

ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING AND LITERATURE; CHANGING TRENDS & NEEDS IN PROFESSIONAL COLLEGES



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Abstract

The blend of literature with various activities in an ELT classroom in the long run history has yielded many positive results in English language acquisition. Classroom observations and experiments in tune with the syllabus prescribed by the university are fruitful come outs. In India, a desire for English as a language of power and higher civilization was created in the minds of people. Whoever learnt this magic language could exercise power and authority over those who did not know it. After the establishment of universities and colleges after 1857, English Studies lured hundreds of students who desired a job. But the study of English literature continues unabated with writers from Chaucer to Lavanya Sankaran. The role of literature in imparting English language can't be ignored. The relationship between Literature and English Language Teaching has been a flourishing pact. Joanne Collie and Stephen Slater(1987: 3-6) support the inclusion of literature in the language classroom as it provides valuable authentic material, develops personal involvement and help contribute to readers' cultural as well as language enrichment. The language teaching has taken many strides in English classroom in recent times. This paper gives an idea on changing trends and needs of teaching fraternity as well as the learners.

Keywords: ELT & Literature, Personal involvement, Classroom Communication



Introduction about ELT & its relation with Literature:

Prior to the disciplinary formation of English studies in India, a desire for English as a language of power and higher civilization was created in the minds of people. The idea that whoever could learn this magic language could exercise power and authority over those who did not know crept into the minds of Indians. After the establishment of universities and colleges after 1857, English Studies lured hundreds of students who desired a job. But the study of English literature continues unabated with writers from Chaucer to Lavanya Sankaran. The role of literature in imparting English language can't be ignored. The relationship between Literature and English Language Teaching has been a flourishing pact. Joanne Collie and Stephen Slater(1987: 3-6) support the inclusion of literature in the language classroom as it provides valuable authentic material, develops personal involvement and help contribute to readers' cultural as well as language enrichment. The language teaching has taken many strides in English classroom in recent times. My paper gives an idea on changing trends and needs of teaching fraternity as well as the learners. In connection with the professional colleges it also touches upon how literature could be used in English class room.

ELT & Literature are a fine blend:

Literature is a term used to describe written or spoken material. Broadly speaking, "literature" is used to describe anything from creative writing to more technical or scientific works, but the term is most commonly used to refer to works of the creative imagination, including works of poetry, drama, fiction, and nonfiction. Literature is an activity which arouses emotions, dreams, aspirations and communicative needs. It is important that reading literature is not a passive activity as learners are constantly building up their knowledge and seeking ways to comprehend the text. The main idea of literature blended with ELT is seeing it as a means of empowering opportunity for developing the literary and language competence. Hence teaching literature in a language classroom, be it in professional colleges or Art Degree colleges promotes discovery –learning as learners take a critical stance towards interpreting the meanings and see the literature as a



personal experience and take responsibility of their learning. The trend today is that even professional colleges such JNTUK has introduced literature in the form of Short Stories creating a way for the students to become one with the literature because of which the students will have a personal experience in comprehending the text. Hence it opens their horizons of learning affecting their emotions, feelings and language acquisition skills. Literature and culture in English Language Teaching at professional colleges is seen as a bridge between the target language and human experience or technology and human life. Literature represents a language or a people; culture and tradition. But, literature is more important than just a historical or cultural artifact. Literature introduces us to new worlds of experience. We learn about books and literature; we enjoy the comedies and the tragedies of poems, stories, and plays; and we may even grow and evolve through our literary journey with books.

Language Teaching came into its own as a profession in the twentieth century. The whole foundation of contemporary language teaching was developed during the early part of the twentieth century as applied linguists. Changes in language teaching methods throughout history have reflected recognition of changes in the kind of proficiency learners need, such as a move towards oral proficiency rather than reading comprehension as the goal of language study. Kelly (1969) and Howatt (1984) have demonstrated that many current issues in language teaching are not particularly new. It has been estimated that some 60 percent of today's population is multilingual. In this context English is the world's most widely studied foreign language. In the process ELT experts came out with various methods and approaches such as CLL, NP, CBLT, CLT, and many more.

How literature could be assimilated in English Classroom: some practical experiences:

Instructors have realized that literature can be used to reinforce the skills and complement language teaching. **Scher (1976)** affirms that with students at the beginning and intermediate levels, instructors can use literary texts for “ language practice, reading comprehension, and possible aesthetic appreciation” (quoted in Muyskens, 1983, p. 413).



In contrast, with advanced students like professional students literary texts may be utilized for the “ development of knowledge of world literature, practice in reading and discussing the creative work, and the introduction of literary concepts, genres, and terminologies- e.g. recognition of figures of speech, levels of meaning, and other stylistic features” (p. 413). JNTU, Kakinada has introduced in its syllabus for the second year B.Tech students of the university during the R10 regulation. This is meant for two semesters with the name “Life, Language and Culture” Exploration- 1 & 2. I would like to put forth how effectively this text could be used to reach the target students. It is very much applicable to mention in this connection the three models proposed by **Carter and Long (1991:2-3)**.

