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Integrating literature in english language curriculum: Benefits and challenges

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Abstract

This study analyses the incorporation of literature into the English language curriculum, emphasizing its advantages and obstacles. Literature functions as a valuable resource for language acquisition, providing real texts that promote critical thinking, expand vocabulary, and cultivate cultural understanding. Engaging with varied literary works enables children to relate language acquisition to real-world circumstances, fostering enhanced understanding and empathy. Nonetheless, the incorporation of literature presents some obstacles. Educators may face challenges in selecting suitable texts that align with students' diverse backgrounds and interests, while also accommodating varying levels of reading competency. Moreover, the equilibrium between literary analysis and language learning may provide challenges in curriculum development.

Keywords: Communication skills, cultural awareness and sensitivity, enhancing language proficiency, linguistic competencies, time constraints

1. Introduction

The integration of literature into the English language curriculum is a topic of interest to language teachers for several reasons. Most importantly, literature is the representation of language in use, and it can be the basis of language activities best situated to introduce students to the complex interconnectedness of language with culture and human emotions. It can also be seen as a model of good language, a stimulus, and a reference point for generating language activities. A literature-oriented approach, in which the study of literary texts is foregrounded in the curriculum, can offer students valuable insights as well as enhance various language skills. The use of literature in English language teaching is centered on the belief that the classroom learning process should be communicative, intercultural, critical, and allusive ^[1, 2, 3].

There are many benefits to integrating literature into the language syllabus. For instance, literature can be a rich source of information about a certain culture or period; through it, we are transported to a world of people who share thoughts and feelings different from those of people we know today. Literature is also a valuable source of biographical material, which may be both inspiring and eye-opening. Many studies provide evidence about the advantages of using literary texts in the teaching of a second language ^[45]. In listening and speaking, students get a chance to practice and use spoken language in and out of class. While in reading and writing, students can both appreciate and analyze literary or non-literary works. Additionally, the learners will also be better able to express ideas through the written text. It has also been recommended by many contemporary critics claiming that literature brings life and interest to the lesson, merely compared to the traditional direct method that uses meaningless learning devices. However, there have been challenges that come up in connection with the integration of literature teaching in the English curriculum. These challenges must be faced and given solutions so that there are no obstacles to the learning process in the classroom ^[6, 7, 8].

2. The Role of Literature in English Language Education

Integrating Literature in the English Language Curriculum: Benefits and Challenges

The role of literature in English language education is not restricted to mere linguistic benefits. Many scholars elaborate on how literature can improve the linguistic competencies of learners in different dimensions, such as improving vocabulary, grammar, writing, and

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communication skills. Interestingly, the interface between language and literature is connected to various other educational spheres, especially personal development, cognitive aspects, and socio-cultural competencies, which are much beyond the scope of language education. The study of literature encourages deep thinking and a degree of introspection, encouraging individual growth and personal development [9, 10, 11].

The study of literature enhances one's insight, ability to see, and gives courage to talk about life. This occurs when we engage with literature on the basis of three domains of thinking, listed as critiquing, making, and connecting. The more students 'consume' a piece of literature, reading, rereading, and immersing themselves in the flow of the narrative, the more chances there are that they will evaluate, interpret, and connect, enhancing their cognitive abilities, not just their linguistic abilities. The more engaging the narrative, the more the consumer will automatically use all of their accumulated knowledge and experiences as a framework for interacting with the narrative to try and arrive at meaning, the ultimate goal of any transaction with a written text. In short, the pedagogical potential of literature can indeed be 'powerful' and maybe 'thoughtful'. [12, 13, 14, 15, 16].

2.1 Enhancing Language Proficiency

Enhancement of language proficiency is a paramount concern in today's varied EFL/ESL curriculum across the world. An enlightening comprehension of language structures is extremely significant for learners to be proficient in their language rules; otherwise, they stumble in using the appropriate language for communication. Since its origin, literature has been integrated into the English language curriculum for enriching the proficiency of second language learners. Being rooted in the language system, literary knowledge is anticipated to effectively inculcate in learners the effective use of grammar, accurate structures, and vocabulary. Studying and contemplating literature during language learning helps to attain diverse language targets for learners because the language used in literary texts is often different from the language generally used in the classroom setting during language learning [17, 18, 19].

