ideal chances for practicing language skills.

Brumfit too shares the same view as McKay of literature and argues blatantly that literature, by definition is a skill subject not a content subject. He asserts that literature greatly influences people's reading capacities and skills. If students read literary texts, Brumfit claims, they are unexpectedly exposed to various uses and types of linguistic components and as they go along, they will naturally attain familiarity with these new linguistic expressions and ultimately expand their linguistic knowledge and horizon (Brumfit, 1986). In this regard, literature helps learners to absorb new linguistic phenomena faster and more efficiently.

Nevertheless, the significance of literature and the key role it plays in fostering the process of learning foreign languages have been the point of interest for many researchers and language scholars. Enkvist states that if you want to speak fluently and know every aspect of the language, you ought to study and know literature very well. Learners are not learnt any foreign languages merely through booklets, lists of vocabulary, or phone books, they rather learn the language more effectively through reading long stories, plays, and poems. In many ways, he argues, literature and language are integrated and go together and without having some understandings of literature, learners cannot grasp the language wholly (MacCabe, 1985).

Further, both of (Zyngier, 1994) and (Povey, 1972) claim that literature helps in growing learners' awareness of language and allows them to create new worlds, with which they might not be very accustomed, and they build these worlds through the language of the writers or literary texts. Thus, they become performers of what the author says and recreate the authors'

aims or messages through their own language, which is unquestionably a good platform for practicing linguistic abilities and put in practice the grammar skills they attained in linguistic classes. Studying the language of the poet or authors wisely and meticulously results in creating the same or very similar experience of that of the author. In their quest for recreating the same experience of the author, the readers rely on their acts of imagination. In this way, the poems appear as an illustration that words do not suggest in isolation, which inevitably suggests the fact that the complete meaning of the words are always contextual. They also claim that literature develops every skills of the language as they expand the linguistic knowledge through providing sufficient proofs of far-reaching and unnoticeable vocabulary usage, specific and complex syntax. Therefore, it is plausible to claim that teaching literature in the language classes is becoming a worldwide and fast developing phenomenon.

On the other hand, if the materials of the language classes are only language based, monotonous and completely detached of any aesthetic values of art, learners will find it very annoying. Thus, instead of enjoying their classes to the fullest, which is the suitable and expected environment for learning, they will only endure it reluctantly and lose their passion for learning. Therefore, and as Short and Candlin (1984) claim teaching literary texts in the language classes brings a new flavor into the class and makes the class more enjoyable. In addition to the fact that many students like literature by nature, and long to read or study literary texts because it simply entertains them on one hand, and as they investigate the stories, they yearn for understanding the texts completely and are really enthusiastic about finding out more about the characters or the plot, which means looking up for new words and ultimately enriching their vocabulary on the other. Consequently, as they suggest, including literary texts in the language classes are essential and brings about a suitable and friendly environment for teaching and learning (Arthur, 1968).

Criteria for selecting the appropriate literary texts

Regarding the materials or contents of literature it is very essential to know what and what not to include in the language classes. Selecting the best literature or literary texts in the language classes is very important and teachers have to choose their literary example appropriately and

meticulously. The amount of the influence literature leaves upon the students in the language classes depend on the suitable and well-chosen materials of literature. (Moody, 1971) claims that language teachers should select materials of literature, which are uncomplicated and stylistically straightforward. The themes too, have to be chosen accordingly and with sufficient cautious, as Moody argues, the themes are to be generally relevant and familiar. Teachers of foreign languages are preferred not to go deep in their literary examples and include particular texts, which in addition to their surface and literal meaning have deeper connotations and embody messages other than their lexical meanings. Even if the chosen examples of literature do carry deeper meanings, or hint at some important and historical events, teachers are advised, as (Hill, 1986) suggests, to focus merely on the literal or lexical meaning of the extracts and oversee the extended or poetic references the examples carry along. (Maley, 2001) asserts that fastidious and wise choice of literary examples in language classes are certainly essential in the successful usage of any representational materials.

