

The Question of Methodology in Effective Literature Pedagogy

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Abstract

Literature plays a vital role in the teaching of English Language and the acquisition of communicative competence. Sadly though, this role has not been sufficiently realized because emphasis is not laid on the significance of the subject in the learning process. There have also been poor or inappropriate teaching methodologies observed in literature teaching at all levels of education. It is very important at this time to consider critically strategies for effective teaching of the subject in order to utilize fully literature's function as a resource for the teaching of English Language and acquisition of communicative skills. This paper therefore, examines the different approaches or teaching methods to the subject, literature. The paper will also help to identify the most appropriate methods to maximize benefits and get the best result. Through an empirical observation, common classroom learning situations are identified and examined in this paper.

Keywords: Literature, Communicative Competence and Empirical Observation

Introduction

Today, and as before, emphasis is always placed on the ability of students to perform very well in examinations in Literature and even other subjects. The result is that the study of texts (literary texts) is often geared towards the challenges of examination and the substance of studying is often neglected. Ordinarily, it might seem that literary texts are meant to be read to delight the individuals in the confines of their homes the same way home videos are enjoyed by many. At best, literary texts could be read by some groups who share common goals with the expectation that their minds undergo cognitive and or affective development. Studying literature in a formal setting is entirely different because it is an intellectual exercise that is connected with

academic task of some kind. The learner's interest as to whether he or she enjoys the text is of little importance but he is concerned with drawing relationship between what is in the text and laid down literary parameters by which works of arts are judged.

There is need for the teacher to be cautious in order to avoid handling down predigested meaning to students. They should be taught to read, understand and interpret texts themselves. It is in this regard that Alex (1983) warns sternly that students are not indoctrinated with academically hall-marked and guaranteed set of received opinion but they are helped to be skilled and sensitive readers who are able to judge any work of literature themselves. (p 89)

Any fruitful literary study should be guided by this principle. Often, the learner is seen as one who knows nothing while the teacher is assumed to know it all or at least a good deal of the text or subject to be learnt. So, under this situation, how is knowledge to be transferred successfully? This takes us to the issue of methodologies or approaches to literature teaching. For the purpose of this study, a number of methodologies will be examined critically in order to find out their weaknesses and strength and see the most appropriate method for a particular genre or topic in relation to literature teaching. However, it will be beneficial to first consider literature and language interrelatedness and how this relationship serves to enhance communicative competence.

Literature and Language Interrelatedness

There exists a tight connection between Literature and English Language especially in institutions of higher learning. It is important to know however that literature as a subject to be studied is different from using Literature as a resource for language learning. In studying Literature, various aspects of a text such as plot, setting, characterization, theme, point of view and many others are given attention. But when using literature as a tool for language learning, a level of competence in language use itself is a prerequisite. Ironically, students are rarely at the desirable level of competence, no wonder they memorize at the expense of understanding. This in turn results in the act of reproducing opinions in examinations. To use Literature as a resource for language learning is stylistic in nature and the text itself is the foundation which leads to further

discoveries and interpretations. Here, the choice of interesting literary texts will stimulate students' interest and spur them to activities or even engage them in interactions which will result in attaining high proficiency level. Language learning and literary understanding that result from learners' participation and engagement with text is made possible also through the choice of interesting texts.

It is important to note that literary works be it drama, poetry or prose utilize the same language system (i.e. grammar, vocabulary, syntactic rules of making meaningful utterances) found in other non-literary discourse. But there is an area of difference which often lies in the function which subject creative writings to some form of inventions to make such writings conform to the conventions of either poetic, novelistic or dramatic communication. This makes the message linguistically striking in contrast to what the reader used to know as normal non-literary writings.