The reason behind using literary texts in language classrooms is that learners can practice language patterns in distinct languages in diverse situations. Literature introduces a diverse range of sentence structures and vocabulary to learners. By reading and discussing literature, learners can observe language in diverse contexts and can practice using it. A concern for reading and understanding the events and characters can provoke learners to focus on the semantic implications of the expressions in the texts. A focus on the emotional and psychological import of expressions will lead to comprehension of the details. Reading literature can help learners grasp the authentic use of the language. Many learners are attracted to the emotional meaning present in the stories. Literature is language in use; thus, it provides learners with genuine models of language rules and contexts with facilitative situations in every language lesson [20, 21].

2.2 Developing Critical Thinking Skills

In terms of developing critical thinking, literature contributes much, as it alerts us to our inner emotional states and moral struggles, as well as to those of others. Therefore, is it not the case that entering into the feelings, ideas, and other circumstances of the characters we read about can stretch the imagination in ways no other stimuli can? If we consider that the analytical task of literary analysis and

appreciation requires people to interpret and evaluate the issues and values developed in a text, one by one or together, then we are on the road to developing skills in evaluating not the arguments of scholars or the trials of a one-dimensional multiple-choice questionnaire, but in discerning and discussing reasoning of a much more complex order [22, 23].

Furthermore, to come to an understanding of the agency at work in a novel or short story is also to come to an understanding of the product of creative human endeavor, this being something of value in and of its own right. In other words, the fields not only increase understanding of the world we inhabit but also add to the variety of assessments of that world likely to be generated by those living within it. And it is the ability to move from one text to another, making transferable judgments and recognizing these, that is one way of describing critical discernment. It is, in summary, the fostering of creativity on various levels that makes the study of English literature worthwhile. With the underpinning of a critical way of thinking, first inspired through engagement with literary studies alone, passed on to other areas of study, teachers and lecturers aim to make students' thinking habits agile and inclusive. In this respect, English literature becomes essential to the intellectual growth of an inquiring and innovative mind [24, 25, 26].

3 Benefits of Integrating Literature in English Language Curriculum

1. The Benefits of Integrating Literature in the English Language Curriculum

Literature is a powerful tool for fostering students' cultural awareness and appreciation. Literature serves an educative purpose as it reflects culture, thus providing an opportunity to understand and appreciate diverse lifestyles and values. This cultural value of literature in education, and particularly its role in the development of cultural awareness, often leads to the use of the term 'cultural literature' in a pedagogic context. In the field of English literature, it provides an opportunity for the non-native speaker to gain insights into the life, way of thinking, and experiences of the citizens of English-speaking countries from a variety of different cultural backgrounds. Literature contributes to the transmission of cultural values, concepts, and worldviews, and the acquisition of cultural knowledge and a sense of national identity. It can powerfully arouse consciousness of our cultural roots and history and can tailor existing knowledge and turn it into the ability to understand and, consequently, to absorb and respond properly to new cultural and linguistic experiences [27, 28, 29].

Literary texts can enrich the range of linguistic resources available for vocabulary learning. Most of the words taught in schools have a great degree of weakness in language learning, such as the lack of semantic and communicative context, a disengagement from the communicative situation, and a lack of permanence. Literature, by presenting words in meaningful phrases and sentences, in context, in a communicative setting, can greatly facilitate vocabulary learning. The main assets that literature brings to the task of vocabulary enlargement are the semantic context in which new words are used and the richness and variety of words, as well as the number of times they are repeated. Literary narratives are contextually rich and provide ample meaning for learners to construct the meaning of new words, which in turn helps vocabulary acquisition and retention [30, 31]. The numerous occurrences of words in the text, as well as the use of the words in various syntactic contexts, can assist students in breaking through the 'syntactic straitjacket' and

also in being aware of the varied collocational patterns. Furthermore, the use of multiple meanings and ambiguity in creative literary texts can enable students to look at words from various perspectives, thus reinforcing links between the word meanings. Overall, students' vocabulary can be enriched through repeated exposure to words and language patterns in literary texts, and the context in which language is used in literature may render it, in some instances, more meaningful when compared to language items taken from non-literary texts ^[32, 33].

3.1 Cultural Awareness and Sensitivity

Literature has a critical role in promoting the infusion of culture into the curriculum. One of the foundations of cultural awareness is the understanding that there are diverse ways of living and interpretations of reality. Reading materials that come from various cultures and communities of the world that are culturally and topically valid and authentic offer the means for students to gain understanding and respect for the values and ways of life of others. By studying literary works that reflect diverse attitudes, beliefs, and ways of life, students learn that stereotypes, easy generalizations, and racial or class prejudices can be misleading and harmful. They can also develop a sensitivity towards personal problems, as they gain insight into the different ways that individuals view their world and cope with their problems ^[34, 35].

