

Towards a Reappraisal of Literary Competence within the Confines of ESL/EFL Classroom

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Abstract

The present paper aimed at highlighting the judicious incorporation of literary genres (i.e. novel, short story/fiction, drama, and poetry) as a supposedly inspiring teaching technique and an allegedly potent learning resource into ESL/EFL curricula. The rationale behind this pedagogical inclusion is to promote both teaching and learning effectiveness through capitalizing intensively on the genres so as to teach basic language skills and language areas- macro and micro levels. Much mention was made of the 'why' (i.e. justification and benefits), the 'how' (i.e. logistical considerations), the 'where' and the 'when' (i.e. spatiotemporal factors) aspects of introducing literary texts into the confines of the ESL/EFL classroom. What this vigorous discussion spawned was some detailed accounts of literary competence as an overarching term consisting of morphological, lexical, phonological, syntactic, semantic, pragmatic, discourse, stylistic, and sociolinguistic / sociocultural knowledge bases . Afterwards, evaluation process as the last but most important element of the teaching-learning process was explicated. In the end, seven solutions to the problems and dangers of using culture transmitters in the ESL/EFL classroom were suggested in an attempt to bring literature and ESL/EFL pedagogy into a happy contact leading to teaching and learning effectiveness maximization.

Keywords: literary genres, ESL/EFL instruction, literary competence, culture transmitters, literature instruction assessment

Introduction

Teaching English as a Second/Foreign Language (hereafter ESL/EFL) through literature (i.e. poetry, short story/fiction, novel, and drama) can be traced back to the 19th century when the Grammar Translation Method (hereafter GTM) was adopted by ESL/EFL teachers in order to teach second/foreign languages. GTM required the ESL/EFL students to translate literary texts from the second/foreign language to their mother tongue. Upon its decline, literature was no longer emphasized and was replaced by structures and vocabulary underpinned by such methods and/or approaches to second/foreign language

teaching and learning as the Direct Method, Audiolingual Method, Community Language Learning, Suggestopedia, Silent Way, Total Physical Response, and Natural Approach.

From the above, it can safely be concluded that the status of literature in the English Language Teaching (hereafter ELT) field has been in a constant state of change. Multiple but different views of literature have waxed and waned throughout the history of second or foreign language learning and teaching. Such reconceptualization and status reassessments of literature have been caused, in all likelihood, by the movement of the ELT field towards total professionalism. Richards and Rogers (2005) assert that 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 and others sought to develop principles and procedures for the design of teaching methods and materials, drawing on the developing field of linguistics and psychology to support a succession of proposals for what were thought to be effective and theoretically sound teaching methods. Language teaching in the twentieth century was characterized by frequent change and innovation and by the development of sometimes competing language teaching ideologies. Much of the impetus for change in approaches to language teaching came about from changes in teaching methods (p.1).

Language and literature constituted the focal points of the present descriptive paper. According to the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (2007), language is defined generally as a system of communication by written or spoken words, which is used by the people of a particular country or area. There are different types of languages, which include body language, second language, first language, modern language, and so on. On the other hand, the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English also ascribes three different meanings to the word 'literature'. The first meaning sees literature as books, poems, and plays that people think are important and good. Secondly, literature in another sense is conceived of as books, articles, and the like on a particular subject. Thirdly, literature is conceptualized as printed information produced by people, who want to sell or say something.

Given the three components of literature pointed above, it is thought to be any written text which is categorized into four types, namely fiction, fact, content area text and newsreel by Onukaogu (1999). He holds that fiction needed by language learners to enhance their imaginative ability and creativity, as they read the language consists of poetry, prose and drama. Fact is informational text, carefully written to inform non-experts. Such texts include historical accounts of past national events, where statistical dates of events are stated. Content area text denotes a type of written text, where the author writes for the would-be experts. Here, the texts are designed to enhance the knowledge base of the language learner in the subject area. Newsreels are published or written texts to entertain and to pass on current news items to the reader. Examples of newsreels are newspapers, magazines, newsletters, and so forth. He went on to opine that all the four types of texts are needed in order to make English language curriculum resulting and goal-oriented. As Sivasubramaniam (2006, p. 60) puts it differently, "literature is a body of written texts produced by a culture and highly valued within that culture over a period of time as part of its literary heritage".

