

USING LITERATURE IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

Huda Khudhair Abbas

Assistant Teacher, Department of English, General Directorate of Education in Wasit, Iraq

Received: 12 Sep 2018

Accepted: 11 Oct 2018

Published: 26 Oct 2018

ABSTRACT

Using literature in teaching English is not something new, yet it can be consider as a revival to old tradition. Students can express themselves, comment and justify through literature in language classroom. By using literary text, motivating discussion will be livelier especially if the topic is interesting for them.

This paper examines the use of literature in teaching English for non-English speakers. It examines the historical sequences of using literature in language classrooms, benefits and reasons for using literature as a tool of teaching English as a foreign language, and some techniques that can be used inside the classroom using literature. The techniques and activities that have been mentioned in this paper are suitable for intermediate students.

KEYWORDS: *Teaching and Learning English Language, Literary Texts, Techniques and Strategies*

INTRODUCTION

Interest has increasingly grown on how to make use of literature with the language learners. Literary texts can improve the English language of the learners by using specific techniques based on literary texts.

This interest comes from the awareness that the richness and variety of the literature can be used to elicit authentic responses from the learners and that can motivate the learners and stimulate their imagination. Brumfit and Carter state that "a literary text is an authentic text, a real language in context, to which we can respond directly" (5). Such a literary text broadens the student's horizons of thinking and provides a better understanding. At the same time, using literature in language classroom ensures the student's personal involvement in the language class and fill the gap between the books and real life as literature is considered a mirror of life, thoughts, and feelings.

Povey observes that "literature will increase all language skills because literature will extend linguistic knowledge"(18). Thus, the literary context provides richness the student's lexical or syntactical items and makes them more memorable.

Collie and Sater emphasize that "in reading literary texts students have also to cope with language intended for the native speakers" (4) and that's why they have concluded that the students' "gain additional familiarity with many different linguistic uses, forms and conventions of the written modes"(4). Thus contextualized reading enhances the students' writing skills as they become familiar with features of writing forms like the function of sentences, structural variation, cohesion and cohesive.

No one can deny the fact that only grammar does not matter anymore, as language has to encourage critical thinking, stimulate their imagination and this can be obtained through literature. By using literature in language class, students go beyond the mechanical aspects of the learning process and achieve control over the language. students can get benefits if they are challenged with language input which is beyond their independent level of comprehension to some extent. (Violetta 74)

HISTORICAL REVIEW

Language and literature are closely related. Literature is formed by language, and it is considered one of its persistent uses of language. Literary texts have been used as a teaching tool in language classes. Let us examine the evolving of the use of literature in language classes like a foreign language to end with its present role within the communicative approach.

Literature was the main component in the grammar-translation method. After reading and translating literary texts in the target language, these texts used as a sample of good writing and "illustration of the grammatical rules". (74). Obviously, in this method, the focus was on learning the rules of grammar, form and other lexical items. The weakness was that students forgot the literary texts as there was no interest on content.

Commonly we know that every new method exposes the previous one and this was the case with the structural method because literary texts were denied as a tool in teaching the target language. The views have changed as communication became the aim of teaching by using authentic language samples, and literature was ignored because it was not seen as having authentic use or communicative function.

The interest in literature has come back in the last decade, it is now considered as one of the most recognizable languages teaching resources. According to the communicative approach, literature is used to develop communicative competence.

Brumfit and Carter opposed the notion of the "specific literary language and state that the language of the literary text is common language though there is a high focus on metaphor, similes..."(74,77)

As for discussing any literary topic or text, the teacher has to provide the students with the efficient language they need for the interaction. Thus pre_ activities should be done.

Learning in a cooperative way does not mean only pair work and group work, yet it means the teacher along with the students cooperate to achieve the objectives of the activity or lesson.