Nonetheless, both creative and non-creative writings are grammatically intelligible and fulfill social purpose. The unusual manner of creative communication is foregrounded against the familiar ordinary everyday normal language or discourse. This is the reason why attention is drawn to literary communication and the unusual meaning it conveys. Although literary students need help to understand the unusual meaning of such literary expressions, care should be exercised by the teacher to guard against giving the meaning directly. The students should be led into discovering this in line with Alex (1983) view who advises that the best way is to adopt a gradual, patient and systematic approach. He suggests that

learners should be helped first to understand the conventions of literary communication and gain insight to how different authors have exploited these conventions to convey individual unique method of imparting meaning. This he says, will lead students to what he describes as “communicative awareness” and “language consciousness”. With this, students will be able to dig deep into the underlying meaning instead of just scratching the text at the surface.

Language consciousness involves having knowledge of the different parts which make up the entire discourse. These include: noun/noun phrases, verb/verb phrases, adverbials, prepositions, sentences, etc. If students are to acquire skills in interpreting creative works themselves, they need to be language conscious considering the fact that sometimes grammatical and semantic rules of normal and intelligible communication are subtly or flagrantly broken in creative works. Students can attain language consciousness through regular practice. They should be exposed to usual and unusual literary and non-literary expressions or words combinations. Nonetheless, communication awareness and language consciousness work together, none is sufficient without the other but language consciousness is the first requirement.

Literary artists’ liberty to manipulate linguistic and literary conventions to arrive at what could be seen as individual peculiarity is at play in J.P. Clark’s short poem titled, “Ibadan”. It is a poem of just one stanza of five lines. It strongly illustrates how language is exploited in an unusual manner to relate literary thought. The poem can also be used to demonstrate

how literary works help to explicate language use at its best thus serving as resource to language teaching. This situation is illustrated below using the poem in question.

Ibadan
Running splash of rust
And gold-flung and
scattered
Among seven hills like
broken
China in the sun. (“Ibadan”,
197).

In appealing to the students’ language consciousness, they are helped to see the entire poem as a sentence made up of a number of linguistic groups. The first is a noun, (the subject of the sentence), the name of the city (Ibadan) under description. This is followed by the -ing infinitive (a progressive form of the verb, (“running”). Other verbs in the poem are “flung” and “scattered”. Other linguistic items in the poem include nouns such as “rust”, “gold”, “hills”, “China” and “sun”, also a few adjectives which include, “seven” and “broken” used as qualifiers. The word “splash” is used as adverb to modify the verb ‘running’ in the poem. A critical examination of the words used in the poem helps to reinforce the fact that the classes of words remain elusive until they are put into actual use. For instance, the word “splash” ordinarily could be viewed as a verb as shown in the sentence: “water splash on the floor”. In the poem however, it is used as adverbs in the phrase “running splash” as it modifies running, suggesting disorderliness. A thought further reinforced by the poet’s use of “flung” and “scattered”.

A careful consideration of the meaning and significance of individual words in the poem illustrates the implied or underlying message of the poet. First the nouns, “rust” and “gold” convey two opposite meanings and by extension qualities: old, ugly and bad on one hand and on the other, new, beautiful and good. The verbs “running”, “flung” and “scattered” suggest a spread (not static) of these qualities noted earlier in an interspersed manner across the city. The use of these verbs also suggests the idea of disorderliness or lack of organization. The underlying or connotative message of the poet is that “Ibadan”, the ancient city consists of structures which are old and new, bad and good or ugly and beautiful. The hilly nature or terrain of the city is also brought to the fore when the poet says “... flung and scattered among seven hills”. Another image that strikes the reader’s mind is achieved through the use of adjective in the phrase, “... like a broken China in the sun”. This reminds the reader of the fragile nature of the structures in the city. The poem well illustrates the importance of understanding immediate meaning (semantics) and linguistic combinations in the process of unveiling the underlying or implied meaning of creative communication.

The complementary role of language consciousness and communicative awareness is well illustrated in the above analysis. Communicative awareness relates to the learners understanding of how literary writings are done without due consideration to the conventions of the language. This of course is a common practice among literary artists. Although the rules of normal English usages are essential, many times, they are radically

flouted and such violations depend on other similar violations to arrive at a unified meaning. The teacher in using literature as a resource to language learning gives linguistic clue in a progressive manner from the plain literary meaning to graded interpretative meaning to the inferential and evaluative explanation.

