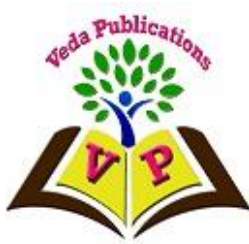**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

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LITERATURE AS AN EFFECTIVE TOOL FOR TEACHING ESL

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ABSTRACT

The present paper traces the position of literature in ESL class at different stages of language teaching history and discusses why language instructors should use literature for language teaching and the kind of literature that should be used in ESL classes. While exploring the arguments for or against teaching literature, the paper presents the postulated pros and cons of the use of literature in ESL class. In addition, the major approaches which have evolved for using literature for teaching language are highlighted. Finally, the position of literature as a significant pedagogic tool for teaching ESL is emphasised and concludes on the note that the successful exploitation of literary texts purely depends on careful selection and what approach to literature is adopted in the class.

Keywords: *Literature, ESL, Language Teaching, Language Skills, Teaching Approaches*

1.INTRODUCTION

The theories of language teaching and the trends in language acquisition have changed over the last hundred years, influenced by linguistic, psychological, educational and political perspectives derived from "a mixture of assertion, theory, observation and experiment" (Hall & Cook 2012, 272). In recent years, the role of literature as a basic component and source of authentic texts of the language curriculum rather than an ultimate aim of English instruction has been gaining momentum. Especially during the last two decades, the interest in literature as a valuable tool in language teaching has been raised (Duff & Maley 1990, 3). Literature has been considered as an influential tool and trend in ESL pedagogy. Vigorous discussions and research of how literature and ESL/EFL instruction can work together and interact for the benefit of students and teachers has lead to the evolution of interesting ideas, methods and approaches of using literature to teach Language.

Although Literature plays a significant role in language curriculum and ESL teaching, many language instructors have questioned why and how literature should be embodied in language curriculum. Many instructors have come to consider the use of literature in language teaching as a valuable and interesting strategy (Sage 1987). The language instructors play a significant role in teaching language through literature. Thus, in order to make their teaching efficient they have to consider some factors. First, they should define the goal of teaching language based on the learners' expectations and demands. Second, they should choose the suitable language teaching approach. Third, they should choose literary texts relevant to the goals of their teaching. By considering these goals, they can effectively teach language through literature. The present paper discusses why language instructors should use literature for language teaching and what kind of literature should be used in language classes. In addition, the major approaches which have evolved for using literature for teaching language are discussed. Finally, the position of literature as a significant pedagogic tool for teaching ESL is emphasised.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

There is a close and undeniable relationship between literature and language. Literature is composed of language and it also provides space for the applications of language. Literature is considered "an ally of language" (Brumfit & Carter 1986,1). The use of literature to teach ESL can be traced back to the nineteenth century, when the Grammar Translation Method predominated ESL teaching. Literature, in the grammar translation method, played a role. Literature of the target language was read, translated, and used as samples of good writing and "illustrations of the grammatical rules" (Duff & Maley 1990, 3). This teaching approach considered form, and learning based on grammatical rules and the lexical items in the text. In this approach, there was no literary interest and literary texts were just used as samples of grammatical structures and good writings. Later, when this method was replaced by methods that emphasized structures and vocabulary, during the 1960s to the end of 1970s, literature was no longer used. These methods were concerned with correctness of grammatical form and not with content, interpretation of the written word or style. In the structural methods of teaching language, literature was disgraced as an instrument, since it presented the old fashion.

Neither of the methods which successively dominated ESL teaching utilized literature to teach second languages. The functional-notional approach emphasised the significance on communication by representing genuine language samples. Literature was not seen as a communicative tool or a genuine example of language application and thus was ignored. The communicative approaches which appeared in the late 70's and early 80's also ignored literature. The tendency in the EFL classrooms was to teach "usable, practical" contents. Thus, literary works had no place in the curriculum. Certainly, literature paves the way for language teaching

through a communicative approach. However, since the 1980s the scenario changed quite radically and literature has found its way back into the teaching of ESL. Brumfit and Carter (1986) and Lazar (1993) have rejected the notion of the existence of a particular literary language and stated that the language used in literature is an ordinary language including linguistic traits such as metaphors, similes, poetic lexis, etc. These features cannot be seen as literature specifics because they also appear in common language application although they have other implications in literature.

