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ISSUES AND BENEFITS OF THE LITERATURE INCLUSION INTO ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING

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Abstract

In this paper, we have a tendency to vindicate the importance of using literature in foreign language learning, respectively English as foreign language learning, as a material which would kindle productive skills of speaking and writing and receptive skills of reading and listening. Not being the supporter of all-literary text English language courses, we state the benefits of the literature to language learning. We cannot overlook the fact that there is a lack of experience and material for promoting the literature in language curriculums and the rareness of this method can be one other element intimidating, thus, disheartening for the wide range of teachers. The dichotomy of the category of teachers who support the inclusion of literature in foreign language learning and those who oppose it, make this method tap in one place and create more discussion on its suitability and practicality than a factual application of the same. We can similarly encounter aloofness from the students who are likewise not used to the presence of literature in ELT. Nevertheless, taking into consideration affluent linguistic contribution and communication provoking nature, we believe that it is the teacher who should bear the load of using resources which would make students spirited and eager in literature usage. The paper similarly aimed at numbering the gains of incorporation of the literature in language learning for achieving the ultimate objectives.

Keywords: Literary Work, Inclusion, Receptive Skills, Productive Skills, Resources.

INTRODUCTION

Language and literature are two separate branches that function isolated from each other. The importance of one or another is not open for discussion. Nevertheless, our objective is to affiliate them and see their functions when in intimate terms. We give special attention to the relation of language and literature in teaching, respectively in teaching English as a foreign language and the contribution of literature to foreign language learning.

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Although in growth, this phenomenon still encounters a dosage of hesitation in its inclusion and implementation, forgetting the fact that language learning should not include only grammar, but have a more global approach and grasp it in its totality with all the mentality, cultural and literary background of the target language. "The goal of foreign language study is to learn a language in order to read its literature or in order to benefit from the mental discipline and intellectual development that result from the foreign-language study" (Richards, 2003, 3).

1. VIEWS ON LITERATURE INCLUSION INTO ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING

There are separate views on whether the combination of literature and language teaching is effective, both of which have their supporting facts and grounds that can be considered valid and reasonable. Supporters of language teaching isolated from literature such as McKay (2001, 63) consider literature as one that maintains its own complicated language not suitable for foreign language learners due to its distinct purpose. There are also "those who argue for a stylistic-linguistic analysis of literary text who question the belief that we learn foreign languages by reading and talking about interesting topics. We must gain an insight into the use of language if we want to improve the learner's 'expressive ability'" (Sinclair, 1982, 19, retrieved from Byram, 2004, 432) and this would present confusion not worthy enough if we compare to the little benefit it gains to the grammar knowledge.

On the other side, the justification of exclusion of the literature from foreign language teaching can be based on the personal experience of the teacher. In the past, not much literature classes were delivered in an attractive manner. This distanced the current teachers, once students, from the literature subject itself, passing the outcomes to their own classrooms today, where they tend to avoid the material which they used to consider tedious. Herein we can mention article 6.4.2.2 of the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages*, which writes "Teachers should realise that their actions, reflecting their attitudes and abilities, are the most important part of the environment for language learning/acquisition. They present role-models which students may follow in their future use of the language and their practice as future teachers" (Common European Framework, n.d., 144). Hence, we understand that current teachers are at great number victims of their *role-models* who in the past avoided literature in language learning.

Moreover, long-time exclusion of literature from the language made teachers not include literary works in their foreign language classes. Teachers with this mindset feel like they defy traditional language learning, but at the same time, they step out of their comfort zone, for the reason that literature inclusion is an unknown area for themselves as well. Although this language teachers do not have to be excluded from using this method, teachers with the literature background and wider literature interests, who are not vast in number, are more susceptible to its use in their classrooms.

Utilizing literature into language teaching further creates a challenge for the teacher because of the students' hesitation in the involvement with the literary work and showing their skills in literary interpretations. Students are usually intimidated by literature and they lack literature literacy. This tendency of avoiding literature and reading literary text further affects its inclusion into language classes.