Literature is also an effective tool for revealing the possibility of interpreting more than one right answer and the way people read different meanings into a given object or event. Literary stories can provide a basis for materials that challenge students to grapple with ethical concepts and to develop the ability to make and justify their value judgments. Narration provides students with greater possibilities of empathy than do analytical and descriptive information, since it involves a personal story, about which students can make predictions, guesses, and personal interpretations based on the preceding development of the story. In addition, fiction describes the complexity of relationships, attitudes held by the characters, their emotions, manners, and ideas that cause actions and reactions, and easily penetrate into student insight to provoke discussion and personal interpretation at length ^[36, 37].

3.2 Enhanced Vocabulary Acquisition

The traditional English language curriculum does not pay much attention to vocabulary learning; rather, it focuses on demonstrating structural and functional accuracy of the language. However, if vocabulary is not up to the mark and structural and functional accuracy is limited by vocabulary exposure, communicative competency may not be developed, even though a few words are picked up. This gap can be considered a limitation of the traditional language curriculum. Readers are familiar with the fact that literary texts offer rich and varied language input. A wider range of words, expressions, idiomatic language, fashionable expressions, new constructions, and arrangements of words in literature is waiting for learners. The meanings of the words and expressions in literature are up to date and quite standard. Words and objects of literature are the cornerstone of awareness and thorough understanding of languages that develop the capability to make references with facility ^[38, 39, 40].

Literature confronts readers with many different usages and meanings. A series of different meanings or uses of a word

may not, of course, straightforwardly cover all aspects of it. Vocabulary items are often repeated with various shades of meaning and contexts. Many new vocabulary items are both appealing and useful, which strengthens both motivation and positivity; besides, it simulates long-term vocabulary retention through multiple usages, especially in story contexts from which students can experience and model the creativity and flexibility offered by language to serve their individual purposes. Moreover, the grammar rules of literary texts are not too hard and fast in accordance with traditional readings. Vocabulary that is learned through literature is more likely to be remembered at a later stage than vocabulary that is merely studied. Characters, dramatic specials, and story events are all subjective for enhanced vocabulary. A stimulating environment always fulfills the objectives by broadening the view and the mind of students, which gives better results in the long run ^[41, 42, 43].

4. Challenges of Integrating Literature in English Language Curriculum

Many educators argue that it is beneficial to integrate literature into English language education due to its numerous advantages. However, numerous challenges tend to surface when literature is integrated into the English language curriculum ^[44].

Lack of resources is one of the challenges to integrating literature into the English language. Many educational institutions do not have a sufficient range of graded readers that can cater to different students' language proficiency levels, hence limiting students' involvement in reading at the same time. Not all ELT lecturers have been trained to teach literature in the English language classroom. The lack of time allocated to the teaching of English language will hinder students from gaining a deeper understanding of the literature. For this reason, learners tend to focus solely on language form instead of exploring the text holistically to comprehend and utilize it in their language learning. Educators are often at a loss when they have to balance language instruction and literary analysis, given the brief time frame of English language learning ^[45, 46].

Some stakeholders in the language educational field conceptualize that the hard-to-embrace language of literature will have a negative impact on solution implementation because of the low value and time-consuming aspect. This view presents an immediate problem for the integration of literature in the English language curriculum. In addressing these issues, the various strategies must take into consideration the extent of accreditation and the personnel, materials, administration, and evaluation that have to be properly managed if literature is to blend with English language instruction seamlessly ^[47].

4.1 Lack of Resources

There are several challenges faced by schools and educational institutions to integrate literature into the curriculum. One of the major challenges is the lack of resources such as books, journals, and articles, from which teachers can select pieces that reflect the different voices and perspectives of various people, societies, and cultures. Additionally, many teachers lack the necessary expertise to guide students through complex literary texts, and since the official teacher training is mainly focused on English, they may lack the confidence to integrate literature, at least at first ^[48]. A lack of resources can also make it more difficult

for teachers to create a balance between literatures from different cultures and to integrate exciting and motivating material from various genres and aesthetic periods of our literary heritage and from different countries around the world, thus running the risk of producing a Eurocentric 'canon.'^[49]