In conjunction with Richards and Rogers' (2005) assertion mentioned above, the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century could be characterized by the novel idea of incorporating literature into ESL/EFL programmes. Hiller (1983) was, in all likelihood, one of the most prominent figures of the era, who reconciled English teaching and literature successfully by writing about poetry as an element of literature in the foreign language classroom. The beginning of the 20th century might be marked by the work created by Ariogul (2001) on the teaching of reading through short stories. He reasoned that similar approaches to reading both literary and non-literary texts were adopted by second or foreign language learners. However, Mengü (2002) elaborated on a markedly different element of literature—a drama-based syllabus for English teaching and learning. Similar to Hiller's work was one created by Sarac (2003).

In addition to such works devoted to individual genres of literature, some attempts were also made to make a connection between literature and ESL/EFL instruction. For instance, Hismanoglu (2005)

emphasized the use of literature (as a whole consisting of poetry, fiction, drama, and novel) as a popular technique for teaching the macro and micro skills.

While the aforementioned authors considered literature as a tool within the language classroom, there existed some scholars like the proponents of GTM who deemed literature as an ultimate aim. Larsen-Freeman (2000, p.11) maintained that GTM was used for the purpose of helping students read and appreciate foreign language literature. There is much mainstream literature related to the question of literary genres use as a hotly debated issue. As apparently different or competing fields of study, the interaction of literature and ESL/EFL curriculum has gained momentum and a multitude of controversies regarding the necessity, justification, and logistical considerations inasmuch as this pedagogical inclusion still prevails in the related mainstream literature. Recent qualitative and/or quantitative studies have attached much importance to such factors as the spatiotemporal aspects of literature incorporation besides the issues of how and why it is suggested to be incorporated into ESL/EFL courses of study.

The significance of the present study lies in that it aims at not only the above mentioned contributing factors but also the pedagogical benefits of the inclusion process from the perspective of the professional and interdisciplinary field of ELT being run by many sometimes competing disciplines including applied and theoretical linguistics, sociology and sociolinguistics, psychology, anthropology, cognitive science, phenomenology, and so on. Also, the cognitively, emotionally, and physically challenging problems and dangers with which ESL/EFL teachers and students are faced in the course of culture instruction are unearthed. In addition, literature pedagogy assessment which is the last but most important element of the teaching-learning process is vigorously discussed. In the end, seven solutions to problems and dangers of using culture transmitters in the classroom are suggested in an attempt to bring literature and ESL/EFL instruction into a happy contact leading to teaching and learning effectiveness maximization.

Literature Incorporation into ESL/EFL Curriculum

Needless to say, making a pedagogical change, as tremendous and vital as incorporating literature into the second or foreign language classroom, is supposed to be soundly justified and supported by theoretically robust assumptions and principles. Chastain (1971, p. 235) believes that literature is no less reading because it involves writing at a higher artistic level than does a note from a friend, and students need to learn to scan, skim, and read intensively and extensively while reading literary selections just as they do with other types of reading materials. Scanning and skimming plays and novels help to develop expectations about the plot. While some difficult or important passages may require intensive reading, others should be read extensively. Poetry and essays will undoubtedly need more careful reading and analysis than a magazine article or a short story read for pleasure.

Chastain (1983) attributed the major difference between reading literary and non-literary texts to interpreting and analyzing the selection. He argues that prior to assigning the first literary piece, the ESL/EFL teacher should provide the students with examples to familiarize them with how authors in the second language tend to write the genre they will be studying. In the case of a short story, play, or novel, the teacher should teach them the traditional three parts-the introduction, climax, and conclusion- and explain the function of each to them. She does the same for the approach to essay and poetry when she feels they are ready for them. Too, she should introduce them to such aspects of the literary piece as setting, characterization, plot, and theme. She should make them aware of symbolism and levels of interpretation, and she should never permit them to leave a reading until they can give a summary of the major events or ideas and a personal reaction in the second language.

'Why' of Literature Incorporation into ESL/EFL Curriculum

This section is associated prominently with the reasons and benefits of including literature in ESL/EFL instruction which are vigorously discussed below.

Emotion and Humour

Perrine (2004) avers that interpretive fiction, which is based upon emotion and humour, presents the reader with significant and, therefore, durable insights into life. These insights represent something more than mere intellectual comprehension; otherwise, the story does nothing that cannot be done as well as better by psychology, history, or philosophy. Fiction derives its unique value from its power to give felt insights. Its truth takes a deeper hold on our mind because it is conveyed through our feelings. Its effectiveness in awakening a sensuous and emotional apprehension of experience that enriches understanding is what distinguishes imaginative literature from other forms of discourse (p.256).

