

Teaching English Through Literature

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Abstract

This paper aims at emphasizing the use of literature as a popular technique for teaching both basic language skills (i.e. reading, writing, listening and speaking) and language areas (i.e. vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation) in our times. Reasons for using literary texts in foreign language classroom and main criteria for selecting suitable literary texts in foreign language classes are stressed so as to make the reader familiar with the underlying reasons and criteria for language teachers' using and selecting literary texts. Moreover, literature and the teaching of language skills, benefits of different genres of literature (i.e. poetry, short fiction, drama and novel) to language teaching and some problems encountered by language teachers within the area of teaching English through literature (i.e. lack of preparation in the area of literature teaching in TESL / TEFL programs, absence of clear-cut objectives defining the role of literature in ESL / EFL, language teachers' not having the background and training in literature, lack of pedagogically-designed appropriate materials that can be used by language teachers in a classroom context) are taken into account.

Key Words: Literature, Teaching Literature, The Teaching of Language Skills, Foreign Language Teaching, Literary Competence

Özet

Bu makale günümüzde hem temel dil becerilerinin (okuma, yazma, dinleme ve konuşma) hem de dil alanlarının (sözcükbilgisi, dilbilgisi ve telaffuz) öğretiminde sevilen bir teknik olarak edebiyatın kullanımını vurgulamayı amaçlamaktadır. Dil öğretmenlerinin edebi metinleri kullanmalarının ve seçmelerinin temelini oluşturan sebepleri ve ölçütleri okuyucuya tanıtmak amacıyla, yabancı dil sınıfında edebi metinler kullanmanın sebepleri ve yabancı dil sınıflarında uygun edebi metinler seçmenin temel ölçütleri vurgulanmaktadır. Üstelik, edebiyat ve dil becerileri öğretimi, farklı edebiyat türlerinin (şiir, kısa öykü, drama ve roman) dil öğretimine yararları ve edebiyat ile İngilizce öğretimi alanında dil öğretmenleri tarafından karşılaşılan bazı sorunlar (TESL / TEFL programlarındaki edebiyat öğretimi alanındaki hazırlığın yetersizliği, ESL / EFL programlarında edebiyatın rolünü tanımlayan açık amaçların yokluğu, dil öğretmenlerinin edebiyat temeline ve eğitimine sahip olmayışı, dil öğretmenleri tarafından sınıf bağlamında kullanılabilecek eğitsel olarak tasarlanmış uygun materyallerin yokluğu) ele alınıyor.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Edebiyat, Edebiyat Öğretimi, Dil Becerileri Öğretimi, Yabancı Dil Öğretimi, Edebi Yeti

1. Introduction

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. Among language educators, there has been a hot debate as to how, when, where, and why literature should be incorporated in ESL / EFL curriculum. Vigorous discussion of how literature and ESL / EFL instruction can work together and interact for the benefit of students and teachers has led to the flourishing of interesting ideas, learning, and improved instruction for all. Many teachers consider the use of literature in language teaching as an interesting and worthy concern (Sage 1987:1). In this paper, why a language teacher should use literary texts in the language classroom, what sort of literature language teachers should use with language learners, literature and the teaching of language skills, and benefits of different genres of literature to language teaching will be taken into account. Thus, the place of literature as a tool rather than an end in teaching English as a second or foreign language will be unearthed.

2. Teaching Literature: why and what

The use of literature as a technique for teaching both basic language skills (i.e. reading, writing, listening and speaking) and language areas (i.e. vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation) is very popular within the field of foreign language learning and teaching nowadays. Moreover, in translation courses, many language teachers make their students translate literary texts like drama, poetry and short stories into the mother tongue, Turkish. Since translation gives students the chance to practice the lexical, syntactic, semantic, pragmatic and stylistic knowledge they have acquired in other courses, translation both as an application area covering four basic skills and as the fifth skill is emphasized in language teaching. In the following section, why language teachers use literary texts in the foreign language classroom and main criteria for selecting suitable literary texts in foreign language classes are stressed so as to make the reader familiar with the underlying reasons and criteria for language teachers' using and selecting literary texts.

2.1. Reasons for Using Literary Texts in Foreign Language Classes

According to Collie and Slater (1990:3), there are four main reasons which lead a language teacher to use literature in the classroom. These are valuable authentic material, cultural enrichment, language enrichment and personal involvement. In addition to these four main reasons, universality, non-triviality, personal relevance, variety, interest, economy and suggestive power and ambiguity are some other factors requiring the use of literature as a powerful resource in the classroom context.