3. USING LITERATURE IN LANGUAGE CLASSROOMS: CONSENSUS AND CONTROVERSY

A host of scholars have dwelt upon the enormous advantages of using literature as a resource of language learning. Maley (1989) for instance, gives seven reasons for using literature as an effective resource in the language classrooms. Literature, in his opinion, has universality, non-triviality, personal relevance, variety, interest, economy and suggestive power and ambiguity (12).

Collie and Slater (1990) observe four major advantages of using literary texts for teaching language (3). Literature is 'an authentic material'. It is not created for illustrating a grammatical example. Each literary work is a world in itself, self-contained. The language of literature is highly contextualized, embedded in the situations and the imaginative world that it seeks to recreate. Literature promotes cultural enrichment, language enrichment and also personal involvement.

Duff and Maley (1990) argue that literature is used for three reasons as a means of second language teaching (6). First of all is the linguistic reason demonstrating that literature is influential in language teaching since it provides the students with real samples of language of language, and also with real samples of a wide range of styles, text types and registers. It is of great significance for second/foreign language learners to be taught in different genres and styles and to be able to distinguish the function of each of them. It refers to the fact that a message needs to be linguistically correct and situationally appropriate, as regards not only its content, but also its form.

The second reason is methodological and considers the idea that literary texts can have several interpretations, thus they generate different ideas among the learners and this leads to creative, motivated interactions with the text, the learners and the teacher (Widdowson 1983). Interaction is one of the pedestals of the communicative approach which defends that the language is learned by communicating. Learners become active, autonomous, and central to the learning process.

The third reason is the motivational factor which is of great significance since the literary texts represent the authentic feelings of their authors and this produces a strong motivation in the learners. With the help of the literary texts, the students can have access to this personal experience and are able to relate what they read to the real world.

According to Carter and Long (1991), "Literature is a legitimate and valuable resource for language teaching." Obediat (1997) is of the view that literature can help learners obtain a competence in target language, learn the usage of idiomatic expressions, speak accurately, and become more fluent and creative in the target language. Hadaway et al. (2002) suggest three benefits of using literature for teaching language. The first advantage considers the contextualization of language. Students get familiar with the application of language in various conditions when they read a literary work. The second benefit considers social factors which are embedded in different genres of literature. The third advantage considers the natural and meaningful application of language which are accomplished via illustrations and use of descriptive language in literature.

Among the large number of advocates of literature based language curriculum there are some dissenting voices too. Linguists like Topping (1968) are in favour of excluding literature from ESL and EFL curriculum because of its structural complexity, non conformity to standard grammatical rules, and isolated cultural perspectives. Charles Blanchard opines that 'the study of literature is a luxury that cannot be indulged during the limited amount of time allocated to English.' Some of the linguists, however, do not reject literature altogether but question the efficacy for certain levels of language proficiency of learners. Leech, for instance, believes that there are many literary texts in prose or poetry that are written in a language which includes vocabulary, grammatical structure, and syntax considered to be too complicated to be incorporated into the syllabus for learners at lower levels. These learners may come across rhetorical devices such as complex metaphors and symbols, which they may not be able to decode. Hence these linguists prefer the conventional ELT programmes to the literature based programme. Linguists like MacKay think that the conventional ELT programmes although targeting 'fluency and accuracy' are unable to provide a greater 'linguistic competence' beyond the primary level. In other words they do not develop an ability in the learner not only to use the target language with force and effectiveness but also 'the ability to think…and work freely within its language system', if not the ability to feel and dream, which is special prerogative of native speakers.

