

English Language Teaching in India: Literature an Effective Tool

Dr. Namita Laxmi Jagaddeb, M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D. in English

Lecturer in English, Mahima Degree College, Bijapali
At-Bijapali, P.O- Panchgaon768226, Dist- Jharsuguda
Odisha, India
njagaddeb@gmail.com

Abstract

Literary pieces can be of immense help in the teaching-learning situation of English in India, particularly at the secondary and higher secondary levels, where English is being taught mostly as a second language. Literary works allow the learner sufficient exposure to free and natural use of English, the command of which will enable him to effectively communicate in various situations as would be required of him in the event of his participation in events and activities at national and international spheres. Further, literature provides the much-needed cultural orientation which strengthens learner's competence of the language and at the same time, inculcates in him the cherished values of life. Thus, the textbooks should be contextualized so as to contain a judicious mix of culture-rich good Indian writings in English and suitable pieces of English literary works, if necessary, adapted or simplified for this purpose. However, materials should be chosen keeping in view the grades and linguistic capacities of students. In any case, such materials ought to be interesting, educative, and eminently readable. This will facilitate classroom presentation of literary works for the teacher. The teacher must employ innovative techniques to secure students' involvement and interest. Different forms of literature require different treatment for effective teaching. While, for instance, teaching of poetry that embodies poet's imaginative experience through emotive language needs special strategy for evoking similar interest in the learner, teaching of fiction or play requires techniques suitable for such specific forms and thereby to teach language skills accordingly. The appeal of literary works will help the learners acquire communicative skills of language in an efficient and abiding manner.

Keywords: ELT in India, literature, effective teaching, language skills

Introduction

The importance of teaching English in India needs no restatement specifically in view of the recent phenomenal rise in demand for acquiring proficiency in the language in the context of fast globalisation, where India has emerged as a front runner. English, by all accounts, is now the

most preferred language across the globe. Verghese calls it “a world language” (Verghese 5), Quirk terms it as “the most international of all languages” (Quirk 5). In India, it has secured a special place not only because of its global acceptability and pre-eminence but more so for its inescapability in the multi-lingual, multi-cultural ways of Indian life. By virtue of long historical association, English has already made a very significant impact on the cultural life of India. It is, so to speak, a lingua franca for Indians of different states and regions who speak diverse languages. As an official language, it is regularly used in crucial spheres of public activities such as in the administration, legislative and the judiciary. Presently, it is the most sought-after language in the socio-political and cultural discourses; the language of trade, commerce, science, technology; the language for international communication. With the rapid globalisation, English is now being popularly perceived as “the language of opportunity and empowerment” (Patnaik 308). Thus, in the present situation, it is imperative that in keeping with the national objectives of education, the curriculum designers, textbook framers and teachers of English should adopt innovative initiatives with a view to delivering effective teaching for developing communicative skills of learners in the language and enabling them to participate effectively in the dynamics of national life as well as in the global arena.

Purpose

The objective of this paper is to show how significant is literature for teaching of English in India particularly at the Secondary and Higher Secondary level of education, where English is being taught as a second language and how literature as an effective tool can be suitably utilized for teaching language skills and helping learners acquire functional, communicative competence in the use of English.

Methodology

This paper is research-based and qualitative in methodology sourcing materials from reference books and journals. The cited materials have been examined with regard to their relevance to the objective of this paper and have formed part of the findings.

Discussion and Findings

The issues for discussion include why literature is important for teaching English language in India and how it can be used to develop the communicative competence of the learner. For furthering the discussion, relevant observations of some notable authors of language and literature are cited below as reference.

B.N. Patnaik in his essay “English and English Language Teaching in India: A point of View” has pointed out the content-deficiency of the course materials. He observes that content is, unfortunately, excluded from the language curriculum. The specially prepared language materials that ignore content and project language aspects such as rules of grammar and

pronunciations are so boring that they kill the learner's interest in the target language. To him, the content should be interesting, enriching, educative and readable. Interesting pieces have motivational value for the learner towards further learning on his own. Thus, text materials should be selected from the culturally rooted Indian literature in English satisfying the aforementioned criteria. (Patnaik 312, 316)

