



THE USE OF LITERATURE IN LANGUAGE TEACHING

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Abstract

Focusing on linguistic elements only does not help language learners communicate fluently in the target language. However, the use of literary texts provides an authentic model for learners that supports their language enrichment. Unlike informational materials literary texts stimulate the language acquisition process. The inclusion of literature in language teaching has been considered advantageous in language learning because it advances learners' competence in all language skills. This study investigated the benefits of using literature in language teaching and found that literature in language teaching is a perfect opportunity to sharpen language awareness.

Keywords: Literature, Literary Texts, Language Learning, Integrating Language and Literature.

INTRODUCTION

A great number of studies highlight the supporting role of literature in foreign language teaching (Kim, 2004; Belcher & Hirvela, 2000; Hanauer, 2001; Sage, 1987). The place of literature in EFL curriculum has been gaining momentum because literature provides valuable authentic materials in which learners are exposed to real life language samples. Language learners when encountered with literature in language learning become familiar with communicative functions and linguistic elements of the target language. Learners deal with how language is used in real life settings and focuses on the interactions which take place between people in these literary texts thus when literature is incorporated in language teaching language learners develop their communicative competence. Furthermore, the use of literature helps learners with cultural enrichment and personal growth (Collie & Slater, 1991; Carter & Long, 1991).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Since the nineteenth century when the grammar-translation method was dominant in language instruction literature has role in the teaching and learning of language. Though the role of literature in the language classroom declined in the 1950s and 1960s, its significance increased in the 1970s and 1980s. Literature has been considered as a valuable resource in language instruction and its inclusion in language teaching provides language learners various benefits.

- a) Literature improves linguistic knowledge of learners; Literature extends linguistic knowledge of learners because learners read texts in which they study a wide range of vocabulary and grammatical structures. Spack (1985) argues that "it is in literature that the resources of the language are most fully and skillfully used" (p.705). The use of literature is a good opportunity for language enrichment.
- b) Literature provides meaningful input; Pugh (1989) states that literature is "a potentially rich source of meaningful input outside the classroom" (p.320). Sufficient amount of comprehensible input enable learners to develop their language proficiency and become competent language users.
- c) Literature increases language awareness; the integration of literature and language is a perfect opportunity to sharpen language awareness (Wales, 1990). Literary encounter allows learners to become aware of how words are linked with each other meaningfully, simply put learners see how vocabulary and structures are connected in sentences.
- d) Literature provides authentic materials; encounter with literature in language learning provides learners with authentic materials in which learners can foster their linguistic accuracy. Moreover, these authentic materials offer learners real examples so that learners can master the language efficiently and effectively.
- e) Literature enhances communicative competence; literature can motivate and stimulate learners for language learning (Holten, 1997; Kaplan, 2000). Literature can promote communication in the language classroom. Collie and Slater (1987) argue that language and literature is integrated "to let the student

derive the benefits of communicative and other activities for language improvement within the context of suitable works of literature” (p.10). Literature allows learners to see how characters interact with each other and how language can be used for different communicative functions; furthermore, when learners are engaged in literature discussions they practice the language in meaningful interaction.

- f) Literature promotes understanding of the target culture; literature is an ideal vehicle to portray culture so people increase their understanding of others who are different from themselves through literature thus people develop tolerance for other cultures (McKay, 1987).
- g) Literature develops interpretive skill; interpretive skill is important in the process of language learning because learners draw inferences from the text during classroom activities. Learners try to construct meaning and understand the text and they develop interpretation skills.
- h) Literature helps social development; literature includes universal themes so it provides learners with insights about the world issues. Learners develop their personal opinions and experiences by literary encounter.

Research Questions

This study has tried to explore the following questions:

- 1) Does the use of literature in language teaching sharpen language awareness of learners?
- 2) Does literature provide a learning environment in the language classroom in which learners can promote their communicative competence?
- 3) Does literature develop interpretive skill of learners which facilitate their comprehension of language materials?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Design of the Study

This study explored the benefits of using literature in language teaching and investigated whether inclusion of literature in language teaching enhance language development of learners. This study applies descriptive research method which describes a situation using the collected data without determining cause and effect. Questions were written and clear to understand. Participants answered the questions and their responses were described.

