

An Exploration of Language –Literature Debate with Reference to ESL Classroom

Abstract

The present paper is based on language –literature debate with reference to ESL classroom. The study explores different arguments in favor of and against of literature that ruled ESL classroom since ages. During the time of 1960s literature was almost out of the ESL classroom on the justification that literature was difficult as teaching material to the language learner. The study also discusses how literature as teaching material used in various teaching methods. Later on, both sides of arguments have been judged with strict neutrality to investigate the real issue in detail.

Keywords: Literature, Language, ESL, Debate.

Introduction

The present paper is based on language –literature debate .It seeks the arguments that are raised by different scholars against literature in ESL classroom. In next stage, study also presents arguments which are favored literature in language classroom. Both parties refuting each other's arguments by establishing valid points.

Aim of the Study

The study discusses teaching methods that used literature for many decades. During the ongoing debate, both parties would be judged neutrally to establish the conclusion.

Teaching Methods and Literature

In language teaching, Grammar translation method is considered the oldest one. During the `time of GTM, literature was the only material to teach language. In this method, the major activity wastranslation of the text. As the time passed, other methods were introduced in language teaching namely Direct and` Audiolingualism where the main emphasis was on spoken language. It was realized that literature was difficult due to its vocabulary because literature provided connotative meaning which was not the aim of language learning. Therefore; these methods did not allowliterary texts as teaching material.

Debate

Literature can be used for language syllabus because it can motivate the learner due to its imagination capability. Therefore, it was realized that teaching of English literature would train the students in language skills. This opinion was continued more than two decades in India but around 1950s a divide occurred that resulted in two pedagogical dislines. One was based on literary criticism and another one was based on linguistic insights. Therefore, a heated debate arose on use of literature in ESL classroom. This language –literature debate is acknowledged as" Language –literature split" (Scott and Tucker, 2002). After reviewing the point of debate this paper will look at the arguments made by the different parties. The study will look at the arguments that support the use English literature in language classroom. In the next stage, the study will explore the arguments that are raised in favor of teaching English as a language with a focus on its linguistic utility. By following such an approach, the study is expected to maintain objectivity and look neutrally at both sides of the debate. With strict neutrality the study would be able to understand the respective merits of the two camps.

Against Literature

Scholars like Donald M Topping(1968:95-96) refused the use of literature in ELT classroom because "Literature has no legitimate place in a second language program whose purpose is to teach language skills to cross section of students who are for studies or work in a variety of

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disciplines". Further he adds that reading of literature will have minimal impact on developing skills like speaking, listening or writing. Therefore literary texts gradually came to be considered unfit for achieving the ELT objective with special reference to those who needed very limited knowledge of English language. Topping's opinion further supported by Blatchford (1974) who opposed the teaching of literature on the ground of time consuming. He suggests that in most cases, very little time in curriculum is devoted to the study of languages. He adds that if the students were to take up literature study during the little time the students had for language skills, it would be a waste valuable resources allocated to English language teaching. While discussing the difficulty that arose by literature in language classroom, Jelena and Alena(2014) quoting Lima(2005:186)"we may find ourselves in the quite uncomfortable position of having to acknowledge that some of our favourite works might cause considerable inconvenience to our language students". It is fact that vocabulay in literure always provide connotative meaning while language learner needs denotative meaning because the target is mastery on four skills(LSRW)in language learning.The ground that literature produces difficult situation in language classroom furher supported by Jonathon who quoted Elaine Showlter(2002:1-20) "the anxiety of teaching". further Jonathan metions that "It is therefore understandable that foreign and second language teachers and lectures may sometimes finds it even more difficult to justify the inclusion of literature in their lesson plan. Some reasons for this difficulty are political. As far as teaching english is concerned ,for example, not only professionals occasionally afflicted by guilty feelings that they are lackeys in the pay of linguistic imperialism, but if they start introducing their students to Shakespear, they are condemned for cultural imperlism." Countries like India, cultural issue is another problem for using Western English literature for language improvement. Therefore, the idea of ESP (English for Specific Purpose) came into existence. The reason behind the introduction of ESP material was to the belief that literature dealt with general or universal subjects. It was also belived that this tendency of literature leads to ineffectiveness in teaching laguage skills in the english language classroom. Many ELT experts felt that literature dealt with universal themes like war, hatred, destruction, passion, and creation, which made it inefficint in practical usefulness. The lack of focus made literary texts meaningless for those who wanted to acquire skills for occupational or functonal purposes. With the advancement of technical education, English was largely seen as a means to develop one's knowledge and as a tool for communication. Moreover, many ELT experts belived that the language that was used in literature was one that did not always confirmed to the general standards of usage .It was for this reason considered to be acceptable for pedagogic purpose in ESL classroom.