The usual patterns which are often found in literary works especially in poems become familiar to students through constant practice and exposure. They may also be able to discover new collocations and understand technical terms or styles such as imagery, simile, metaphor, etc. The fundamental purpose of literature lesson should be to teach students how to discover literary significance for themselves through the act of reading. The teacher should therefore, adopt teaching methods that will enable the students to extrapolate and transfer acquired skills in one literary situation to the interpretation of another. This will be possible not when the teacher feeds students with all information but when he/she guides, controls and encourages dialogue. If students are left to read literary texts like newspaper or other magazines, they will scarcely learn. These are the two extremes identified by Moody (1983) and according to him none of them is appropriate but he suggests an approach that falls between the two. He maintains that the teacher should not tell or demonstrate to the learner everything he needed to know or should he or she leave the learner to find out everything all alone. A skillful teacher according to him gives required basic information for the study of a text and this is seen by him as a motivation for the learner. But the question now is, which

method them is effective? Different well informed scholars have observed varied classroom learning situations especially literature lesson and their observations seem to reinforce one fact. The fact is that active learning methodology is one which encourages students' participation and encourages learners to acquire experience through the expression of their own opinion. This position aptly describes the author of this paper's mind as this methodology could serve as an antidote to attaining literary scholarship. In order to appreciate language conventions and styles of different literary Forms and their communicative functions, dialogue in the form of tutorial, group discussion or seminar, all guided by the teacher will be very helpful. It is very pertinent at this juncture to examine a number of methodologies or approaches which have been identified by some scholars.

Literature Teaching Methods

Kellem (2009), Divsar and Tahriri (2009), Al-Mahroogi (2012), Mood (1983) and Alex (1983) are some of the scholars who have examined critically different teaching methods. They have conducted various studies on the teaching of Literature especially among EFL (English as a foreign language) and ESL (English as a second language) students and have identified the following methods:

1. Linguistic/Language Based Approach
2. Students Centered Approach or Personal Growth Approach
3. Teacher Centered/Traditional Approach
4. Culture Based Approach
5. Integrated Approach

Linguistic/Language Based Approach

Moody (1983) identifies two approaches to literature teaching: the 'extrinsic' which relates to external consideration such as author, history, etc. and intrinsic. Commenting on the intrinsic approach, he observes certain determinants such as: the grammatical, lexical, structural and cultural which is concerned with the message or content as it relates to meaning (semantic level). All the components identified here (under the intrinsic approach) are what the linguistic or language based approach concerned itself with. This agrees with Marhooqi's (2012) views. He sees language based methodology as one which pays attention to linguistic features of literary text and by this literature is used to "discrete" language aspect. He further says that such linguistic features can give an insight to the text literal and figurative significance. Still commenting on this approach Divsar and Tahriri (2009) also express opinion similar to what is said by others. They see the linguistic or language based approach, as one employed in analyzing literary and non-literary text with emphasis on stylistic strategies from the point of view of style in relation to content and form. The intrinsic approach which could also be seen as linguistic or language based gives attention to every minute detail of the text; grammatical (organizations of units), the lexical groups, question of register, the structural - in relation to discourse type such as narrative expository or any other. This approach is very detailed and helps to bring to the fore fresh information gotten from the text. It also allows for the involvement of learners in the learning process.

Student-Centered or Personal Growth Approach

Mahrooqi (2012) specifically describes the learner-centered approach as personal growth approach because of its importance. He maintains that this model encourages learners to participate and to express their opinions. The result is that learners are able to develop their own ideas and their personal growth is enhanced. Rosenblatt (1994) describes this approach as reader response and adds that it exemplifies the personal growth or learner centered approach. This approach actually has the learner's concern at heart and works toward developing his/her literary competence. Sufficient room is given to question and answer dialogue between the teacher and students. The linguistic or language based approach may be tailored towards the students centered or personal growth mode where details of grammar and other descriptive rhetorics are explicated. Kellem (2009) sees the learner centered as beneficial because it encourages learners to be part of the process of meaning building in a very direct personal manner. He describes reader- response as learner centered but he combines this with stylistic approach and clamours for the integration of the two because he sees this as an approach that is effective for literature studies at advanced EFL levels. The view which resonates in this study is that when stylistic (language based) and reader response (learner centered) are merged, equal importance is given to language elements and response personally to literature. The learner centered seeks to exploit the entire learning process to the benefit of learners such that at the end they might have

benefited maximally from the exercise of learning.

