

The Effect of Using Literature in Improving Communicative Competence

Salih Ahmed Mohammed

ABSTRACT

This paper reviews a study that attempts to investigate the effect of using literature in enhancing the communicative competence of EFL learners. The study is a descriptive in nature. It tries to x-ray the beliefs and attitudes of the stakeholders of both parties to the teaching/learning process. Capitalizing primarily on the communicative value of literature, the study depends essentially on the best practices of the reflective practitioners on the ground; trying hard to make its conclusions both knowledge-based and evidence-based with the ultimate aim of offering a feasible solution that allows the two ends of the form/function dichotomy to sit comfortably with one another. The tools used for data collection were rigorously developed to ensure both aspects of reliability and validity. The samples were randomly drawn from the targeted population in order to be as representative as possible. The collected data were statistically analyzed and objectively discussed to arrive at the best possible results. The study came up with the main conclusion that using literature has the potentiality of enhancing the communicative competence of the EFL learners. The findings of the study correlate with the results of the previous studies carried out in situations that are similar to the context in which the present study was conducted.

Keywords: literature, communicative competence, EFL learners, reflective practitioners, form and function.

المستخلص

تستعرض هذه الورقة أثر استخدام الأعمال الأدبية في تحسين مستوى الكفاءة التخاطبية لدى دارسي اللغة الإنجليزية بحسبانها لغة أجنبية. اتبعت الدراسة المنهجية الوصفية وقد حاولت الدراسة أن ترسم صورة واضحة عن المعنيين بالأمر وميولهم. ولما كانت هذه الدراسة تراهن بصورة أساسية على القيمة التخاطبية للأعمال الأدبية، فإنها قد جعلت مرتكزها هو أفضل الممارسات التي يتبعها الممارسون المتأملون؟ على أرض الواقع. وهي بذلك تبذل أقصى جهد حتى تكون مخرجاتها ليست فقط قائمة على المعرفة، بل وقائمة على الأدلة أيضاً، جاعلة في ذلك هدفها الأخير طرح حل مجد من شأنه أن يحقق التواءم والانسجام التام بين طرفي ثنائية التناقض: التراكيب الصرفية والمهام الوظيفية للغة. طُوِّرت أدوات جمع البيانات بعناية فائقة وتركيز بالغ وذلك لضمان خاصيتي الصدق والثبات فيها. أخذت العينات من مجتمع الدراسة بالطريقة العشوائية وذلك لضمان أن تكون ممثلة لذلك المجتمع بأفضل ما يمكن. أخضعت البيانات التي جُمعت للتحليل الإحصائي وجرت مناقشتها بطريقة موضوعية حتى يمكن الوصول إلى أفضل ما يمكن من نتائج. خرجت الدراسة بالخلاصة الأساسية التي مفادها أن استخدام الأعمال الأدبية يتسم بإمكانية تحسين الكفاءة التخاطبية لدى متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية بحسبانها لغة أجنبية. ولقد جاءت نتائج هذه الدراسة متساقطة مع مثيلاتها من الدراسات السابقة التي أُجريت في بيئات مماثلة للبيئة التي أُجريت فيها الدراسة الحالية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الأعمال الأدبية، الكفاءة التخاطبية، متعلمو اللغة الإنجليزية بحسبانها لغة أجنبية، الممارسون المتأملون، التركيب الصرفية و المهام الوظيفية.



INTRODUCTION

The teaching of literature has recently been brought back to life as a vital component of English language teaching. Over the past few decades, there has been much discussion on the value of attempting to teach any kind of literature, whether it is classics or any imaginative work written in English, as part of an English language syllabus. For instance, in the sixties and seventies, there was a distinct reaction against the use of any literary English before the pendulum swung again in supporting teaching literature. The opposition towards literature may well have been due to the impact of the approaches that were practiced in the decades prior to the sixties and seventies and prevailing ideas in language teaching and methodology.

The study of literature acquired eminence during the Romantic period when the Romantic poets such as Wordsworth and Coleridge(1805;15) asserted that the "imaginative truths" expressed by literature were superior to those discovered by scientists, historians and other scholars:

.... the Poet, singing a song in which all human beings join with him rejoices in the presence of truth as our visible friend and hourly companion. Poetry is the breath and finer spirit of all Knowledge; Poetry is the first and last of all knowledge - it is as immortal as the heart of man

Literature was seen as a body of knowledge which ought to be learnt for its own sake.