Nevertheless, once the teacher decides to involve literature in his classroom, no matter the selected literary text, the burden falls onto him as a person responsible for choosing the pattern he should follow and the language skill he wants to enforce. Although literature can be used to enforce speaking in the classroom it does not have to be in the capacity of a Literature Circle which indeed requires thoroughness. Therefore, if we want the weight to be put on discussion, we can encourage our students to the criticism of any kind.

Being in support of literature usage in language teaching, we will hereby offer a few arguments which will make literature welcome in the classroom. Even with the insertion of



various materials, foreign language teaching has adopted a standard character. Hence, it needs a new approach and one way of its revision can be an admixture of it with the literature. Beyond everything, incorporation of literature in English language teaching introduces innovation into the foreign language learning process for many classrooms. As innovation signifies change and alteration, this restructuring brings positive reception by learners since new generations are eager for new ideas. Hunger for unknown and exploration can be saturated with this new approach which brings opportunity for critical thinking and expression, as well as creativity. Beyond this “it trains, in a way no other discipline can, intelligence and sensibility together, cultivating sensitiveness and precision of response and delicate integrity of intelligence” (Leavis 1943, 34-35 retrieved from Gilroy and Parkins, 1996, 213).

As Pound (1968, 23, retrieved from Di Sabato and Di Martino, 2014, 16) puts it, “great literature is simply language charged with meaning to the utmost degree”, Gilroy and Parkinson(1996, 213) referring to Maley (1989, 59) discussing the role of literature in foreign language learning write on the importance of literary texts in language learning as resource with the most sophisticated form of the target language which once was excluded from the language teaching as being too superior for common learners, yet had its come back in recent years due to its discussion initiating character. Though C.J. Brumfit and R.A. Carter are aware of the fact that “Literature teaching is by no means secure in many educational systems, and its role as an ally of language is not infrequently disputed”. They write on the benefits of literature as “. . . a literary text is an authentic text, a real language in context, to which we can respond directly. It offers a context in which exploration and discussion of content . . . leads on naturally to an examination of language”(Swartz, 1987, 44).

2. FORTIFICATION OF LANGUAGE SKILLS THROUGH LITERATURE

The reluctance of some teacher can be comprehensible as they have for years used textbooks which supported linear learning forms. In an example, this is the introduction of the English language starting from the nouns, then the plural of the nouns, just to proceed with the tenses starting from simple tenses to perfect tenses and so forth. Hence, the intrusion of literature into language classrooms can introduce a sort of non-linear learning where we can be introduced with adverbs before the nouns, and third person of the verb before the first person. This type of learning is more natural and not restricted, paving the way to the more creative use of the target, respectively the English language.

Similarly, literary works can be a useful asset due to its feature of being able to introduce the Dogme teaching approach to language learning. Dogme teaching approach, refusing traditional methods, focuses to the students’ needs and interests excluding the textbooks. Using literary pieces does not totally accord to the Dogme method as we use a short story, novel or poetry in our learning process, yet the proceeded activities can be conforming Dogme’s requirements which is basically not following the rules and enforcing free-style learning. Therefore, after using a certain literary work, our activities can be structured in accordance with our exigency.

No matter our direction, apart from the receptive skill of listening and reading it can also benefit the productive skills of speaking and writing. As Hişmanoğlu (2005, 59) writes “The study of literature in a language class, though being mainly associated with reading and writing, can play an equally meaningful role in teaching both speaking and listening. Oral reading, dramatization, improvisation, role-playing, pantomiming, reenactment, discussion, and group activities may center on a work of literature”. These activities can be interrelated and can enforce one or another depending on the students’ needs.

