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Power Of Language: Poetry in English Language Teaching

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ÖZET

İngilizce dil öğretimi, dünyadaki dil öğretmenleri ve dil öğrenenlerinin en önemli kaygısı olarak kabul edilmektedir. Bu mesleğin temel amacı etkili bir mesleki uygulama geliştirmek ve bir dil öğrenme sürecinde karşılaşılan sorunlara çözümler bulmaktır. Bu nedenle İngilizce dil öğretmenleri, özellikle şiir gibi edebi eserleri, dil sınıflarında öğretirken kullanırlar, çünkü edebiyat, özellikle de şiir, yazarın kültüründe görülen düşünceleri, duyguları ve eylemleri yansıtarak dil öğretiminde değerli bir materyal olarak işlev görür. Aslında, şiir, öğrencilerin eleştirel düşüncelerini zenginleştirir ve bu da 21. yüzyıl becerileri çerçevesini büyük ölçüde destekler. Bu nedenle, bu çalışma, İngilizce öğretiminde edebiyatın bir parçası olarak şiirin kullanımını tanımlamayı, edebiyatın kısa tarihsel bir genel bakışını sunmayı, neden edebiyatın bir parçası olarak şiirin dil becerilerini geliştirmek için önemli bir kaynak olduğunu vurgulamayı, şiirin eğitimsel faydalarını sorgulamayı ve özellikle İngilizce dil öğretmenlerinin sınıflarında şiiri etkili bir şekilde nasıl kullanabileceklerini belirtmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Son olarak, şiir, birçok bağlam ve kültürle etkileşim kurmanın doğru bir yoludur ve bu, tüm dil öğretmenleri ve öğrencileri için güçlü bir araç olabilir. Bu çalışmada öğretmenlere yönelik bazı önerilerde bulunulmuştur. Daha ileri çalışmalar için, öğrencilerin edebi unsurlarla ilgili bakış açılarına dair daha sistemli çalışmalara ihtiyaç vardır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Edebiyat, Şiir, İngilizce Dil Öğretimi, Kültür, Eleştirel Düşünme

ABSTRACT

English language teaching is the most important concern of language teachers as well as language learners in the world. The main goal of this profession is to build effective professional practice and to find out the answers to the problems that the learners meet through learning a language. Therefore, English language teachers use literature when teaching English, since literature, particularly poetry, reflects thoughts, feelings, and actions seen in the writer's culture as a great teaching material in the language classes. In fact, poetry enriches the students' critical thinking, which highly promotes the framework of 21st century skills. Therefore, this study aims to define the use of poetry as a part of literature in ELT, to present a brief historical overview of literature, to emphasize why poetry as a part of literature is an important source of developing language skills, to question in what ways poetry offers educational benefits, and to point out how poetry can be used through learning process especially for English language teachers to effectively use poetry in their classes. Finally, poetry is a great way of interaction with numerous contexts and cultures which could be a powerful tool for all language teachers and learners. Some suggestions for teachers have also been made in this study. For further studies, more systematic studies on the students' perspectives regarding literary components are required.

Keywords: Literature, Poetry, English Language Teaching, Culture, Critical Thinking

INTRODUCTION

English, known as *the world's lingua franca* or a *global language*, plays a significant role all over the world as a way of global communication for the human beings that desire to connect to each other. As Held, McGrew, Goldblatt and Perraton (1999) state, the basic definition of globalization is the way of spreading, intensifying, and acceleration of global interconnectivity in all spheres of modern social life.

Crystal (2003) explains that in more than 100 nations, including China, Russia, Germany, Spain, Egypt, and Brazil, English is now the language that is most frequently taught as a foreign language. In most of these nations, English is also replacing other languages as the most common foreign language to be encountered in schools.

English is a notable language that has spread throughout the world, which is always in the first rank in world affairs and known as an international language. Therefore, English language teaching (ELT) has become vital to help the learners gain the ability to use both spoken and written English effectively and manage to communicate with other people in various settings and situations, since the ultimate objective for ELT is to promote learners to associate with other people from different groups or communities.

