

Using Literature in ESL Classroom

Abstract

The present paper discusses historical background of English Language teaching in Indian perspective, defines what literature and language is, it also views the separation between the study of literature and the study of language which eventually led to the literary texts in language classroom. The present paper also defines literary texts as powerful pedagogic tool to obtain language skills.

Keywords: Literature, ESL Classroom, Language Teaching

Introduction

The present paper discusses beginning of English Language teaching in India, elucidates language and literature, it also scan the separation between the study of literature and study of language which in result leads to use literature in ESL Classroom. Different perspectives on literature use have been also mentioned in the study. Language and literature has been viewed as one coin that has two sides which supports the notion that language and literature are inseparable entity.

Aim of the Study

With the advancement and new researches in linguistics and literary criticism, teaching of language and literature has been subjected to new perspectives. The study looks at historical background of English Language teaching in India, defines the concept of language and literature. It also discusses the separation between language and literature. The present study further analyses different arguments that encourages literature in ESL Classroom.

Historical background of English Language teaching in India

The teaching of English in India can be traced back to the seventeenth century, starting with the work carried out by avid Christian missionaries eager to spread the Gospel. British East India Company initiated the systematic and institutionalized teaching of English in 1700AD. By virtue of its connection with the British Parliament the company was made responsible for starting and running schools for Indians under its jurisdiction. The first official action in this regard was the passing of the charter act of 1813, which directed the company to set a system to formally educate Indians. The move was favoured by the company shareholders as the entire setup promised to create a cheap source of clerical staff for carrying out company activities. The process of producing English knowing bilinguals in India began with Minute of 1835, officially endorsed T.B. Macaulay's goal of forming "a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern – a class of persons, Indians in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinion, in morals and in intellect" (Kachru:p:22).

What is Literature

The concept of literature has always been a challenge to define. To point out an exact definition has proven to be quite difficult. Someone commented that to truly know a language, one must know something of the literature of a language. Using descriptive language, literature intellectually stimulates a reader to imagine world they are not familiar with. Nelson Brooks in his book *Language and Learning* (1960:96), questions, if everything in print is literature. HE goes on to state " Literature is best thought of ,along with music ,painting and sculpture ,as one of the fine arts. Thus ,according to Brooks ,literature is considered as one of the fine arts. John Mc Rae (1991:vii) defines literature with capital L and small l. According to him, capital L refers to classical texts like of Shakespeare and Chales Dickens, and small l refers to fiction, fables. Further he defines "any text, whose imaginative content will stimulate reaction and response in the receiver.

Moody(1971:4) says , " Literature ,we observe ,seems to undergo a kind of evolution along with other features of the culture it belongs to ,though as in other kinds of evolutionary growth the basic archetypal patterns can often be clearly traced in later documents". Moody (1971:2)

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further states, "literature occupies a territory of some size and importance within the total realm of language, but not the whole field". If we accept the fact that all literature is language then one can go further in to the nature of literature. Therefore, to him, "A work of literature is, of course, something more than the language from which it is constructed "(Moody: 1971:3) Hence, Literature is basically language and it can be used fruitfully to obtain language purposes. As Brumfit and Carter (1986:25) mentioned that literature is a form of art and as such is the language and the content of it is deliberately and creatively modified for the needs of the writer.

What is Language

Nelson Brooks (1960:8) defines language as "the medium by which thoughts are conveyed from one person to another, consequently all words or combination of words used orally or by writing must be considered as coming within the scope of language". Thus, language both spoken or written, comes in a variety of discourse types. Linguists and language teachers viewed language as 'usage or use'. Usage refers to the formal components of language and 'use described its functional dimension.

Separation between Language and Literature

The teaching of language has largely been carried out through the study of literature .This approach was later changed (1960-1980)due to the needs how learners and because of the changing scenarios across the world. As Widdowson commented, "Literature and poetry in particular, has a way of exploiting resources in a language which have not been codified as correct usage. It is therefore misleading as a model it has no place in an approach to teaching that insists on the gradual accumulation of correct linguistic forms." (1984:162). Educators have been arguing as to whether literature actually helps in the teaching of language. The result was a rift between language and literature which did not support literature for language purpose. It must be noted that the rift led to the development of new critical approach to literature teaching, which in turn helped generate a greater interest in English literature in the ELT classroom.

Literature in ESL Classroom

The use of literature in ESL Classroom is not only to help students comprehend the meaning that write tries to express but also to enhance students thinking and language abilities, as well as language skills (LSRW). Students have to learn vocabulary, evaluate evidence individually and in group discussions, form judgements based on synthesis and analysis, and develop a coherent argument in support of a position.

Literature can be a part of the ESL curriculum due to its ability to motivate students to learn the usages of language in different context. Language texts which contain real situation materials, fail to hold the interest of the fall in motivation levels of the students is their realization that the target language skills are beyond their reach.

Brumfit and Carter (1986) feel that a literary text is an authentic piece in which real language is used and capable of supporting a discussion and

exploration of language. At this juncture, this should be noted that language literatures are considered as one coin that has two sides. Some examples of the use of literature to assist in language learning can be found in Bassnet and Grundy (1993), Carter and Long (1991), Collie and Slater (1987), Duff and Maley(1990).

Literature is a broad term that covers a wider range of activities and when it becomes a subject of study, it is seen as an activity involving the use of language .According to Carter (1986:127)" it is my contention that some of the language activities and work with models on the literariness of texts can aid such development ,and that response can best develop with increased response to and confidence in working with a language using a variety of integrated, with language based hypothesis and in classes where investigative student –cantered learning is the norm." The language found in literature includes language from all professions and aspects in life. According to Ali (1988:94) "the language of literature is not a variety of language as legal or medical language. The former is all inclusive, whereas the latter consists of any relevant vocabulary to the rest exclusion of the rest...So literary language is not essentially different from ordinary discourse; as a variety or as special type of language." Thus, literary text can be used in ESL Classroom to enhance language skills.

Conclusion

There are many benefits of using literature in the language classroom. 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 as well as reinforce learners' knowledge of lexical and grammatical structure. Moreover, an integrated approach to the use of literature offers learners strategies to analyze and interpret language in context in order to recognize how and why language is manipulated but also why. An integrated approach to the use of literature in the language classroom offers language learners the opportunity to develop not only their linguistic and communicative skills but their knowledge about language in all its discourse types. The use of literary texts in the language classroom can be a potentially powerful pedagogic tool.

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