Literature likewise gives students insight into natural language use. Spontaneous sentences relax the learner and effortlessly deport the memory. Reading is the best workout for the nerves and affects both our verbal and visual sides of the brain. “Neuroscientists theorize that reading



'rewires' areas of the brain responsible for both vision and spoken language. Even adults who learn to read late in life can experience these effects, increasing 'functional connectivity with the visual cortex,' some researchers have found, which may be 'the brain's way of filtering and fine-tuning the flood of visual information that calls for our attention' in the modern world" (Hampton, 2018). Hence in terms of reading, we can use literary texts which, concurrently, based on the fact that around 67% of the people are visual learners, it can at least help us visualize the story. Visualizing the event creates a sketch in our brain which will associate us with a certain word, giving it a place in the context. Besides, learning being a chain reaction, the context will help us give the word a meaning and connection to other words and situations since "the complete meaning of a word is always contextual" (Firth, 1935, 1958, 7). Apart from this contribution Hişmanoğlu (2005, 59) states "Having students read literature aloud contributes to developing speaking as well as the listening ability".

We will initially focus on vocabulary acquisition from using literature in the classroom, which we consider among key objectives of literature usage in language teaching. Various stories and experiences written in the literary works include different language and expressions. New vocabulary increases our comprehension of the target language. Having in mind the importance of the vocabulary, we should not let ourselves be incidental vocabulary learners and wait for the implicit contact with the word, but we should force ourselves into intentional vocabulary learning with a purpose and an objective. It is here where literature can step in as it shelters vast, rich and witty vocabulary that attentive readers can derive plenty from. It is a resource that can teach the learner to manipulate and control already learned grammar rules. Furthermore, learner's engagement is intensified when in search of the unknown word, from the literary text, in the dictionary. The participation in the *decoding* of the text lexicon raises the feeling of contribution and bond that is triumphant when finding the meaning and learn its contextuality which would enable the user proper usage of the word in the future.

Likewise, by trying to interpret the literary text, the reader becomes part of it, an active participant rather than a passive reader and becoming an *accomplice* strengthens the connection and raises the interest in the text and language used. According to McRae (1994) "literary texts are representational more than referential". In this way, they catch the interest of the reader involving their sentiments (retrieved from "Using Literature", n.d.). Our gravity is towards the interpretation of the text for the purpose of initiating communication and speaking.

Although we believe that the type of the activities included in the classroom determines the target of the learning, the speaking skills should be yielded, being in support of Lott (1988, 9) who writes "when the text itself is reached it is generally treated in a rather perfunctory way, and its distinctive nature as literature and as a display of language put to special uses, seems often to be lost sight of" (retrieved from Byram, 2004, 377).

During the usage of the literary text as a source of language teaching, group discussion or classroom activities can be suggested as more advantageous as it opens doors to the interpretation and approach beyond learners' own. Thought mainly content-based, the discussion can be led to any direction desired. This would produce communicative enhancement and open discussions which can likewise create an opportunity for emergent language which is "language that 'comes up', often unpredictably, in the interaction between the learners, and/or the teacher and the learners" ("Emergent language", 2016). Such unpredictable plots and language keep learners in the edginess of what is to follow hence engage him. Furthermore, the discussion over the plot makes the learner more active in critical thinking, brainstorm and urge to further expression in a foreign language. Speaking activities additionally support the act of pronunciation thus makes it desirable practice.

On the other side, there are cases when learners enjoy the incorporation of literature in language learning, yet they are hesitant in speaking activities. This can depend on learner's



reserved personality or lack of student-centered learning in the preceding learning style. At this point, writing can come to aid where learners can be given to state their opinion, write their criticism or write on the message or moral of the story. Moreover, "Sometimes known as the second visual modality for learning, reading and writing is a learning style where individuals are able to absorb and retain the most information through reading and writing text, versus imagery and symbolism" (VARK, 2006). Writing based on the material read requires, as a chain reaction, more attentive reading and concentration on the text. The process of writing itself raises the awareness and observant usage of the language in sentence construction. Writing is known as an activity similar to speaking as it evokes our brain for organizing our ideas and phrase creation. Yet this slower mean of expression than speaking can also have an upside due to its character of being conducted in the classroom or at home, thus giving an opportunity for further search on the theme. "Most researchers agree that literature is a rich source for language teachers to involve their students in writing practices in which they respond to short and essay questions about the text content and help them develop their L2 writing and composition skills" (Alkhaleefah, 2017, 194).