Therefore, literature spotlights emotions and feelings as mankind's most important and pressing needs requiring total fulfillment and satisfaction. Sarac (2003, pp. 17-20) assumes that one of the educational benefits of poetry is evoke feelings and thoughts in heart and mind. In a similar way, Helton, Asamani, and Thomas (1998, pp. 1-5) state that poetry helps students to identify the emotions of characters so that they can learn how others cope with situations and problems similar to their own experiences. Also, Mengu (2002) contends that drama increases creativity, originality, sensitivity, fluency, flexibility, emotional stability [emphasis added], cooperation, and examination of moral attitudes, while develops communication skills (pp.1-4).

For now, it can safely and rightly be concluded that literature use within the ESL/EFL classroom context is in line with the premises of Affective Filter Hypothesis first proposed by Krashen (1982, 1983) theorizing that in unfavorable circumstances individuals develop negative attitudes that result in an affective filter, or mental block, that prevents them from using the input to internalize language. In other words, the use of literary texts makes learning circumstances favorable and enjoyable. Hence, the literature internalization process is expedited. We argue that the mere use of works of literature does not necessarily lower students' affective filter inasmuch as there are many other confounding and contributing factors involved like the teacher's overdisciplinary behavior and classroom management.

Native Language and Culture

As Chastain (1971) puts it, "one of the basic components of growth and expansion of awareness is comparison. As people become acquainted with others, they learn more about themselves, just as their exploration of the variations in another culture enables them to see more fully into the complexities of their own society. The same fundamental principle applies to language study. Studying a second language provides a comprehension of the connotations of words and the building blocks of expression that is unimagined prior to the study. Can there be any doubt that a more complete knowledge of oneself, one's language, and one's culture is a valid and worthwhile goal of any educational programme? Sharing the same thought, Erkaya (2005) states, "As students face a new culture, they become more aware of their own culture. They start comparing their culture with the other culture to see whether they find similarities and/or differences between the two cultures." Misinterpretation may occur due to differences between the two cultures, as Gajdusek (1998, p.232) explains. To avoid misinterpretation, instructors should introduce the culture to the students or ask them to find relevant information about it.

Second Culture Acquisition and Culture Transmitters

Brown (2000) conceptualizes culture as a way of life. He further discusses that it is the context with which we exist, think, feel, and relate to others. It is the "glue" that binds a group of people together. It is apparent that culture, as an ingrained set of behaviors and modes of perception, becomes highly important in the learning of a second language. A language is a part of a culture, and a culture is a part of a language; the two are intricately interwoven so that one cannot separate the two without losing the significance of either language or culture, because learning a second language implies some degree of learning a second culture. Similarly, Sage (1987, pp. 12-13) claims, "Poetry is one of the most effective and powerful transmitters of culture."

To conclude, all genres of literature (i.e. poetry, short fiction/story, drama, play, film, and novel) transmit cultural ideologies, beliefs, values, assumptions, behaviors, practices, and patterns of feeling. Short stories, according to Erkaya (2005), are effective when teaching culture to EFL students. Short stories transmit the culture of the people about whom the stories were written. By learning about the culture, students learn about the past and present, and about people's customs and traditions. Culture teaches students to understand and respect people's differences. Likewise, Henning (1993, p. 31) maintains that culture should be integrated into the curriculum and "literature is one feature... in the cultural domain that provides... added value beyond the level of language acquisition. Literature helps students to expand their "linguistic and cognitive skills, cultural knowledge and sensitivity" (quoted in Shanaham, 1997, p.165).

Pedagogical Supplement

According to Hismanoglu (2005), literature complements classroom learning materials in that literary texts and genres of literature deal with a large battery of topics, themes, or subject matters which are common to all human cultures despite their different ways of treatment-death, love, separation, belief, nature, the list is familiar. These experiences all happen to human beings.

Life Experience Broadening, Widening, and Sharpening

Perrine (2004, p.554) points out that novels, short stories, plays, and poems exist to bring us a sense and a perception of life, and to widen and sharpen our contacts with experience. Their concern is with experience. We all have an inner need to live more fully and deeply and with greater awareness to know the experience of others and to know better our own experience.