A further challenge is that the resources that are finally provided are likely to be outdated and unfashionable, largely because there is little money for the production of new books or the updating of existing resources. The desire of students to 'connect' to the literature of the syllabus is likely to be diminished if it does not reflect aspects of contemporary culture. The issue of supporting teachers, either during preparations of the curriculum or during daily contact with teachers in service, has not yet been developed enough and needs more investigation, as what has been done so far is insufficient. Teachers still need practical and systematic guidance to relate the various parts of their textbooks to the components of the English language that they are expected to teach, and to be exposed to a range of texts that promote a wide variety of literary genres to a broad audience. It is also important to help develop their self-confidence, as many do not see their role as being able to magnify and re-enact the poem's frames. As more and more rival disciplines are now flexing their muscles to take a bigger stake in the curriculum, the time is long overdue for those committed to literature to state their case with clarity and passion; it has never needed defending more!^[50, 51, 52]

4.2 Time Constraints

Dealing with a large number of students in a class and pressure from pedagogical managers to connect the theoretical aspects of the English language and literature can be treated as another problem that educators contemplate while integrating literature into the English language curriculum in Chile. On the one hand, some college or high school students from different disciplines enroll in SFL courses with different language proficiency but with little knowledge about English or North American/British literature^[53]. More specifically, students who live far from the city attend Saturday courses, whereas other teenagers from the urban centers attend the course four hours a week. School students prepare for school leaving exams during the last year, which means they take specific courses in history, arts, philosophy, language, etc. More generally speaking, the exclusion of literature is, in some cases, not a voluntary decision on the part of the educational agent at the moment of planning the curriculum for basic or middle education. On the contrary, the teacher would probably ignore the set of guidelines that pre-conceive the kind of content that deserves to be included in the teaching and assist in the learning of a modern foreign language. The time factor could be considered a zone of interference in terms of the climate of expectation of integrating literature into the English curriculum, in view of the initial cost/benefit balance. Therefore, it may be pointed out that curricular integration is only possible given a corresponding adjustment in the hierarchies of the educational agency, which would benefit the field of education in Chile^[54, 55, 56, 57].

5. Best Practices for Successful Integration

To make literature an integral part of the English language curriculum and a successful dual component of the language

course instead of a project tacked on as a separate activity, a number of teachers in Western countries have worked on their teacher education programs at graduate and postgraduate levels. The teachers are trained to choose and teach appropriate children's and adolescent literature^[58].

Conclusions and Recommendations the majority of the research we reviewed showed that teachers integrated literature alongside teaching language because they were confident about and successful in motivating and engaging their students. Such teachers used a variety of creative means such as student-led literature circles, aesthetic reading, and creative, student-centered assignments to foster an appreciation of and a deep understanding and connection with the literature. The integration of literature also promoted language development in a four-skill environment, with reading for personal understanding and expression percolating in class writing, speaking, and creative activities. Opportunities to explore values, attitudes, beliefs, and themes that may, in fact, help the students in real life - especially their own lives - came out consistently in the literature as a motivation. Hence, the following knowledge can be considered as "best practices" in terms of recommendations for literature integration^[59, 60, 61].

Teacher Education as 'the Hand' Regarding teacher education, the teacher must be trained to use literature either in integration with language or specifically for applying strategies for good contextualized and meaningful language development. Ongoing professional development will then be necessary to keep teachers updated on the wealth of literature that is being published^[62, 63].

5.1 Teacher Training and Professional Development

Teacher training and professional development opportunities from the very beginning should be part of every literature-text integration policy. Teachers should not only be serious readers and critical analysts of literary texts, but also skilled language educators or instructors with a good understanding of different aspects of the English language to which they can contribute in their lectures, as well as a variety of reading-to-learn strategies. With all this expertise, any teacher can improve the quality of the English language instruction that students receive in the EFL classroom by enhancing the parameters of literature selection and by choosing tasks where any class can demonstrate a very wide spread of diversified competencies. Teachers should then be equipped with strategies that can not only generate new literature-based instructional options, but also provide reliable competence-enhancing opportunities promoting different reading strategies for reading in a foreign language on a critical basis^[64, 65, 66].

