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USING LITERATURE IN EFL CLASSES

Abstract

This article emphasizes the benefits of using literary texts in EFL classes. Literature can be the content of the course itself or can be used as a resource to teach English language. While teaching the second language, grammar and vocabulary activities can be presented and promoted through different genres of literary texts. As literary texts are highly rich both in content and language, short stories, novels, poems and plays can be used as authentic materials to help language learners to discover another culture in EFL classes. While studying literary texts in language classes, students' language awareness is expanded as they encounter different usages of language. Lazar (1993) states that for language acquisition, literature is a stimulus for students. Therefore, it is just impossible to deny the linguistic efficacy of using literary texts in language classes; appropriate literary texts need to be selected and presented to language learners in EFL classes.

Keywords: Literature, Literary Texts, EFL Classes, ELT

YABANCI DİL OLARAK İNGİLİZCE SINIFLARINDA EDEBİYAT KULLANIMI

Öz

Bu makale yabancı dil olarak İngilizce sınıflarında edebiyat eserlerinin kullanımının önemini vurgulamaktadır. İngilizce öğretiminde edebiyat, ders müfredatının ana konusu da olabilir yalnızca dili öğretmek için kaynak materyal olarak da kullanılabilir. İkinci dil öğretimi esnasında, dilbilgisi ve kelime alıştırmaları değişik türdeki edebiyat eserleri aracılığı ile hazırlanıp özendirilebilir. Edebiyat metinleri hem dil hem kültür alanında zengin olduğundan, kısa hikâye, roman, şiir ve drama, öğrencilerin yeni bir kültürü keşfetmesi amacıyla otantik materyal olarak İngilizce dil öğretimi sınıflarında kullanılabilir. Öğrenciler, dil sınıflarında edebi eserler çalışırken, değişik dil kullanımlarına maruz kaldıklarından, öğrencilerin dil farkındalığı da artar. Lazar'a (1993) göre edebiyat öğrencileri dil öğrenmeye teşvik eder. Bu sebeple, dil öğretimi sınıflarında edebiyat eserlerini çalışmanın dile büyük katkısı olduğu inkâr edilemez; dil öğretimi sınıflarında uygun edebi eserler seçilmeli ve öğrencilere sunulmalıdır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Edebiyat, Edebi Eserler, Yabancı Dil Olarak İngilizce Sınıfları, İngiliz Dili Öğretimi

Introduction

What is literature? There are some many possible ways of defining literature. For Eagleton (1996, p.2) literature transforms and intensifies ordinary language, deviates systematically from everyday speech. Selden (1989) claims that literary language is different from daily language and make us recognize things with a different point of view. Actually, literature is life itself. In this changing world, nothing stays the same and all these changes can be seen in every field such as art, architecture, health as well as education and language teaching. In this postmodern era of the world, it is impossible not to see traces of change in the field of language teaching. Needs of the students and institutions change from day to day. Learning about other cultures, discovering metaphorical and connotative meanings in another language, being aware of values, traditions and historical background of other societies are possible with the help of studying literature of that society. As literary texts reflect life itself, it is a great opportunity for the language learners to discover new worlds and cultures through these texts in language learning classes.

Lazar (1993) claims that using literature in the language classroom has many advantages. She (1993, p.14) believes that literary texts are authentic materials which are really motivating, enjoyable, have educational worth, easy to find in many syllabi and rich in cultural aspects. Lazar (1993, p. 15) also states that a literary text is a stimulus for language acquisition, develops students' interpretive abilities, highly valued and has a high status, expands students' language awareness and encourages students to talk about their opinions and feelings. For Collie and Slater (2011), literary texts need to be studied in language classes because they are valuable authentic materials, and good for the students' cultural enrichment, language enrichment and personal involvement.

Campbell lists the following good reasons to use literary texts in EFL classes (2007, p.6):

- Students will develop a variety of reading strategies in support of comprehension.
- Students will identify literary terms and examine how these terms contribute to the craft of writing.
- Students will develop skills in support of analyzing literature.
- Students will develop discussion skills that enable them to converse with peers about the literature they read.
- Students will discover connections with the literature they read: text to self, text to text, and text to world.
- Students will recognize the role literature plays in telling the story of cultures.
- Students will read literature as a model for the kinds of writing they are doing.

In this paper, the approaches of using literature with the language students, teaching English through different genres of literature – poems, novels, plays, and short stories- and impact of using pre-reading, while-reading and post-reading activities while using literature in EFL classes will be presented.