Higher-Order Thinking Ability Development

Erkaya (2005) maintains that of all the benefits of short stories, higher-order thinking is the most exciting one. High intermediate and advanced students can analyze what they read; therefore, they start thinking critically when read stories. Young (1996) also discusses the use of children's stories to introduce critical thinking to college students. He believes that "stories have two crucial advantages over traditional content: ... [First] because they are entertaining, students' pervasive apprehension is reduced, and they learn from the beginning that critical thinking is natural, familiar, and sometimes even fun. Second, the stories put issues of critical thinking in an easily remembered context." (p. 90). Howie (1993) agrees with the use of short stories to teach critical thinking. He affirms that instructors have the responsibility to help students to develop cognitive skills because everyone needs to "make judgments, be decisive, come to conclusions, synthesize information, organize, evaluate, predict, and apply knowledge." By reading and writing, students develop their critical thinking skills (p. 24). Students can gain insight into literature by gaining entrance to a world familiar or unfamiliar to them due to the cultural aspects of stories, and taking a voyage from the literary text to their own minds to find meanings for ideas, leading to critical thinking (Erkaya, 2005).

Motivation

As Erkaya (2005) put it, "Since short stories usually have a beginning, middle, and an end, they encourage students at all levels of language proficiency to continue reading them until the end to find out how the conflict is resolved". Elliot (1990) affirms that literature motivates advanced students and is "motivationally effective if students can genuinely engage with its thoughts and emotions and appreciate its aesthetic quality" (p. 197). He stresses the importance of developing student-response (individual and group levels) and competence in literature. In addition, one of the reasons Vandrick (1997) lists for using literature with students is that literature motivates students "to explore their feelings through experiencing those of others" (p. 1).

Globalization Phenomenon Demand

Labo-Popoola (2010) believes today, as a result of globalization, there has been an increasing need to interact at both official and unofficial levels. In particular, nationals of different countries have to move from one geographical region to another, needing a language of communication. In this case, some languages such as English, French, Spanish, German and Arabic have become what can be described as 'second language' in many communities of the world. In other words, they have become the language of communication, interaction, and relationship. For this reason, the languages mentioned above, need to be learnt if we must develop along with others. He adds that through literature, the learner achieves cultural assimilation or acculturation, language development and competence, conflict resolution, a good liberal education and development of desired and desirable attributes

Beauty and Splendor of Nature

Sivasubramaniam (2006) argues that through literature beauty and splendor of nature are enjoyed by the student (reader) and experiences that are not possible in real life situations are gone through imaginarily.

'How' of Literature Incorporation into ESL/EFL Curriculum

On the basis of the preceding section on the necessity, rationale, and instructional benefits of literature use, it becomes apparent that the teaching of a new culture triggers the idealization of a new language in the ESL/EFL classroom. Mere instruction of a new language without taking its culture into account is of little or no value from anthropologists' perspective. The next possibly giant step to be taken is to investigate the logistical procedures for incorporating fundamental aspects of the culture into the ongoing class activities. The proceduralization process is associated prominently with three issues of key importance- namely students, teacher, and instruction.

Students

The description of the influence students exert on the procedural aspects of the literature incorporation process is made below under four fundamental rubrics.

Reason Provision

Providing each and every student, even Limited Proficiency English (hereafter LPE) students, with cogent reasons for the 'why' aspect of literature use could promote learner motivation and learning effectiveness.

Needs Analysis

To conform to the premises of humanistic psychology first proposed by Carl Roger (1951) in an educational context, any literature-based curriculum/syllabus should not start operating independently of learner needs, interests, preferences, expectations, desires, likes, and dislikes. He added that this 'whole' person approach helps every single learner to understand the 'self and communicate the self' to others. In the case of the students' lack of intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation as a springboard for future learning of literary items should be drawn upon, for instilling intrinsic motivation could be a real challenge for the teacher.

Self-Awareness Programme

Consciousness-raising techniques and programmes should be adopted prior to, during, and after a course of study in order to sensitize the students to their strengths and weaknesses, learning styles and strategies, and their areas of difficulty with specific literature areas and/or teaching methodologies.

Selection and Gradation/Sequencing

We are of the opinion that literature incorporation should be preceded by considering learner variables like (1) affective variables (e.g. self-concept, attitude, perseverance, internal versus external locus of control, introversion versus extroversion, interests, and needs); (2) cognitive variables (e.g. background knowledge, cognitive style, learning skills, learning strategies, aptitude, and intelligence); (3) social variables (e.g. social context, a sense of belonging, language and culture shock); and (4) biological variables (e.g. sex, age).