3. OTHER BENEFITS OF LITERATURE IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING

We mentioned the benefit of literature in receptive and productive language skills as well as vocabulary acquisition. English literature being affluent and old starting from the eighth century it can aid learners of English as a second language with its diverse themes and rich history. "In many countries around the world students have fairly limited access to spoken English, and written English often takes on primary importance for stimulating language acquisition. Literature may provide a particularly appropriate way of stimulating this acquisition, as it provides meaningful and memorable contexts for processing and interpreting new language" (Lazar, 1993, 17).

Additionally, among the benefit of its incorporation is language enhancement where literature can be a useful resource for learners' acquaintance with the syntactic and lexical forms of the English language. Even when the literary text does not directly focus on the syntactic or lexical form but the plot itself, the subconscious awareness does not lose power. Simultaneously, variegation of the topics starting from the family relations to adultery, from the social to psychological issues, lead to diverseness of the vocabulary and language, which directs to the broad fortification of our lexicon. Similarly, Hişmanoğlu (2005, 56) discussing Maley's (1989, 12) list of reasons for literature usage in the language learning, talks of a "sociolinguistic richness" of literature which can introduce the learner to the formal and informal language in diverse social circumstances.

Cultural and social background is another value, where using literary works such as novel, drama, short stories and poetry can be direct input of the culture of the English language and society. Gaining information on the morality, behavior, relationships, traditions, interests and loathes, make learner involved or at least not being oblivious of the mentality of the English language hosts. This kind of introductory information can trigger learner's curiosity to further exploration of English culture. "If students are familiar with the literature in their own language, then studying some literature in English can provide an interesting and thought-provoking point of comparison" (Lazar, 1993, 15).

This opinion is similarly accentuated in the Common European Framework, as:

Knowledge, awareness, and understanding of the relation (similarities and distinctive differences) between the 'world of origin' and the 'world of the target community' produce an intercultural awareness. It is, of course, important to note that intercultural awareness includes an awareness of regional and social diversity in both worlds. It is also enriched by awareness of a wider range of cultures than those carried by the learner's L1 and L2. This wider awareness helps to place both in context. In addition to objective knowledge, intercultural awareness covers an



awareness of how each community appears from the perspective of the other, often in the form of national stereotypes (Common European Framework, n.d., 103).

This quote validated the importance of intercultural awareness in language learning, the awareness which can be effectively gained through a literary work. Incorporating literary element into our language learning will provide us with the information on the connection between our world and the world of the target language. This recognition will simultaneously produce an opinion of a community from the receiver's perspective, hence make him acquainted with the target language and culture.

4. SELECTION OF THE LITERARY RESOURCES IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

A lot of research state the difficulties that teachers encounter in their selection of the literary material in English language teaching due to the confusing targets of the literature and language combination. This is the point where again the responsibility and effort remain on teacher's shoulders who should design the content and objectives of their class.

Lazar states that "Literature itself is the content of the course, which concentrates on areas such as the history and characteristics of literary movements; the social, political and historical background to a text; literary genres and rhetorical devices, etc. Students acquire English by focusing on course content, particularly through reading set texts and literary criticism relating to them" (Lazar, 1993, 24). Regarding the conformance of the material to be used in the classroom, we should reconsider some of the matters for the best choice, which would fulfill our needs.

Initially, the resource should contain a theme that would attract the interest of our learners. This could be affinity in age group, geography, social condition or culture. The similarity of the age group can create a sense of comprehension of the character due to the generation involvement, while the similarity in the geographic position, social condition or culture can create a connection between the learner and the characters. On the other side, the opposition of these conditions can also be attractive and used as a resource, focusing on the comparison of the learner's situation and setting to that of the literary character.

Having in mind the requests in the selection of suitable resources for foreign language teaching, we have to reconsider literary works which are suitable for us. Primarily no matter the literary genre we select, the language level of the material is of crucial importance. Chosen material should be suitable to the learner level, hence would not be discouraging and repelling as compelling and difficult. Besides this, the size of the material is of equal importance due to the time given for its use.

