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Social Effects and Other Impediments in Teaching Literature

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Abstract

Does literature help students to learn a language? Why the English teacher uses literature in language class? What are the main problems in teaching literature in language classroom? Should we, as teachers, keep the students far from literature?

Literature is an authentic material and it encourages interaction among the learners and also it expands language awareness. Literature educates the whole person and motivates the people. It will teach a person about the society and world.

But it is not so simple a job to motivate learners towards learning a language while teaching literature. We think that there is an urgent need to balance the learning of technical skills in English with the studies in Literature.

This paper is an attempt to explain the social effects and other complications in teaching literature. It deals with the objectives and problems in teaching literature in language classroom.

Introduction

This paper tries to unfold the socio-sanitary effects of teaching literature in English class room. It also focuses on the problems of teaching literature in English classroom. It is the teachers' responsibility to bring about a healthy balance between literature-heavy leaning and extreme language-only orientation that we notice in our colleges. Teaching literature in the language classroom could be interesting and effective.

There is correlation between literature and language in many ways. Unless a person learns a language, he cannot think of literature. Viswanadha Rao wrote that language and literature are the right eye and the left eye, the sun and the moon of all human expression (T. Viswanadha Rao, 2007: 144). The important explanation of literature is that literary texts are products that reflect different aspects of society. They are cultural documents which offer a deeper understanding of a country or countries (Basnet and Mounfold 1993). There is no inherent quality to a literary text that makes a literary text; rather it is the interpretation that the reader gives to the text (Eagleton, 1983).

Literature means "pieces of writing that are valued as works of art, especially novels, plays and poems" (A. S. Hornby, 2010: 898). Though we have many definitions and arguments regarding literature, the real thing is that literature deals with lives of human and other beings. Literature is intellectually inspiring because a book can take a reader to imaginative world. This is done through the use of descriptive language. That is why we say that language and literature are depending on each other.

Objectives of the Study

1. To find out the language needs in teaching literature in English language classroom.
2. To know the syllabus of literature in text books
3. The problems that English teachers face during teaching literature are identified.
4. To find out solutions for the problems of teaching literature in language classroom.

The importance of literature in ELT

Teaching literature needs specific skills. Literature does not mean 'English literature' or "serious or high literature". It also includes literature from other cultures, children's literature as well as popular literature. Literature holds high status in many cultures and countries. For this reason, students can feel a real sense of achievement when they understand and appreciate a piece of highly respected literature. Also, literature is often more interesting than the texts found in course books. Literature encourages interaction among the learners and educates the whole person. By examining values in literary texts, teachers encourage learners to develop attitudes towards them. These values and attitudes relate to the world outside the classroom.

We would like to discuss many points of teaching literature in language classroom. If we want to know a language, we must know something of the literature of a language. Literature has been taught as a subject in many countries at the secondary or tertiary level. Literature will help students in many ways but unfortunately literature is not given that much of importance as other subjects. Can any one become a good and voracious reader or fluent in English without touching literature? No.

Literature is neither preferred in school curriculum nor in engineering programs. In school books, small stories and narrations are incorporated. In India, English language has more demand than literature. When a teacher teaches literature, students may be attentive to story, not for the nuances of language. If a person keeps his concentration on language during reading a story or novel, the importance of story is reduced and that is what is happening in India. The prominent fact is that one can learn a language by reading. If we read for pleasure, literature will help learners and teachers. Unfortunately, teachers as well as students, most of the times, do not read literature for learning a language.

Problems in Teaching Literature in English Language Classroom

Though we have many problems in teaching literature in India, the main problem is that while studying literary pieces prescribed for them in their classes, etc., students focus on the story, not on the language. The students should focus on language use in the literary pieces they study. Most of the students try to translate the statement through the grammatical rules. As Gambhir (1991) said: "...The most important thing for second language learners is to be able to acquire or assimilate rules as to what different structures may mean in different social situations in a given language...", and again: "...The format of the classroom and teaching materials has to be as far as possible close to natural socio-linguistic situations that a person is likely to encounter in the target society. The classroom should be less of formal academic centre where the teacher is explaining how a language works and students are taking notes; or, a teacher is making students drill key structures of a language. A language classroom should emphasize activities which take place in real life communication rather than pattern rehearsal..."

Why Only for the Undergraduate Classes? Why Not also for Professional Degree Courses?

The other problem is that literature course is served for only the general UG course students. The technical, law, medicine and other professional course students do not have the literature course in their curriculum. This is also one of the reasons for the students to avoiding the study/reading of literature. Literature is to be offered under properly planned divisions of the syllabus into units and sub-units to ensure conscious learning of language structures, and an insight into how the same could be used for producing connected compositions in oral and written discourses. The generally poor response of students in literature classes in English is indicative of the fact that a good deal needs to be done to make classes interesting, participatory and interactive. When literature is offered, the teacher has to make the book practically as many times conveniently broken up into inter-linkable parts as possible.

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The solution lies in our successful effort in making the syllabus sensitive to the challenges students may face in their life and career. We have to demonstrate clearly the need for the students in engineering, medicine and other professional courses students to study literature including communicative English as part of their curriculum.

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