

Teaching of English through Literature

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1. Introduction

Language and literature go hand in hand and complement to each other. No literature can live without language and *vice versa*. The use of literature in a language classroom offers sufficient space for the learners to express their opinions, justify their arguments and mirror themselves. It helps to develop the critical thinking abilities of the learners and at the same time creates an atmosphere in which different levels and background of learners can participate. In this way, literature provides an opportunity to the learners to use language in different contexts. Moreover, it makes the class lively, interactive and motivating, and an interactive class obviously improves communicative competence of the learners and keeps a lasting impact on their mind. The use of literature also enables the learners to contextualize the use of languages literature for specified purposes. In other words, literature is the main component of an English language class, so teachers need to illustrate the objectives and methodology of teaching literature that can assist the learners.

The central objective of this paper is teaching English language through literature. Teaching language through literature benefits the learners to learn from the different genre of literature: poetry, fiction, essays, short-stories, and drama. The paper illustrates how the teachers resolve the basic methodological issues when they approach a class with literary text. The methodology used in this paper can be used for general English classes at both school and college levels. In addition, it also fulfills the needs of teaching of specific English. In broad way, it covers teaching of the four language skills (Reading, Writing, Listening, and Speaking) and major language areas like vocabulary and grammar. Literature provides learners a wide range of individual, lexical, or syntactical items. Students get familiar with various aspects of language in contextualized body of text which helps them to learn about the syntax and discourse functions.

The literature in the classroom leads to the use of valuable authentic materials, language enrichment, cultural enhancement and personal involvement. Thus, learners are exposed to actual language samples in real life. Maley (1989: 12) lists some of the reasons for regarding literature as potential resource in the language learning process, they are:

- a. Universality
- b. Non-triviality
- c. Personal relevance
- d. Variety
- e. Interest
- f. Economy and suggestive power
- g. Ambiguity

(cited in Naik 2011: 8)

There is, therefore, a requirement for learner training in appreciation, interpretation and use of literature. In order to help students to achieve competence, we shall show how it can be achieved through in-class and home-take tasks and learners centered methodology.

1.1 Materials and Classroom Activities

Classroom activities reveal language deficiencies of the students that range from poor vocabulary to a lot of errors in grammatical forms. They had problems with tense, word-class,

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subject-verb agreement, word-choice, word order and sentence structure. Most of these problems can be avoided by the use of material from literature. The students are encouraged to write their opinions on a certain behavior of a character in the text or on any simple incident from the text, the students learned to express in their own ways. The various themes in the story and the style and the pictures that support the stories help the students get involved with the text. In case of teaching language through literature, the text acts as a material to promote critical thinking and to develop language. The stories of reasonable length, loaded with vocabulary and compelling topics, are encouraging for the students. Stories can both entertain and educate young learners. Some of the main reasons for composing materials for teaching language through literature are:

- a. Authentic context for the teaching of grammar and vocabulary
- b. Its motivating appeal to the learner's imagination and emotions
- c. It involves students in meaningful debates, discussions and other language tasks
- d. It enables learners in developing their overall language skills
- e. It helps in developing the learner's interpretive and analytical skills
- f. It offers insights into the norms and cultural values embodied in the language.

1.2 Poetry in Language Teaching

There are teachers who draw dichotomy between language and literature. They ask, whether poetry have any place in language teaching. Whether teaching of literature needs specific methodology for language students; or teaching literature is the same as teaching language. These questions are important and they can be answered in the following ways:

- a. Literature provides major recourse for developing language skills
- b. The stylistic features (lexical, syntactical, graphological, semantic and the like) of literature are very rich. The study of these features enriches the language skills of the learners. This is an integrated approach in which both literary and language aspects are given equal focus.

Poetry is often used in teaching of language among many other literary genres. There are many reasons for using poetry, for instance, its short length, suitability for a single classroom lesson, and peculiar linguistic features like polysemy of words, alliteration, etc. Additionally, the evocative character, imagery and its appeal to feelings make the language class very interesting and enjoyable.