In addition to these linguistic principles and criteria for selecting the best materials for the language classes. Students' cultural background and their linguistic understandings are also vital. The age and the mentality of the students also play a part and have to be taken into the consideration of the teachers prior to picking the literary examples (MacCabe, 1985). It is no sense in bringing literary texts with philosophical concepts and notions into classes of beginners who are but rarely accustomed with the language and still have a long way ahead. Further, (Duff, 1990) states that the texts have to be fascinating and attract the attention of the largest number of the learners. The more fulfillment of these principles or criteria for choosing, the better the chance for enhancing the language skills of the students and the more opportunity in bringing about a friendly environment for teaching. It is, thus very essential for the teachers of foreign languages to know what to choose in their classes, for the impact the literary texts leave behind is undoubtedly pursuant to the quality and suitability of the literature examples discussed or analyzed in the classes.

The common and suitable literature in the language classes

Previously, the importance of the inclusion of literary texts within the language classes was evidently manifested and many arguments in favor of having literature in the language classes were discussed. In this section, the paper is going to shed light upon the most appropriate and prevalent examples of literature that teachers use in their foreign language classes. The most appropriate and common types of literary materials that teachers of foreign language classes use are as follows:

a. Using short stories

Using short stories in language classes is one of the most widespread technique, to which most of the language teachers resort as a powerful means of teaching the language. (Gomez, 2010) states that using short stories in language classes not only enriches the linguistic skills of the learners, such as grammar, morphology, phonology and/or syntax, but also increases students' creativity. It is an irrefutable fact that short stories as a literary genre is usually short and simple, which makes the students understand the central theme or main idea more quickly and effortlessly. If the students break off with easy materials, as (Collie, 1987) suggests, they will naturally grow the tendency to like the entire class environment and as this enthusiasm is lighted within them, they only go further and further in their explorations and thus in a short time bring about significant progresses in their linguistic skills and crucial changes in their psychological attitudes and personal lives commence to emerge. (Wright, 1996) states that "we all need stories for our minds just as much as we need food for our bodies". Stories are, thus like fuels for the grammar classes and provide a friendly yet very empowering learning environment for the students.

Further, to obtain the largest advantages of the short stories in language classes, teachers can have extra activities in their classes. Such as, inclining the students towards predicting the future events or thinking of the past incidents in the story and making plausible connections of different tenses that undoubtedly develops their understandings of the tenses in the language (Brunfit, 1986). Teachers can also ask students to point out to particular grammatical structures within the texts and make sufficient explanation and analyses for them, which is another useful device for learning and maintaining the grammar skills. Students can also be persuaded to

anticipate the meaning of new words prior to looking it up in dictionaries i.e. attempting to realize the meaning of the words based on the context merely is a very important method for knowing the meaning and also expanding students' general horizon about the foreign language they are learning (Kim, 2004). Finally, teachers can require from the students to put themselves in the characters' shoes and try to figure out whether or not the students have similar reactions to the events as those of the characters, which also paves the way for further discussions and more practice of the language.

b. Using plays and drama

Plays are generally supposed to embody acting, or they are originally written in order to be acted. Therefore, we almost always have direct communications among the actors or we might have long soliloquies where the protagonist or any other actor is speaking to the audience. However, the former is more prevalent where the audience are directly exposed to the actors' verbal communication on the stage. Thus, if the teachers of foreign languages include extracts from plays or bring in scenes where the actors are actively speaking with each other, they give their students ample opportunity to learn the daily expressions of the language along with using both receptive and productive skills (Maley, 2001). Additionally, teachers can ask the students to prepare a scene or two of a familiar play and perform it in their classes with perfect accent and tone, which is a very useful technique to improve students' pronunciation skills, on one hand and their confidence about the language, on the other. A performance of an appropriate Play in the language class will inevitably change the classroom into a stage and the students into heroes or protagonists, where they boldly practice their language skills and give themselves sufficient chances to practice and improve their language skills in general, spoken skills, in particular (MacCabe, 1985). Accordingly, using plays in classrooms is vital and rises the students' linguistic skills into a very high level and teachers are, thus advised to include plays in their language skills.

c. Including poems

The language of poetry is, by nature very attractive and the vocabularies used in poetry are always delicate and different from the everyday language. This intrinsic feature of poetry

makes it quite distinguished genre in literature. (Kayintu, 2011) argues that poetry has a completely different form and is a unique genre amongst all the parts of literature. Therefore, he asserts, the vocabularies we encounter in poetry are quite exclusive and one is not likely to attain it elsewhere. In addition to the fact that the figurative language of poetry is also vital in increasing students' vocabulary, such as using metaphors, pun, oxymoron, etc. Alluding to other personas or historical events and phenomena outside the text, is also another crucial aspect of poetry that deepens the students' understandings of the culture on one hand, and expands their linguistic skills and abilities, on the other (Spack, 1985).