1. Approaches to Teaching Literature

There are various categorizations to approaches to using literature in language classes. One of the most significant one is Lazar's (1993) list of possible approaches while using literature with the language learner; a language based approach, literature as content, and literature for personal enrichment. With a language based approach, students will improve their knowledge of language while they develop their interpretation skills. With the selection of correct material according to the needs of the learners, most of the class will be fulfilled. Literature for content approach is really suitable for tertiary level as the main content of the class is literature itself here. Text selection depends on the content of the lesson; if it is 16 and 17th centuries' English literature, most probably selections from Shakespeare and Milton would appear in the syllabus. With a literature for personal enrichment approach, students might be motivated through literature to become life-long learners.

Another model on using literature in language classes is suggested by Carter and Long (1991). Three main categories in their model are: the cultural, the language and the personal growth models. Literary texts are viewed as sources of cultural elements in cultural model. The focus is on the texts' social, political and historical background. This model usually used in universities' literature departments. Language is focused on in language model and it is a more student-centered model. Grammar, vocabulary and linguistic features of the texts can be presented to the language learners with the related activities. The personal growth model encourages students to realize their personal experiences and cultural awareness, improve their critical thinking skills.

2. Using Short Stories in the Language Learning Classroom

Short stories are great authentic materials in language classes as they do not only contain a great amount of language but also contain cultural elements which give an opportunity to the learners to learn about other societies' way of life. As short stories are shorter than novels, it makes reading process easier for students; through short stories students from all levels might be taught four skills with the help of text itself and related activities. Students' grammar and vocabulary

knowledge as well as their critical thinking skills may develop while studying short stories as they are easier to cope with in terms of its length. While analyzing the characters in a short story, students may encounter with a variety of registers. Pardede (2011) states that short stories provide students enjoyable activities while improving their linguistic and cultural knowledge of the target language.

Lazar (1993) mentions possible student problems with short stories in EFL classes such as understanding the language and plot of the story and solutions are presented in a list of pre-reading, while-reading and post-reading activities. With the help of related activities, especially on pre-reading phase, all these problems can be solved. Lazar (1993) lists various kinds of pre-reading, while-reading and post-reading activities to be used with literary texts in language classes to make the most of the class and overcome some possible difficulties that may be come across by students. Again, especially the impact of pre-reading activities can not be denied to overcome cultural problems in all genres of literature in EFL classes.

Personalising the short story by asking the students if they have experienced anything similar or analyzing the characters would be good for raising learners' awareness and critical thinking skills. Short stories carries the period's cultural items which paves the way for the students to be aware of other cultures in the world. For instance, James Joyce's (1914) *Dubliners* consists of 15 stories which really reveals 20th century's Irish middle class life with 15 stories in it. Examining the plot, the setting, the characters and themes of the short stories would open new horizons to the learners and gives them an opportunity to learn about other cultures.

3. Using Novels with the Language Learner

Novels can be counted as great authentic material sources to be used in language classes as they reflect the target culture's norms, way of life, the period of the text itself, etc. It is a great chance for EFL students to discover the meaning beyond, to analyze other people's lives and even compare the target society with their own. They have an opportunity to see everyday English or old English.

Asefa (2015) states that using novels in EFL classes has many benefits; as novels are authentic materials, they increase students' motivation and presents aspects of the target culture. For Asefa (2015), studying novels in EFL classes improves students critical thinking skills as they encounter real life like settings, therefore they learn to see the meaning beyond. Of course what really matters here is to choose to correct material for the students as a teacher as so many options are existed here. A language teacher needs to take into consideration the learners' needs first, then their age group, their level of English while selecting novels. Even the learners' family backgrounds need to be thought while selecting a novel to be used in language classroom to be able to overcome any possible cultural burdens that might be encountered with while studying a novel in the language class. Another opportunity with novels is to use the film versions of the novels in language classes as that kind of an activity may arise motivation and interest towards lesson. Comparing the novel itself with the film version may expand learner' critical thinking skills as well as writing and listening skills. Paran and Robinson (2016) believe novels are ideal for extending reading activities to engage students out of the classroom environment; they would also improve students' cinematographic knowledge.

