

## Significance of Teaching Literature in the EFL Classroom

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**Abstract:** *Teaching and learning English language has become inevitable in today's world. There are several methods and techniques to teach and learn English. However, the importance of innovative techniques and strategies to teach English has been emphasized to keep the teaching profession going. In this regard, one of the interesting methods of teaching English in the EFL classroom is through literature. This method has potential to raise the interest of the leaners and provide a good alternative to the tedious methods in practice by English teachers. This paper reviews a wide range of literature to highlight the importance of teaching English through literature in the EFL classroom. It, then, explores a number of approaches being used to teach a foreign language through literature. The paper focuses on two types of approaches: general approaches used by literary people to teach language through literature and approaches developed specifically by the linguistics to help language professionals for utilizing literature in the language classroom.*

**Key Words:** *Structuralism, Stylistics, Reader-Response, Language-Based Approach, New Criticism*

### 1. Introduction

The significance of using literature in the EFL classroom is highlighted by the scholars. Van (2009) finds literature useful in the EFL classroom. According to him (ibid), literature in the EFL classroom, provides context that is similar to real life situations. It involves learners by appealing to their imagination and developing their critical thinking. In addition, students get an opportunity to develop a variety of vocabulary by reading dialogues and understanding the text. According to (Healy, 2010), literature enhances the creative capability of leaners and develop in them awareness of the culture of the target language. Healy (2010) mentions four valid reasons for using literature in the EFL classroom.

- Most of EFL course books are found insipid and less motivating by the learners. Through the use of literature, students feel interested and get pleasure by reading good stories.
- Discussion while reading literature encourages students to get involved by exchanging their thoughts and ideas, feelings and emotions through meaningful interactions with the fellows. They can narrate the story and appreciate the characters while participating in the class activities.
- Teaching literature helps students develop better attitudes by reflecting over the concepts and ideas propagated in the literary works by the authors.
- The use of literature in the EFL classroom gives confidence to learners for using the language in a more confident way. In short, literature could turn out to be a significant factor in developing reading habits of learners to their academic, cultural, linguistic and intellectual learning.

## **2. APPROACHES TOWARDS TEACHING ENGLISH THROUGH LITERATURE**

There are a number of approaches being used to teach a language through literature. In this section, we focus on two types of approaches: general approaches used by literary people to teach language through literature and approaches developed specifically by linguistics to help language professionals for utilizing literature in the language classroom

### **2.1. Literary Approaches**

Literary analysis includes six most common approaches. Each of six approaches is being discussed in brief to help readers get to know about them.

**2.1.1 New Criticism:** This approach allows readers to peruse the text in his/her own way. A reader can interpret the literary work in an objective manner without taking into account the social, cultural, political and historical background in which the text was produced. A reader does not necessarily need to have knowledge of the author's purpose and motive behind writing the work (Thomson, 1992) to understand a literary work.

**2.1.2. Structuralism:** In this approach, the readers focus on exploring the structures and processes involved to arrive at the meaning of a literary text. Aesthetic pleasure or value, which is a main function of a literary work, does not capture the attention (Culler, 1982 & Carter and Long, 1991) of readers as they focus on the importance and value of the structural aspects of the text.

**2.1.3 Stylistics.** The Stylistic approach, which was developed in 1970s, involves the analysis of the various features of language used in a literary text. This approach develops interest of the readers and sharpens their sensitivity towards literature and enhances their understanding of the language used in it (Rodger, 1983; Moody, 1983; Widdowson, 1983).

**2.1.4. Reader-Response:** This approach focuses on developing such activities which may inspire readers to interpret the text in the light of their own experiences and life events, opinions and views, feelings and emotions. This approach encourages readers to identify the literary work with their own selves (Dias and Hayhoe, 1988; Rosen – blatt, 1978).

**2.1.5. Language-Based Approach:** This helps learners develop awareness of the language which is used in literature. This approach develops knowledge base of any other language including English. So many scholars (Nash 1986; Littlewood 1986; Carter and Long 1991) believe that this approach is more accessible and easy to practice for both teachers and learners in the EFL class.

**2.1.6. Critical Literacy;** It's not meant for teaching literature. However, this approach could be utilized for teaching both literature and language. This approach investigates the connection between social power and language use (Luke and Freebody 1997; Osborn 2000; Pennycook 2001; Walsh 1991; Wallace 1992)

## **2. 2. Language model Approaches**

Carter and Long (1991) describes that some approaches used for teaching literature could be utilized as the language model approaches in the EFL classroom. Each of three language model approaches are being discussed in brief.

**2.2. 1. Language-based approach.** It's the most common approach used in the EFL classroom. In this approach, familiar grammar items, lexical features, and discourse categories are focused to enhance learners' knowledge about the target language (English). This model facilitates learners to develop a better understanding of a literary text and enable them to make meaningful interpretations and enjoy aesthetic value of it by systematically studying the various examples of certain linguistic features, literal meaning, figurative language, and dialogues involving direct and indirect speech. A number of activities could be utilized in the EFL classroom. These activities include cloze procedure, jumbled sentences, prediction exercises, creative writing, summary writing and role play. To serve linguistic goals, EFL teachers design such activities by deconstructing literary texts.

**2.2.2. Cultural Model:** In this approach, EFL students are supposed to analyze literary works with focus on the target language and literary history. A Learner explores and interprets historical, social, political and literary context of the work written by the author. While exploring the cultural background, a learner develops a good understanding of the text by interpreting various cultures and ideologies in relation to his/her own.

**2.2.3. Personal Growth Model:** This approach combines the cultural model and the language model. It focuses on using language in a text by placing it in a particular cultural context. This model facilitates learners to enrich their emotional and intellectual experiences while learning a language. Students get opportunities in the EFL class to share their views and opinions by finding relation between their own cultural context and that of used in the literary works. It's rightly pointed out by Cadorath and Harris "text itself has no meaning; it only provides direction for reader to construct meaning from the reader's own experience" (1998, p. 188). It's true, learning takes place when students are capable to analyze and interpret texts and be able to construct meaning of it in the light of their own contextual experience.

### 3. Suggested Approach

It's suggested, English Professionals, may not depend only on a single approach. They may combine elements and components from each of three language model approaches mentioned above. In this regard, Duffy and Maley (1990) maintain that to get maxim benefit of teaching literature in EFL class, it's important to include all the three elements: the linguistic element to help students learn the language and get exposure to linguistic structures of the literary text; the methodological element to help student know about the processes and strategies involved in reading; the motivational element to convince learners to read literary works by enabling them to appreciate and enjoy the literary texts. Savvidou (2004) agrees with Duffy and Maley (1990) in suggesting three different ways of approaching the literary text. She (ibid) suggests to first apply cultural model followed with linguistic analysis approach and finally working for the personal growth of learners. In brief, the integrated approach is a multidisciplinary approach. According to Adeyemi (2010), teachers utilize a variety of strategies and techniques, methods and approaches while applying integrated approach in the EFL classroom.

#### 4. Conclusion

Interesting material increases the motivation of students to learn. Students feel enthusiastic and become persistent. They give more concentration to complete tasks being done in the classroom. (Crookes and Schmidt 1991). Suck level of learners' involvement does not come by chance. It largely depends on the materials used in the classroom by the teachers. Thus, it's suggested that classroom activities, while teaching literature in the EFL classroom, must be amended to become student-centered so that learners may get opportunities to engage themselves in collaborative group work. The choice of activities designed from a particular literary work is crucial for the active involvement of learners. At the end, it's important to note that the role of the teacher is also very important in choosing a literary work and employing ways of interpreting it in the class to make it interesting and involving for the students.

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