

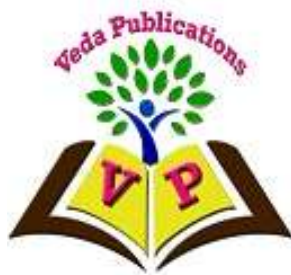


LITERATURE, CULTURE AND ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING & LEARNING

Dr.Sr.Shiny K.P.

(Principal, JMJ College for Women, Tenali.)

ABSTRACT



Literature is a good source for English language learners to know the culture and beliefs of various people. Literature, Language and Culture are interconnected and are mutually dependent in social life. Culture can be incorporated while teaching literature in second language teaching and short stories are the best vehicles to teach culture. Literary works is included in the course material of the language classroom to enable the learners to understand the culture of the target community better and to practice the target language in different aspects. Culture plays a very important role in language teaching because some of the words in the foreign language refer to specific meanings in a particular society, which may not be understood by the members of other cultures unless the cultural context is explained. Literature cannot be taught and understood without understanding the cultural context in which it is used. Culture provides adequate and authentic materials and it also provides interesting practical situations in teaching learning process. And this type of teaching learning process enable the learners to attain proficiency in English language as the learners spent much time in reading, listening and analyzing. There is an increasing need in incorporating cultural components in English as second language textbooks in the present as well as in the future under the phenomena called globalization as the English language is the tool for international communication mainly for business and politics. This paper discusses the importance of teaching culture through literature in English language classroom to know the societal values, beliefs and cultural elements of different communities. A few implications are also provided to the language teachers and policy makers.

Keywords: *Literature, Culture, English Language, Language Teaching, Learning.*

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INTRODUCTION

Teaching culture through literature is important in the language classroom as societal values, beliefs, cultural elements and attitudes are incorporated into communicative approach. It also increases the effectiveness of English language teaching and learning. The main aim of language teaching is to enhance linguistic abilities of the learners along with cultural competence which can be together called as intercultural competence. In present day language classrooms, teachers are expected to include cultural components in teaching because of paradigm shift in language teaching with a different outlook on culture. This outlook emerges from social sciences i.e culture as a broad term that embraces in it many aspects of a society like arts, food, environment, customs and traditions, religious practices, ethics, morals and manners. Consequently, culture includes everything that man has either acquired or learnt in his individual and social life. Anthropologist like Ward H. Goodenough believes that "Culture is an idealized cognitive system- a system of knowledge, beliefs, and values that exist in the minds of individual members of society" (Qtd. in Casson 17). Culture provides adequate and authentic materials and also interesting practical situations in teaching learning process. According to Krasner, linguistic competence alone is not enough for learners of a language to be competent in that language but they also should know the cultural background to learn better.

LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

Literature is rooted in language and language gets life through Literature. So Literature and language are closely interconnected. According to Lazar (1993), Literature should be used in the classroom and must encourage the students to learn as it is a motivating stimulus for language acquisition; students enjoy it and also improve their communication skills. Literature, a convenient source of content for a course in foreign language, provides motivating materials for language teaching. Carter and Long (1991) equally agree that Literature is a legitimate and valuable resource for language teaching. Valdes (1986) opines that it is simply accepted as given that Literature is a viable component of second language programs at the

appropriate level and that one of the major functions of Literature is to serve as a medium to transmit the culture of the people who speak the language in which it is written. It means, when one teaches literature in the language classroom, he/she is teaching language for communication in various contexts and situations.

LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

In the present industry world, employees must communicate with people from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds every day. While communicating, intonation, the use of non-verbal cues and inference play a large role in conveying information, and preferences around these communication methods differ widely by culture. Brooks (1986) argues that physically and mentally everyone is the same, while the interactions between persons or groups vary widely from place to place. Hantrais (1989) puts forth the idea that culture is the beliefs and practices governing the life of a society for which a particular language is the vehicle of expression. Therefore, everyone's views are dependent on the culture which has influenced them, as well as being described using the language which has been shaped by that culture. The understanding of a culture and its people can be enhanced by the knowledge of their language. This brings us to an interesting point brought up by Emmitt and Pollock (1997), who argue that even though people are brought up under similar behavioural backgrounds or cultural situations but however speak different languages, their world view may be very different. Language is rooted in culture and culture is reflected and passed on by language from one generation to the next (Emmitt & Pollock 1997). From this, one can see that learning of a new language involves the learning of a new culture (Allwright & Bailey 1991). Consequently, teachers of a language are also teachers of culture (Byram 1989).

LITERATURE AS A RESOURCE FOR LANGUAGE TEACHING

Literary texts may be used in the language classroom as a resource for language development. McKay (2001) argues that using literature in the language classroom provides three major advantages for learners:



- ❖ It demonstrates the importance of authors' choice of form to achieve specific communicative goals,
- ❖ It is an ideal resource for integrating the four skills- reading, writing, listening and speaking,
- ❖ It raises cross-cultural awareness.

