



## ROLE OF LITERATURE IN ESL CLASSROOM

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### **Abstract**

*Language and Literature are intrinsically related. Literature exists in language and its content gets communicated through language. Literature is the content which is conveyed through language. But language not only conveys message of the content but also signifies meaning of symbols which convey more than the literal meaning of the words. Since teachers and experts in the field of ELT have realized the importance of literature in the language classroom, there is a need to integrate these two and bridge the gap.*

**Keywords:** *Language, Literature, Language Skills, Bridge the gap.*

### **Introduction**

In language classroom, literature from across the globe shall be included. Literature in translation should also be included. In addition to these, local materials such as folktales, folksongs, etc., shall be included to make the materials and methods more interesting, effective and culturally relevant. It should also include literature written in English from countries where English is learnt second or a foreign language. We should have a broader view of literature and include, essays, travel writing, biography, autobiography, etc., into the purview of literature. In addition to all these, teachers need to involve learners in decoding the texts and sensitize them to literary devices used in them. Learners should be encouraged to respond to the texts in the form of writing or speaking. They should be given variety of writing and speaking assignments. Class presentations, group activities should be encouraged. Through such language skills development activities learners will not only get an opportunity to appreciate literary texts but also for honing their language skills.

### **Benefits of Using Poetry to Language Teaching**

Poetry can pave the way for the learning and teaching of basic language skills. It is metaphor that is the most prominent connection between learning and poetry. Because most poetry consciously or unconsciously makes use of metaphor as one of its primary methods, poetry offers a significant learning process. There are at least two learning benefits that can be the appreciation of the writer's composition process, which students gain by studying poems by components.

### **Developing sensitivity for words and discoveries that may later grow into a deeper interest and greater analytical ability.**

Saraç (2003:17-20) also explains the educational benefits of poetry as follows:

1. Provides readers with a different viewpoint towards language use by going beyond the known usages and rules of grammar, syntax and vocabulary,
2. Triggers unmotivated readers owing to being so open to explorations and different interpretations,
3. Evokes feelings and thoughts in heart and in mind,
4. Makes students familiar with figures of speech (i.e. Simile, metaphor, irony, personification, imagery, etc.) due to their being a part of daily language use.



Through poetry, students can also study the semiotic elements in the target language. Semiotic elements constitute a cultural training as well. As Hiller (1983:10) states, poems should be seen as hyper signs of which constituents, “semiotic signifiers”, come together in their common relationship and lead to the “symbolic level” and this level is the one inclined to be signified in a poem. This notion can be described as follows:

Semiotic level = signifier/ signifier

POEM-HYPERSIGN =Symbolic level/ signified

Moreover, poetry employs language to evoke and exalt special qualities of life, and suffices readers with feelings. It is particularly lyric poetry which is based on feelings and provides still another emotional benefit. Poetry is one of the most effective and powerful transmitters of culture. Poems comprise so many cultural elements - allusions, vocabulary, idioms, tone that are not easy to translate into another language (Sage 1987: 12-13).

### **Benefits of Using Short Stories to Language Teaching**

Short fiction is a supreme resource for observing not only language but life itself. In short fiction, characters act out all the real and symbolic acts people carry out in daily lives, and do so in a variety of registers and tones. The world of short fiction both mirrors and illuminates human lives (Sage 1987:43). The inclusion of short fiction in the ESL / EFL curriculum offers the following educational benefits (Ariogul 2001:11-18):

- Makes the students’ reading task easier due to being simple and short when compared with the other literary genres,
- Enlarges the advanced level readers’ worldviews about different cultures and different groups of people,
- Provides more creative, encrypt, challenging texts that require personal exploration supported with prior knowledge for advanced level readers,
- Motivates learners to read due to being an authentic material,
- Offers a world of wonders and a world of mystery,
- Gives students the chance to use their creativity,
- Promotes critical thinking skills,
- Facilitates teaching a foreign culture (i.e. serves as a valuable instrument in attaining cultural knowledge of the selected community,
- Makes students feel themselves comfortable and free,
- Helps students coming from various backgrounds communicate with each other because of its universal language,
- Helps students to go beyond the surface meaning and dive into underlying meanings,
- Acts as a perfect vehicle to help students understand the positions of themselves as well as the others by transferring this gained knowledge to their own world.

In brief, the use of a short story seems to be a very helpful technique in today’s foreign language classes. As it is short, it makes the students’ reading task and the teacher’s coverage easier. An important feature of short fiction is its being universal. To put it differently, students all over the world have experienced stories and can relate to them. Moreover, short fiction, like all other types of literature, makes contribution to the development of cognitive analytical abilities by bringing the whole self to bear on a compressed account of a situation in a single place and moment (Sage 1987:43).