1.2.1 The Case of Language in Poetry

One of the features of differentiating poetry of other genre is use of language. The different genre of literature use different types and domains of language. Poetry uses language in unusual contexts. It is what Widdowson calls "deviant use" of language. In other words, language is not used in conventional sense in poetry. For example, the lines

Tyger! Tyger! Burning bright
In the forest of the night

on the surface level reveal that the tiger is torched in a dark forest. It does not arouse any deep emotion or feeling. But the moment one enters into non-literal interpretation by evoking metaphors, symbolism, similes, analogies, etc, it shows unconventional use of language in revelation the fury of God or Energy in the cosmos.

1.2.2 Teaching Poetry

The above section reveals that stylistic analysis is one of major arenas to explicate the formal features of English including the levels of phonology, vocabulary, grammar and discourse and relate them to an understanding of the texts. Apart from this, the aesthetic sense makes class interesting and enjoyable. Taking all these into account, the following aspects are suggested for teaching language through poetry:

- a. Reading aloud
- b. Guessing from the title
- c. Selecting key words
- d. Listing words with synonyms and antonyms
- e. Thematic discussion
- f. Relating poem with personal experiences
- g. Discussing questions
- h. Rewriting a poem in story or prose
- i. Making presentation
- j. Describing the objects in different context, and the like

1.2.3 How Not to Teach a Poem

The teachers generally begin teaching poetry by providing information about the poet's life, background and literary history. They are of the opinion that it background notes will help the learner to appreciate the poem. But it is not the case; rather it is waste of time. The teachers should avoid the following modes of teaching poetry:

- a. Do not provide background to the author unless it is very necessary
- b. Do not paraphrase the poem
- c. Do not close the possibilities of arriving new meanings
- d. Do not explain much, but whenever required, explain with reference to the context
- e. Do not use too much social, political, historical and the like kind of background unless required
- f. Do not avoid discussing the manner in which language is used in poems
- g. Do not avoid technical aspects like prosody, rhetoric, meter, etc. unless you are teaching for specific purposes

1.3 Activity

Read the following poem, "Fog," by A.K. Ramanujan carefully and answer the question that follows:

Fog

Stuck in the need to move on,
eyes turn round and round,
oxen at the oil-press.

Waiting for change, the body
changes, a chrysalis
that will rot unless it breaks
into wings. Restless, unable to move,
claustrophobic in elevators,
those prisons that move on their own,

hands strain against the present tense,
a labyrinth with cement pillars,
trees without leaf or season,
legs running without moving, finding
nowhere everywhere, a swirl
of fog that lifts an hour at a time,

a cold that burns without blisters,
pulse ticking off time like
an umpire over a fallen wrestler. (1995)

1.3.1 Evaluating the learners’ background

The teachers should ask the students to guess the central idea of poems by concentrating on the title. It will help the teacher to know how much critical ability the learners of the class posses. Further, it will assist the teacher in dealing with the poem.

1.3.2 Pronunciation skill

The teacher should read loudly the poem by following the rules accentual patterns, meter, foot and other technical devices which would help the learner to grasp the pronunciation of words in context of a phrase of sentence. And, latter the learners should be asked to read the poem loudly. This practice will help them to erase the influence of mother tongue.

1.3.3 Reading Skill

Read the poems carefully and select the right option for the questions i and ii. For the next three questions, discuss them with your friend and then present it to the class.

- i. What does the title stand for in the poem?
 - a. a state of confusion
 - b. a thick cloud of very small drops of water
 - c. reflection of temporality
- ii. What do you understand with the phrase “trees without leaf or season”?
 - a. a bare tree
 - b. changes in nature
 - c. month of fall
- iii. What is the gist of the poem?
- iv. Do you agree with the idea, “pulse ticking off time like / an umpire over a fallen wrestler”? Read the poem and argue for or against by substantiating your arguments.
- v. Discuss the nature of movement and change, as they appear simultaneously in the body and the natural world.