Participants

Sample participants in this study were English language department students (N=75) at Ishik University in Iraq. Students have literature courses in their fourth year so all senior students at the department participated the study. Questionnaires were filled in by students in the classroom.

Data Collection

In survey method research many researchers prefer a Likert-type scale and in this study the researcher used a five point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The collected data has been analyzed through SPSS. Students have literature courses as well and a survey was carried out among 75 students. The researcher used a five point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The collected data was entered into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) and analyzed using simple frequency distributions.

Table 1: Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.831	8

In this study the alpha coefficient for the eight items is .831, suggesting that the items have relatively high internal consistency. In most social science research situations a reliability coefficient of .70 is acceptable.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Motivate_Stimulate	75	3	5	4.24	.612
Authentic_Materials	75	3	5	4.13	.600
Linguistic_Knowledge	75	3	5	4.24	.541
Competence_in_all_Skills	75	3	5	4.25	.617
Language_Awareness	75	3	5	4.16	.594
Culture_Interpret_Discourse	75	2	5	3.85	.630
Intellectual_Development	75	2	5	3.81	.630
Meaningful_Input	75	2	5	4.21	.664
Valid N (listwise)	75				

Table 2 shows the specific results for each variable that was entered into the analysis.

Table 3: Literature motivates and stimulates learners for language learning Motivate_Stimulate

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Ambivalent	7	9.3	9.3	9.3
Valid Agree	43	57.3	57.3	66.7
Valid Strongly Agree	25	33.3	33.3	100.0
Valid Total	75	100.0	100.0	

The "Valid Percent" column is used in deterring the frequency distribution. In this case 33.3 % strongly agree and 57.3 % agree that literature motivates and stimulates learners for language learning. A total of 90.6 % of the participants agree that literature has a motivating factor in language learning. Clearly there is a greater number of strongly agree and agree than ambivalent.

Table 4: Literary texts provide authentic materials which are valuable to language learning

Authentic_Materials

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Ambivalent	9	12.0	12.0	12.0
Valid Agree	47	62.7	62.7	74.7
Valid Strongly Agree	19	25.3	25.3	100.0
Valid Total	75	100.0	100.0	

25.3 % strongly agree and 62.7 % agree that literature provides authentic materials which are valuable to language learning. A total of 88.0 % of the participants agree that literature provides authentic materials which allow learners to foster their linguistic accuracy and language awareness. Clearly there is a greater number of strongly agree and agree than ambivalent.

Table 5: Literary texts improves linguistic knowledge of learners

Linguistic_Knowledge

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Ambivalent	4	5.3	5.3	5.3
Valid Agree	49	65.3	65.3	70.7
Valid Strongly Agree	22	29.3	29.3	100.0
Valid Total	75	100.0	100.0	

29.3 % strongly agree and 65.3 % agree that literature improves linguistic knowledge of learners. A total of 94.6 % of the participants agree that literature is a useful resource in which language is most fully and skillfully used. Clearly there is a greater number of strongly agree and agree than ambivalent.

Table 6: Literary texts advance competence of learners in all skills

Competence_in_all_Skills

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Ambivalent	7	9.3	9.3
	Agree	42	56.0	65.3
	Strongly Agree	26	34.7	100.0
	Total	75	100.0	100.0

34.7 % strongly agree and 56.0 % agree that literature advances competence of all learners in all skills. A total of 90.7 % of the participants agree that literature helps learners with development of language skills. Clearly there is a greater number of strongly agree and agree than ambivalent.

Table 7: Literary texts raise language awareness of learners

Language_Awareness

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Ambivalent	8	10.7	10.7
	Agree	47	62.7	73.3
	Strongly Agree	20	26.7	100.0
	Total	75	100.0	100.0

26.7 % strongly agree and 62.7 % agree that literature raises language awareness of learners. A total of 89.4 % of the participants agree that literature sharpens their language awareness through allowing them how words and rules are linked with each other in a meaningful way in sentences. Clearly there is a greater number of strongly agree and agree than ambivalent.

