

EXPOSING LITERATURE INTO LANGUAGE TEACHING AND LEARNING

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Abstract: Teachers often regard literature as inappropriate to the language classroom. Teaching literature in foreign language classroom becomes essential if teachers are concerned with the meaningful foreign language learning activities experienced by the students. It is not sufficient to only emphasize on acquiring mastery of structure and form but also involves acquiring the ability to interpret literary discourse in all its social and cultural contexts. Accordingly, this study focuses on literature exposure in English language teaching and learning. This study which is a descriptive qualitative study was endorsed the data from two sources: namely is the English lecturer and the students of the English Department of UMM. The instruments used included interview and questionnaire.

The result of the analysis indicates literature exposure has an essential role in English language learning because it is beneficial to the learners' linguistic development, create opportunities for personal expression as well as reinforce students' knowledge of lexical and grammatical structure. Moreover, it becomes important for English teacher to consider cultural contexts into their English language teaching. Students should be given the opportunity in the selection of materials and classroom activities that can expose and enhance students' literary knowledge and understanding.

Key words: *literature exposure, EFL learning, Language Teaching*

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Introduction

It is true that little in the formal process of teacher's training and education for foreign language teachers is designed to increase the knowledge of social and cultural context of communication. Linguistics and literary issues are the dominant focus in this process. The teachers to-be are also trained in methods and techniques of classroom management and content presentation of four basic language skills while at the same time they lack the right exposure and training of the role of culture in communication.

Language and literature is the product of culture. People use language to interact with other people and they write and read literature to enjoy it, because literary work depicts social reality. For a teacher who will employ literature in her/his English classroom, (s)he needs linguistic competence and literary competence as well. Lazar (2002) states that the latter may be relevant to language teachers wishing to use literature in their lessons. It is therefore argued that literature and language are two entities which intertwine each other.

Teachers often regard literature as inappropriate to language classroom. The reason lies in the common beliefs concerning literature and literary language. Firstly, the creative use of language in poetry and prose often deviates from the conventions and rules which govern standard, non-literary discourse, as in the case of poetry where grammar and lexis may

be manipulated to serve orthographic or phonological features of the language. Secondly, the reader requires greater effort to interpret literary texts since meaning is detached from the reader's immediate social context. Therefore, teaching literature in foreign language classroom becomes essential if teachers are concerned with the meaningful foreign language learning experienced by the students.

Literary subjects are necessary given to the EFL students due to the fact that studying literature is good for one's general personal development, making one a well-rounded person. There is no doubt that the study of literature encourages imagination and creativity (Whiteson, 1996: vii).

As Chomsky (in Whiteson, 1996: vii) has said on various occasion and gave advice to English language teachers, that they should equip learners with the best examples of language available, that is, literature. By integrating the arts, specifically literature, into their teaching, teachers give their students excellent opportunities to express themselves in the target culture. Likewise Marcuse, the philosopher (in Kushner, 1994), says, "Art cannot change the world, but it can contribute to changing the consciousness and drives of the men and women who could change the world". It is time to treat our students as the kind of people who can change the world.

The writer is interested in discussing literature exposure in English language

teaching because of some reasons. In the first place, the writer has so far taught language and literature in the English Department at the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education. Despite Education program such literary courses as *Introduction to Literature, Prose, Poetry and Drama* were given to the students due to the fact that literary texts give many benefits as supported by Lazar (2002). Owing to those advantages the teaching of English through a wide variety of literary genres has been employed in the English Department at the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education in the University of Muhammadiyah Malang.

Second, based on the writer's experience when she taught Literature and non-literature courses, the students were very enthusiastic to join the class. The activities involving literary texts in English language teaching not only can reinforce students' knowledge of lexical and grammatical structure, but also create opportunities for personal expression. In addition, various interesting activities can be designed to meet students' needs in the EFL classroom and to attract students' interest and motivation

Reading literature then becomes an important way of supplementing the inevitably restricted input of the classroom, and within the classroom itself, the use of literary texts is often a particularly successful way to promoting such activities as discussion and group work where

students need to share their feelings and opinions as stated by Lazar (cited in Gunes, 2009) in *Literature and Language Teaching* (2002). This is because literature is very rich in multiple levels of meaning. Focusing on a task, which demands that students express their own personal responses to these multiple levels of meaning, can only serve to accelerate the students' acquisition of language." Gunes (2009) therefore argues that integrating literature into language teaching may enrich and expand immensely the level of vocabulary as well as its practical uses. Students will see various examples and styles of writing while they are reading. Thus, the use of literature in language teaching will enable students not only to employ words, different structures and styles in various ways but also to expand their understanding of different meanings of the same words. While reading a literary text, students may internalize all the varieties of words, styles, examples and structures, which allows them eventually to be more aware and competent in their uses of language.