Further, the beautiful feelings and magnificent images that are portrayed in most poetry, inevitably overwhelm the students' emotional states and make them very passionate about literature as a whole. Most of the students, consequently get more involved in poetry and are, at times, inspired to try to produce similar texts themselves. As they make efforts to express their attitudes and/or inner feelings properly, they will have to think of the appropriate words, grammar and morphology, which efficiently convey the exact meaning or the precise message they have in their brains, and in so doing they predictably come across myriads of variations of words and grammatical structures, which in turn build up their vocabulary and ripens their awareness of the grammar of the language they are learning (Mart, 2016).

Practically and to achieve the highest levels of advantages from the poems, teachers can ask the students to re-write the poems in their own words and discuss various approaches to the poems, which offer sufficient opportunity for practicing the spoken skills along with enabling and further enlightening the mental activates of the students. For these reasons, including and embracing poetry as useful and complementary material for the foreign language classes is very essential and teachers must take it into their considerations.

d. Using excerpts from novels

in addition to all the grammatical structures, vocabulary, and linguistic expressions that students can achieve in reading novels, learning about the targeting culture is a key

advantage of including extracts or quotations from novels. (Wales, 1990) claims that the more familiarity students gain with the targeting culture, the better chances and proficiency are available to them in learning that language. (Zyngier, 1994) stresses that novels are not merely stories narrated, they are rather precious and very valuable facts, which are constantly and invariably transferred to the individuals all over the world. They teach us everything about a foreign culture, their tradition, their values, their past, and most importantly, their use of language and different variations of their language in different stages of history or different speaking styles for different social classes within that community. The latter is crucial because as (Povey, 1972) suggests, it is possible to identify particular groups of people within the same culture only through their language style or accent. Hence, if the teachers were successful in bringing extracts from novels, which are mostly authentic and real representations of the targeting culture, they would certainly incline their students to be exposed to all the dialects of this culture, as different characters embody different groups of people, and thus students will become extremely familiar with the language and its different dialects or variations.

There are, nevertheless innumerable beautiful literary expressions student can attain in novels along with the formal and polite variety of language, from which students can learn and use in their writing assignments, such as writing essays, research projects or academic papers. *Wuthering Heights* is a proper example of these novels, where several dialects and accents of English language are meticulously embodied through various characters from particular classes of the English community in the Victorian Age. The inclusion of quotations or excerpts from novels in the language classes, is hence a very clever trick and an important technique for better understanding and learning of the language.

Conclusion

Through studying the above mentioned arguments and after fastidious consideration of the previous studies, it is plausible to conclude that including literary texts within the language classes greatly helps the students and fosters the process of learning language. Literature not only enhances students' linguistic skills, but also renders them to be creative and critical

thinkers in the end. In addition to that, literature is the perfect place and platform, where all the linguistic phenomena and grammatical structures are well performed and practiced. To most of the language scholars and researchers, who are previously mentioned in this paper, expanding students' horizon and prospective with regards to the targeting culture is very essential and key for deciphering all the aspects of the language and thus learning it with efficiency and proficiency. If the language classes are only and purely grammar-based, it would most probably annoy the students and makes them bored. Therefore, it is very wise of the teachers and beneficent for the learners to have some material from literature included in their language classes.

However, the significance of bringing literary texts into language classes depends on the criteria for selecting the most appropriate literature and wise assessment of the students' abilities and response to these literary texts. It is extremely important to the the teachers of foreign languages to think meticulously about the literary material they want to include in their syllabus to avoid any eventualities in advance, because the level of the language, in which the literary texts are written, have to be entirely consistent with the students' language abilities, otherwise it would not bring about any improvements and would, instead lead to a chaos and complete waste of time and energy.

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