1. *Valuable Authentic Material*

Literature is authentic material. Most works of literature are not created for the primary purpose of teaching a language. Many authentic samples of language in real-life contexts (i.e. travel timetables, city plans, forms, pamphlets, cartoons, advertisements, newspaper or magazine articles) are included within recently developed course materials. Thus, in a classroom context, learners are exposed to actual language samples of real life / real life like settings. Literature can act as a beneficial complement to such materials, particularly when the first "survival" level has been passed. In reading literary texts, because students have also to cope with language intended for native speakers, they become familiar with many different linguistic forms, communicative functions and meanings.

2. *Cultural Enrichment*

For many language learners, the ideal way to increase their understanding of verbal / nonverbal aspects of communication in the country within which that language is spoken - a visit or an extended stay - is just not probable. For such learners, literary works, such as novels, plays, short stories, etc. facilitate understanding how communication takes place in that country. Though the world of a novel, play, or short story is an imaginary one, it presents a full and colorful setting in which characters from many social / regional backgrounds can be described. A reader can discover the way the characters in such literary works see the world outside (i.e. their thoughts, feelings, customs, traditions, possessions; what they buy, believe in, fear, enjoy; how they speak and behave in different settings. This colorful created world can quickly help the foreign learner to feel for the codes and preoccupations that shape a real society through visual literacy of semiotics. Literature is

perhaps best regarded as a complement to other materials used to develop the foreign learner's understanding into the country whose language is being learned. Also, literature adds a lot to the cultural grammar of the learners.

3. Language Enrichment

Literature provides learners with a wide range of individual lexical or syntactic items. Students become familiar with many features of the written language, reading a substantial and contextualized body of text. They learn about the syntax and discourse functions of sentences, the variety of possible structures, the different ways of connecting ideas, which develop and enrich their own writing skills. Students also become more productive and adventurous when they begin to perceive the richness and diversity of the language they are trying to learn and begin to make use of some of that potential themselves. Thus, they improve their communicative and cultural competence in the authentic richness, naturalness of the authentic texts.

4. Personal Involvement

Literature can be useful in the language learning process owing to the personal involvement it fosters in the reader. Once the student reads a literary text, he begins to inhabit the text. He is drawn into the text. Understanding the meanings of lexical items or phrases becomes less significant than pursuing the development of the story. The student becomes enthusiastic to find out what happens as events unfold via the climax; he feels close to certain characters and shares their emotional responses. This can have beneficial effects upon the whole language learning process. At this juncture, the prominence of the selection of a literary text in relation to the needs, expectations, and interests, language level of the students is evident. In this process, he can remove the identity crisis and develop into an extrovert.

Maley (1989:12) lists some of the reasons for regarding literature as a potent resource in the language classroom as follows:

- 1. Universality*
- 2. Non-triviality*
- 3. Personal Relevance*
- 4. Variety*
- 5. Interest*
- 6. Economy and Suggestive Power*
- 7. Ambiguity*

1. Universality

Because we are all human beings, the themes literature deals with are common to all cultures despite their different way of treatment - Death, Love, Separation, Belief, Nature ... the list is familiar. These experiences all happen to human beings.

2. Non-triviality

Many of the more familiar forms of language teaching inputs tend to trivialize texts or experience. Literature does not trivialize or talk down. It is about things which mattered to the author when he wrote them. It may offer genuine as well as merely "authentic" inputs.

3. *Personal Relevance*

Since it deals with ideas, things, sensations and events which either constitute part of the reader's experience or which they can enter into imaginatively, they are able to relate it to their own lives.

4. *Variety*

Literature includes within it all possible varieties of subject matter. It is, in fact, a battery of topics to use in ELT. Within literature, we can find the language of law and of mountaineering, of medicine and of bull-fighting, of church sermons and nursery talk.

5. *Interest*

Literature deals with themes and topics which are intrinsically interesting, because part of the human experience, and treats them in ways designed to engaged the readers' attention.

6. *Economy and suggestive power*

One of the great strengths of literature is its suggestive power. Even in its simplest forms, it invites us to go beyond what is said to what is implied. Since it suggests many ideas with few words, literature is ideal for generating language discussion. Maximum output can often be derived from minimum input.