In addition to the advantages mentioned above, Lazar (1993, p.14) explains the following benefits of using literature in the language classroom for the learners:

- ❖ It is very motivating
- ❖ It provides authentic material
- ❖ It has general educational value
- ❖ It is found in many syllabi
- ❖ It enables students to understand another culture
- ❖ It is a stimulus for language acquisition
- ❖ It develops students' interpretative abilities
- ❖ It is highly valued and has a high status
- ❖ It expands students' language awareness
- ❖ It encourages students to talk about their opinions and feelings

CULTURE AS A SOURCE FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING

Language competence does not only include the knowledge of grammatical principles and sentence construction, but also knowledge of the norms that link language to social and cognitive context. Many teachers and students seem to overlook the fact that knowledge of grammatical systems has to be complemented with culture-specific meanings. It is therefore essential for language teachers to approach language learning with this in mind, as the understanding of this relationship is central to the acquisition of linguistic and cultural competency. It is impossible to teach a language without its culture for culture is the necessary context for language use (Stern, 1992, p.205). Claire Kramsch remarks that it is important to be aware that culture in language learning is not an expendable fifth skill; it is present within writing, reading, listening and speaking. She emphasizes the role of context and the circumstances in which language can be used accurately and appropriately. (c.f. Kramsch 1). Culture offers various authentic materials to enhance the dynamics of a class in

particular for the undergraduate students. The structure of a language can determine the way in which speakers of that language view the world. The meanings of a particular language can also represent the culture of a particular social group. It is impossible to understand a culture without having some form of understanding of its language. When people learn another language, it helps them to learn about the world. Learning a language is therefore learning the behaviour of a given society and its cultural customs. Language is a product of the thoughts and behaviour of a society.

Language and culture have a function of communication as they both carry meanings. On the one hand, language carries syntactic, semantic and pragmatic meanings for language users to communicate (Brooks, 1997). On the other hand, culture carries meanings and cultural meanings are expressed through patterns of behaviour i.e. language. In order to communicate successfully across languages and cultures, one must understand culturally different norms of interaction and people's values and thoughts (Saville-Troike, 2003).

IMPLICATIONS FOR LANGUAGE TEACHING

1. Teachers must instruct the students on the cultural background of language usage. If one teaches language without teaching about the culture in which it operates, the students are learning empty or meaningless symbols or they may attach the incorrect meaning to what is being taught. The students, when using the learnt language, may use the language inappropriately or within the wrong cultural context, thus defeating the purpose of learning a language.
2. Language teachers must realize that the meaning of the text is bound in cultural context. So the teachers not only explain the meaning of the language used, but the cultural context in which it is placed as well. Often meanings are lost because of cultural boundaries which do not allow such ideas to persist. Language teachers must remember that people from different cultures learn things in different ways.

**IMPLICATIONS FOR LANGUAGE POLICY**

Policies for language teaching must encompass cultural values from the societies from which the languages are derived as well as being taught. In other words, when making policies regarding language teaching, one must consider the cultural ideologies of all and every student, the teacher, as well as the culture in which the target language is being taught. Language teaching policies formed with the cultural characteristics of both teacher and student in mind will not be prone to make assumptions about the appropriateness of students' behaviour based on the policy maker's own cultural values (Englebert 2004) but will increase cultural awareness. When creating policies, one must consider the cultural meanings of teaching materials used.

IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHING LITERATURE

1. An English language teacher needs to be competent in both Literature and Language in order to attain proficiency in English language. The Literature teacher should encourage the learners to master the language skills prescribed in the literary texts and the language teacher should use excerpts from the prescribed literary texts to illustrate various language components. Thus, the success or failure of the learners in English Language classroom would be a collective responsibility of both the language and literature teacher.
2. Literature provides various activities to stimulate critical and aesthetic responses such as reading, listening and viewing, discussing, writing and performing. Literature transports learners to other places and other times and exposes them to real-life values. The close study of literary language can reveal the infinite variety of expression available in English, which in turn can sensitize learners to its nuances, its beauty, its wit and its sounds. The literature teacher can show the learners how writing entails making choices to create an impact on the reader and through this, the study of the forms and structures of language such as vocabulary, grammar and syntax is

transformed from being a series of exercises into something living and relevant to the learner's need to communicate effectively in a complex world.

CONCLUSION

There is a close association between Literature, Culture and Language. It is impossible for one to teach language without teaching literature and culture of the given society. Literature is an agent for language development and improvement. As a teacher of language, one must be culturally aware, considerate of the students' culture, and inform students of cultural differences thus promoting understanding. Literature is used in English Language teaching to broaden students' horizons by giving them knowledge of the classics of literature, to improve students' general cultural awareness, to stimulate students' creative and literary imagination and to develop their appreciation of literature. Literary texts offer a rich source of linguistic input and can help learners to practice the four language skills i.e. listening, speaking, reading and writing in addition to exemplifying grammatical structures and presenting new vocabulary. Culture is a product of the human mind and it is defined, propagated and sustained through language and literature. In other words, language gives full expression to people's values and norms. Thus, it is important to integrate literature and culture in language teaching as it provides authentic materials and factual situations for language teaching and learning.

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