In ELT classes, there are various activities that encompass a spectrum of possibilities to be able to communicate in the target language presented by language teachers. The use of literature in language instruction is highlighted by the instructors as the most effective and genuine usage of the target language, and they suggest that it is an intriguing and worthwhile topic to address (Sage, 1987). Among many other genres of literature used in ELT, poetry is the main way for teaching and learning of language skills.

Research Questions

Specifically, this study has addressed to find out the answer to the following research question:
How can poetry be used through English language teaching process?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Brief History of English Literature

ELT has experienced a progression of verifiable periods, so language teachers have been trying to implement different principles promoted by linguists, researchers and teachers as well as material designers.

From the 1950s to mid-1980s, English language education was ruled by discourses that developed realistic ways to deal with language, where explicit useful and functional purposes were great interests. Linguistics was the main focus of the language programs (Widdowson, 1982). Lack of creativity and literature in a linguistic setting was a problem with the proposed curricula. The Grammar Translation Method made extensive use of literature, and only grammar and vocabulary were taught using literary texts via this method to illustrate the grammatical rules (Duff & Maley, 1990).

English literature was first introduced to the Sri Lankan context during colonial period by the British. Particularly elite people or the royal family members had the chance to get English education and were able to read the masterpieces of English literature. When the Grammar Translation Method lost its popularity and was regarded as inefficient in teaching languages, the use of literature in the language classroom to understand the translation of Classic texts eliminated. In fact, literature was eliminated from the language-learning curricula (Carter, 2007).

However, at the end of 1980s, the basic content knowledge and skills became important and language students agreed on the lack of these premises (Stern, 1985). In addition, the students were then willing to practice language skills through a genre of literature, poetry. Literature began to be considered as a good source for language development (Hall, 2005), and literary texts were applied to reach language learning aims. Language teachers were always skeptical about the reason why such a rich source of language input was disregarded (Lima, 2005). Maley (1987) points out that the literature is written in a language that is currently in use, it may be used to practice that language. Nowadays, further research is being done to find out the positive outcomes of the use of literature in various ELT teaching areas. The effectiveness of the interaction between language learners and the literature of the target languages is therefore the subject of much research (Kramsch, 2014).

The Importance of Literature in Foreign Language Learning

ELT makes extensive use of literature to teach fundamental language skills. Lazar (1993) strongly supports the use of literature and claims that it helps students grasp concepts and improve their linguistic and cognitive abilities. Also, Collie and Slater (2007) claim the need for using literature and expresses that literature may offset the more fragmented effect of many collections of texts used in the classroom by providing material with some emotional color that can make greater touch with the learner's personal life. As Brumfit (2001) points out, the teaching of literature offers various benefits and the most valuable is to let the students define themselves “through contact with others’ experience”.

Kramsch (2000) highlights the place of literature and states that literature is an opportunity to develop vocabulary acquisition, the development of reading strategies, and the training of critical thinking. As asserted by Maley (1989), literature offers various language types and different subject matters. The students are therefore exposed to genuine language, which increases their familiarity with the target linguistic forms and communicative functions and broadens their language awareness of a variety of styles, text kinds, and genres. Additionally, literature might be considered an appropriate source for a variety of exercises to improve four skills (Belcher & Hirvela, 1999; Erkaya, 2005; Nasr, 2001). Working with literary texts, the learners are actively involved in finding out the uncertain implications and assumptions in the text, which also encourages the students to infer the meaning, and to develop their interpretative abilities. As a result of being inspired, the students start interacting with the text, their classmates, and the teacher (Widdowson, 1982). According to authentic and meaningful circumstances, which authentic and meaningful contexts supply, the literary texts' suitability to the learners' exploring wills is connected to the motivating criteria (Van, 2009; Ghosn, 2002).

The culture and customs of the target language are accessible to students through literary materials including novels, plays, short stories, poetry, and other works of literary texts. These written or oral materials are also valuable in that they serve as conduits for the conveyance of emotions, thoughts, and, most significantly, the cultural nuances inherent in the language from which they originate (Delibaş & Delibaş, 2017). Therefore, the students may develop a deep understanding of the social, political, historical, or cultural events occurring in a particular society (Floris, 2004).