Schulz (1981, p.44) made the argument that by selecting stories appropriate to students' level of language proficiency, instructors avoid "frustrational reading". Murdoch (2002) indicates that "short stories can, if selected and exploited appropriately, provide quality text content which will greatly enhance ELT courses for learners at intermediate levels of proficiency" (p.9). Chastain (1971, p.300) contends that one of the major hurdles to the successful implementation of culture goals in language classes revolves around attitudes. Before students can learn about culture, they must be receptive to the concept of learning about cultures other than their own. Often the teacher has to break down cultural barriers prior to initiating teaching-learning activities designed to accomplish culture goals. One way to begin teaching culture on a positive note is to emphasize similarities among people. From the beginning, the students can move to a discussion of differences among members of their family and among families, schools, and cultures. This approach stresses that similarities are present in all cultures and that differences in the expression of these similarities are natural. He goes on to mention three factors- namely the students' environment, the attitude of the teacher, and ethnocentrism. They are believed to exert a tremendous influence on students' receptivity to the learning of cultural concepts.

Rosenkjar (2007) highlights that the students will rely on word-for-word translation, which is not the way to develop language skills or literary appreciation in students. Therefore, literary texts have to be chosen in such a way that they would capture the interest of the reader (learner). The texts should lead the students to discover language features. They should be chosen to serve as a springboard for creative communicative post-reading activities. Conformity with Comprehensible Input Hypothesis first proposed by Krashen (1982, 1983) seems a must for the teacher at the selection and gradation level. The difficulty level of literary selections or items should be slightly above the students' current level of language proficiency and literature information. It should be borne in mind that determining $i + 1$ is a matter of teacher creativity and intuition due to the complexity of learner variables.

Teachers

In addition to learner variables, literature incorporation is complicated by a labyrinth of teacher variables including self-concept, interpersonal skills, and knowledge of subject, diligence, and standards.

Instruction

Chastain (1981: 120-131) presented some factors including instructional goals, current texts, course organization, analysis of students' needs, second language classroom processes, comprehensible input, output required, developing competence, practice, aptitude-treatment interaction, out-of-class and in-class learning, and machine-assisted instruction. They all seem to have implications for the literature classroom and exert some influence upon the use of literature in the EFL/ESL classroom settings.

'Where' of Literature Incorporation into ESL/EFL Curriculum

Contextual or situational factors could affect how crucial the cultural component is in language learning. To choose stories according to students' preferences, stories should have various themes because, as Akyeland and Yalcin (1990, p. 178) point out, "varieties of themes will offer different things to many individuals' interests and tastes." But the themes, as Widdowson (1983, p.32) put it, should be "consistent with the traditions that the learners are familiar with to avoid conflicts." A number of variables are presented and discussed at length below.

ESL versus EFL

The spread of English as an International Language (hereafter EIL) has indeed muddied the formerly clear waters that separated what we still refer to as ESL and EFL. Learning ESL- English within a culture where English is spoken natively- may be clearly defined in the case of, say, an Arabic speaker learning English in the USA or the UK, but not as easily identified where English is already an accepted or widely used language for education, government, or business within the country (for example, learning English in the Philippines or India). According to Nayar (1997) we need to add yet another ESL context, English in Scandinavia, where English has no official status but occupies such a high profile that virtually every educated person can communicate competently with native speakers of English. Learning EFL, that is, English in one's own culture with few immediate opportunities to use the language within the environment of that culture (for example, a Japanese learning English in Japan or English in Iran), may at first appear to be easy to define (Brown 2000).

Social Distance

The concept of social distance, as Brown (2000, p. 185) stated, emerged as an affective construct to give explanatory power to the place of culture learning in second language learning. Social distance refers to the cognitive and affective proximity of two cultures that come into contact within an individual. "Distance" is obviously used in a metaphorical sense to depict dissimilarity between two cultures. On a very superficial level one might observe, for example, that people from the United States are culturally similar to Canadians, while U.S. natives and Chinese are, by comparison, relatively dissimilar. We could say that the social distance of the latter case exceeds the former. Similarly, Schumann (1976) described social distance as consisting of the following parameters: (1) Dominance: In relation to the TL [target language] group, is the L2 [second language learning] group politically, culturally, technically or economically dominant, non-dominant, or subordinate? (2) Integration: Is the integration pattern of the L2 group assimilation, acculturation, or preservation? What is the L2 group's degree of enclosure-its identity separate from other contiguous groups?; (3) Cohesiveness: Is the L2 group cohesive? What is the size of the L2 group?; and (4) Congruence: Are the cultures of the two groups congruent-similar in their values and belief systems? What are the attitudes of the two groups towards each other? (p. 136).