### **Benefits of Using Drama to Language Teaching**

Using drama in a language classroom is a good resource for language teaching. It is through the use of drama that learners become familiar with grammatical structures in contexts and also learn about how to use the language to express, control and inform. The use of drama raises the students' awareness towards the target language and culture. In this context, the use of drama as a tool rather than an end gains importance in teaching a foreign language. Yet, there is one obvious danger: cultural imposition should be severely avoided since it results in the loss of language ego and native language identity in many cases. To put it differently, language learning should be culture-free but entirely not culture-biased. For this reason, the new language and the context of the drama should fuse into a language learning process with high interest, relevance and enjoyment. Learners should make use of drama to promote their comprehension of life experiences, reflect on particular circumstances and make sense of their extra linguistic world in a deeper way (Sarçoban 2004:15). The educational benefits of drama, according to (Lenore 1993), are as follows:

- Stimulates the imagination and promotes creative thinking,
- Develops critical thinking skills,
- Promotes language development,
- Heightens effective listening skills,
- Strengthens comprehension and learning retention by involving the senses as an integral part of the learning process,
- Increases empathy and awareness of others,
- Fosters peer respect and group cooperation,
- Reinforces positive self-concept,
- Provides teachers with a fresh perspective on teaching.

Some other educational benefits of using drama in a foreign language class can be listed as follows (Mengü 2002:1-4):

- Bringing authenticity into the classroom,
- Exposing the learners to the target culture as well as the social problems a society may be undergoing,
- Increasing creativity, originality, sensitivity, fluency, flexibility, emotional stability, cooperation, and examination of moral attitudes, while developing communication skills and appreciation of literature,
- Helping learners improve their level of competence with respect to their receptive and productive skills,
- Providing a solid basis for the learners to bridge the gap between their receptive and productive skills,
- Offering students, the space and time to develop new ideas and insights in a range of contexts,
- Enabling students to develop new understandings and forms of knowing not accessible in other more traditional ways of learning.

In other words, the use of drama seems to be an effective technique in today's communication - based, student-centered foreign language teaching. Since it is an authentic material, it helps students to promote their comprehension of the verbal / nonverbal aspects of the target language they are trying to master. Particularly, teachers, who wish to make language learning more colorful, motivating and interesting, can make use of drama in their language classes. Since drama is the reenactments of social



events, students improve their personality and code of behavior. Thus, they can achieve more meaningful and realistic teaching from which students can benefit to a great extent.

### **Benefits of Using Novel to Language Teaching**

The use of a novel is a beneficial technique for mastering not only linguistic system but also life in relation to the target language. In novel, characters reflect what people really perform in daily lives. Novels not only portray but also enlighten human lives. Using novel in a foreign language class offers the following educational benefits:

- Develops the advanced level readers' knowledge about different cultures and different groups of people,
- Increases students' motivation to read owing to being an authentic material,
- Offers real life / real life like settings,
- Gives students the opportunity to make use of their creativity,
- Improves critical thinking skills,
- Paves the way for teaching the target language culture,
- Enables students to go beyond what is written and dive into what is meant,

**Helton, C.A, J.Asamani and E.D. Thomas (1998:1-5) expounds the educational benefits of novels as follows:**

- Stimulates their imagination,
- Helps students to identify the emotions of the characters so that they can learn how other scope with situations and problems similar to their own experiences,
- Helps them master the skills that will enable them to acquire information, process this knowledge, identify problems, formulate alternatives, and arrive at meaningful, thoughtful, effective decisions and solutions,
- Develops oral and written language skills,
- Serves as a springboard for a multitude of holistic learning and critical thinking activities beginning with basic comprehension and writing,
- Presents a unique way of teaching reading by getting students involved and excited about the reading process,
- Motivates students to become a lifelong reader,

When selecting a novel to be used in the foreign language class, the language teacher should pay attention to whether the novel has an intriguing story that will be of interest to the entire class. Themes and settings captivating their imagination and exploring the human condition should be included in the nature of the selected novels. Novel should have a powerful, fast-paced plot and interesting, well delineated, memorable characters. The content of the novel should be suitable to students' cognitive and emotional levels. Specific themes and concepts being developed in class should also be incorporated within the novel.

When assessing comprehension, teachers may employ novel tests requiring students to develop the sub-skills of written language like spelling, handwriting, grammar, and punctuation. Essay type tests written by teachers help students to gradually improve their skills in writing and organizing material into paragraphs with acceptable sentence structure. The tests are made up of not only fact-based questions serving as a basis of evaluating comprehension but also open-ended questions developing critical thinking abilities. The open-ended questions enable students to predict outcomes, make comparisons and contrasts, and draw conclusions. Class discussions of each novel event should comprise the main



idea and supporting details, including who, what, when, where, and how. Details of various social issues such as sexual harassment and abortion, which are often an integral part of the plot, can provoke interesting debate. Discussions can also facilitate vocabulary development (Helton, Asamani and Thomas 1998:1-5).

The use of novel is a very beneficial technique in today's foreign language classes. If selected carefully, using a novel makes the students' reading lesson motivating, interesting and entertaining. Though many students find reading a novel written in a target language difficult, boring, unmotivating, novel is a very effective way of building vocabulary and developing reading comprehension skills. It is through reading that students broaden their horizons, become familiar with other cultures, and hence develop their intercultural communicative competence, learning how to view the world from different perspectives. The result will be the possession of critical thinking and writing.

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