4. FACTORS FOR CHOOSING APPROPRIATE WORKS OF LITERATURE

The key to success in using literature in the ESL class rests in the literary works that are selected. One of the challenges teachers face is regarding the selection of a suitable literary text for the students. The needs of the students, their motivation, interest, and cultural background should be taken into consideration while selecting a literary work for the classroom teaching. Also factors such as culture, interest, motivation and language level of the students should be considered. Reading literary texts has valuable effects on the learner's linguistic knowledge when it is interesting and meaningful. Selecting texts about the real-life experiences, desires and emotions of the learners is also significant. Furthermore, language difficulty should be regarded. Simple language of a literary work can facilitate the understanding of the literary text but it cannot be seen as the most crucial factor. As Honeyfield (1977) points out, simplification tends to produce a homogenized product in which the information becomes diluted. Criteria such as appeal, interest, and relevance also play a significant role. Other factors like enjoyment, pleasure and fun all help learners treat the linguistic problems that sometimes are serious in less interesting materials (Collie & Slater, 1990).

5. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES TO TEACHING LITERATURE: FOUR MODELS

There have been some approaches to implementing literature in EFL/ESL classrooms which are as follows:

5.1. Maley's (1989) approaches to teaching literature

i. The Critical Literary Approach:

The focus is on the literariness of the texts including such features as the plot, characterization, motivation, value, psychology, background, literary concepts etc. To do so, the students should have already mastered the intermediate level and they should be familiar with literary conventions.

ii. The Stylistic Approach:

In this approach the focus is on literature as 'text'. Unlike the Critical literary approach, the description and analysis of language is made prior to making interpretations.

5.2. Carter and Long's (1991) Model

i. The Cultural Model:

 Considers literature as an ideal vehicle to transmit cultural concepts such as history, literary theories, genres, biography of the different authors, etc. (Carter & Long, 1991). Language is treated as a cultural artefact, requiring learners to approach literary texts from social, political, literary and historical perspectives.

ii. The Language Model:

This model mainly considers literature to be aimed at language development and awareness. In other words, it defends that the aesthetic aspect of literature is achieved only through the linguistic and discoursal quality of literature (Lazar, 1993). No attention is given to the literary quality of the texts. However, care should be taken into account not to let the linguistic feature vitiate the pleasure of reading literature (Lazar, 1993). This approach to teaching literature is similar to Maley's stylistic approach.

iii. Literature as Personal Growth or Enrichment

This approach gives priority to personal experience as a means to engage students in the literary works. Learners' interaction with literary texts is intended to enhance their personal development and language awareness. (Carter & Long 1991) Here the learners are not to identify and learn the new words or exclusively work out on the linguistic features, but appreciate the literary experience which is associated with the learners' own real-life experience.

5.3 Amer's (2003) approaches to teaching L1 narrative texts in EFL/ESL literature

i. The Story Grammar Approach (SGA):

This approach is based on the idea that there is an interaction between the reader and the text. In other words, the reader becomes aware of the text structure. It is closely associated with genre-awareness in textual analysis and how this knowledge is conducive to a better understanding. Knowing the difference between two different text types, e.g. narrative vs. expository will help the learners make better guesses about the text types and how ideas are developed in a text.

ii. Reader Response Approach (RRA):

This approach is based on a premise of teaching literature for literature's sake not for language learning and development purposes. It is similar to Maley's (1989a) critical literary approach. Each individual responds differently to a single text and thus constructs his/her own version of reality when encountered with the text. Therefore, we can have multiple interpretations rather a single correct interpretation of a text according to RRA (Amer, 2003).

 Amer (2003) argues that though SGA favors the cognitive aspect of the learners and RRA favors the affective aspect, these two approaches should not be considered as totally separate but they should be used judiciously depending on the language ability level of the students.