7. *Ambiguity*

As it is highly suggestive and associative, literature speaks subtly different meanings to different people. It is rare for two readers to react identically to any given text. In teaching, this has two advantages. The first advantage is that each learner's interpretation has validity within limits. The second advantage is that an almost infinite fund of interactive discussion is guaranteed since each person's perception is different. That no two readers will have a completely convergent interpretation establishes the tension that is necessary for a genuine exchange of ideas.

Apart from the above mentioned reasons for using literature in the foreign language class, one of the main functions of literature is its sociolinguistic richness. The use of language changes from one social group to another. Likewise, it changes from one geographical location to another. A person speaks differently in different social contexts like school, hospital, police station and theatre (i.e. formal, informal, casual, frozen, intimate styles speech). The language used changes from one profession to another (i.e. doctors, engineers, economists use different terminology). To put it differently, since literature provides students with a wide range of language varieties like sociolects, regional dialects, jargon, idiolects, etc., it develops their sociolinguistic competence in the target language. Hence, incorporating literature into a foreign language teaching program as a powerful source for reflecting the sociolinguistic aspects of the target language gains importance.

2.2. Criteria for Selecting Suitable Literary Texts in Foreign Language Classes

When selecting the literary texts to be used in language classes, the language teacher should take into account needs, motivation, interests, cultural background and language level of the students. However, one major factor to take into account is whether a particular work is able to reveal the kind of personal involvement by arousing the learners' interest and eliciting strong, positive reactions from them. Reading a literary text is more likely to have a long-term and valuable effect upon the learners' linguistic and extralinguistic knowledge when it is meaningful and amusing. Choosing books relevant to the real-life experiences, emotions, or dreams of the learner is of great importance. Language difficulty has to be considered as well. If the language of the literary work is simple, this may facilitate the comprehensibility of the literary text but is not in itself the most crucial criterion. Interest, appeal, and relevance are also prominent. Enjoyment; a fresh insight into issues felt to be related to the heart of people's concerns; the pleasure of encountering one's own thoughts or situations exemplified clearly in a work of art; the other, equal pleasure of noticing those same thoughts, feelings, emotions, or situations presented by a completely new perspective: all these are motives helping learners to cope with the linguistic obstacles that might be considered too great in less involving material (Collie and Slater 1990:6-7).

3. Literature and The Teaching of Language Skills

Literature plays an important role in teaching four basic language skills like reading, writing, listening and speaking. However, when using literature in the language classroom, skills should never be taught in isolation but in an integrated way. Teachers should try to teach basic language skills as an integral part of oral and written language use, as part of the means for creating both referential and interactional meaning, not merely as an aspect of the oral and written production of words, phrases and sentences.

3.1. Literature and Reading

ESL / EFL teachers should adopt a dynamic, student-centered approach toward comprehension of a literary work. In reading lesson, discussion begins at the literal level with direct questions of fact regarding setting, characters, and plot which can be answered by specific reference to the text. When students master literal understanding, they move to the inferential level, where they must make speculations and interpretations concerning the characters, setting, and theme, and where they produce the author's point of view. After comprehending a literary selection at the literal and inferential levels, students are ready to do a collaborative work. That is to state that they share their evaluations of the work and their personal reactions to it - to its characters, its theme(s), and the author's point of view. This is also the suitable time for them to share their reactions to the work's natural cultural issues and themes. The third level, the personal / evaluative level stimulates students to think imaginatively about the work and provokes their problem-solving abilities. Discussion deriving from such questions can be the foundation for oral and written activities (Stern 1991:332).

3.2. Literature and Writing

Literature can be a powerful and motivating source for writing in ESL / EFL, both as a model and as subject matter. Literature as a model occurs when student writing becomes closely similar to the original work or clearly imitates its content, theme, organization, and /or style. However, when student writing exhibits original thinking like interpretation or analysis,

or when it emerges from, or is creatively stimulated by, the reading, literature serves as subject matter. Literature houses in immense variety of themes to write on in terms of guided, free, controlled and other types of writing.

3.2.1. Literature as a Model for Writing

There are three main kinds of writing that can be based on literature as a model:

Controlled Writing: Controlled model-based exercises which are used mostly in beginning-level writing typically require rewriting passages in arbitrary ways to practise specific grammatical structures. For instance, students can be reporters doing a live newscast, or they can rewrite a third person passage into first person from a character's point of view

Guided Writing: This activity corresponds to intermediate-level ESL / EFL. Students respond to a series of questions or complete sentences which, when put together, retell or sum up the model. In some cases, students complete the exercise after they receive the first few sentences or the topic sentence of a summary, paraphrase, or description. Guided writing exercises, especially at the literal level, enable students to comprehend the work. Model approach and scenario approach are very beneficial in this respect.