Psychological Distance

Psychological distance is the result of various affective factors that concern the learner as an individual, such as resolution of language shock, culture shock, and culture stress, integrative versus instrumental motivation, and ego permeability (McLaughlin 1987, p. 110). "It is assumed that the more social and psychological distance there is between the second language learner and the target language group, the lower the learner's degree of acculturation will be toward that group. It is then predicted that the degree to which second language learners succeed in socially and psychologically adapting or acculturating to the target-language group will determine their level of success in learning the target language," says McLaughlin (ibid.).

Trends in the existing educational system

The following trends in the existing systems of education (i.e. institutes, language centers and clubs) could affect the existence and nature of literature inclusion.

Pluralism: Bilingualism and multilingualism is stimulated and developed.

Individualism: Self-pacing of learning is emphasized and prioritized; individual's needs are focused upon. Students, in general, Limited English Proficiency (LEP) students, in particular, are empowered, and LSP, ESP, EAP, and the like are designed.

Whole- Person Approaches: The cognitive affective and social aspects of human learning are prioritized.

Student-Centered Instruction: Students participate in governing the learning environment; they exhibit intrinsic motivation for their participatory role in such decision-making processes as curriculum/syllabus designing.

"What" to learn versus "How" to learn: Learning how to learn and think figures more prominently than what to learn.

Tuition Fee: There should be a balance between tuition fees and instruction quality.
Pre-and In-service Programmes, Teacher Training/Development Centers (TTC/TDC)
Self-Awareness Programmes, Learning Centers

The above-mentioned trends were all discussed by Chastain (1981). They all seem to influence the quality and efficacy of literature use in formal settings. Thus taken together, all of the variables mentioned and discussed above are indeed influential in the productivity level of a learning environment. ESL/EFL instruction and literature operate interactively and independently. As Chastain (1971) argues, "The concept of classroom climate deals with the social relationships that exist in the class. Although the primary course books are academic rather than social, learning takes place in a social situation. The classroom climate exerts an important influence on students' attitudes, interests, willingness to participate, and ultimately achievement" (p. 154).

'When' of Literature Incorporation into ESL/EFL Curriculum

The time period during which literature can be included with maximum results depends chiefly on the students' proficiency and competence level. There are no constraints on the time of the inclusion since not only are literary texts subject to modification and adaptation, but also learning tasks vary from one student or group of students at a similar level of language and literature competence to another student or group of students. As Erkaya (2005) confirms, "short stories allow instructors to teach the four skills to all levels of language proficiency. In a similar vein, Birchbichler and Muyskens (1980) divide literary analysis into three levels: (1) The engagement or involvement level at which students express their own feeling about any aspects of the reading; (2) The interpretation level at which students interpret a character's motives and predict what may happen; and (3) The evaluation level at which they judge the value and meaning of the work. For post-reading activities, they recommend ranking exercises, agree-disagree exercises, completion items, questions, and role playing. Also, Mead (1980) promotes an approach in which the teacher divides the students into small groups for discussion. Each student writes a sentence about the reading selection and justifies what he has said. Finally, the teacher serves as discussion leader for the entire class as they comment about important aspects of the reading.

Literary Competence

The proper use of literary texts in TEFL/TESL programmes promotes the students' literature information or literary competence. It is an all-encompassing and overarching term under which morphological, lexical, phonological, syntactic, semantic, pragmatic and discourse, stylistic, and sociolinguistic/sociocultural knowledge is subsumed. "Literature helps students acquire a native like competence in language, 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" (Odiat, 1997, p.32).

According to Hismanoglu (2005), in translation courses, many language teachers make their students translate literary texts like drama, poetry, and short stories into their mother tongue, Turkish. Since translation gives students the chance to practice 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. Furthermore, 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 speech styles). The language used changes from one person 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, idiolect, etc. it develops their sociolinguistic competence in the target language.

