

## LITERATURE IN THE CLASSROOM: HOW LITERATURE WORKS IN A LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

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### **Abstract**

This paper attempts to find relevant theories that would underlie the study being conducted by the researchers. The study aims to bring literary texts into class and they become the resources to enhance students' vocabulary, syntactic knowledge, as well as the skills in understanding the texts deeply. Furthermore, the proficiency of the learners would simultaneously develop. Researching various references, some underlining theories are figured out and would become the bases to carry out the study. The theories reveal some facts how literature would be very resourceful for language teaching and increase students' motivation. Beside to make literature works for language class, approaches to employ literature for classroom activities are also identified. By applying the underlying theories, the researchers would carry out a research in order to see the effectiveness of using literary works for students to gain better proficiency.

**Key words:** literature, literature in language classroom, literature in language teaching

This paper is aimed to pinpoint some relevant theories or prior studies pertinent to the ideas of making literature as the source of learning second or foreign language. The idea of using literary works in language teaching has been around since the era of Grammar Translation Method (GTM); however, the popularity goes up and down as people's orientations keep changing, so do the trends in language teaching. Literature in language teaching has experienced being adored and then ignored, then adored again. Some people agree to put literature as the source of learning, but at the same time some others are against

the idea. Controversies remain undeniable; however, there is still believe that values of bringing literature into language teaching and learning are worth considering. Activities in using literature in language teaching and learning might be one point need to be considered wisely so literature will be able to be aptly employed in the language classrooms.

### **Why Literature**

Literatures are defined in differently in some dictionaries. Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (2003) defines literature as books, plays, poems and so on that people think are important and good. The Oxford Wordpower Dictionary (1998) defines literature as writing that is considered to be a work of art. The Concise Dictionary of Current English (2011), however, defines literature as writings whose value lies in beauty of form or emotional effect.

Literature commonly has a bountiful and widely varied body of written material, and it mostly speaks about fundamental human issues which are enduring rather than momentary. Literary works can transcend both time and culture to speak directly to a reader within a country and other countries in different times. Literature works are also enjoyable and motivating (Clandfield&Foord, 2006), because they are able to reach the parts of a person's feelings, dreams, fantasies, and experience that other texts can't reach (Pulverness, 2007). This aspect of literature is closely related to motivation, especially intrinsic one. Intrinsic motivation is the type of motivation that is animated by personal enjoyment, interest, or pleasure, engaging in an activity because it is enjoyable and satisfying to do. Literature is able to meet someone's personal enjoyment, interest, or pleasure.

In relation to English language teaching and learning, literary works are very useful source of language teaching and learning activities. Literary works can expand language awareness, encourages interaction and discussions, and educates the whole learner's personality. Ellis (2002) argues that foreign language teachers should use non-defensive approaches in classes, because English language teaching has linguistic, psychological, cognitive, social and cultural objectives, and literature meets them.

Furthermore, Duff & Maley (2007) suggest that there are three main reasons for using literature, namely linguistic, methodological, and motivational. In terms of linguistic reasons,

Hedge (1985) suggests that literary texts can develop the student's knowledge of language at the levels of vocabulary and structure and at the level of textual organization. In addition, communicative language teaching values literature as authentic texts in which the opportunity for vocabulary acquisition, the development of reading strategies, and the training of critical thinking skills happen to be (Kramsch&Kramsch, 2000).

In terms of methodological reasons, meanings in literary texts bring out different understanding, reactions, and interpretations which may inspire discussions and sharing feelings, and all these mean that literature encourages interaction (Duff &Maley, 2007; Clandfield&Foord, 2006). Also second language reading does not differ greatly in principle, from first language reading and can often be studied using the same or adapted techniques and methodologies (Verhoeven, 1999).