Therefore, teaching literature in foreign language classroom becomes essential if teachers concerned with the meaningful foreign language learning experienced by the students. It is not sufficient to only emphasize on acquiring mastery of structure and form but also involves acquiring the ability to interpret discourse in all its social and cultural contexts. So the writer focuses on exposing

literary in English language teaching and learning in the English Department at the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, University of Muhammadiyah Malang.

Teaching Literature in Foreign Language Classroom

There has been an increasing interest in using literature in language classroom and how literature can be used with the language learners. Literature exposes learners to complex themes and fresh, unexpected uses of language (Lazar, 2002: 15). A good novel or short story may be particularly fascinating since it involves learners in suspense of uncovering the plot. With the literature materials for language learning being carefully selected, learners will feel that what they do in the classroom is relevant and meaningful to their own lives.

EFL teaching methods require more than the presentation of grammar and vocabulary lessons; they must also stimulate cultural awareness and critical thinking skills that students need to become fluent, successful English speakers who can handle advanced communicative activities.

Classical and modern literature has often been overlooked in the EFL classroom, especially regarding advanced EFL students. Research on the benefits of literature in language teaching extends back to the 1980s, when it was recognized that literature is conduit for improved critical thinking skills (Oster 1989). According to Van (2009,7) literary texts are effective in

promoting English language developments in all four skills "through interaction, collaboration, peer teaching, and student independence,". Other scholars have also remarked on the effectiveness of using novels as teaching tools in the ESL classroom (Paran 2008; Yahya and Rahim 2009).

The use of literature in language teaching and learning offers some benefits. It provides learners with the access to the culture of the people whose language they are studying (Lazar, 2002, 16). Since language cannot be separated from culture, using literature in language classroom is then essential for the language learning itself. Literature helps learners in language acquisition. It is a fact that written materials are more available in language classes; therefore, literature may provide an appropriate context for processing and interpreting new language (Lazar, 2002: 17).

Benefits of Using Literature in Language Teaching and Learning

According to Lazar (2002: 89), novel is a literary work that involves a chronological sequence of events, linked by relations of causes and effect. The description of events in a novel is shaped by a narrator and the language of the novel is used in a highly self-conscious way to convey particular effects. Using literary works in language teaching and learning provides some benefits especially if it does not

require specific examination and there is time availability. According to Collie and Slater (2004: 3-6), the benefits that can be gained from using literature in language teaching cover the following things:

- a. It provides valuable authentic material.

Literature offers abundant and various types of written materials. A literary work can be transcended both in time and culture as it can be read by the reader in different country at a different time. Literature is authentic in a sense that it is not designed for specific language teaching purposes. Recent language course materials have integrated many authentic samples of language in order for learners to be exposed to a language that is genuine and can be used in the classroom context. Literature is a valuable complement to such materials. In reading literary texts such as novels, short story or drama, students have also to cope with language intended for native speakers and thus they get additional familiarity with many different linguistic uses, forms, and conventions of the written mode.

- b. It is the source of cultural enrichment.

Literary works such as a novel, a play, or short story offer a full and vivid context in which characters

from many social backgrounds can be depicted. A reader can discover their thoughts, feelings, customs, etc. This vivid imagined world can quickly give the foreign reader the codes and preoccupations that structure a real society.

- c. It functions as language enrichment.

It is believed that extensive reading increases a learner's receptive vocabulary and facilitates transfer to a more active form of knowledge. Literature provides a rich context in which individual lexical or syntactical items are made more memorable. Reading a substantial and contextualized body of text, students will gain familiarity with many features of the written language such as formation and function of sentences, the variety of possible structures, the different ways of connecting ideas which broaden and enrich their own writing skills. The extensive reading of a literary work develops the students' ability to make inferences from linguistic cues and to deduce meaning from context.

- d. It offers personal involvement

Engaging imaginatively with literature enables learners to shift the focus of their attention beyond the more mechanical aspects of the foreign language system and it makes the learners eager to find out

the plot of the story, feel close to certain characters and shares their emotional responses.

Research Design

This research is a descriptive qualitative one which describes the integration of literature in language teaching. This research was conducted in English Department Faculty of Teacher Training and Education University of Muhammadiyah Malang. The data were compiled from two sources: first is the English lecturers and the students of English Department of UMM. The instruments used were interview and questionnaire. Interview was conducted with the English lecturers who were teaching English skills using literary texts while questionnaire was given to the fourth semester students. The appointed class was IV A which consisted of 41 students. The time and length of this research was decided with the class lecturers and was carried out on Tuesday at 10.20-12.10 and Wednesday at 08.40-10.10. The interview was conducted with the lecturers of Reading, Listening, Speaking and Writing. Furthermore the questionnaire was distributed to the students which consisted of 6 questions. The questionnaires aim to know the students' responses to the integration of literature in language teaching and learning.