Teacher training and education in the field of teaching literature can also provide possible solutions to the very paradox of reader-response theory raised in this context, particularly with respect to L2 classrooms. Policymakers in this area should include several perspectives in this new target domain. Among these, it could be suggested that in order to be able to choose or adapt a literary text and to make it suitable for their class needs, teachers could complete a Literature-in-English checklist based on a variety of literary analysis frames. A Competence-Enhancing Progression of Critical Reading in L2 could also be designed for teachers who are largely unfamiliar with literary studies as a field^[67, 68]. A rather clear and easy-to-follow checklist for class reaction and outcome forecasts

would also be an important key input for teachers in their formative years. Up-to-date training and development diploma courses and seminars should aim at engaging individuals in literature interpretation strategies and should also demonstrate the student or class benefits related to literature-text use in the target language. Literature textbooks, provided within the frame of such courses to students who have been reading ELT methodology, competencies or skills development, as well as integrated methodology courses, could greatly support the accessibility of such courses. Concerning professional development, a number of strategies can be used during in-service training seminars, multipliers' events, and other lifelong learning occasions. Conferences can also be devoted to stimulating interest in this particular field through plenary papers, workshops, symposia, and seminars^[69]. At the local level, certain resource centers may provide a kind of Network Literature-in-English Wall where information is exchanged, proposed textbooks and literature readers evaluated, and joined projects and exchanges of personal experiences and responses within the field encouraged. Solutions can also be proposed which will suggest, for instance, the creation of active informal networks of the teaching profession who respond to literature as readers. Such partnerships are also seen as an opportunity for a great deal of in-service training, as content-based integration is in need of more specific in-depth treatment in syllabus or project design. In this respect, suggestions can also be offered for the creation of resource teacher teams in charge of the production of a collection of personal critical responses to literary works, including all levels of competence in an A to Z classification. This collection should aim to help both students and teachers involved in projects currently or in the future in special methodological training in course book design, project syllabus drawing, or target reader aim identification. This collection can also be used as a resource pool in ESP courses, cooperation routes for university research and home-grown materials, and even doctoral research center libraries^[70, 71, 72].

5.2 Selecting Appropriate Texts

5.2.1 Selecting Appropriate Texts for Language Learning

The choice of literature in the curriculum and as additional reading can have a major impact on the effectiveness of the integration of literature in education. It affects both teachers and students and their respective roles and attitudes. The guidelines for teaching both teachers and students promote the integrated study of literature and language as well as their explicit interrelation. Thus, the choice of literature is of great importance for both teachers and students. Introducing literature to secondary students in such a diverse environment with so many languages and cultures ought to reflect the diversity of society in order to promote inclusivity. Students from across the rich diversity of cultures will find references in some of the stories in our selection that may inform and resonate with their own experiences or cultures, providing greater opportunities for meaningful engagement^[73, 74].

Older, classic texts from international literature can be included because of their reference in the arts and culture. Some teachers of English will also be keen to expose students to certain works with the aim of providing students with fundamentally formative experiences across the

disciplines. Choosing appropriate literature is a complex process, which includes considerations of the relevance of the text to the students themselves, to their preferences, their social environment, and their own competence - including their age and language competence. The importance of the topic and genre in the teaching process is also significant^[75, 76]. Genres can serve to introduce the students to particular kinds of readers' expectations and thus facilitate the reading process. Some texts - for instance, songs or poems read for rhythm - while quite difficult in terms of vocabulary, may provide indirect grammar input for students, as the process of reading them emphasizes rhythm awareness rather than word comprehension. All these items contribute to meaning negotiation - and the creation of personal meaning - which may encourage more detailed processing of the text. That would mean they could be likened to comprehensible input, and as such may be most usefully approached as texts which call for creative reading^[77, 78].

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be systematized that, through the texts in the essay, it has been shown that literature can and should be an integral part of the foreign/second language curriculum in terms of the numerous benefits it can offer to students. Among these, literature can directly contribute to the improvement and expansion of language teaching and learning, as well as promote the humanistic values and pragmatic ideals of language teaching. However, it has also been shown that the use of literature, vis-à-vis the numerous benefits, may pose difficulties as there are, in fact, obstacles to the introduction and application of literature in the EFL/ESL classroom. The most common problem associated with the use of literature in the language classroom is the lack of time and frequency of contact. Some other problems or challenges, as it has been shown, may result from the constraints of time or inadequate facilities, such as classrooms that are too small and overcrowded, lack of audio-visual equipment and materials, but also from the fact that the application of modern literature does not have wide distribution or is not widely spread in the social environment. As a result, literature must adopt the dilemma "when and how to integrate culture into the language learning process." Therefore, it has been suggested that teacher training is essential if literature is to be effectively and accurately integrated into the classroom. It has also been suggested or shown that the selection and use of literature for language teaching must be the best available and comprise elements that are logical, meaningful, praxeological, and pedagogically valid. In short, it is an undisputed fact that despite the obstacles, literature is an important area of language evolution, and it is absolutely valid, and language teachers often introduce and apply it in their teaching. More research can be conducted and more essays like this can inspire teachers to use texts to improve foreign language teaching and learning.

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