Reproducing the Model: This activity comprises techniques like paraphrase, summary, and adaptation. These techniques are very beneficial ESL / EFL writing exercises. In paraphrasing, students are required to use their own words to rephrase the things that they see in print or hear aloud. Since paraphrase coincides with the students' trying to make sense of the poem, it is a strikingly useful tool with poetry. Summary work goes well with realistic short stories and plays, where events normally follow a chronological order and have concrete elements like plot, setting, and character to guide student writing. Adaptation requires rewriting prose fiction into dialog or, reversely, rewriting a play or a scene into narrative. This activity enables students to be aware of the variations between written and spoken English (Stern 1991:333).

3.2.2. Literature as Subject Matter for Writing

Finding appropriate material for their writing classes is sometimes difficult for composition teachers since writing has no subject matter of its own. One benefit of having literature as the reading content of a composition course is that the readings become the subject matter for compositions. In a composition course whose reading content is literature, students make inferences, formulate their own ideas, and look closely at a text for evidence to support generalizations. Thus, they learn how to think creatively, freely and critically. Such training helps them in other courses which require logical reasoning, independent thinking, and careful analysis of the text (Spack 1985:719).

There are mainly two kinds of writing based on literature as subject matter: writing "on or about" literature, and writing "out of " literature. These categories are suitable and useful for ESL / EFL

3.2.2.1. Writing "On or About" Literature

Writing "on or about literature" comprises the traditional assignments - written responses to questions, paragraph writing, in-class essays, and take-home compositions - in

which students analyze the work or in which they speculate on literary devices and style. Writing “on or about” can occur before students begin to read a work. The teacher generally discusses its theme or an issue it raises, and the students write about it with reference to their own life experience. This helps interest them in the work and makes them ready for reading and writing about it. Most writing assignments done during as well as after the reading, however, derive from class discussion. They take many forms, such as questions to be answered, assertions to be debated, or topics to be expanded, discussion groups to be established.

3.2.2.2. Writing “Out of” Literature

Writing “out of” literature means making use of a literary work as a springboard for composition - creative assignments developed around plot, characters, setting, theme, and figurative language. There are many forms of writing out of literature, such as *Adding to the Work*, *Changing the Work*, *Drama-Inspired Writing* and *A Letter Addressed to Another Character*, etc.

Adding to the Work: This comprises writing imaginary episodes or sequels, or, in the case of drama, “filling in” scenes for off-stage actions that are only referred to in the dialog.

Changing the Work: Students can make up their own endings by comparing the author’s ending to their own. Short stories can be rewritten in whole or in part from the point of view of a character versus a third person narrator or of a different character.

Drama-Inspired Writing: It is possible to derive drama-inspired writing activities from plays, short stories, novels, and sometimes poetry. The student steps into the consciousness of a character and writes about that character’s attitudes and feelings.

A Letter Addressed to Another Character:

The student can write a letter to one of the characters, in which he / she gives the character personal advice about how to overcome a particular problem or situation (Stern 1991: 336).

3.3. Literature, Speaking, and Listening

The study of literature in a language class, though being mainly associated with reading and writing, can play an equally meaningful role in teaching both speaking and listening. Oral reading, dramatization, improvisation, role-playing, pantomiming, reenactment, discussion, and group activities may center on a work of literature.

Oral Reading

Language teachers can make listening comprehension and pronunciation interesting, motivating and contextualized at the upper levels, playing a recording or video of a literary work, or reading literature aloud themselves. Having students read literature aloud contributes to developing speaking as well as listening ability. Moreover, it also leads to improving pronunciation. Pronunciation may be the focus before, during, and / or after the reading.

Drama

Needless to say, literature-based dramatic activities are valuable for ESL / EFL. They facilitate and accelerate development of the oral skills since they motivate students to achieve a clearer comprehension of a work's plot and a deeper comprehension and awareness of its characters. Though drama in the classroom can assume many forms, there are three main types, which are *dramatization, role-playing, improvization*.

