

BENEFITS OF USING LITERATURE IN READING LESSONS TO THE 6th GRADE PUPILS

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Abstract

Literature has long been used as a source for reading materials in English as a first language. In recent years, there has been a growing interest in utilizing literature in second language (L2) classrooms.

Key words:

Literature, reading, language 1, teaching, comprehension

With reference to the benefits of using literature in language learning, Collie and Slater state that there are four reasons for using literature in the classroom: valuable authentic material, cultural enrichment, language enrichment and personal involvement. Furthermore, Heath indicates that “Literature has no rival in its power to create natural repetition, reflection on language and how it works, and attention to audience response on the part of learners.” Thus, integrating literature into L2 learning can create a learning environment that will provide comprehensible input and a low affective filter.

Strong also argues that literature should form an important part of any language teaching class because it offers a rich source for learning reading. Literature may form part of communicative pedagogy in three different ways:

- 1) providing a context for in which to develop pupils’ reading strategies and knowledge of non-fiction and literary texts;
- 2) forming the basis for an extensive reading program with the attendant acquisition of new vocabulary as well as grammatical forms;
- 3) offering the opportunity to explore cross-cultural values.

Widdowson draws our attention to the important point that literary texts have a unique advantage over non-literary ones. Literary texts depend heavily on the reader’s interpretation. A literary work is “separate, self-contained” with its language structured into “patterns of recurring sounds, structures and meanings” on symbolic and thematic levels.

Recent research shows that literature can play a positive role in L2 learning. Learners show increase in vocabulary, and significant gain in reading comprehension. In addition, literature provides L2 learners with a combination of pleasurable and comprehensible texts. This will help learners to develop a positive attitude towards reading in a second language. This positive attitudinal change is likely to lead to more independent reading which can be beneficial for their language acquisition. According to Dornyei, using literature in the classroom can help in “creating an overall positive motivational climate in the classroom.” Creating a rich literature second language environment will enhance learners’ intrinsic reading motivation.

Literature presents a rich source of vocabulary. Beck and McKeown’s research showed that explicit vocabulary activities resulted in a significant increase in vocabulary. Dixon-Krauss and Kuhn and Stahl reviewed research that investigated

the effect of literary text context on vocabulary development. They concluded that the vast majority of learned words did not come from direct instruction but were learned incidentally. Research in second language shows similar results.

Literature and Culture

Literature offers a rich resource for not only language but also culture and our lives. Rich cultural information is embedded in literature. Children's literature is a powerful tool to teach children about their own culture, themselves, the world, and others. Literature can enhance L2 learners' critical thinking skills. Through literature, they can appreciate the similarities and tolerate the differences between their culture and other cultures. They can realize that "there is no one right way to think and feel, and no society can claim to have all of the right answers; we each gain perspective and insight into our world by examining the perspective of other societies and cultures. Studying literature from another culture gives learners insight into the values and customs of other places. Literature is a powerful tool in teaching the relativity of cultural values and the inherent problems in cross-cultural communication.

Thus, exposure to literature stimulates learners to reflect on concepts, recognize real life problems, explore causes and solutions, and compare their values and life styles with other cultures. This can provide teachers and learners, in the language classroom, with an authentic and rich context for discussion about their cultural values and traditions in contrast with other cultures. This, in turn, may encourage learners to avoid ethnocentrism and develop intercultural competence.

From a sociolinguistic point of view, an important reason for using literature in language teaching and learning is its sociolinguistic richness. Literature reflects the linguistic features of the social classes and the geographical areas of the culture. People speak differently in different situations, occasions, and places (i.e. formal, informal, dialects, colloquial, etc.). Thus, literature offers "genuine samples of a very wide range of styles, registers, and text-types at different levels of difficulty".

As for approaches to exploring culture, Banks proposes four instructional approaches: decision-making and social action approach, transformation approach, additive approach, and contributions approach. The decision-making and social action approach invites pupils to study important social issues and take action to solve problems by reading culturally conscious literature. The transformation approach modifies literature focus units to promote the study of historical events and contemporary issues from culturally diverse points of view. The additive approach connects multicultural literature to an existing literature focus unit. The contributions approach creates a cultural connection through literature with a special holiday or occasion.

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