Literature which involves affective, attitudinal, and experiential factors may motivate learners to read (McKay, 1986). Therefore, literature is motivating because it deals with situations and themes that the writer considered important to address. Moreover, the motivational effect of the genuineness of literary texts is enhanced when the topics are in related to the learner's personal experience (Duff &Maley, 2007). Also, with the use of literature, learners may build new vocabulary and expand their understanding of words they already knew (Ono, Day &Harsch, 2004). Moreover, literature may help students to have the habit of reading, and if students can develop this habit especially for enjoyment and interest, they may increase confidence and fluency, and gain the habit of reading in a foreign language (Brown, 2000). This, therefore, becomes important for students' further independent motivation in learning a foreign language.

### **The Evolution of Literature in Language Teaching**

It is an old story that there is a controversy whether literature can be used as one of the sources in language teaching or not. It took place in the era when perfect grammar, remembering vocabulary, and translation of the mother tongue became the end goal of the process. Grammar Translation Method is the era who has enabled literature takes a very important role in language teaching. In that era, Literature had been so popular that it was used as one of the resources to concise use of grammar and vocabulary, then as the medium to be translated into mother tongue. In this era, literary texts became so much resourceful in

terms of model for grammar practice, vocabulary learning, and translation (Liaw, 2001). In practice, the literary texts were read and then translated into the mother tongue as they were used as examples of good writing and “illustrations of the grammatical rules” (Duff and Maley 1990: 3).

However, in the later era when structuralists took the drive, the popularity of literature in language teaching had been fade off as it did not really assist learners learning the language for communication. In the structural approach literature was discredited as a tool, because it represented the old tradition (Llach, 2007). The functional-notional method ignored literature, because in this method the importance lies on communication and they present authentic language samples. This era failed to see the capacity of literary text as an authentic material that can be used as the source for learners to see how a language is used in real context. They could not accommodate a situation when real communication really took place.

In more recent decades, even up to now, the realisation towards the values of literature in language teaching is reviving remarkably. People who seek the authenticity, meaningfulness, as well as communicativeness again realize the deep meaning of using literature in language learning. It has been claimed by many researchers, say Brumfit and Carter (1986) and Lazar (1993), that literary language is not specific but its common language with a high concentration of linguistic features like metaphors, similes, poeticlexis, unusual syntactic patterns, etc. The features appear in ordinary language use and also in nursery rhymes, proverbior publicity slogans. Then, it really shows how common people get used in their daily life interaction to deal with this sort of language, language in literary works.

The ups and downs of the use of literary works in language teaching should open a new horizon to the language practitioners or specialists that upon the disadvantages, there are some values that can be explored so that classrooms as the laboratory for teachers and learners in the process of learning can become a place that is loaded with enormously varied learning resources.

## **Literature and Language Teaching**

Prior researches in literature and language teaching have provided laborious data that would enable education practitioners or specialists to employ all sorts of literary works for the resources. Povey (1972) is one of the researchers who has promoted learning from reading literature. It is found out that reading literatures has familiarized learners with subtle vocabulary usage and new and complex syntax and through this learning activity; literatures contribute to the extension of language usage and linguistic knowledge. Moreover, such an activity is able to provide models for language use or communication in EFL setting.

More positive contributions from literatures to language teaching are offered by McKay (1982) and Khatib et.al. (2012). By means of literature from which role relationships as well as social context are attached to the setting, learners can gain knowledge about how language use. Duff and Maley (1990) claims that literatures provide learners with genuine, authentic samples of language, and also with real samples of a wide range of styles, text types and registers. These would mean to the learners to learn about meaning of a message. These varieties would build learners communicative competence so that in understanding a message the need to discern the notion of adequacy that a message needs to be linguistically correct and situational appropriate, as regards not only its content, but also its form (see Llobera 1995, Sanz and Fernández 1997, Cassany 1999). Thus, in language learners, learners need to be able to figure out the intricate relations among linguistic knowledge, situational appropriateness as well as the content.