C. Paul Verghese in his *Teaching of English as a Second Language* opines that learners of English language should be encouraged to read literature with interest and pleasure for which he recommends a meaningful selection of literary materials properly graded keeping in view the academic level, linguistic abilities and mental maturity of the students. He has suggested that along with different forms of English literature, Indian writings in English should also be chosen for study, as they will be easily appreciated by the learners and thereby will facilitate learning of language. This will also provide him scope to note the cultural distinctions of two different societies and make a contrastive study of two different traditions. To corroborate his point of view Verghese has quoted Albert Markwardt as having observed that such cultural analyses are important for language study. Verghese has also cited John F. Povey who remarks that literature, among other things, will increase all language skills by providing evidence of subtle usage of vocabulary and complex and exact syntax. It also helps in cultural orientation of the learner. (Verghese 113-119)

J. C. Mahanti in enumerating the 'why' of literary pedagogy has stated that teaching through literature is pleasurable and efficient, its domain being the universe of discourse. He has cited *Panchatantra*, wherein Bishnu Sharma has employed literary forms to teach finer points of sociology, psychology, ethics, statecrafts and so on to the princes who were considered unteachable. To him, literary pedagogy leads to acquisition of proficiency in language. Teaching of a foreign literature helps the learner compare its culture with his own which would result in greater self-definition and awareness. Teaching of literature binds the society and the individuals together, brings about changes, renews language, assimilates "the new" and "the foreign" into the culture. Study of literature, of all curricular subjects, is the least specialized as its realm is the worldview of a particular culture. (Mahanti 75, 77)

A. K. Antony in his *Teaching of English as a Second Language in India* has appropriately remarked that literature in addition to teaching language skills helps the learner cope with the environment and live-in harmony which is the aim of education. Literature being the testimony of the ethical, cultural, imaginative, and affective aspects of human beings, it helps the learner build his character. Antony while pointing out the problems inherent in teaching of literature has sorted out the same and presented a categorical and practical method of teaching of prose and poetry to enable the learners acquire the language skills in interactive and participatory way. (Antony 105-117)

Penny Ur in his *A Course in English Language Teaching: Practice and Theory* has put forward a list of different advantages, teaching of literature is likely to provide to the learners. The benefits include, among other things, enjoyable reading of text materials, learning language skills, imbibing cultural values, and developing empathetic, critical and creative thinking.

The above noted comments and opinions favouring the role of literature in effective teaching of English language carry conviction and bear realistic implications for the present English language teaching-learning situations in India. Their observations are based upon practical experience and thus have authentic and referential value for the curriculum designers, textbook framers and teachers as well. They should do well to select suitable literary pieces as text materials to make the learner-centric method of teaching English for communicative skills a real success.

A reference to Verghese is deemed relevant here. He has enumerated five functions which communication ought to achieve. They are the personal function of revealing oneself; the direct utterance in which one tries to control the listener; the 'the phatic communion' meaning speaking in a ritualised way; the referential utterance in which the information is conveyed to listeners, and the creative use of language as in poetry, songs etc. To him in the present time of globalisation, a learner needs to be competent in his command of English to express in a much greater variety of contexts. (Verghese 16). Thus, for teaching of literary works for developing communicative skills of English language, the teacher requires various innovative techniques to help the learner learn effectively the different communicative functions of language and utilise them efficiently in a variety of situations.

Dr. Z.N. Patil in his essay "Developing Linguistic and Communicative Competence through Literature" has very brilliantly demonstrated how literary pieces could be taught to acquire proficiency in the use of English language. While he has recognized the benefits of teaching literature in the traditional method such as students' understanding, enjoyment, appreciation of literature, awareness of the use of language, development of their affective aspects, awareness of the working of human minds and human relationships, but, at the same time, he has pointed out the consequential disadvantages of such method which makes the learner use the language in a bookish manner. In his own characteristically authentic manner, he has illustrated from his personal experience how literature could be tapped as a rich source for teaching language for acquiring linguistic and communicative competence for use in varieties of real life situations. For this purpose, Dr. Patil has chosen two short stories namely, "Unicorn in the Garden", "The Moth and the Star" of James Thurber and some poetic lines from Wordsworth's "The Solitary Reaper", "Daffodils", W.B. Yeats' "The Second Coming" and Robert Frost's "Stopping by the Woods on a Snowy Evening".