In teaching literature, the teacher can practice the four skills while presenting the materials. Practicing the four skills with any literary text comes from the idea of "the wholeness of language"(Brown 49). The idea of teaching a language as a whole and not in parts, like learning lists of words, or even unconnected sentences emphasize the certain structural pattern. That's why using a literary text in a communicative way could be so beneficial for English language teaching. one of the key facts is clustering the literary text if it is going to be discussed intensively. The students may listen to a piece of literature, guessing the whole meaning or writing notes, then interaction about it, the discussion could focus on certain cultural backgrounds, lexical items or even personal experiences. Thus any negotiation about the topic leads to an authentic use of the language.

Using such kind of texts will provide rich educational ambience as the students have to express their views according to their beliefs, feeling, knowledge and background.

Moreover, literary texts can be considered as a content-based activity. Briton, Snow and Wesche state that "integration of content learning with language teaching aims"(7) which means that teaching the language through the subject matter not teaching language as an isolated skill. Thus the language will be the medium instead of being the goal, and this way of learning is less stressful for the students especially if the literary text is interesting, related to their culture, age, and level.

As Brown discussed that "content-based classrooms may yield, and increase in intrinsic motivation and empowerment, since students are focused on subject matter that is important to their lives" (49)and he also added that" students are pointed beyond transient factors like grades and texts" (50)

One crucial point is that the kind of the text to be used, it is advisable to use a text of modern English and not old English like Shakespeare's plays or sonnets, as students tend to learn the language that they can use here and now, and this is considered a reward to them and a demonstration to what they have learned before. (marckwardt 2,7)

THE USE OF LITERATURE IN THE LANGUAGE CLASSROOMS

Most students frustrated as they partially understand but not able to respond, and this may result from the passive learning and one side in the educational process. Suggested solutions are like the involvement and interaction. Techniques like storytelling and role play may be used to break the static way of learning and improve their spoken language. The selected literary topics should have language relevance according to their level or course. One more point is that the oral interaction followed by questions or writing activities related to certain functional or grammatical area to demonstrate what has been discussed and use the vocabularies which have been used orally. And this is to overcome the shortcomings that some linguists believe in like Topping who believes that literature does not achieve the goal of linguistic proficiency for foreign students. (95,100)

Using literature as a technique for teaching language skills or for language areas becomes wide spreading in English language teaching and learning. Collie and Slater (3) list reasons why it is advisable to use literature in language classes:-]

Valuable Authentic Material

Literature is authentic material as it is not written for the purpose of teaching language. Samples of the language used in real-life situations like travel timetables, advertisements or magazine articles are recently implemented in teaching the English language, and thus literature can be seen as a complement to such samples. Moreover, the students become familiar with various linguistic forms, meanings and communicative functions as well, as they have to know the kind of language intended for native speakers.

Cultural Enrichment

When traveling to a country and stay for a period of time for the purpose of learning the language of that country is unaffordable, then the best choice is to read literary works. Though the world of literature sometimes is imaginary, the reader can get a better understanding of that society, way of life, traditions, habits, feeling, and the context of using

vocabularies, as the characters for example in a novel or short stories are from different backgrounds, levels, gender. So the world of literature provides the students with colorful picture about the cultural contexts of the language.

language Enrichment

Using literature in teaching and learning English can enrich the students' cultural competence, naturalness as the students will be exposed to many features of written language, individual lexical items. They learn ways of connecting ideas, functions of sentences, they become productive when they observe the richness and the variety of the language.

There are more reasons for using literature in language teaching and learning (Maley 12):

Universality.

Non-triviality.

Variety.

Personal Relevance.

Interest.

Economy and suggestive power.

Ambiguity.

Short stories and teaching language:

An short story is a good source to get a better understanding of not only the language but life itself. The characters through their roles offer two benefits to the students, the first one they present daily behavior through their acting, thus the students expose to daily language, tone, and register. The second one is that through their real like acting represent symbolic side and that enables the students to use their imagination and motivates the critical thinking, to think out of the box beyond the boundaries of the literal meaning. The world of short fiction both mirrors and illuminates human lives. (Sage 43)

Using Drama in Language Classes:

Using drama in teaching is a technique that enables the students to comprehend the grammatical structure in context, the kind of language directed to an audience, intended to native speakers. It is important to notice that using drama not for its sake but as a tool of teaching the language. Students should get the benefit of drama to comprehend life experiences, derived from certain circumstances and make sure of their extra linguistic ambience in depth. (Saricoban 13,32)

TECHNIQUES FOR TEACHING ENGLISH USING LITERATURE

Duff and Maley went to divide teaching literature into four stages (11):-

- Starting points.
- General approaches.
- Developing ideas, themes, topics, and projects.