The process of creativity and the entire body of literature were given an honoured and elevated status that sustained the elitist nature which the study of literature has to acquire.

to examining traditional approaches to literature, what is apparent is the prevailing views amongst the elite were continually

emulated by educationists, possibly preventing a clearly-defined role for literature teaching in education. Most of these views remained as propaganda and failed to motivate a reasoned set of proposals as to how a literature course could be designed. The ultimate purpose of literary criticism can be defined as interpretation and evaluation of literary writings as works of art and the major concern of the critic is to explicate the individual message of the writer in terms which make it clear to others. However, this is a difficult process to implement without a sufficiently explicit and pedagogically-oriented definition of the nature of literature study as a subject. A consistent assertion that literature illuminates the mind with no specific aims in terms of objectives only served to make literature an unpopular subject. Moreover, changes began to happen in the sixties and seventies.

The approaches in language teaching in the sixties and seventies stressed the structural methods to language learning, with emphasis on discrete-point teaching, "correctness" in grammatical form, repetition of graded structures and restricted lexis. These approaches represented a methodology unsuited to literature teaching, and were unable to accommodate literary texts. Thus, in many situations, while English language teaching adopted a structural approach, literature was taught as a separate subject, sometimes comprising of purposeless poetry recitation.

Nevertheless, current approaches have endeavored to reexamine the value of literature and have begun to uphold its worth again. These approaches assert the value of literature teaching from several aspects, primarily, literature as an agent for language

development and improvement, cultural enhancement and also for the eminence that many poets have previously ascribed to it.

1. The Relationship Between Language And Literature

It is difficult to supply a watertight definition of the term "literature" but what can be asserted is that literature is not the name of a simple, straight-forward phenomenon, but an umbrella term which covers a wide range of activities. However, when it becomes a subject of study, it may be seen as an activity involving and using language. The claim "the study of literature is fundamentally a study of language in operation" (Widdowson: (1971;18 is based on the realization that literature is an example of language in use, and is a context for language use. Thus, studying the language of literary texts as language in operation is seen as enhancing the learner's appreciation of aspects of the different systems of language organization.

Linguistic difficulty has been one of the main arguments against literature. There has been a general pre-supposition that to study literature, one requires knowledge of the intricacies of language and an inherent interpretative ability to derive the writer's message.

Traditionally, literature has been used to teach language use but rarely has it been used to develop language use.

The advantage of using literature for the latter purpose is that literature presents language in discourse in which the parameters of setting and role-relationships are defined. R. Carter (1986;25) insists that a natural resolution would be to take an approach in which language and literature teaching are more

closely integrated and harmonized than is commonly the case at the present time so that literature would not be isolated, possibly rejected, on account of the "literariness" of its language:

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 responses can best develop with increased response to and confidence in working with a language using a variety of integrated activities, with language-based hypotheses and in classes where investigative, student-centered learning is the norm.

(R. Carter: 1986;127)

Another argument against literature also relates to literariness. With the shift to communicative approaches to ELT in the eighties, literary language is seen as not providing the conventional and appropriate kinds of language required to convey, practical, everyday messages. Poems, plays and novels make use of the same basic language system but have differing functions from non-literary discourses in the communicative function. The result is that poets, novelists and playwrights produce linguistic messages, which by their very nature, stand out prominently against the reader's background awareness of what is both communicatively conventional and linguistically appropriate to the social purpose that the message is to fulfill, though grammatically intelligible in terms of syntax and vocabulary.

Yet, what emerges from such work is the recognition that the precise contextual values of every word, phrase, clause and sentence can be inferred from its interaction with all the others in the text.

2. The communicative value of literature

Because of its communicative values, literature should be given a central role in language teaching and learning. According to Akwanya (2005; iv) "the divorce between 'language' and 'literature' in the educational curriculum seems to undermine all the efforts of teaching and learning English".

Works of literature can expose second language learners to some kind of linguistic structures, which would in turn serve as "comprehensible input" in the learning process. Ray Williams (qtd. in Otagburuagu, 2007;195-196) points out that [L]iterature in a first or a second language confronts the student with various operations of language and the need to elucidate its meaning. Since literature organizes language in the most exemplary fashion, the second language learner must be aware of the importance of applying the language of literature as a model for his own use. The teaching of literature has the practical value of enabling the student to learn about the second language as well as use it.

Literary texts not only enable students to learn about the language, but also to learn the language itself. Otagburuagu stresses the fact that "literature is language in action" (2007;194). It is in literature that one can see all the possible structures and linguistic patterns in any language. One needs to acquire much more than the knowledge of the structures of the language. Language use entails some knowledge of the social milieu of the language community. In acquiring a language, one "imbibes the value system of the culture, its world view and way of relating to and describing the environment" Akwanya (2007; 46). It is not probable that the learners of a second or foreign language can acquire all of these simply by the study of

grammar in classrooms. The solution is in literature which has the potential of exposing the reader to those elements.

