

Enliven English Language Teaching through Literature

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Abstract

The present paper attempts to bring out the role of literature in language teaching process to rejuvenate the acquisition of listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills among the learners who use English as a second language. The use of literary works in language teaching starts with the formation of teaching- learning objectives at various levels to inculcate various sub skills. Next, we have the selection of the appropriate material followed by gradation and presentation of the literary text. Last but not least, we have testing where the test items are formed and used to achieve the desired objectives. This paper also attempts to put into light the dialectical relationship between language teaching and literature. Here, literature, enriched with the creative and effective use of language related to the different contexts, makes one able to appreciate the linguistic as well as aesthetic quality of the text. In the same way, language teaching also fosters good writing and reading skills among learners and enables them to use the foreign language very creatively while dealing with the personal and social experiences. Thus, language teaching makes the language learners apply their different skills in the production of literary works. At the same time, literature also makes the learners aware of the various possibilities of the rich, productive, imaginative, and creative use of the language.

Keywords:

ELT, Corpus, Principles of Selection, Gradation and Presentation, Cognitive processes, Testing, and Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing Skills.

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Introduction

English language teaching has become the most intensive area of research among the scholars, educationists and teachers. But when it deals with literature, a question is aroused as whether literature really fulfilled its purpose when it deals with the language skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. Sometimes, teacher finds it useless to inculcate certain language skills among the learners due to the shortage of time or the difficulties faced by them while understanding the various strands of language use in a literary text. When we talk of real life experiences and the creative, imaginative, realistic, and descriptive uses of language, it becomes imperative to include literature in the course work of language learners to make the teaching-learning process more powerful, authentic, and expressive. It may be a corpus i.e. any collection of written material stored on computer or any hard material i.e. books, novels etc. Perhaps one of the most important reasons for opting out the literary work for language skills is the emotional impact that they have on the learners.

Basically, language teaching and literature are inter-connected areas as both contribute to the expansion of each other's fields. Literature by providing a vast range of language use enriches the language, which in turn provides the base for creating literary canon. Sometimes, students as well as teachers find it difficult to deal with the literature written in foreign language as most of the time, context differences result into the different meanings of the same word/ phrase or the sentence. And sometimes, students find difficulty in coping with the deviations and the poetic license used by the poets or the writers in their literary works and hence poses a threat in the acquisition of the second language. This problem can be sorted out by making the students familiar with the context while using the corpora or literary text for language teaching so that the intended purpose can be achieved. So, in this way, while dealing with the literature for language use, we need to make our objectives crystal clear regarding teaching of listening, speaking, reading and writing skills. At the same time, we need to categorize these objectives according to the students' ability to understand, apply, analyse, evaluate and create cognitive process which are further categorized in the factual, conceptual, procedural and meta-cognitive knowledge type.

Let's start with the grammatical aspect of language teaching. Here, the various parts of grammar such as noun, pronoun, adjective, adverb, preposition etc. are taken into account by literary text which provides a good scope for testing the grammar in an authentic and impressive manner. Literary passages also help in providing the interesting and meaningful contexts for grammar teaching and hence prepare the students to use grammar in real life scenario. Here instead of teaching grammar in isolation through simple and isolated sentences, students are given meaningful passages from the literary text and are prompted to identify or write or complete sentences through integrated activities which allow the learners to use their reading and writing skills for the completion of the task. It is possible that sometimes literary texts deviate from the normal language use. So, in that case, students must be sensitized by the various possible uses of language and after that let them understand the contexts which will enable them to understand the deviated grammatical possibilities of such texts.

Next we have vocabulary, which is considered an integral part of a literary text. Literary text provides the learners with various possibilities of discourses or contexts which influence and sometimes create the meaning of the word. Context helps us understand the meaning of a word from the passage. Sometimes learners gloss the meaning by relating it to the other words or the context of the sentence or paragraph or the text. Contexts related to dialects, registers, and idiolects also influence the meaning of the words. So, literature proves to be very beneficial for the students as it provides them with rich vocabulary. Apart from contexts, literature also provide the glimpses of deviations in vocabulary either by de-contextualizing it or by impropriating the usage of a particular word. Sometimes deviation occurs because of the use of incorrect spellings. We can also have other forms of vocabulary such as ambiguous words, homonyms, homophones, words with denotations and connotations, words with metaphorical meanings etc. in a literary text. Thus, all these things help the learners improve their vocabulary from different types of literary texts and hence, enable them to use it very vigorously.