Over to You: further ideas with a focus on language.

Starting points present selected activities that can be used with students of different levels in which the students do not need to have any previous background in literature. The aim of such activities is to attract the students' attention, motivate them to guess, speculate, moreover to encourage discussion and familiarize them to work on short texts. Starting points activities introduce approaches that can be followed later with longer texts. And it is easy for the teacher to prepare, adapt and renew such activities.

In the General Approaches, the teacher can select the material from different sources. In other words, there is no certain text to be used, instead, the teacher can use the frame with the sources he chooses, and here in this stage longer, texts can be used like short stories or chapters from novels.

While in the Developing the Ideas, the emphasis is on discussing topics like jobs, memories by using literary texts. The discussion helps the students to speak freely out of their personal experiences or cultural knowledge.

The last stage which is considered as further ideas has in fact, a certain focus on language. Here, the chosen literary texts can be used to improve the language skills or a particular area of language.

Starting Points 4. 1

The Starting Points ground the basis for using literature in teaching and learning the language. As it is mentioned earlier in this paper, this stage aims to provide the teacher with activities which can be followed easily, with students with no previous knowledge in literature. An alternative to the traditional approach of dealing with a text like question and answer. Give freedom to the students to speculate, comment or criticize and give suggestions.

A worthy point to be noticed that such activities are designed in specific to practice language and not for studying literature. The aim is to use literary texts to generate language. So instead of asking the students directly "what is literature", we can use an alternative which can provide the students to make assumptions about it.

According to the aims listed by Maley, certain activities can be designed like:

Opening Lines

Opening lines from different texts like poems or other fiction or non-fiction texts can be given to the students to identify which lines belong to which poem. The teacher can prepare the material as a powerpoint and project it on OHP, otherwise the teacher can write the material on pieces of paper and give them to the students, the titles of the poems and the other texts should be written on the board and the students have to match between the opening lines and the poems. The class can be divided into groups of 4-5 students in each group and setting time by the teacher for the activities. Then the teacher can reveal the right match. The aim of this activity is to let the students know that literature is not away from our ordinary language and one may think it is prose if they do not know its sources. For example:-

- Walking through a field with my little brother Seth,
I pointed to a place where kids had made angels in the snow. (Berman)
- Some say the world will end in fire, some say in ice. (Frost)
- Ink runs from the corners of my mouth. There is no happiness like mine. (Strand)

- He spoke for half an hour. Then he asked that someone should lead them in prayer. (Achebe 7)

The first three texts are opening lines of poems by David Berman, Robert Frost, and Mark Strand. While the last one is from Chinua Achebe's novel *No Longer at Ease*

Sources

Here the students can be given short paragraphs from various sources among which should be literary texts. The students should read the texts individually and identify the literary texts, then they can share their ideas, and work in groups. The teacher has to ask them to identify the words that help them to decide on the literary texts.

Then the teacher has to reveal the right answers by writing the sources of the texts on the board and the students have to check their giving reasons for their answers.

Such an activity attracts the students' attention to what is really said in the text. As well as using the text as a topic of discussion.

Split Exchanges

Such an activity can be fun for the students. Short dialogues exchanges that suit the students' level. Each exchange should be split into remark and responses, the teacher can select six exchanges and split them into two groups A and B, and divide the class into six groups. The teacher then has to give three groups A sheets, and three groups B sheets. Each group has to select a speaker who has to say one of the remarks from sheet A while the speaker from group B has to give a suitable response from sheet B. This activity can be done as a written activity, as the students have to match the remarks from group A with the suitable halves in group B.