Table 8: Literary texts provide cultural information which fosters ability of learners to interpret discourse in social contexts

Culture_Interpret_Discourse

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Disagree	2	2.7	2.7
	Ambivalent	15	20.0	22.7
	Agree	50	66.7	89.3
	Strongly Agree	8	10.7	100.0
	Total	75	100.0	100.0

10.7 % strongly agree and 66.7 % agree that literature provides cultural information which fosters ability of learners to interpret discourse in social contexts. A total of 77.4 % of the participants agree that literature promotes understanding of the target culture. Clearly there is a greater number of strongly agree and agree than ambivalent and disagree.

Table 9: Literature develops personal growth and intellectual development of learners

Intellectual_Development

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Disagree	5	6.7	6.7	6.7
Ambivalent	8	10.7	10.7	17.3
Valid Agree	58	77.3	77.3	94.7
Strongly Agree	4	5.3	5.3	100.0
Total	75	100.0	100.0	

5.3 % strongly agree and 77.3 % agree that literature develops personal growth and intellectual development of learners. A total of 82.6 % highlight the role of literature in intellectual development and personal growth. Clearly there is a greater number of strongly agree and agree than ambivalent and disagree.

Table 10: Literature provides meaningful input

Meaningful_Input

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Disagree	2	2.7	2.7	2.7
Ambivalent	4	5.3	5.3	8.0
Valid Agree	45	60.0	60.0	68.0
Strongly Agree	24	32.0	32.0	100.0
Total	75	100.0	100.0	

32.0 % strongly agree and 60.0 % agree that literature provides meaningful input. A total of 92 % of the participants agree that literature develops language proficiency of learners via meaningful input. Clearly there is a greater number of strongly agree and agree than ambivalent and disagree.

Table 11: ANOVA^a

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1 Regression	14.724	3	4.908	19.509	.000 ^b
Residual	17.862	71	.252		
Total	32.587	74			

a. Dependent Variable: Meaningful_Input

b. Predictors: (Constant), Language_Awareness, Competence_in_all_Skills, Linguistic_Knowledge

In table 11 Sig < .01, then the model is significant at 99%.

Table 12: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.672 ^a	.452	.429	.502

a. Predictors: (Constant), Language_Awareness, Competence_in_all_Skills, Linguistic_Knowledge

In table 12, the variables language awareness, competence in all skills, and linguistic knowledge were used. The dependent variable is meaningful input. There are two important numbers in table 12; R and R square. The R number is the combined effect of all the independent variables on the dependent variable and in this study there is a positive association between meaningful input and language awareness, competence in all skills and

linguistic knowledge. The R Square shows that these three variables explain 45.2 % percent of the variance in the dependent variable.

Table 13: Coefficients^a

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	.078	.546		.143	.887
Linguistic_Knowledge	.447	.125	.365	3.580	.001
Competence_in_all_Skills	.199	.108	.185	1.836	.071
Language_Awareness	.335	.113	.300	2.968	.004

a. Dependent Variable: Meaningful_Input

Table 13 shows how much influence independent variable exerts on dependent variable. The numbers under Standardized Coefficients, Beta are important. The higher the number is the more influence it has on the dependent variable. In this study linguistic knowledge is more important than language awareness, but competence in all skills is not as important as the other numbers. We can conclude that the impact of literature as meaningful input on linguistic knowledge and language awareness is more than competence in all skills. The significance level for two variables is between .000 and .050 which means there is a significant relationship between the variables. Although the significant level for the other variables is less than .1 (if Sig <.1, the model is significant at 90%) a relationship could be found.

CONCLUSION

The inclusion of literature in language teaching is a good opportunity for language enrichment. Learners can develop their linguistic knowledge, language skills, and language awareness in literary texts. Learners in literary texts see how words and structures function in sentences. Learners see how characters in literary texts interact with each other which help them develop their communicative competence. Literature is a rich source of meaningful input for language learners and it is useful to enhance language proficiency. Literature at the same time allows learners to learn about other cultures. There is a bond culture and language learning. When language learners know about the culture of the language they are learning, their comprehension of some notions will be facilitated.

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