

English through Literature in the ESL/EFL Context

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Abstract - The main pursuit of this paper is to emphasize the view that the use of literature can help the learners to learn and understand the language in a better way. It is also believed that language does not operate in isolation, it requires situation to use it and literature provides ample situations through which learner can learn the language in a better and comprehensive manner.

However, it can be said that the greatness of a language can only be known in a better way through literature. English in the ESL/ EFL contexts can be learned in a better way through the use of literature. Even though there are some difficulties in using literature in language classroom but it is essential to incorporate authentic texts in order to facilitate better learning opportunities. The problems encountered in using literature can be solved if the teacher is ready to plan and prepare well.

Keywords – English, ESL, EFL, Language, learner, teacher.

ENGLISH THROUGH LITERATURE IN THE ESL/EFL CONTEXT

English Literature has been a prominent source of teaching and learning English in ESL/EFL context. Literature plays a prominent role in teaching and learning four basic language skills i.e. reading, writing, listening and speaking and language areas (i.e. vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation which are very important in learning English. Most of the teachers often think of using literature in their class room to enhance interest among students which is the prime concern.

According to Collie and Slater (1990:3), there are a few reasons which lead a language teacher to use literature in the classroom. These are “valuable authentic materials, dispersed with socio- cultural and economic factors of the target language group.”

Literature is a great source of authentic material. Literature is not specifically created for teaching a language. Many texts incorporate authentic language used in real-life contexts. Literature makes people encounter real life situations. While reading the literary text readers get exposition of various linguistic forms, functions and meanings.

Another significant aspect of literature is that it provides cultural enrichment to the reader. For many language learners it is not possible to have direct acquaintance with the target language group that easily because of several socio economic factors. For such learners literature acts as a facilitator by providing various instances of how communication takes place in the target language community and region.. Though literature learners can get acquainted with the wide range of lexical and syntactic

elements which in turn help the reader understand the language in its complete sense. They become familiar with various aspects of written language by reading a literary text. They become aware of the various syntax and discourse functions, connectors and structures which in a way improve the way they write and discourse. Learning seems to be more interesting when they start perceiving the diversity and richness of the target language they wish to learn it in a way acts as the motivating factor for learners. It also provides culture enrichment to the learners which are one of the essential factors of learning a foreign language. Literature provides learners with a wide range of language varieties to develop their sociolinguistic competence in the target language. So, using literature in teaching English is a powerful mechanism to understand socio linguistic elements of target language.

LITERATURE AND THE TEACHING OF LANGUAGE SKILLS

The role of literature is very crucial in teaching four basic language skills like reading, writing, listening and speaking

Literature and Reading:

Reading a literary text helps one improve the horizons of understanding the ways of target group. It provides the reader socio, economic and psychological aspects of the target group which help us comprehend the literary text in a better way.

Literature and Writing:

Literature is the powerful tool of enhancing one's creative and critical writing skills. While reading a literary text the reader comes across several communicative patterns,

lexicons, syntactic and stylistic elements to communicate the subject matter, so as the reader reads the text he gradually learns those ways of expressions and improve their writing style. Hence, literature helps student in learning certain devices employed by various writers to enhance his style of writing.

Literature for Speaking and Listening:

Even though the study of literature is mostly associated with reading and writing skills, through Dramatization, role-playing, group discussion, and other group activities student's oral and aural abilities can be improved to a great extent.

Though there are umpteen benefits of using literature in the language classroom but it is not a cake walk for most of the teachers because of several problems. First, it is not that easy to select a text which suits and meets the requirements of the students in reaching the target in their mind. Second, it requires a lot of preparation and planning from the side of the instructor or teacher to deliver the goods in the best way possible. Third, it requires a suitable training to the teachers so that they can carry on the task of using literature without creating cultural chaos in the minds of the readers. So it requires the exploitability of the content to meet the required objectives set. "At advanced levels, however, students are given literature in its original form so that they can develop their literary competence in the target language. Students learn how to write English more clearly, creatively, and powerfully. However, when selecting the literary texts to be used in language classes, the language teacher should take into account needs, motivation, interests, cultural background and language level of the students" (Collie & Slater, 1990:6-7).

Conclusion:

Literature provides an "incomparably rich source of authentic material over a wide range of registers. If students can gain access to this material by developing literary competence, then they can effectively internalize the language at a high level" (Elliot 1990:198). So, literature if used properly can bring the desired results in acquiring target language in a more comprehensive manner. It can create better understanding of the target culture and help the learner attain competency in four basic language skills of the target group.

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