Each of the genres of literature has something to learn from. Learners can learn economy of words by reading poems. As Akindele and Adegbite (1999;50) rightly observe "the development of the four basic language skills of speaking, reading, listening and writing is enhanced by the components of the three academic components of literature – prose, drama and poetry". Thus, all the genres of literature are resourceful in helping to develop communicative competence.

3. Teaching literature in EFL class

Language acquisition is an extremely complicated process which involves variety of variables that contribute either positively or negatively. One of the most influential effect of these variables is the quality of instruction offered to the learners. This section of the literature review provides an overview of two major approaches related to the teaching of literature in EFL contexts: (a) The stylistic approach, and (b) the communicative approach.

3.1 Stylistics approaches

Many specialists recommend employing a stylistics approach to the teaching of English in the EFL classroom. Busse and McIntyre (2010; 6) explains that stylistics in its most general sense refers to 'the study of style in language and how this results from the intra-linguistic features of a text in relation to non-linguistic factors such as author, genre, historical period, and so on.' Busse & McIntyre go on to argue that new historical stylistics should be considered as a combined discipline of linguistic description and literary interpretation, which is characterized by being both functional and formal.

A stylistic analysis of a text presupposes adequate knowledge of the context, the period, and the language in which the text was produced. This is because context-related information guides the reading of the specific text.

According to Leech (2010; 17), stylistics can be defined as a 'way of using language.' When language style is examined, the focus will be on the style used in a certain textual domain. In view of stylistics in today's world, Carter (2010;58;61) thinks that it has a significant role to play in relation to methodology in the instruction of literature, and accordingly, in the developments in both first and second language teaching contexts. One major development in this area is the focus on 'textual transformations' in which comparative text analysis can be used through rewriting a literary text from different points of view. This can take the form of translating the text from textual to dramatic, verbal to visual, or spoken to written.

According to Prieto's point of view (2010;163), a stylistics-inspired pedagogy of both literary and non-literary texts has the advantage of providing learners with genuine chances for enhancement. Taking into account real-life language functions, such genuine chances are extremely beneficial in relation to enriching knowledge: creative, analytical and critical.

Warner (2010;163) points out how pragmatic stylistics (an interdisciplinary branch of literary linguistic study that deals with literary texts as social acts of interactive communication) can serve as a methodological foundation for a pedagogical strategy of what can be referred to as contact pragmatics. This strategy (contact pragmatics) stresses the relations between linguistic function and form. Hence, it can be employed to promote learners' sensitivity to

the use of linguistic choices, enabling them to recognize interpretation in certain social and historical contexts.

From another perspective, Zyngier and Fialho (2010;13;33) explain that one of the problems with literature instruction and pedagogical stylistics is their divorce from theories of education. It is of great importance for teachers to consider both aspects of the instructional content and the context in which it is conducted; the social conditions in which they teach.

Critical pedagogy is more likely to enhance literary awareness in an EFL stylistic context. In addition to this, the relationship between teachers and learners has to be based on mutual understanding and respect rather than superior to inferior relations. Consequently, there has to be some intimate relationship between both parties. Finally, the class has to be a healthy environment conducive to autonomous learning of major types: cultural, critical, and emotional. It is worth mentioning here that the role of emotion in education has acquired more importance in the field, especially when it comes to the teaching of literature in English in different cultural contexts, where the experiences related in novels, short stories and poems can be a far cry from the day to day experiences of students in their native contexts.

Proponents of the significance of emotion in literature is an evidence of underlying universality of experience shared by all, irrespective of the differences in cultural and social contexts (Dawson, (2007;92) Brearely, 2000). According to Dawson (2007;103), the four emotions people share regardless of any considerations are: happiness, anger, sadness and fear. When teaching in class, focus should be made on the role emotions play in relation to students' response to a reading text, literary texts in particular.

3.2 The Communicative approach

Gilmore (2007;66) emphasizes that we need to present language which is solidly contextualized, as well as sensitize students to the ways in which the discourse presents its context. Nevertheless, as each culture is unique, so each classroom is; not only all over the world but also within the same country. This calls for the need to follow an elective approach, in order to meet individual students' needs. Gilmore goes on to stress that teachers need to promote all components of communicative competence on the part of EFL students. For example, the component of discourse competence refers to the ability to produce unified, coherent and cohesive spoken as well as written texts. Also, pragmatic competence may come from the students' daily interactions. It refers to one's ability to make himself/herself understood, as well as establish and maintain smooth relationships. EFL students' pragmatic awareness can be enhanced by increasing the amount of pragmatic input, alongside with genuine emphasis on the aspect of communicative competence. Moreover, linguistic competence refers to the linguistic knowledge of grammar, structure, and so on. From a practical point of view; and as Hiep (2005;2;9) puts it, communicative language teaching can be applied through information gap activities, pair and group work, as well as a variety of other practices that are likely to suit each local context by itself. With reference to the cultural and even physical setting, the teacher can use tasks set for small groups, or/and for a whole class format. On the whole, a combination of the two is usually appropriate. Whatever the task is, it is imperative that students are exposed to a variety of life-like situations through which they practice English for communicative purposes whilst enjoying the task.