Choosing a novel as a resource for our language classroom work can be delicate. The story can be detailed and comprehensive, yet it can be exhausting due to its length. The length of an average novel is around 100.000 words which deems it too lengthy for classroom use. The time and the difficulty in maintaining the interest of the learner to this resource make it less coveted. Some teachers may make their choice for the excerpts of the novel which would create confusion due to the unawareness of the previous development in the story and difficulty to connect to the context.

Nevertheless, if we decide to integrate a novel into our foreign language teaching in order to facilitate the comprehension of the plot, as well as strengthen the connection with this type of extensive narrative, usage of the trailer of the movie version of the novel would be highly recommendable. Trailer being of the promotive nature shows the best parts of the story but does not reveal it in its entirety, thus raises the level of curiosity. Knowing the power of the visuality, a trailer will help us put a face to the name and picture to the setting. Moreover, a certain scene may attract our interest and push us to search for it in the novel.



The use of short stories is the best literary source in foreign language teaching. Short stories word count is around 10.000 words which makes it suitable for classroom work. Initially, the length of the book does not give an intimidating impression which is the crucial factor in learners' acceptance of the resource. Short stories contain the same qualities of the novel yet in a small package in this manner we would not be deprived of the real-life activities which novel offers activating all necessary mind games that would be initiated with a novel. Another upside of the short story is the ability to read it in one sitting. Completing the material in one academic hour does not leave the story in half nor the interest not satiated.

Poetry, on the other hand, can offer unique quality in language learning. Applying different language and figures of speech makes the material alluring and practical. The poetic device of imagery used in the poetry affects five senses of sight, hearing, taste, touch, and smell, creating the visual, aural and tactile images. Likewise, rhythm and rhyme as useful devices involve our aural sense and with its musical quality makes learner memorize an unknown word or obscure idea. For instance, rhythmic and rhyming lines from *The Raven* such as "Once upon a midnight dreary, while I ponder weak and weary" by Edgar Allan Poe, though included in a dark and long poem it does not lose the catchy character for our sense of hearing.

Nevertheless, regardless of the proneness to the particular genre and chosen material, "national and regional literature make a major contribution to the European cultural heritage, which the Council of Europe sees as 'a valuable common resource to be protected and developed'. Literary studies serve many more educational purposes - intellectual, moral and emotional, linguistic and cultural - than the purely aesthetic" (Common European Framework, n.d., 56).

CONCLUSION

Though the significance of language and literature as two separate entities is not questionable, we discussed the gains of their association. The weight was put on English language teaching through literature. Though started with its application in the mid-twentieth century this combination is still considered in growth or even unknown in many classrooms. While among those who have tried or heard of it there is still a division between the supporters and opponents of this method of foreign language learning. Many teachers without a literature background hesitate to step out of their comfort zone and standardized teaching methodology, thus hesitate to include literary works in the classroom. Nevertheless, despite our mentioning the hesitation of the students to relate to the new way of learning the English language through literature in general, nowadays new generation predominance is for the innovative approaches in learning. This attraction for the inquisitiveness can be used by teachers who should introduce their learners to the new tactics and methodology including literature as an unexpected element, for filling their curiosity and at the same time for gaining the benefits it offers.

Abandoning the linear leaning form through literature integration we can work on the reinforcement of all language skills and language fields. The special gravity is put on text interpretation aiming the commencing of communication and speaking. The vocabulary acquisition is another benefit of literature involvement in language teaching, knowing the vast range of themes that literary works can introduce to us with all the emergent language that we can benefit from. Apart from the language skills and areas, literary works can furthermore represent direct feedback of the English culture and social background which will additionally connect the learner to the English language.

The difficulties encountered during the selection of the material to be used in the ESL remain constant due to the lack of specially designed material, hence leaving the teachers to their own devices. In the course of this material selection, there are points such as field of interest, age group, social conditions, and the culture, language level mastered of our learners, which should be taken into consideration, hence make the resource cross-cutting with their domain of curiosity.



Regarding the selection of the material, the teacher is yet again the one who will determine the course of his class, nonetheless, is recommended to use the chosen material in a cohesive manner as to contribute to all language skills.

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