Teacher Centered Approach

This is seen as very old or traditional method. The lecture method is seen to be teacher-centered since the teacher dominates the whole learning process leaving little or no room for learners' participation. Studies seem to indicate that the instructors at the University level in English as L2 situation often use the teacher-centred approach in many institutions of higher learning around the world. There is however, skepticism about the traditional teacher centered approach as this approach tends to encourage the teacher's spoon feeding the learner, giving every and all needed information to learners. It is one of the extremes identified by Moody (1983) The linguistic and culture-based approach lend themselves to the teacher centered approach.

Culture Based Approach

Rahma (2012) views this approach as a literary approach which investigates the social, historical, political and literary relevance of a text. But he describes this approach as teacher centered. Moody (1983) describes it as one concerned with the content or message and understanding of the meaning of what is presented in relation to the cultural context. Savvidou (2004) makes her own contribution to the study of the culture-based approach to literature teaching and cites Cater and Long (1991) who see the cultural model as one which requires learners to explore and interpret literary text from social, political and historical angles. She adds that this approach reveals the universality of thoughts and ideas and helps learners

understand other cultures and ideologies in comparison with theirs.

Integrated Approach

As the name suggests, the integrated approach combines the stylistic (which emphasizes language correctness), reader response and student centered approaches. The benefits of these different approaches are brought together under the integrated approach for the learner to explore. Kellem (2009) asserts that the integrated approach put equal importance on the study of language elements and responds personally to literature. The integrated approach lays emphasis on the correctness of language in literature learning and the content of the material. Commenting further on the integrated approach, Kellem (2009) maintains that it helps the teacher to bridge the gap between aesthetic and stylistic showing how pleasurable and understanding can work together and “feed off each other”. To him, the integrated approach has greater benefits due to the fact that it merges learner-centered and reader-response with the stylistic, learners are therefore encouraged to be part of the process of meaning building in a direct personal way.

Divsar and Tahriri (2009) also support the integrated approach and argue that approaches to literary analysis need not be mutually exclusive. The integrated approach according to them helps learner to search for implied meaning through a detailed stylistic analyses of text features. Their studies identify three levels of considerations to which learners are exposed through the integrated approach to literature teaching and these include linguistic, cultural and communicative considerations. The approach makes literature lessons practical, communicative

and interactive since it marries literature and communication. Mahrooqi (2012) observes that the most effective methodology for literature should be one which encourages a combination of methods. The integrated approach seems to be the one which meets such condition. The benefits of this approach are overwhelming for the students; it is stimulating as the instructor tries to understand their culture and encourages their interpretations, personal experiences and reactions to the story (text). The students eagerly anticipate and even prepare ahead for more of such lessons.

Other Methodologies for Literature Teaching

An empirical observation of literature lessons over a period of time has actually yielded much data with regards to different methodologies employed by instructors especially at the tertiary level. Through such observations, the researcher has been able to identify and gain insight into commonly used approaches in literature teaching. Such approaches include:

Lecture Method

Individual Method

Group Method

Team Teaching

Lecture Method

It falls under the traditional teaching method and appears to be the oldest teaching method often employed in institutions of higher learning. The lecture method is seen as one which presents the instructor as the main information giver. He or she stands before the students to deliver the lecture and he or she may choose to use available teaching aid. The students are expected to listen attentively and take notes as the lecture progresses.

This approach is preferred for convenience as it is the easiest when dealing with a large number of students but it has its own challenges. It does not give enough room for interaction between the instructor and the learners and in many cases a number of students who lack skills in note taking struggle with the lecture method. This lecture method is highly teacher centered so it places learners in a passive mood and thus hinders understanding. The instructor will find it difficult to be informed about students' problems since verbal feedback is rarely present, it is just one-way communication. Where instructors assumed that learners have been carried along and asked questions, experience has shown that many have just been absent minded and have not been following. The lecture method appears not to be the best teaching method as it has more disadvantages than advantages.