Reading skills deal with the learners' ability to comprehend the passage meaningfully and also include analysing, interpreting, evaluating, and creating a new piece of writing on the basis of reading a literary text. So, when using corpora or text in the form of a novel, drama etc. to develop and improve the reading skills, we need to select the passage from the unseen text as seen passages sometimes foster cramming or memorization of the answers. For fostering reading skills among the students, we can select a literary text to point out the main idea, theme, characters, mood, tone, and plot through integrative teaching and testing. We can also ask the students to read the text extensively as well as intensively to look for the general meaning as well as to identify or analyze or interpret the specific lexical aspects like synonym, antonym, one word substitution, homonyms etc. Through literature, we can also ask the students to predict what will happen next in the given text or identify the various connections between different parts of the text or we can ask the students to read the text and relate it to their personal experiences.

Like reading skills, listening skills can also be fostered with the help of literature. Here students can be provided with a variety of dialogues or conversations among different characters through audio visual aids which help them to listen the literary text carefully, understand its context, identify the meaning of different words or phrases, point out the deviations either in grammar or speech or vocabulary which in result enables them to generate the overall meaning of the passage or the conversations. Listening skills usually go side by side with the other skills. So it allows the learners to be more active in accomplishing many activities simultaneously or sometimes one after the other. For instance, learners can be asked to pen down the main points of the conversation or they can be asked to listen to the text and then relate their own experience to bring out the main idea or the gist of the literary text. They can also be asked to listen carefully to the debate between two characters and present their critical views on topic of their debate. Like reading, intensive and extensive listening skills can be employed to inculcate among the learners the ability to summarize the main idea of the literary text. At the same time, they can be asked to listen carefully to the poem and identify the rhyming scheme or homophones used in the poem. So, in this way, literature plays a vital role in enhancing the listening skills among the language learners.

After reading skills, we have writing skills which imply the use of cognitive process in selecting, accumulating, and presenting the ideas in a coherent manner. Here, literature plays an indispensable role where learners can be given a literary text and asked them to write down the development of thought of the same text. They can also be asked to read or listen to the literary opus and to evaluate it critically. In the same way, they can be asked to read a novel and instead of asking them to write on the thematic aspect, they can be asked to write a letter to their friends by discussing and adding their own experiences to the theme of the novel. They can also be asked to read the conversation between two characters in the drama and then they can be asked to form their own dialogues from a different perspective. Here, learners' own understanding, emotions, and experiences are made related to the experiences of the various characters present in a particular literary work. Students can also be asked to read a monologue of Browning and then asked to write down their own monologues by looking at the structure of the development of thought employed by Browning. Learners can be asked to compose a poem relevant to the theme of corpus. Thus, care to be taken while using a literary text to trigger the imaginative and creative writing skills among the learners in an integrative way by any of the various means such as through letter writing, report writing, speech writing, article writing etc.

In the same way, literary works play a vital role in the development of the speaking skills of the learners. Like writing, speaking is also a creative and active cognitive process in which ideas are generated, graded and finally presented in a coherent manner. So, learners can use a literary item and then put it into the scene by the means of discussion, debate, speech, role play, poem reading, identifying and pronouncing correct pronunciation, rhyming words, internal rhyme, rhythm of the literary text etc. Apart from this, here emphasis is also laid on the manner with special focus on the stress and intonation in a literary text. Learners can also be asked to relate their experiences to that of the speakers and generate their own world view. Speaking skills, like the writing skills can be best enhanced among the learners by employing them in the integrated activities where the learners can be made familiar with the contexts by

reading or listening to various dialogues or conversations followed by the discussions or debates on the themes/ style/ structure/ language use etc. in writing or speech.

To capitulate, it can be said that literature really enlivens the English Language Teaching process by incorporating real, imaginative or figurative variation of language use related to the various contexts or discourses which simply correlate with the experiences of the learners and give them the perfect glimpses of the social, personal, cultural, and psychological aspects/ ranges of language use.

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