4. Using Poetry in the Language Classroom

Poetry is such a rich genre in literature in terms of language itself and stylistic elements that it contains. Therefore it can be said that using poetry is appropriate for all three approaches mentioned by Lazar (1993). According to Collie and Slater (2011), universal themes in poems help language learners to overcome cultural and linguistic burdens in language classes and the unexpected language usage in poems help them to write in a more creative way. Reading and understanding poems in language classes pave the way for learning different usages of the language. Also learners train themselves to see the meaning beyond in the poems by analyzing metaphorical and figurative usage of L2. Learners' critical reading and writing skills may reach their highest improvement with the help of pre-reading, while-reading and post-reading activities provided by the language teacher. Poems can be read aloud in class by the students for pronunciation exercise, they can be asked to rewrite the poem, or to discuss how it is related to their own life experiences. Studying Edgar Allan Poe's poem Annabel Lee might be such a great exposure of 19th century's English language by an American author and themes of love and death for learners. As learners' poem interpretations will vary, this provides a great opportunity for them to discuss the differences in their approach.

5. Using Plays with the Language Learner

Collie and Slater (2011) state that language learners get a chance to see different registers and usages of the target language through literary texts. Maley and Duff (2013) add that to be able to use drama in language classes, language teachers do not have to be experts in drama but need to be willing and believe that they will work for the learners with the help of related activities. Plays are just great examples for that as they provide authentic language for the language learners. Studying plays in EFL classes expands students' perspective towards the target culture. For instance, Shakespeare's plays present both universal themes and English society's way of life in those times. Also reading in English from 16th century will be a great challenge for the students. It is possible to use the simplified versions of these plays for new beginners or elementary students. In contemporary plays, learners will get a chance to see daily usages of the target language in different registers which really feed their analytical thinking skills.

For Kelner (1993), using drama in language classes is beneficial to language learners. Kelner (1993) adds that drama improves their creative thinking skills, enhance language development, embraces imagination and creativity, good for listening skills and comprehension, rises awareness to other people's way of lives and cultures, and motivates both students and language learners towards the class. According to Lazar (1993), play extracts can be used in language classes to improve language learners' oral skills, also this can be a good activity with lower levels. Even if the text itself is a little higher to the student level, it can still be simplified with the related pre-reading, while reading and post-reading activities. Lazar (1993) also lists some ideas to overcome some student problems that may be encountered while reading plays such as giving background information about the play, helping with the language of the text and involving students.

6. Significance of Pre-Reading, While-Reading and Post-Reading Activities While Using Literature in EFL Classes

Selecting the correct material for the correct group is crucial in language teaching classes. There are many factors that need to be taken into consideration while choosing materials for language learners. Students' cultural background does really matter while selecting a literary text to be studied in the language class to be able to see and solve the cultural burdens they might have during the reading process. Students' needs, their proficiency level, age group and literary background also designate the selection. However, with the help of pre-reading, while-reading and post-reading activities, studying literature can be more beneficial for students. According to Lazar (1993, pp. 83-86) pre-reading activities can be used with literary texts in language classes to help students with cultural background, to stimulate student interest in the story and pre-teach vocabulary; while-reading activities can be used to help students to understand the plot, to understand the characters, to help students with difficult vocabulary, style and language; and post-reading activities can be used to help students to make interpretations of the text, to understand narrative point of view, and to follow-up writing activities and fluency practice.

Grabe and Stoller (1991) also believe that pre-reading- during-reading, and postreading instruction are significantly important for the learners for a better comprehension of the text. Pre-reading activities can be listed as follows: previewing and skimming the text, discovering the new vocabulary, revising information from previously read texts. While-reading activities may include summarizing the main themes of the text, analyzing the characters and linguistic features of the text, finding the answers that asked in pre-reading part and making predictions for the rest of the story. For postreading phase, comprehension questions that asked in the previous phases may be answered, information presented in the text can be revised, and other lectures about the text can be listened to (Grabe and Stoller, 1991).

With the help of these activities, even difficult texts can be simplified or easier texts can become more complicated, also cultural or linguistic burdens can be overcome especially on pre-reading phase. On while-reading phase learners can be involved in the story with the help of activities about the plot, setting and characters. On post-reading phase, learners may increase their creativity in writing and speaking activities. All phases of activities do play a crucial role to make the most of the learning process.

Conclusion:

In sum, use of literary texts in EFL classes helps students to understand other cultures and native-like context. Studying and analyzing literary texts develop language learners' critical thinking skills. With the help of these authentic materials, students get a chance to learn and revise English grammar while they enrich their vocabulary knowledge. Studying literary texts is also a great opportunity for the language learners' personal enrichment; they might become life-long readers as these materials are really motivating and enjoyable. Reading literature stimulates learners imagination while it gives them a chance to be creative in their writing and speaking activities. Selecting the literary text according to the students' needs, age and level plays a crucial role in the process. Using different genres of literary texts will not only improve learners' language skills but also it will be a great opportunity for them to understand other cultures.

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