Widowson (1983) and Oster (1989) state the fact that a literary text invites multiple interpretations and fosters creative thinking. Literatures supply meanings to be interpreted in different ways by different students; therefore, when it is employed in language classrooms, learners are encouraged to involve in an active interaction with the text, fellow students and the teachers before they finally come to certain ends, interpretations. In order to come to a certain interpretation, critical thinking would be undeniably involved, and then an interaction and communication would be the side effect. The classroom would be alive with intricate relations among different activities, namely critical thinking, interacting, and communicating. It at the same time would foster an affective asset of the students, as it would yield the autonomous capacity that would grow along with the effort of the students to take an active role in the interaction.

Other contribution is figured out by Lazar (1993) and Riverol (1991). Literatures supply learners with cultural information about the country whose language they are learning. Say, One aspect of special importance within the communicative approach, and that is magnificently reflected in the poem at stake, is the idea of literature supplying the learner with cultural information about the country whose language they are learning (Lazar 1993: 16). Poetry that is fictional, although it needs special care when it is employed in the classroom, is a source for learners to see how cultures attached to the poems and poetry writing.

Another value is that literature is benefit to writing skill such as encouraging creativity, learning richer vocabulary and using them in students' writing and learning how to use figurative language to make the writing more affective (Oster, 1989).

### **Literature and Students Motivation**

Literature and students motivation have been an interesting research field in the area of English language teaching. Many researches have shown some evidence of this issue, like Duff&Maley (2007) who show that literature is considered as one of the most motivating resources for language learning, Clandfield&Foord (2006) who also find that the use of literature in English classroom has become a great interest among foreign language teachers since the 1980s. Other studies in this field are Brumfit&Carter,1991;Collie&Slater,1990; Benton&Fox,1985. These researchers give recommendations that literary works, especially short stories frequently becomes an ideal way of introducing students to literature for motivation and improvement in their reading and writing skills.

Khatib (2012) also claims that literature gives contributions to learning, particularly in affective aspects. Literature is able to yield students motivation when it is used as the medium for teaching reading; furthermore, it is identified that there is a significant influence on the reading proficiency of the learners. If we conceive reading as the interaction between readers and the text, the reader should be willing and motivated to read and the literature can be considered as a tool for providing motivation. The improvement of reading proficiency leads to achievement in academic and occupational goals. Another benefit of the literature is the encouragement of tolerance for cultural differences and promotion of creativity in the students the motivational criterion is of great relevance because the literary text shows the

real feelings of the writer and this generates a powerful motivation in the learner. With the literary text the student accesses this personal experience, if she is touched by the theme and provoked, she will be able to relate what she is reading to her world, to what she knows and feels. Designing stimulating activities that motivate the learners is the greatest challenge for language teachers, and literature has a strong motivating power due to its calling on to personal experience.

### **Activities in Language Classroom**

Terms and condition would apply might be an expression that can be used to represent to how a literary works can be put into classroom activities. Considering more on the values, without necessarily minimizing the drawbacks, the practitioners need to reconsider on how to adjust literatures so that they can be employed as one of the resources for learning languages.

Maley (1989) in Khatib,et.al. (2012) offers two different approaches to use literatures in classroom activities. The approaches give different emphasises that are quite applicable to the setting of ESL/EFL learning. Some adjustment might need to be made to enhance the effectiveness of the approaches.

The first approach, the literary critical approach puts the primary concern on the literariness of the text we study. Thus, the activities would be directed to deal with reading literary text then analysing some aspects including the plot, characterisation, setting, point of view, motivation, value, psychology and the like. The constraint of applying this approach that need to be counted for is what is called a “pseudo-competence”. According to Maley, when this approach is employed, it will be very possible that the ESL/EFL learners miss the desirable competence for the purpose of this approach; as a result students would only end with memorising the technical critical terms without deep understanding and merely repeat the opinions. In other words, rote learning would consequently be used by the students as they might not ready to come to the level of understanding. Therefore, Maley highlights that in this manner, a great amount of preparations and work on students’ language and literary competence need to be reconsidered wisely. However, such situation would be unable to be avoided; therefore, the practitioners need to adjust the approach so it would be applied aptly to the situation that prior observation to students competence needs to be committed.