Collie and Slater (1990, pp.6-7) asserted that, "Reading a literary text is more likely to have a long term and valuable effect upon the learner's linguistic and extra linguistic knowledge when it is meaningful and amusing." In similar vein, Hismanoglu (2005) claims that 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 reading. Poetry paves the way for providing readers with a different view point towards language use by going beyond the known usages and rules of grammar, syntax, and vocabulary (Sarac 2003). As Cubaku (2001, p.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 language such as stress, pitch, juncture, intonation by studying poetry. 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 (Hismanoglu, 2005). Oster (1989) affirms that literature helps students to write more creatively (p. 85). Instructors can create a variety of writing activities to help students develop their writing skills. They can ask students to write dialogues (Murdoch, 2002, p.9) or more complex writing activities if students have reached a high level of language proficiency. In addition, 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 texts at a university in Hong Kong. The group who read literary texts showed improvement in vocabulary and reading.

Literature Instruction Assessment Process

This section addresses the last but most important element of the learning process, that is, assessment. This phase appears after course goals are set and learning materials and activities are graded/sequenced. Chastain (1971, p.378) argues that, "An effective goal-oriented teaching-learning sequence contains clearly understood objectives, productive classroom activities, and a sufficient amount of feedback to make students aware of the strengths and weaknesses of their performance." The classroom teacher can evaluate the students' performance both formally (i.e. on the basis of a formal, standardized test) and informally. Also they can assess the students' literature achievements dynamically and constantly. Under such a circumstance, the validity and reliability of teacher evaluation and measurement is increased to a larger extent. Furthermore, dynamic assessment better reflects the developmental nature of the foreign or second literature learning process. Evaluation and testing is also of great and equal benefit to the teacher. In effect, it serves as a learning device by which the teacher and students become aware of their performance in the curriculum. 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 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 discussion of each novel event should comprise the main idea and supporting details including who, what, when, where, how. Details of various social issues such as sexual harassment and abortion, which are often an integral part of the plot, can

provoke interesting debate. Discussions can also facilitate vocabulary development (Helton, Asamani, & Thomas, 1998: 1-5).

Conclusion

On careful examination of a multitude of works and contributions to widening, broadening, and expanding the scope of the related literature, it is concluded that the idea of integrating and using literary texts and genres of literature seems to be fully supported and justified by a rich variety of theoretically robust principles. To successfully attain the goal, the teacher should be acutely aware of the reasons and justifications (i.e. the 'why' aspect), appropriate procedures (i.e. the 'how') contextual/situational factors (i.e. the 'where'), and temporal considerations (i.e. the 'when'). Taking into account this intricate web of factors leads to the successful implementation and use of different genres of literature (i.e. poetry, short fiction, story, novel, drama), thereby promoting learning and teaching effectiveness, reaping a host of pedagogical benefits for both the teacher and students, enriching their awareness of life, and enhancing literary competence as a generic term consisting of knowledge of morphology, lexis, phonology, syntax, semantics, pragmatics, discourse, stylistics, and sociolinguistics. In order for the teacher or curriculum/syllabus designer (s) to gain some understanding of the efficacy of the inclusion practice, testing, measuring, assessing, and evaluating techniques are required to act as a learning device for the teacher as well as students by shedding light on their strengths and weaknesses. Although little or no doubt can be cast on the act of introducing literature into the TESL/TEFL courses, it is not without its flaws. Chastain (1971, pp. 316-317) delineates them as follows:

The number one problem is how to provide the culture information to teach culture. Another major problem is how to devise ways of presenting culture in such a way that the students can comprehend and relate to the information. Learning experts say that students must be able to relate to course content. Another problem is that of finding time in the class period to include culture.

One danger in teaching cultures is that teachers may attempt to teach culture when they do not have the knowledge or expertise to do so. Such attempts may do more harm than good. If the second culture is presented in such a way that false impression arises, the alternative of no culture is preferable. The second danger is the amount of work done in the first language in many classes in which the teacher stresses culture. While few second-language educators would currently recommend banning the first language from the class, work done entirely in the first language obviously doesn't lead to second language communication skills. The third danger is that the culture content selected for the class may concentrate on the unusual, the bizarre, and the esoteric to the exclusion of the basic characteristics of the culture. Cultural activities should not be turned into some sort of circus freak show. Stevick (1976) cautioned that learners can feel alienation in the process of learning a second language, alienation from the people in their home culture, the target culture, and from themselves. In teaching an alien language, we need to be sensitive to the fragility of the students by using techniques that promote cultural understanding.