1. Cultural Model:

This model creates a kind of interest and like for the cultures and their importance in the learners. The learners may learn to appreciate various cultural aspects and their ideologies. This model develops one’s perception of feelings and artistic forms.

2. Language Model:

This model insists on language acquisition. Literature is considered as a medium to teach vocabulary and formation of sentence structures.

3. Personal Touch:

The students tend to understand the different variations in human society, its needs, targets, changes. Thus student becomes personally involved in reading, thinking, contemplating. The personal involvement is also a major factor in learning a foreign language.

Teaching English in professional colleges differs from that of Arts colleges the reason being literature is less projected in the curriculum of these colleges except for a few cases. JNTUK took a good decision to make the students of Engineering colleges to taste the literature to instill in them a desire to understand the human nature and its various aspects. I personally found in students a perfect taste for learning and taking part in various activities arranged such as GDs, Panel Discussions, Debates expressing their views on



different aspects of character analysis or plot constructions. My experiments in English classrooms the use of Literature have reached expected outcome. When I conducted a panel discussion on 'human strings' i.e. human weakness from a story named as 'The Hawk and the Tree', from the book 'Life, Language and Culture' students involved in a serious discussion which brought out emotional and personal involvement of the student community. In this aspect, I would say, the literature prescribed for the professional college students has served the purpose.

Benefits of literature like short stories:

Researchers who advocate the use of short stories in ESL/EFL list several benefits of short stories. These include motivational, literary, cultural and higher-order thinking benefits. Nevertheless, before instructors look at these benefits in more details, they need to be reminded of one benefits, i.e. reinforcement of skills. When we include short stories in the curriculum, it is to be remembered that short stories of various cultures and human tendencies create in students a polished – high order of thinking. This will kindle a fire in them as they understand and read the stories; it's a fire of imagination.

Murdoch (2002) indicates that "short stories can, if selected and exploited appropriately, provide quality text content which will greatly enhance ELT course for learners at Intermediate level of proficiency". (p.9) Instructors can create a variety of writing activities to help students to develop their writing skills. We can also give text based topics for debates, discussions, projects and so on. This will create reinforcement skills. Let me also say how this could be used in a professional college as the students get busy with their technical gadgets and their subjects. They find little time for English language classes or its activities. I shall here illustrate how my experiments with the professional students were successful. The instructors can create a variety of writing as well as speaking activities based on these practices. If we take a story such as The Hawk and the Tree, there are a variety of activities which can really benefit the students such as the below.

1. Summarize the story in three sentences, including the main character, setting, conflict, climax, and resolution.



2. Enact a situation when people exhibit their strings i.e. jealousy, egotism, selfishness etc..
3. Write an imaginary dialogue between the cobbler and the hanging hawk in its last minute of life span.
4. Write one sentence on the theme of the story.
5. Instruct the students to do a small project such as collect the pictures of those animals and birds that suffer from different injuries but can't express their pain in words. The emotional feelings of the students will be aroused hence they will become part and parcel of the project expo.

These activities are only a few of my experiments but there could be many more based on the teachers' creativity.

In addition, literature such as stories can be used to improve students' vocabulary and reading. Lao and Krashen (2000) present the results of a comparison between a group of students that read literary texts and a second group that read non-literary text at a university in Hong Kong. Obviously the group who read the literary texts showed drastic improvement.

Introducing literary elements:

Gajdusek (1988), an American who studied child growth, explains how literature can be introduced by describing the order of activities: pre-reading activities, factual in- class work, analysis and extending activities. Based on the same story mentioned above we could ask students before they are introduced to 'The Hawk and The Tree'

- a. What is justice?
- b. How can people behave as they suffer from different 'strings'
- c. Have you ever seen an animal or a bird hanging to it's death door and looking for help without expressing it.

Teachers can also teach simple elements, such as character, setting and plot. The same



and more complex elements such as conflict, climax, resolution, etc... can be introduced with more advanced levels.

Concluding Remarks:

Since the ultimate goal of English Language Teaching in professional colleges is to help students to communicate clearly to the point, it is necessary that we adopt literature in benefiting this target. In addition to the four skills, short stories help instructors to teach literary, cultural and higher-order of thinking aspects. After all the professional students need to become humane first and technical next. This is one of the reasons why some universities have introduced value-ethical education in the first year of their study itself. I strongly believe that literature plays a vital role in achieving this aspect. "The relationship between literature and English language Teaching has been throughout the years a type of marriage-bond". Says Dario Banegas. It will continue so.

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