Dramatization

Dramatization requires classroom performance of scripted materials. Students can make up their own scripts for short stories or sections of novels, adapting them as closely as possible to the real text. Based on the story, they must guess what the characters would say and how they would say it. Scripts written by students are also probable with plays. Poems comprising one or more personae may also be scripted by students. Students should attentively read assigned sections of dialog in advance and be able to answer questions about characters and plot. They should indicate vocabulary, idioms, or dialog they don't understand and words they cannot pronounce. Students next rehearse the scene with their partners. Although they don't memorize it, they learn it well enough to make eye contact and say their lines with meaning and feeling. Moreover, they discuss semiotic aspects of staging the scene (i.e. facial expressions, gestures, and the physical aspects). At last, the dramatization is presented before the class.

Improvization and Role-Playing

Both improvization and role-playing may be developed around the characters, plot, and themes of a literary work. Improvisation is a more systematic activity, i.e., a dramatization without a script. There is an identifiable plot with a beginning, middle, and end in improvisation. However, in role playing, students picture characters from the work being read and join in a speaking activity other than a dramatization, such as an interview or panel discussion.

Group Activities

Making each student responsible for facts and ideas to be contributed and discussed, group activities stimulates total participation. All students are involved and the participation is multidirectional. When teaching English through literature, some of the group activities used in language classroom are *general class discussion, small-group work, panel discussions, and debates*. All of these group activities both develop the speaking abilities of the students and give importance to pronunciation practice. Teachers indicate pronunciation errors of the students during the act of such activities so as to correct such errors (Stern 1991:337).

4. Benefits of Different Genres of Literature to Language

4.1. Benefits of Using Poetry to Language Teaching

Poetry can pave the way for the learning and teaching of basic language skills. It is metaphor that is the most prominent connection between learning and poetry. Because most poetry consciously or unconsciously makes use of metaphor as one of its primary methods, poetry offers a significant learning process. There are at least two learning benefits that can be derived from studying poetry:

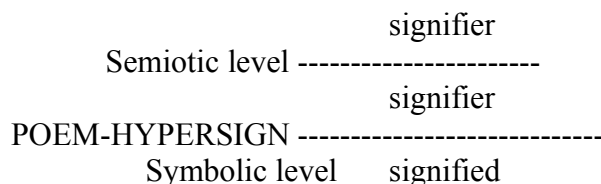
- The appreciation of the writer's composition process, which students gain by studying poems by components
- Developing sensitivity for words and discoveries that may later grow into a deeper interest and greater analytical ability

Saraç (2003:17-20) also explains the educational benefits of poetry as follows:

- provides readers with a different viewpoint towards language use by going beyond the known usages and rules of grammar, syntax and vocabulary,
- triggers unmotivated readers owing to being so open to explorations and different interpretations,
- evokes feelings and thoughts in heart and in mind,
- makes students familiar with figures of speech (i.e. simile, metaphor, irony, personification, imagery, etc.) due to their being a part of daily language use.

As Çubukçu (2001:1) mentions, poetry is a rewarding and enjoyable experience with the properties of rhyming and rhythm both of which convey "love and appreciation for the sound and power of language." At this juncture, it can be stated that students become familiar with the suprasegmental aspects of the target language, such as stress, pitch, juncture, intonation by studying poetry.

Through poetry, students can also study the semiotic elements in the target language. Semiotic elements constitute a cultural training as well. As Hiller (1983:10) states, poems should be seen as hypersigns of which constituents, "semiotic signifiers", come together in their common relationship and lead to the "symbolic level" and this level is the one inclined to be signified in a poem. This notion can be described as follows:



Moreover, poetry employs language to evoke and exalt special qualities of life, and suffices readers with feelings. It is particularly lyric poetry which is based on feelings and provides still another emotional benefit. Poetry is one of the most effective and powerful transmitters of culture. Poems comprise so many cultural elements - allusions, vocabulary, idioms, tone that are not easy to translate into another language (Sage 1987: 12-13).

4.2. Benefits of Using Short Stories to Language Teaching

Short fiction is a supreme resource for observing not only language but life itself. In short fiction, characters act out all the real and symbolic acts people carry out in daily lives, and do so in a variety of registers and tones. The world of short fiction both mirrors and illuminates human lives (Sage 1987:43). The inclusion of short fiction in the ESL / EFL curriculum offers the following educational benefits (Ariogul 2001:11-18):

- makes the students' reading task easier due to being simple and short when compared with the other literary genres,

- enlarges the advanced level readers' worldviews about different cultures and different groups of people,
- provides more creative, encrypt, challenging texts that require personal exploration supported with prior knowledge for advanced level readers,
- motivates learners to read due to being an authentic material,
- offers a world of wonders and a world of mystery,
- gives students the chance to use their creativity,
- promotes critical thinking skills,
- facilitates teaching a foreign culture (i.e. serves as a valuable instrument in attaining cultural knowledge of the selected community,
- makes students feel themselves comfortable and free,
- helps students coming from various backgrounds communicate with each other because of its universal language,
- helps students to go beyond the surface meaning and dive into underlying meanings,
- acts as a perfect vehicle to help students understand the positions of themselves as well as the others by transferring these gained knowledge to their own world.