With the help of the "Unicorn in the Garden", Dr. Patil has shown how learners could be made to find out the meaning of new words by themselves from the contexts; how he helped them develop grammatical competence by making them produce grammatically variant but semantically equivalent versions of the original sentences used by the writer; acquire conversational skills by engaging in role play activities. Then, with the story "The Moth and the Star", Dr. Patil has illustrated how the students naturally responded to the dialogic exercises on synonyms, antonyms, substitutions, pronoun references etc. Further, Dr. Patil, using the poetic lines as aforementioned has also exemplified how linguistic and pragmatic competence of the students could be developed and how they could be made to perform various speech functions such as complimenting, expressing memories, criticizing obliquely, and taking leave.

Dr. Patil's demonstration of such innovative practice teachings is highly beneficial and educative for teachers and scholars as well. The way he uses the literary texts to secure students' active involvement and response is quite unique. The varieties of language contexts, he has sorted out for students' activities are very graphic and scientific as well as creative. This method serves both the purpose of teaching communicative skills and enjoying literature. Every teacher of English should take a cue from Dr. Patil's handling of literature for teaching skills of language.

Veena Ahire in her essay "English Songs for productive language-learning activities" has suggested that songs which are thematically, linguistically, experientially and culturally within the reach of the students can be included in the textbook. To her, "As an independent activity, a song can be used to develop listening skills and provide a launching pad to teach grammar and vocabulary and to develop language skills and study skills". (Ahire 36). Further, she offers an alternative suggestion for the teachers to choose suitable songs to teach in addition to text materials and make the classrooms lively as well as teach language. Such songs can be introduced at the beginning, middle and end of the lesson. She has picked up the song "Jimmy and Johnny" to demonstrate her aforementioned point of view. The suggestion of Veena Ahire on the score is quite plausible. However, the teachers need innovative ideas and the scope for time management to put it into practice.

Conclusion

From the aforementioned discussion and findings, it is ascertained that literature can be a very effective tool for teaching English in India for communicative purposes. However, what is needed most is the contextualization of the textbooks and proper training and orientation of teachers to handle literature for such teaching. A considerable part of textbooks should constitute a prudent mix of culture-rich good Indian writings in English and pieces of English literature, if necessary, adapted or simplified for such purpose. The materials ought to be interesting, educative, readable and selected keeping in view the academic levels and linguistic maturity of

the students. It is high time for the concerned authorities to engage in a serious stock taking of the English language teaching situation in India and to take appropriate steps as proposed above in the best interest of the learners. Teaching literature for communicative purpose is of vital importance in the present circumstances. Along with providing value-based education, it will make the learner proficient in the use of English language and empower him to play a meaningful and dynamic role in the life of the nation as well as to avail of the opportunities of globalisation.

Works Cited

- Ahire, Veena. "English Songs for productive language-learning activities"
Innovations in English Language Teaching.
Chief Ed. Z.N. Patil. Hyderabad: Orient Blackswan Pvt. Ltd., 2012.
- Antony, A. *Teaching of English as a Second Language*.
Bareilly: Prakash Book Depot, 2008.
- Mahanti, J.C. "Literature as a Discipline of Thought: The Why of Literary Pedagogy".
Humanities and Pedagogy: Teaching of Humanities Today.
Ed. K.C. Baral. New Delhi: Pencraft International, 2002.
- Patil, Z.N. "Developing Linguistic and Communicative Competence through Literature".
The Indian Journal of English Studies. Chief Ed. Dr. Binod Mishra. Vol. LV, 2018.
Roorkee: Association for English studies in India.
- Patnaik, B.N. "English and English Language Teaching in India: A Point of View"
The Critical Endeavour. Ed. Bijay Kumar Das. Vol. XXIII, January 2017.
Cuttack; The Researchers' Association, Odisha.
- Quirk, Randolph. *The Use of English*. London: Longman, 1962.
- Ur, Penny. *A Course in Language Teaching: Practice and Theory*.
Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.
- Vergheese, C.Paul. *Teaching English as a Second Language*.
New Delhi: Sterling Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 2016.
-



Dr. Namita Laxmi Jagaddeb
M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D. in English
Lecturer in English, Mahima Degree
College, Bijapali
At-Bijapali, P.O- Panchgaon768226,
Dist- Jharsuguda
Odisha, India
njagaddeb@gmail.com