For Literature

After discussing the arguments againt literature, this section analysis the arguments for literature. Widdowson(1984:96) makes certain

clarification and makes a distinction between literature as a subject and literature as discipline. He also distinguishes 'learning' from 'studying' literature as follows "By study I mean enquiry without implication of performance, the pursuit of knowledge about something by some some kind of ratinal or intuitive enquairy, something, therefore, which is given separate third person status. By learning I mean getting to knoe how to do something as an involved first person performer. Study, in this sense, is action which leads to knowledge and extends awareness, whereas learning is knowledge which leads to action and delops proficiency." Widdowson(1984) suggests that the task for the classroom teacher is to teach his learners learning of literature, how to read and interpret for themselves. Therefore, it may be added that literature helps students to acquire a native-like competence in English, convey their ideas in good English, and learn the features of english, get insights into how the English linguistic systyem is in communication. Support for the inclusion of literature have also come from sources like the research of Marwan M Obeidat(1997) who made several studies in this area especially in the Arab countries expressed his ideas on the teaching of literature in ESL classroom and recommended the inclusion of more literary texts in languahe teaching. Obeidat(1997) maintains that the teaching of literature in ESL classroom plays an important role in making the learning process even though the syllabus of the universties in Arab world had almost completely removed english literature from their curriculum. Regarding the 'usage' Brumfit and Carter(1988;6) feel that all qualities of language can be found in literature without fail and therefore it is not important to exclude literature in the ESL classroom. They even suggesed that a 'usage' like oxymoron is a regular feature of a language and not prerogative of literature. The issue of cultural context of literary texts, Arna S Haris and Allen C. Harris(1967) emphasized the significance of the cultural context in the study of literature and have come up with two-part bibliography of literary texts acoording to the difficulty levels of the students. In reply of those who claimed literature ought to be out from language classroom ,Arna and Allen(1967) strongly condemed their views and suggested that literary texts can be divided on the basis of their cultural contexts. They divided their selection into the following categories according to the level of the difficulty of the literary texts. (a) low intermediate level (b) intermediate level (c) high intermediate level (d) low advanced level (e) advanced level . Thus ,Arna and Allen (1967) argued that literature is a copulsory part of language classroom. ESP materials for language purpose generally loose the interest of students with passage of time while this is not the case with literature. ESP materials faced a number of problems ,which may not be the case with literary texts . Authentic ESP materials have a very short life as they are largely based on certain contexts of real life situations. Sandra MCKay (1986:198) said that literature can function as an independent means of language learning withot being made secondary "literature does have a place in ESL curriculum. For

many students, literature can provide a key role to motivating them to read in English” So, scholars like (Lazar, 1993, Carter and Long, 1996, Collie and Slatter, 1994, Duff and Maley, 1990, Burk and Brumfit, 1986) supported literature in ESL classroom on different grounds such as linguistic enrichment, motivational enrichment, and authenticity.

Conclusion

A critical exploration of the arguments of the two sides enable us to look at the views of the two schools of thought together. It can be found that the rigid stands by the two sides are not helpful in solving the problems faced by the students. An objective analysis of the debate indicates that both the sides are basically targeted towards improving the language skills of the students. Both sides have been found to have their respective merits and demerits. In the light of the above discussion, it can be concluded that the fusion of linguistic insights and literary criticism would be the learner-centered material for teaching of English language in ESL classroom.

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