Literature, according to Langer (1997), opens up possibilities for students, enabling them to inquire, understand, relate, and discover. It also encourages learners to reflect on their own lives and the world around them. Ghosn (2002) asserts that literature has the power to alter people's perspectives on the world.

In a nutshell, literature is a spectacular way for teaching students how to use the linguistic knowledge of sociolinguistics and pragmatics appropriately, as well as how to acquire communicative competence (McKay, 2001). Literature has been a great concern in language instruction thanks to all the benefits mentioned above.

Poetry in English Language Teaching

Poets, authors, and philosophers have all explored the topic of what poetry is through the centuries. Several poets have provided a few definitions of poetry. Here are some of these:

“Poetry: the best words in the best order.” (Samuel Taylor Coleridge)

“Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality.” (T.S. Eliot)

As seen from these different definitions, there are quite different points of view what actually poetry is. Most poetry is written with the aim of being read by other people, and so it conveys “a public voice”. As the work of poetry is a personal way, it is possible that each person will have a different response to a particular poem. Poetry elicits a unique response from each reader because various people's minds may be activated in different ways by the same words and imagery.

There are certain features of poetry, and these are the important components that create the whole effect of a poem: Form, tone, mood, imagery, rhythm, rhyme, voice and content. These aspects of poem present the answers to the basic questions below while working on the poems:

- i) What is this poem about?
- ii) How is it written?
- iii) Why has the poet selected this way of writing the poem?

When these questions are answered, the different meanings might be interpreted by the readers. Poetry is a way of representing feelings and ideas aesthetically. According to Melin (2010), teaching poetry is a reading-aesthetic endeavor where sound is the primary means of meaning communication. Poetry helps students discover sounds, phonetics, and phonology of a target language and draws their attention to certain features of a language, such as sounds, as well as functions and patterns. As Maley & Moulding (1985) stated, small parts could be remembered. For instance, so many people could have learnt a few verses by heart from William Shakespeare:

“To be or not to be
That is the question”.

However, poetry is regarded as the most difficult genre of literary texts and the use of poetry in foreign language teaching with old writing and expressions is difficult to defend. One of these poems “Apsolom & Achitophel” from the poet, Dryden, might be this:

A fiery soul, which, working out its way,
Fretted the pigmy body to decay;
And o'er-informed the tenement of clay.

As the poet, Dryden, did not write this poem regarding the language readers, Lazar (1989) claims that students can identify linguistic deviations in the poem, reinforce the grammatical rules of the target language by reflecting on the author's word choices, and improve their language abilities by talking about the reasons behind the author's word choices. Poems have historically been used as a teaching tool to avoid monotony in lessons because of this.

Educational Benefits of Poetry

The most obvious connection to learning may be achieved through poetry. For language learners, poetry has numerous educational benefits. These are as follows:

- i) Poetry is often short, so it provides different opportunities and creative activities to use in a class hour as seen in Larkin's poem:

Days

What are days for?

Days are where we live

They come, they wake us

Time and time over.

They are to be happy in:

Where can we live but days?

Ah, solving that question

Brings the priest and the doctor

In their long coats

Running over the fields.

As shown from this poem, poetry develops imaginative thinking and encourages students to employ certain interpretive skills while reading, such as guessing on the symbolic significance of certain words rather than concentrating on their literal meaning.

Love, death and other universal themes and experiences could be presented via poetry as presented by Maley:

When I am old

When I am old and gray

And full of death,

Caress me still,

And with your breath

Assure me that I live . . .

- ii) Poetry proves that language is not as rigidly governed by rules as it is thought.

The Octopus

Tell me o Octopus, I begs

Is those things arms or is they legs.

Rhyming and rhythm are two aspects of poetry that make it interesting to read. From the poem below, it can be concluded that studying poetry helps students get familiar with vocalic elements like stress, pitch, and intonation in the target language. Reading poetry exercises lets students become more conscious of phonetic and linguistic elements. Additionally, it demonstrates how to pronounce the words:

The Pronunciation Poem

Here is some pronunciation.