Though the activity is controlled, yet the students have some freedom as more than one combination is possible. The teacher has to remind the students that is important to examine the context of the exchanges and make plausible combinations more than finding the right answers. The materials should be chosen to present or practice a particular area of the language. This activity can be considered as a brainstorming or warming up activity as the dialogue exchange can be taken from passages or texts that will be worked on intensely in other activity.

Speculation

On speculation, the students are given short texts that have dialogues and a short description. And the students have to speculate of any explanation at what is happening, discussing among them. After discussing the teacher can give three or more explanations for each text where one is right and ask them to identify it. The aim of the activity is not to know the right explanation but to speculate on the meaning of the words in context and the situational meaning.

General Approaches 4.2

In fact, general approaches are considered as extended activities to the starting points activities.

Normally texts can be dealt with in different ways, in other words, there is flexibility in dealing with the same text, so we can use the text in a way in the starting points and use it in another way in the general approach, for example using it as split exchange in the starting points regardless of knowing the context. Later we can use the same text in a fuller context in the general approaches like suggesting the words or storylines. Though the texts are relatively different there are

some common features like the description of places or people. And that makes it easier for the teacher to find material for this activity. Such as storylines, characters sketches, and suggesting the words.

Storylines

The teacher can select five to six key sentences from a short story or novella that can give the students hints of the sequences of the events of the story, and write it on the board and ask the students to complete the sentences by what they think happens later in the story. The teacher has to give them time to think about their version of the story.

Discussing their suggestion and what the most difficult thing to explain should be done after they finish, and finally, the teacher should reveal the actual events. Such kind of activity can be done as a written activity or the students can do it orally, it develops their skills their writing and speaking. It helps them to acquire the skill of dealing with long texts as at the end of the activity the students will be eager to know what happens in the story and have the curiosity to read the original text. Such kind of activity can be done even with reading passages in their textbooks.

Character Sketches

The teacher should choose a group of characters sketches from different literary texts, and distribute the passages among the groups of the students, give them time to read the sketches, then the teacher can ask them different kinds of questions and they example:

- Which of the character might be stingy?
- Which of the characters travels a lot?
- Which of the characters has fitness?
- Which of the characters has money?

Students can guess the answers to these questions according to the sketches they have, for example:

- A character is stingy because he goes shopping rarely.
- character travels a lot as he is having many foreign stamps in her/his passport.
- A character has fitness as he /she does exercises regularly.
- A character has money as he /she used to travel in the first class.

Suggesting the Words

for this activity the teacher need to select a part of a text which has a dialogue, and the dialogue should be clear enough so that the students can understand it without knowing the background of the texts, then the teacher has to write the extracts omitting expressions like " I'd love...., would you like...., do you mind.... " and give the passage to the students who have to fill the gaps suggesting expressions. Such an activity focus on the spoken language and everyday speech. Like the following lines from Twain's novel "Tom Sawyer" (72):-

'It's ever so nice- I wish I could draw.'

'It's easy,' whispered Tom. 'I'll learn you.'

'Oh, will you? When?'

'At noon. Do you go home to dinner?'

'I'll stay if you will.'

'Good- that's a go. What's your name?'

'Becky Thatcher. What's yours? Oh, I know. It's Thomas Sawyer.'

The teacher has to omit the underlined words and the students have to suggest them.

Developing Ideas

In this kind of activities, the students have to develop the ideas from given texts which suggest themes or topics. Like creating a situation from the dialogue.

Creating Situations from Dialogues

The students are given a short passage of dialogue, easy and open to interpret, within given time the students have to add dialogue before and after the given passage, the teacher has to tell them to imagine that the given passage is part of the play or short story. Both the given text and what the students complete should be easy to speak because after that the students have to perform it. The teacher can give any passage to them like the following one which is from Spark's novel, *"At First Sight"* (274):-

"Daddy?"

"Yes?"

She yawned. "Where are we going?"

"We're going to take a ride," Jeremy said, carrying her through the living room. As he adjusted her in his arms, he patted his pocket, making sure he had the keys.

"In the car?"

"Yes," he said, "in the car."

The teacher has to give the students to think and imagine and then try to complete the dialogue.