5.4. Van's Approaches (2009)

i. New Criticism:

Argues that meaning is contained solely in the text and hence external elements are not to be taken into consideration. In this approach literature is conceived independent of its author's intentions. The contextual factors such as the political, social, and historical background of the text, along with the readers' reactions to the author's intentions, are considered not relevant to the interpretation of the literary work.

ii. Critical Literacy:

Critical Literacy has its base in a variety of theories such as critical philosophy, pedagogy, educational sociology, and feminism. The main objective of this approach to literature teaching is to foster the learners' critical awareness and hence not take things at face value. Learners should acknowledge that there is always a hidden meaning behind the text which is controlled by social and political reasons.

iii. Stylistics:

The Stylistic approach, which emerged in the late 1970s, emphasises the analysis of the features of literary language to develop students' sensitivity to literature. Students are encouraged to use their linguistic knowledge to make aesthetic judgments and interpretations of the texts. In contrast to New Criticism and Structuralism, learners' personal judgments and interpretations of the text become highly desirable in this approach.

iv. Reader-Response:

In this approach the interpretation is achieved through the interaction between the text and the reader. It also enhances student-readers' drawing on their own experiences, opinions and feelings for their personal interpretation of literature. In contrast with the previous approaches, learners are here expected to play an active role in the reading process.

v. The Language-Based Approach:

It defends literature as "an excellent vehicle for CLT methods that result in four-skill English language development through interaction, collaboration, peer teaching, and student independence" (Van, 2009). Thus it emphasizes awareness of the language of literature and calls for the implementation of a variety of language activities. Literature is contacted through a set of activities including cloze procedures, ending rewriting, brainstorming, summarizing, jigsaw reading, etc.

vi. Structuralism:

Structuralism gained importance in the 1950s and did not treat literary texts as individual entities; instead, this trend tried to make them fit into a more global framework that could be applied to general literature (Dias & Hayhoe, 1988). In other words, Structuralism was only interested in the mechanical, formal relationships of the literary and linguistic components of the text. Taking literature as a scientific system, Structuralism did not contribute to students' personal development, enhancement of cultural awareness, and development of language skills.

5.5. SAVVIDOU'S (2004) AND DIVSAR'S (2009) INTEGRATED APPROACHES.

Savvidou's (2004) and Divsar's (2009) integrated approaches defend the linguistic description of literary texts. Also, they aim at exploring literary and non-literary texts from the perspective of style and its relationship with content and form (Divsar & Tahriri, 2009). In other words, they suggest models that integrate linguistic description and textual analysis. Thus, the Savvidou's (2004) approach consists of a six-stage based model that makes literary texts work for language learning purposes:

The First Stage - Preparation and Anticipation: Elicits the learners' real or literary experience of the main themes and context of text

The Second Stage – Focusing: Learners get familiarized with the text through its listening and/or reading and are finally ready to focus on specific content in the text.

The Third Stage - Preliminary Response: Aims at developing the students' initial response to the text: written or spoken.

The Fourth Stage - Working I: Focuses on comprehending the first level of meaning through the practice of intensive reading.

The Fifth Stage - Working II: Leads to a deeper exploration of the way in which the message is conveyed through the overall structure of the text. Any possible special uses of the language are also considered.

The Sixth Stage - Interpretation and Personal Response: Is focused on increasing textual understanding thus enhancing the enjoyment of the text and enabling learners to come to their own personal interpretation of the text.

Very similar to this, the integrated approach proposed by Divsar and Tahriri (2009) point to three main considerations to be taken in the EFL teaching process: linguistic, cultural and communicative. According to the authors, the linguistic considerations are to be taken as a prerequisite for the literary discussion. The linguistic analysis of the text should be followed by cultural considerations as they might help students to lower the fences separating them from the target culture. In the same way, the communicative considerations set up the conditions for a crucial part of language learning consisting in an active interpretation of the text's meaning.

6. CONCLUSION

After a deliberation of the position of literature in ESL classes and a careful reflection on both the advantages and drawbacks of using literature for language teaching and learning purposes, it can be concluded that literature, in spite of some weak points, provides a motivating drive for language learning and teaching due to its spectacular features which are not readily found in any other texts. In order to practically establish these merits, some of the major methodological approaches to teaching literature were put forward. However, if the points of controversy of literature-as-a-language tool are to be considered, it can be said that there is no one single right way to use literature in the language classroom. In fact, various approaches can be adopted by a particular teacher depending on his/her teaching needs. Relevant practical classroom techniques can be discerned from these models.

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