In brief, the use of a short story seems to be a very helpful technique in today's foreign language classes. As it is short, it makes the students' reading task and the teacher's coverage easier. An important feature of short fiction is its being universal. To put it differently, students all over the world have experienced stories and can relate to them. Moreover, short fiction, like all other types of literature, makes contribution to the development of cognitive analytical abilities by bringing the whole self to bear on a compressed account of a situation in a single place and moment (Sage 1987:43).

4.3. Benefits of Using Drama to Language Teaching

Using drama in a language classroom is a good resource for language teaching. It is through the use of drama that learners become familiar with grammatical structures in contexts and also learn about how to use the language to express, control and inform. The use of drama raises the students' awareness towards the target language and culture. In this context, the use of drama as a tool rather than an end gains importance in teaching a foreign language. Yet, there is one obvious danger: cultural imposition should be severely avoided since it results in the loss of language ego and native language identity in many cases. To put it differently, language learning should be culture-free but entirely not culture-biased. For this reason, the new language and the context of the drama should fuse into a language learning process with high interest, relevance and enjoyment. Learners should make use of drama to promote their comprehension of life experiences, reflect on particular circumstances and make sense of their extralinguistic world in a deeper way (Sarıçoban 2004:15). The educational benefits of drama, according to (Lenore 1993), are as follows:

- stimulates the imagination and promotes creative thinking,
- develops critical thinking skills,
- promotes language development,
- heightens effective listening skills,
- strengthens comprehension and learning retention by involving the senses as an integral part of the learning process,

- increases empathy and awareness of others,
- fosters peer respect and group cooperation,
- reinforces positive self-concept,
- provides teachers with a fresh perspective on teaching.

Some other educational benefits of using drama in a foreign language class can be listed as follows (Mengü 2002:1-4):

- bringing authenticity into the classroom,
- exposing the learners to the target culture as well as the social problems a society may be undergoing,
- increasing creativity, originality, sensitivity, fluency, flexibility, emotional stability, cooperation, and examination of moral attitudes, while developing communication skills and appreciation of literature,
- helping learners improve their level of competence with respect to their receptive and productive skills,
- providing a solid basis for the learners to bridge the gap between their receptive and productive skills,
- offering students the space and time to develop new ideas and insights in a range of contexts,
- enabling students to develop new understandings and forms of knowing not accessible in other more traditional ways of learning.

In other words, the use of drama seems to be an effective technique in today's communication-based, student-centered foreign language teaching. Since it is an authentic material, it helps students to promote their comprehension of the verbal / nonverbal aspects of the target language they are trying to master. Particularly, teachers, who wish to make language learning more colorful, motivating and interesting, can make use of drama in their language classes. Since drama is the reenactments of social events, students improve their personality and code of behavior. Thus, they can achieve more meaningful and realistic teaching from which students can benefit to a great extent.

4.4. Benefits of Using Novel to Language Teaching

The use of a novel is a beneficial technique for mastering not only linguistic system but also life in relation to the target language. In novel, characters reflect what people really perform in daily lives. Novels not only portray but also enlighten human lives. Using novel in a foreign language class offers the following educational benefits:

- develops the advanced level readers' knowledge about different cultures and different groups of people,
- increases students' motivation to read owing to being an authentic material,
- offers real life / real life like settings,
- gives students the opportunity to make use of their creativity,
- improves critical thinking skills,
- paves the way for teaching the target language culture,
- enables students to go beyond what is written and dive into what is meant,

Helton, C.A, J.Asamani and E.D.Thomas (1998:1-5) expounds the educational benefits of novels as follows:

- stimulates their imagination,
- helps students to identify the emotions of the characters so that they can learn how others cope with situations and problems similar to their own experiences,
- helps them master the skills that will enable them to acquire information, process this knowledge, identify problems, formulate alternatives, and arrive at meaningful, thoughtful, effective decisions and solutions,
- develops oral and written language skills,
- serves as a springboard for a multitude of holistic learning and critical thinking activities beginning with basic comprehension and writing,
- presents a unique way of teaching reading by getting students involved and excited about the reading process,
- motivates students to become a lifelong reader,

When selecting a novel to be used in the foreign language class, the language teacher should pay attention to whether the novel has an intriguing story that will be of interest to the entire class. Themes and settings captivating their imagination and exploring the human condition should be included in the nature of the selected novels. Novel should have a powerful, fast-paced plot and interesting, well delineated, memorable characters. The content of the novel should be suitable to students' cognitive and emotional levels. Specific themes and concepts being developed in class should also be incorporated within the novel.

When assessing comprehension, teachers may employ novel tests requiring students to develop the sub-skills of written language like spelling, handwriting, grammar, and punctuation. Essay type tests written by teachers help students to gradually improve their skills in writing and organizing material into paragraphs with acceptable sentence structure. The tests are made up of not only fact-based questions serving as a basis of evaluating comprehension but also open-ended questions developing critical thinking abilities. The open-ended questions enable students to predict outcomes, make comparisons and contrasts, and draw conclusions. Class discussions of each novel event should comprise the main idea and supporting details, including who, what, when, where, and how. Details of various social issues such as sexual harrassment and abortion, which are often an integral part of the plot, can provoke interesting debate. Discussions can also facilitate vocabulary development (Helton, C.A, J.Asamani and E.D.Thomas 1998:1-5).

In sum, the use of novel is a very beneficial technique in today's foreign language classes. If selected carefully, using a novel makes the students' reading lesson motivating, interesting and entertaining. Though many students find reading a novel written in a target language difficult, boring, un motivating, novel is a very effective way of building vocabulary and developing reading comprehension skills. It is through reading that students broaden their horizons, become familiar with other cultures, and hence develop their intercultural communicative competence, learning how to view the world from different perspectives. The result will be the possession of critical thinking and writing.

5. Conclusion

Literature plays an important role in the English programs of many non-English speaking countries. However, there are some problems encountered by language teachers within the area of teaching English through literature. First, there are very few pedagogically-designed appropriate materials that can be used by language teachers in a language classroom. Second, there is a lack of preparation in the area of literature teaching in TESL / TEFL programs. Third, there is the absence of clear-cut objectives defining the role of literature in ESL /EFL. Many instructors try to include literature in their classroom, but lack the background and training in that field.

The teacher has an important role in teaching English through literature. First, he should determine the aim of language teaching in relation to the needs and expectations of the students. Giving a questionnaire or interviewing with the students orally, the teacher can set up the aim and the objectives of the language teaching. Second, he should select the appropriate language teaching method, teaching techniques, and classroom activities. Then, the teacher should select the literary texts relevant to the aim and the objectives of his teaching. While selecting literary texts to be used in language classroom, the students' language proficiency, interests, age, sex, etc should be taken into account in order not to bore students with inappropriate materials. At elementary levels, for example, students should be given simplified or specially written stories. At advanced levels, however, students are given literature in its original form so that they can develop their literary competence in the target language. To put it another way, students learn practically the figurative and daily use of the target language in the literary texts and encounter different genres of literature (i.e. poems, short stories, plays, etc.) at advanced levels. Observing how characters in a play or a short story use figures of speech, such as simile, metaphor, metonymy, etc so as to express their communicative intention, students learn how to write English more clearly, creatively, and powerfully.

As Obediat (1997:32) states, literature helps students acquire a native-like competence in English, express their ideas in good English, learn the features of modern English, learn how the English linguistic system is used for communication, see how idiomatic expressions are used, speak clearly, precisely, and concisely, and become more proficient in English, as well as become creative, critical, and analytical learners. Custodio and Sutton (1998:20) explain that literature can open horizons of possibility, allowing students to question, interpret, connect, and explore. In sum, literature provides students with an incomparably rich source of authentic material over a wide range of registers. If students can gain access to this material by developing literary competence, then they can effectively internalize the language at a high level (Elliot 1990:198). Especially, for students with verbal / linguistic intelligence, the language teacher's using literature in a foreign language class serves for creating a highly motivating, amusing and lively lesson. Literature is not only a tool for developing the written and oral skills of the students in the target language but also is a window opening into the culture of the target language, building up a cultural competence in students.

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