Further Ideas with Focus on Language: 4.4

The teacher can save time before teaching such activity, the teacher has to set his /her goals and the objectives of teaching particular material such as some grammatical or functional areas like:

Listening: What Happened Next?

The students listen to an audio of part of prose text, and the stop of the audio should be when the events are heading towards climax or resolution. The students then have to predict the possible end. after discussing their guessing, the teacher can give them the passage that comes after the audio, check if the text has any of their prediction.

Listening here can save time, instead of giving them written passages and the students might take longer time in silent reading

Listening: Word Recognition

The students listen to an audio based on a dialogue from the short story, novel or a play that the students have a difficulty with either recognizing their meaning or in their usage in the spoken language.

The teacher has to write the list of difficult words on the board and ask the students to copy them in their notebooks. while they are listening, they have to identify which word they have heard, like:

Sea/see

There/their

Invincible/invisible

Guilt/ gilt

CONCLUSIONS

Literature and language are closely related, literature is formed by language. Engaging learners in interesting topics is definitely one of the successful strategies in teaching the language. Using literary texts in teaching the English language can motivate the learners to step forward in learning the language.

The richness and variety of literature can be used to gain authentic responses from learners. Using literature in teaching the English language ensures the learner's personal involvement in the language class and fill the gap between books and real life as literature is considered a mirror of life, thoughts, and feelings.

Using literature in teaching the English language helps the learners to be familiar with many different linguistic uses, forms and writing modes like structural variation, cohesion, cohesive and functions of sentences. By using literary texts which stimulate learner's imagination, learners go beyond the mechanical use of language, rely more on expressing themselves, ideas than patterns and grammar.

REFERENCES

1. Achebe, Chinua. *No Longer at Ease*. England: Penguin Group, 2010. Print.
2. Berman, David. *Snow*. www.weareteachers.com.
3. Briton, Donna M., Snow, Marguerite Ann, and Wesche, Marjorie B. *Content _ based Second Language Instruction*. Rowley, MA: Newbury House, 1989. EBook.
4. Brown, H. Douglas. *Teaching by Principles: An Interactive Approach to Language Pedagogy*. Longman. EBook
5. Brumfit, C. J. and Carter R. A. (eds.). *literature and Language Teaching*. Oxford: OUP, 1986. EBook.
6. Duff, A. and Maley, A. *Literature*. Oxford: OUP, 1990. EBook.
7. Collie, J and S. Slater. *Literature in the Language Classroom: A Resource Book of Ideas and Activities*. Cambridge: CUP, 1987. EBook

8. Frost, Robert. *Fire and Ice*. www.weareteachers.com.
9. Maley, A. "Down From the Pedestal: Literature and Resources" in *Literature and the Learners: Methodology and Approaches*. Cambridge: Modern English Publications. EBook.
10. Madhavi Godavarthy, *Literature and Language in an EFL Classroom*, *International Journal of English and Literature (IJEL)*, Volume 3, Issue 5, November-December 2013, pp. 105-110
11. Marckwardt, Albert H. "What Literature to Teach: Principles of Selection and Class Treatment". *English Teaching Forum*. 19, 1. (1981): 2.7. Int.
12. Povey, J. "Literature in TESL Programs: Language and culture". *Teaching English as a Second language*. H. Allen and R. Campbell (eds.). New York: MC. Graw Hill, 1972. Int
13. Saricoban, A. "Using Drama in Teaching Turkish as a Foreign Language". *Eurasian Journal of Education Research*. No. 14, 2004. Int
14. Sage, H. *Incorporating literature in ESL/ Introduction*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall. Int.
15. Sparks, Nicholas. *At First Sight*. London: Sphere, 2011. Print.
16. Strand, Mark. *Eating Poetry*. www.weareteachers.com
17. Topping, Donald M. "Linguistics or literature: An Approach to Language" *TESOL Quarterly*. 2(2).
18. Twain, Mark. *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*. London: Vintage Books, 2012. Print.
19. Violetta, Koutsompou. "The Use of Literature in the Language Classroom: Methods and Aids". *International and Journal of Information and Education Technology*. Vol. 5. No. 1. Jan 2015