Ration never rhymes with nation,

Say prefer, but preferable,
Comfortable and vegetable.
B must not be heard in doubt,
Debt and dumb both leave it out.
In the words psychology,
Psychic, and psychiatry,
You must never sound the p.
Psychiatrist you call the man
Who cures the complex, if he can.
In architect, chi is k.
In arch it is the other way.

- ii) Poetry develops sensitivity for words and discoveries that may enhance a deeper concern and greater analytical ability.

40-Love

middle	aged
couple	playing
ten	nis
when	the
game	ends
and	they
go	home
the	net
will	still
be	be
tween	them

This poem represents emotional gap between a middle-aged couple and seems like a tennis match between them. The number in tennis is counted as 15, 30, 40 and the like and called as “love”.

iv) Poetry introduces pupils to literary devices that are used often in everyday language, such as personification, metaphor, and simile.

The snow fell softly all the night
It made a blanket soft and white...

v) Poetry develops oral and written language skills presenting sentence patterns as exemplified in Holmes and Moulton’s work (2001). For instance, in their work, imaginary sound is stated with the line " I hear the voices of characters talking as I read" or two special characteristics are shown with the line “I am studious girl who loves to read”.

vi) Poetry may provide students access to the culture of the speakers of the target language they are learning. An example is in John Donne's poem emphasizing Seven Sleepers with the lines:

“Or snorted we in the Seven Sleepers’ den?
’Twas so; but this, all pleasures fancies be”

The Use of Poetry Through Learning Process

Maley and Duff (1989), Lazar (1993), and Collie and Slater (1987) suggest various activities to motivate the learners using poetry in learning process. Additionally, Collie and Slater (1987) emphasize the importance of ‘warm-up activities’ to draw attention of the learners to poetry. There are different models that might be implemented in a learning process:

- i) Cultural Model,
- ii) Language Model,
- iii) Personal Growth Model,
- iv) Mixed Model.

When these models have been used integratively depending on the students, poetry becomes one of the most effective literary texts. There are many suggestions for the teachers when working with poetry:

- i) The verses in the poem could be changed and asked the students to put them into the correct line.
- ii) The poem could be turned into a prose, a dialogue or daily language structures.
- iii) The words used in the poem could be discussed as a whole class.
- iv) The last verse of the poem could be changed.
- v) Alternative titles could be thought and suggested.
- vi) The theme of the poem could be related to personal experience.
- vii) The cultural effects or motives could be discussed, and they could be compared to the readers’ own cultures.
- viii) The forms, structures, phonological aspects of the poem could be worked on.
- ix) The words in the poem could be matched with the meanings, pictures, or figures.

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE STUDY

The current study has centered on the examination of literature and poetry's role in teaching foreign languages mainly in ELT and has emphasized how much importance literature and poetry play in language teaching. Not just in many non-English speaking nations, but also in the motherland of English, literature is a significant component of English curricula. According to Obediat (1997), literature aids students in acquiring proficiency in English, effectively expressing their ideas, learning the nuances of modern English, gaining an understanding of how English is used in communication, speaking clearly, precisely, and concisely, as well as developing their analytical, creative, and critical thinking skills. Literature is not only advantageous for developing the written and spoken language proficiency of the students in the target language but also understanding the culture of the target language, which enhances the cultural competence levels of students as “a crucial part of language learning lies in making it meaningful experience for learners” (Delibaş, 2023, p. 53). Therefore, through poetry, students may develop their English language skills and utilize the language more eloquently.

Overall, it is obvious that literature contributes to English language development of the learners since a variety of methods regarding the promotion of the educational process, and poetry encompasses different methods, providing significant positive impact on the advancement of English proficiency of the students.

For future studies, more systematic studies on the students' perspectives and the evaluation of various language courses based on literary components are required as it is undeniable that literature has a lot to offer language learners as a stimulating drive for language learning and instruction.

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