The second, stylistic approach puts the focus on literature as „text“. The starting point for this approach is the text itself and then we concentrate on textual discoveries leading to interpretations of the text. Because language is in priority in this approach, it is certainly more relevant to EFL/ESL contexts. Unlike the first approach, linguistic elucidation and description precedes interpretation.

Considering the two approaches proposed by Maley, it can be inferred that in the implementation to the ESL/EFL learning, the first approach makes students learn not only through rote learning but it should rise to higher level of understanding, or deep understanding so that they can develop higher or critical thinking. On the other hand, the second approach makes students interact with the text and with each other; then, the interaction would lead to language learning and literary understanding follows as a by-product of their involvement in and engagement with the texts.

If we try to refer to the idea of competency level based on Bloom Taxonomy, the first approach leads students to gradually gain competency from remembering, rote, or knowledge through synthesising, deep understanding that becomes an end for higher or critical thinking; while the latter approach lead students up to the level of understanding that is preceded from interpretation.

Llachattempts to make reading as an aid for language development as it is found to be one of the best way of learning a language. Reading can be used as the activity to develop linguistic and communicative competence, whether consciously or unconsciously, reading could help the second language learner acquire not only more vocabulary and more meanings and uses of the words already known (lexical competence), but it also contributes to develop syntactic knowledge (Llach,2007; Brumfit and Carter, 1986). Krashen (1989) and Coady (1997) argues that it is through extensive reading, that learners acquire most of their vocabulary, and that instruction plays a rather insignificant role as the number of words learned is concerned. Paribakht and Wesche (1997) are also of the same opinion. For Grabe and Stoller (1997), reading contributes greatly to vocabulary development and also to listening comprehension.

Therefore, reading literature is positive in several ways. It presents with authentic and varied language material, it provides with contextualized communicative situations, real patterns of social interaction, and use of language (Collie and Slater 1987: 2), it



highlights the central role of the learner in the learning process and stirs up interaction in the classroom, it motivates learners by allowing them to relate what is being read to their own experiences since it calls on emotional responses (Collie and Slater 1987: 2), and it contributes largely to develop further reading skills like “deducing the meaning and use of unfamiliar lexical items”, “understanding the communicative value (function) of sentences and utterances”, “recognizing the script of a language”, etc. (Grellet 1981: 4-5). Using literature to teach language not only contributes to a better linguistic understanding, a development of creative skills, and higher language proficiency, it also makes an important contribution to literary appreciation (Ramsaran 1983: 42)

### **Conclusion**

Amongst some controversial about the use of literatures in ESL/EFL classrooms, it can be figured out that literatures can become resourceful means to learn language. Students who are exposed to various types of literary texts would learn linguistic features like metaphors, similes, poetic lexis, unusual syntactic patterns, etc. The features appear in ordinary language use and also in nursery rhymes, proverb, and the like. These features to some researchers are seen as something specific that would be difficult when employed in language learning; however many agree that those features are common as they can easily be found in daily languages like in the lyrics of children songs.

Besides some linguistic features that are still resourceful for language learning, literatures are found to be able to supply learners with cultural information about the country whose language they are learning. This sort of knowledge would be needed as learning a language remains inseparable from learning the cultures.

Literary text also brings live context, where student can access the context and see their personal experience in them. This would become a stimulating asset for learning and this would contribute to enhancing learning motivation. Moreover, It presents with authentic and varied language material, it provides with contextualized communicative situations, real patterns of social interaction, and use of language.

To see all the evidences derived from other researchers then the present study is confidence to continue investigating the effects of using literary texts to improve students language proficiency.

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