To overcome such pedagogical problems and dangers, some prerequisite steps are suggested by the authors. Firstly, the teacher ought to experience living in the country whose language and culture is to be taught and learned. The longer the time period, the more culture knowledge and first-hand experience is gained, and the more effective the teaching and learning processes will be. An alternative to this solution is for the teacher to teach in collaboration with a culture expert who is specialized in how to teach culture successfully. Therefore, the teacher will be equipped enough with some modes of presenting culture in the classroom. It should be noted that all learner variables and contextual factors should be considered first.

Secondly, curriculum designers should not overemphasize language knowledge to the exclusion of culture learning. That language learning and culture learning always go hand-in-hand should be disseminated to all stakeholders including the teacher, students and their parents, and even textbook writers. Textbook writers and learning materials designers should become aware of the key importance of

culture knowledge and should be encouraged to design materials which are pedagogically appropriate and applicable.

Thirdly, pre- and in-service programmes should be administered in TTCs/TDCs for the purpose of expanding and sharpening teachers' knowledge of a new culture and making them well prepared to manage classroom culture teaching and surmount pedagogical problems like allocating an appropriate amount of time to culture teaching so that neither culture learning nor L2 communication skills are ignored.

Fourthly, discovery-learning technique should be prioritized throughout the course of study. Ample opportunities should be provided for students to help them discover some information about the new culture. The very benefit of this teaching technique is that little or no culture knowledge is imposed and stereotypic perceptions are avoided.

Fifthly, the teacher should make judicious use of the students' native language. That is, the new culture should be explained in the target language so as to develop both culture knowledge and L2 linguistic knowledge and communicative skills. But in the case of some quite inexplicable or non-easily understandable cultural content, the students L1 can be used to help them capture its essence. An alternative to this approach is to use audio-visual learning materials.

Sixthly, the teacher ought to consult a native speaker of the target language, preferably an educated one, in order to gain some knowledge of different characteristics of the new culture so that the basic characteristics rather than the unusual, bizarre, and esoteric ones are selected course content.

Finally, any curriculum should be based on Needs Analysis. When students' likes and dislikes are analyzed, the teacher becomes sensitized to learner fragility or sensitivity. Consequently, students probably won't feel alienated in the process of learning an alien language. The selection of teaching materials, techniques, and activities is dependent on the Needs Analysis. They should be geared toward culture objectives. Needs Analysis helps students easily relate new culture information to their existing information in the cognitive system. Therefore meaningful learning occurs.

Robinson-Stuart and Nocon (1996, p. 432) suggested that, "Language learners undergo culture learning as a process, that is, as a way of perceiving, interpreting, feeling, being in the world... and relating to where one is and who one meets." As Brown (2000) puts it differently, "Culture learning is a process of creating shared meaning between cultural representatives. It is experiential; a process that continues over years of language learning, and penetrates deeply into ones' patterns of thinking, feeling, and acting (p.182).

Culture in a second or foreign language curriculum should not be presented as a list of facts to be memorized by the students. The stress on "small c culture" is a comparatively recent innovation (Chastain, 1971, p. 317). This culture type is alleged to be involving. That is, the reader inhabits the small culture-oriented literary texts. It should be noted that although they are involving, they should be complemented by time-on tasks. Chastain (ibid. p. 155) avers that time-on tasks studies reveal that during a significant portion of the class hour, students are often not involved in learning. They may take several minutes to calm down after the break between classes and to get involved in the activities of the new class. They may be slow to move from one activity to another or quick to entice the teacher onto a non-productive tangent. They may even expect a few minutes prior to the end of the period to get ready to go to their next class. The teachers' responsibility is to minimize these delays, distractions, and interruptions and to maximize the time spent on learning.

To conclude, the quality of teaching culture could shape and impact the quality of language teaching as a whole. To create a beautiful picture of ELT, the language teacher should work in dialogue with anthropologists, sociologists, pedagogical researchers, action researchers, learning experts, culture experts, psychologists, neurologists, sociolinguists, and other experts prior to, during, and after the course of dealing with the three elements of the language learning process: (1) To set language and culture objectives; (2) To design, select, and sequence teaching-learning materials, resources, activities, and techniques; and (3) To evaluate and measure culture learning and teaching effectiveness.

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