After the data were collected they were then analyzed. The technique of data

analysis in this research was based on Miles and Huberman (1992) that was started with data reduction, data presentation, data conclusion and data verification.

Result

The integration of literature is split into two main parts with reference to the teaching activities of English language skills and those of language components. The literature integration into language skills includes the activities of reading, writing, speaking and listening, while the literature integration into language components involves the activities on structure/grammar and vocabulary.

The classroom activities which combine the use of literary texts and material development by learners to show how learner involvement can be maximized by engaging learners in meaningfully-designed tasks and the efficient exploration of literary texts.

Material Developments Through Poem

Literature exposure in EFL will explore worldviews using information and knowledge of literary structures that appeal to and stimulate the students. It does not only focus on grammar and vocabulary, but also allows students to analyze and compare culturally diverse point of view, perspectives, and ways of describing the world through a basic literary analysis of a text.

Sorry

Dear parents,

I forgive you my life,

Begotten in a drab town,

The intention was good;

Passing the street now,

I see still the remains of sunlight.

It was not the bone buckled;

You gave me enough food

To renew myself

It was the mind's weight

Kept me bent, as I grew tall

It was not your fault.

What should have gone on,

Arrow aimed from a tried bow

At a tried target, has turned back,

Wounding itself

With questions you had not asked.

(R.S.Thomas in Maley and Moulding;
1998)

Based on the interview to the English lecturer, the following is the activities from the poem designed by the teacher to facilitate four English language skills: Listening, Writing, Reading, Speaking and English components: pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar/structure.

Listening

The purpose of the activities is to sharpen students' listening ability in learning pronunciation different verbs forms

such as *begotten, passing, renew, kept, grew*, have gone the distinction between long and short vowels (/i/ and /i:/) in word like *dear, good, now, tall, food, bow*, and so on.

Students are provided with the text of the poem with those words missing. They can listen to the recording three times: the first time is purely devoted to listening and trying to work out what the missing words are; the second time deals with filling the gaps; and the third time consists of checking to confirm whether or not the answers are correct. The teacher then discusses the answers with the students and practices pronouncing the words with them through further listening to the tape.

Writing

Actually, writing skill offers an excellent opportunity for integrating language and culture because it can be controlled at various levels of difficulty. In addition, in writing, literary works constitute good model for narratives.

By examining literary works, language learners learn about not only the grammar and vocabulary but also the writing mechanics and organization. They can see how correct punctuation is applied, how ideas, events and facts are organized into good paragraphs and finally how the paragraphs are combined into captivating stories. Nash (1987) presents techniques for teaching the paraphrasing skills using poems. Such an exercise is challenging and yet realistic because poetic language, though compact, is not easy to understand

and thus paraphrasing will help students' understanding.

The activity related to writing skill is by asking students to write down sentences or paragraphs based on the word or lyrics of the poem. The poem used in the activity is *Sorry* by RS. Thomas.

The next step is to help students understand more about the poem by engaging them in creative writing task which involve placing them into different roles related to the characters in the poem. For example, students may be asked to imagine themselves to be the parents and children in the poem. Each of them is to give response toward the poem written or orally. The parents will comment whether or not they will forgive them. The other half will pretend to be the children who tell them what they feel. Another writing activity can be done in groups. Each group will be asked to write on a sheet of paper the conflicts which they can remember having with their parents.

Learners may be unable to replicate the whole session because designing creative writing task might be beyond their abilities. They can definitely work on the filling-in-the-gaps task. To minimize the pressure, students may do it in groups. First, they have to choose a poem they like for the exercise. Then they decide which language items they want to practice (for example: vocabulary, noun, verb, adjective, pronoun, adverb and so on) and delete appropriate words in the poems. At the same time, teachers will need to give feedback to the students to make sure that what they have prepared suits the purposes, before they actually present their work to their classmates.

Based on the learners' work, teachers may build up more creative writing or grammar exercises. Working on their own materials, students find learning more interesting and motivating.

Speaking

Speaking activities can basically be performed under formal and informal (casual) circumstances. Therefore, it is better if speaking activities provide both opportunities for the students. In addition, speaking as an activity of verbal exchange is more frequently done in casual atmosphere and more verbal exposures are presented in this informal circumstance. The important thing in designing speaking (communicative) activities is that students have something to say. Students should be given ample opportunities both in formal or informal contexts to describe and give opinions about both native and target language cultural concepts.

Another way to furnishing speaking activities with culture exposure is by having students involved in simulations and role playing that reflect both cultures. In such an activity students can express freely their ideas in the construction of the dialogue in a low anxiety environment. This will naturally lead to a role-play exercise during which students can further stretch their imagination through exposure to other students' work. Stern (1987) held an opinion that literary work can also be used to enhance the learners' oral skills. At intermediate level, dramatization,

improvisation and role-play of what they read in the literary work can improve the learners' oral skills.