According to Sauvignon (2005;2;7), communicative language teaching is not only concerned with face-to-face oral communication, also the principles of communicative language teaching cover reading and writing activities that involve learners in explaining, negotiating, and conveying meaning. Taking on board the notion of the context of situation, communicative language teaching can be seen as an approach or theory of intercultural communicative competence, to be stressed when developing methods and materials appropriate to a given instructional situation. Sauvignon (200;2;7) argues that communicative language teaching is not only concerned with oral communication, but also the principles of communicative language teaching apply to reading and writing activities that engage readers and writers in the interpretation, expression, and negotiation of meaning. Wesche and Skehan (2002;207;228) explain that communicative classrooms are generally characterized by the use of authentic texts and communication activities that necessitate frequent interaction among learners, and learner-centered approaches that give priority above all to learners' language needs.

In general, communicative language teaching stresses provisions of:

opportunities for learners to focus on the learning process in contextualized settings, cooperative learning tasks for learners to exchange ideas in life-like situations, and substantive content for learners to learn as a means for language enhancement.

Kleinsasser and Sato (1999;83), on the other hand, claim that communicative language teaching is derived from a multi-disciplinary perspective that includes; at least, language,

psychology, philosophy, sociology, and education research. According to Hutchinson and Waters (1993:68), the communicative approach is concerned with three sets:

the nature of language, the process of learning, and the context within which learning takes place. Communication is usually based upon the four elements of (a) interaction, (b) performance, (c) purpose, and (d) context. The language forms used in real-life situations vary according to the three factors (a) features of role, (b) status, and (c) degree of formality. Consequently, the following principles of communicative approach to language teaching have to be taken into consideration when using literature to enhance communicative competence:

People learn best when they are interested in and can identify with the content of what is being taught.

A major role of education is to enable all learners to achieve their maximum potential. No two learning situations are the same. The content of any lesson, therefore, is best negotiated between the teacher and the learner.

An essential aspect of any kind of teaching/learning a foreign language is the social context within which it occurs.

Integrating all four language skills should be emphasized.

Having said this, it remains to mention that the two approaches reviewed above are not mutually exclusive. They can always be used in an eclectic fashion. Techniques from the communicative approach can be used as vehicles for content from the stylistics approach. Also the principles mentioned in the stylistics approach can serve well as a framework for the techniques employed by the communicative approach.

4. Previous studies

In his study entitled "Communicative Performance in the Written Discourse of Undergraduate Students: what can literature offer?", Ugwuanyi (2017;66;81) examined two groups of students of the University of Nigeria who were taught using two approaches (literature-based and grammar-based) in order to measure the effect of the approaches on their communicative performance. The data comprised 100 essay scripts (50 for each group) qualitatively analyzed based on content, expression, organization and mechanical accuracy; and also quantitatively analyzed using SPSS in order to measure the difference between the two groups. The findings show that there are significant differences in the performance of the two groups in favour of the literature-based approach.

In the study entitled "The Role of Drama in Developing the Communicative Competency among Primary School Pupils in Nakuru Municipality, Kenya" (Khaemba, 2014;26), the researcher mentioned that the study sought to investigate the influence of drama on the development of communicative competence among primary school pupils. The study was informed by the Communicative Language Teaching Theory (CLT) proposed by Hymes (1971;6) and the Monitor Theory of Language Teaching and Learning proposed by Krashen (1976;60).

The study particularly examined pupil competences based on their speaking and writing skills. The results of this study show that drama pupils had better communicative competence in the English language compared to non-drama pupils. A majority of pupils 164(91.1%) of drama pupils scored above 50% in the speaking and written tests cumulatively, compared to 125(69.4%) of the non-drama pupils.

5. Conclusion

Using literature in the classroom language" is a notion that has its important point in language development. So, any curriculum based on this concept should also maintain language as the fundamental concern. For this, it is imperative that curriculum designers start out from the traditional view attached to literature. It is also equally important that the syllabus has recommendations for teaching strategies and forms of assessment. The objectives may outline the importance of literature towards language development, but these objectives become redundant if the teaching and assessment techniques do not apply those objectives properly.

Literature causes creativity in language and imagination, and should be screened in any education system that regards discovery and satisfaction as essential components of the learning process.

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