1.3.4 Vocabulary

a. Choose one word from the box which is similar in meaning for following words printed in bold.

i. The eyes turn **round and round**.

circular	all over	here and there
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Ans.

ii. Trees **without leaf**.

change	autumn	period
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Ans.

- b. Give one word for each of the following definitions. One has been done for you.
 - i. The middle point or part of something.centre.....
 - ii. Suffering from extreme fear of being in a small place.
 - iii. A complicated series of paths, which is difficult to find your way through.
 - iv. A flat green part of a plant growing from a stem, branch or root.
 - v. To move around quickly in a circle.
- c. The spellings of the following words are disordered. Organize the spelling with the help of given meaning. One has been done for you.
 - i. memreberremember.....
Meaning: to keep an image in memory of an event, a person, a place, etc.
 - ii. nosirp
Meaning: a building where people are kept as punishment for a crime they have committed.

- iii. thouwit
Meaning: not having, experiencing or showing something
- iv. Unodr
Meaning: Shape like circle or ball
- v. Stelrerw
Meaning: a person who takes part in sport of wrestling.

1.3.5 Writing Skills

- i. Write the summary of poem in your own words.
- ii. Write a note on the situation of autumn time in your own town and show how it is different from the poem.

1.3.6 Listening Skills.

- i. The teacher should read the poem loudly and ask the students to mark certain words in the poem. For instance the words like oil-press, elevators, strain, season, hour, umpire, etc.
- ii. The Teacher should give stanzas from the poem with missing words and ask the students to fill the space after listening him/her. For instance:
 - a. that burnsblisters,
pulse ticking time like
an. over a fallen

1.3.7 Speaking Skills

Divide the students in the group to 3-5 and ask them to discuss the poem among themselves for other possible meanings and interpretation. And later ask them to present their ideas.

1.4 Recommendation

There are certain methods of utilizing literary texts in the language classrooms for the purpose of making learning fruitful and enjoyable. Some of the important norms are:

- a. The text should not be from foreign culture. The teacher should choose such texts which incorporate in general the culture and tradition of the learners. In culture friendly texts make students feel at home, increase their participation and motivation.
- b. The classroom and home-take activities should be learner-centered. The teacher should ensure participation of every learner. It helps in developing effective communication.
- c. The teacher should encourage and motivate learners through positive feedback. It will help the learners in class-room participation and involvement.

1.5 Conclusion

In short, it suggests that language could be taught adequately through literature. Literary texts are good resource and authentic materials to facilitate language teaching and learning. It offers rich context of language use and enables the learners to learn language in context of their convenience. In this paper a poem by Ramanujan has been given to facilitate the teaching of language through literature. The poem instigates multidimensional development of the skills of language by stimulating imagination, and working through multiple exercises and activities. It makes the tasks interesting and covers all four language skills. However, learners’ proficiency, interest and age should be taken into consideration while selecting the text and classroom.

1.6. Answers to the questions:

1.3.3 Reading Skills:

- i. A state of confusion
- ii. Month of fall
- iii. The poem “Fog” is concerned with state of utter confusion caused by the Nature. The falling of fog halts everything movement of the Nature. There is desperation for

change, but the path is unclear. Thus, any attempt for transition appears to be in vain. In other words, the poet depicts the futile and meaninglessness prevailed in humanity through the Nature.

- iv. I completely agree with the statement because throughout the poem there is sense of meaninglessness and uncertainty. The very first sentence shows something has been stopped and it requires to run on (“Stuck in the need to move on”). But it has not began yet (“Waiting for change”) and finally gets “strain[ed] against the present”. In this way, the statement is right.
- v. The poem shows that any change in nature needs desertion and destruction of the old one like trees drop leaf in the month of fall. It stops for a while and breaks them into pieces, and then takes shape in something new.

1.3.4 Vocabulary

- a. i. circular ii. autumn
- b. i. Centre ii. Claustrophobic iii. Labyrinth iv. Leaf v. Swirl
- c. i. Remember ii. Prison iii. Without iv. Round v. Wrestler

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