Reading

This reading activity aims at developing the students' ability to comprehend the literal meaning of the poem, at the same time analyzing the message and tone. It may be more suitable for advanced students and can be done in groups. The literary text used in the present activity is *This is Just to Say* by William Carlos Williams

The teacher first provides the students with the text of a set of comprehension questions. The teacher then reads the text to the students and gives them some time to do the silent reading, focusing their attention on questions geared toward the surface understanding of the text. Students may work out the answers in groups in order to generate more conversation in English. The questions used in the activity are as follows:

1. Is this a poem, note or letter?
2. Who is talking in the text?
3. To whom is he talking?
4. What is the meaning of the sentence "Forgive me"?
5. Is there any hidden meaning?

Students should have a general understanding of the text after they have completed the comprehension exercise. The teacher then discusses the answer with the

students, focusing on the development of the story of the text.

The theme of the poem may be introduced to the students, drawing their attention not only to the surface meaning of the poem but also to the message it carries. This can be done by reflecting on the guiding questions taken from the poem "Sorry" by R.S. Thomas as follows:

1. What does *Sorry* refer to?
2. What is your attitude as a son or a daughter toward the poem?
3. As children grow up, should the son or daughter leave home when they find themselves in conflict with their parents?
4. What did you and your parents disagree about?

From the reading activities based on literary works learners not only improve their comprehension on explicit details or facts but also produce personal evaluations.

Vocabulary and Grammar Activities

Novel in the teaching of ESL or EFL can be used to develop learners' vocabulary as well as to improve their grammar. Stern (1987) states that literary texts can be used for developing learners' vocabulary. By asking learners to simplify, restructure, restate and paraphrase utterances, learners can improve their grammar.

In this activity the students were asked to read the novel "The House on the Mango Street" by Sandra Cisneros. They

selected the second three chapters of the novels with the chapter title *My name* and *Our Good Day* respectively. They also were asked to listen to the audio version of the novel to help them retain the words in their memory and understand the stories (words) through this audio exposure of the words. After that some students were assigned to read the paragraph of the chapters to the class. This is the additional word exposure to them. Next the students working in group were to discuss the selected words from the chapters by using the flow of the stories in the chapter to decide the part of speech and word meaning. They were encouraged to use context clues of the paragraph to understand the words and only referred to use the dictionary when necessary and to confirm their answers. The lecturer helped the students with the problems they got to solve. When they had already understood, they were asked to use the words in their own sentences individually.

Some students were appointed to write their sentences on the whiteboard and the class discussed whether the words were used correctly in the sentences. This was done to increase the students' knowledge of the part of speech and the word meaning and to improve their ability in constructing correct sentences.

Students' Response to Literature Exposure in Language Teaching and Learning

The students' response to the literature exposure in language teaching and learning can be seen in the students' answers for the questionnaires below:

1. *Do you ever read English literary texts (novel, short story, poem or drama)?*

Among 41 students, those who answered yes were 37 students while the rest of 4 students answered no. It means that 90.24 of students ever read literary texts, and 9.76 % of students never read English literary texts.

2. *Do literary texts give you advantages?*

The students who answered yes to this question were 31, while the rest of 10 students answered no. It can be said that 75,61 % students got advantages while reading literary texts, 24,39% of students said little advantages, and no one said no advantages.

3. *Do literary texts improve your grammatical aspects including part of speech, verb tenses, and punctuation?*

There are 36 students who answer yes, while the rest of 5 students answered no. It can be said that 87.80 % of students said that literary texts can improve their grammatical aspect such as adjective, adverb and so on.

4. *Do you think that the activities using literary texts can improve your English skills?*

30 students answer yes and the rest of 11 students answered no. It can be said that 73,17% of students thought that the activities using literary texts can improve their linguistic development and the rest of 26,83 students thought that it didn't improve their grammatical aspects.

5. *Do you find lesson or message from the literary text you read?*

There are 32 students who answered yes while the rest of 9 students answered no. It means that 78,1% of students got lesson and message from literary texts, and 21,9 % of students did not understand.

6. *Do you find cultural perspectives from literary texts?*

The students who answered yes to this questions 33, while the rest of 8 students answered no. It can be said that 80,48% of students can learn culture from others while 19.51% of students said little advantages, and no one said no.

Conclusion

Using literature in the EFL classroom is of many advantages. Literary texts can improve students' linguistic performance (listening, speaking, reading,

and writing) and competence (grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation). In addition, literary texts attract students' attention and interest to learn English in the language classroom setting because they are provided with various activities and they can entertain the students. Apart from offering a distinct literary world which can widen learners' understanding of their own and other cultures, it can create opportunities for personal expression and to reinforce learners' knowledge of lexical and grammatical structure as well. In short, the use of literary texts in the language classroom can be a potentially powerful pedagogic tool.

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