Individual method

This model is similar to the learner centered in that attention is primarily on the learner but it is borne out of the fact that there is individual difference especially with regards to the intelligent level of learners. It is an instruction method where students work separately at their own level or rate toward achieving an academic goal. The instructor is expected to first explain the task to be performed giving guideline on each procedure to be taking in performing the academic task. This method is used sparingly especially at the primary level of education where the learners are considerably few. It accommodates learners with diverse learning capabilities and it is employed when the task is mainly related to writing. Gokhaie (1995) observes that many

scholars do not see the individual learning method as the best for it is stressful and time consuming.

Group Method

This is described as collaborative learning by Gokhale (1995). Here students are paired or grouped for the purpose of learning. The group may comprise of students of different performance levels but they are made to work together in order to achieve a common goal. Students are responsible for One another's learning as they consult different materials related to the text under consideration and come up with their different contributions which they discuss together as a group and also see how the various contributions are merged to make a unified whole. Although this learning approach is not as popular as the lecture method, a good number of scholars seem to be in support of it. It encourages interactive learning (among students especially) and critical thinking. Where there is a large number of students, this approach is useful since the slow learners are given room to work and also make contributions, they are carried along and no one is left behind. The group learning or collaborative method encourages active interaction among learners, they do not receive information passively rather they search for it themselves and investigate critical opinion on a given text, by this they acquire skill and attain literary competence. They are also able to react to works of art in a constructive manner after a reasonable period of time since their initial efforts are usually guided and subject to moderation by the instructor. The collaborative learning could take the form of tutorials, group discussion or seminars but it is better when done under the guidance of the

teacher. It is learner- centered in that attention is primarily on the learner so it is a good approach to learning language and literature.

Team Teaching

This is the last approach to be considered in this study and it is more related to the teacher centered approach because it involves using a number of instructors to teach a particular subject or even topic. The instructors involved in this teaching method have the freedom to use their different approaches or method in handling the subject or topic. As in the case of literature, different tutors may handle the different genres of literature bringing in their experiences and expertise. Team teaching as defined by the Education Encyclopedia involves a group of instructors working purposefully, regularly and cooperatively to help a group of students of any age learn. The teachers involved may have to set goals for the course, design syllabus, prepare lesson plan individually, teach students and assess them. This approach allows for interactions among teachers and also between teachers and students. This approach is not very common, however, it is very beneficial because it creates room for the team to evaluate students objectively and students can also evaluate the members of the team. It also allows for sufficient coverage of course content, students' development and democratic participation. It encourages critical thinking and practical application of knowledge. This method also encourages innovations, imagination and creativity. It improves teaching quality, relationship among teachers and boosts morale.

Conclusion

This paper so far has examined the relationship between Literature and Language and demonstrated how Literature serves as a resource for language (English) teaching using the poem, "Ibadan" by J.P. Clark. Light is shed on a number of teaching methodologies which have been investigated by notable scholars as well as the author of this paper. It has been observed that no single method has proved to be the most appropriate for teaching all literary genres or topics. The point then is that two or more approaches can be utilized in teaching a particular literary genre or topics. As suggested by some scholars already, an approach that gives consideration to the learners and encouraged their active participation is the one which is most effective. Such method should be able to develop learners' language awareness, communicative, competence and critical thinking. It is very clear from the forgoing that quite a good number of approaches considered in this study appear to be very effective considering their benefits. For instance, the group method creates room for various learners with different intelligent level to work together; the language or stylistic model emphasizes language correctness and content of the material and the integrated method combines elements of the language with literature and helps learners attain literary and communicative competence. It is important to say that instructors can employ different approaches in their teaching of Literature instead of sticking to just one. It is good for instructors to consider the abilities and disabilities of the learners in choosing methodology for teaching a literary topic.

They may need to take every necessary precaution in order to create an interesting active and interactive learning environment and this can be possible when appropriate texts, other learning aids and teaching methodologies are carefully selected.

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