

Poetry in EFL Classroom

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Abstract

Literature is considered as a promoting tool for language learning purposes. Literature can be used to foster students motivation to read and write in order to achieve their academic proficiency. Poetry as a part of literature has affirmed that literature has a great deal in developed students' literacy competence. This paper argues for the use of literature and some approaches in teaching and learning literature especially poetry in EFL classroom. This paper also elaborates some benefits of using literature and poetry in the EFL classroom and proposes some assessments which can be used to assess students' literary competence in poetry.

Keywords: Literature, Teaching Poetry, EFL Classroom

Introduction

Literature has widely used in teaching and learning English nowadays. Some theoretical discussions and some case studies have support the relevance of using literature to a foreign language teaching. Literature is considered as a promising tool for language learning purposes. Literary exploration can be used to enhance the efficiency of language learning programs and also gives some advantages in the classroom (Van, 2009). Literature also fosters learners' motivation to read and write which also can improve their reading and writing proficiency to serve their academic and occupational needs (McKay, 1982 in Bagherkazemi & Alemi, 2010).

It has been argued that poetry has been commonly taught in English classroom. Poetry as one of the literature products can be used to develop learners' knowledge of English and to teach structure, grammar and vocabulary (Khansir, 2012). Some researchers have attempted to discuss the usefulness of the linguistic analysis of literature for pedagogical purposes which is in this article focused in poetry. This article will (1) elaborate literature teaching and its beneficial in the classroom, (2) explore some

approaches in teaching literature, (3) suggest practical classroom in teaching poetry and (4) propose the assessments in poetry.

Literature, literature teaching and the advantages

There is no exact meaning of what literature is. According to Meyer (1997) understanding what exactly literature is has always challenging where in fact, at times one seems to be reduced to saying, 'I know it when I see it' or 'Anything is literature if you want to read it that way'. Literature is stories, poems, and plays especially those that are considered to have value as art and not just entertainment (Clandfield, 2003). It is in line with Purves et al (1990 in Mustafa, 1994) who defines literature as an art work for the person who create and the person who attends it in order to seek for pleased. Literature is creative and imaginative written or verbal production that fulfills certain socially and culturally approved functions (Parkinson & Thomas, 2000). It means that literature is what the readers feel, think and responds to works both in written or verbal production that have value as art and not just entertainment. The written productions of literature are short stories, novels, poems, dramas, the pictorial-graphical representations are caricatures, drawings, calligraphies where the audiovisual of literature examples are those presented on TV and Video and those packaged through sound arrangements (Mustafa, 1994). The meaning of literature sometimes depends on different factors. Literature as a subject means an activity that involves and uses languages. Literature in language teaching emphasizes on the use of literature to promote language learning which requires three-way interaction, the teachers, the readers and the texts (Abdullah, et. all, 2007). Therefore the activities in the language classroom are based on the text which has adapted to suit students' level proficiency.

Many educators have used literature in the classroom due to the several reasons. According to Collie and Slater (1987 in Parkinson, 2000), there are four main reasons which lead an educator to use literature in the classroom. These are valuable authentic material, cultural enrichment, language enrichment and personal involvement. Valuable authentic materials mean that literature products are the samples of language in real-life contexts. Literature is inherently authentic and provides authentic input for language learning (Ghosn, 2002). It can act as a beneficial complement to such materials where the learners become familiar with many different linguistic forms, communicative functions

and meanings. Another reason of using literature in the classroom is it is cultural enrichment which means literature facilitates a full and colorful setting in which characters from many social/regional backgrounds can be described. Literature promotes cultural and intercultural awareness especially in the era of globalization (Tayebipour, 2009 in Khatib, 2011). It is a complement to other materials used to develop the foreign learner's understanding into the country whose language is being learned and adds a lot to the cultural grammar of the learners. Moreover, literature is as language enrichment in the classroom means literature provides learners with a wide range of individual lexical or syntactic items. Students become familiar with many features of the written language, reading a substantial and contextualized body of text. The last reason is literature improve personal involvement. Students can select their own literary text in relation to the needs, expectations, and interest where they can develop their language.

Moreover, Parkinson & Thomas (2000) propose some benefits of literature in language learning. First, literature provides a model of a good writing that offers learners large chunks of classical writing. Then, literature is difficult where the students keep stretching the language until the end. Literature is also memorable where the words stick in the minds without conscious effort such as songs and poems. Fourth, literature helps students to assimilate the rhythms of language. Parkinson and Thomas also points out that literary texts are non trivial in the sense that they deal with matters which concerned the writer to make him or her write about them and the last benefits of literature is it can make an opinion- gap between one individual's interpretation and another's can be bridged by genuine interpretation.

Furthermore, Nasr (2001) also adds some reasons of literary in EFL classes, they are; it has the potential to integrate the four language skills, it requires learners to think out and put into practice special reading strategies to deal with the idiosyncratic characteristic of verse and prose, it broadens intellectual perspective and boots cognitive maturation and it helps learners develop feelings for the language they are learning. Then, Ladousse- Porter (2001 in Bagherkazemi & Alemi, 2010) informs that reading literary works activates and enhances the readers' emotional intelligence and makes literature suited to the language classroom where emotional intelligences contribute to more effective language learning. Literature is also as a good medium for critical thinking

enhancement among language learners (Ghosn,2002, Van,2009). Ghosn (2002) maintains that literature can bring changes in the attitudes of the learners. It allows students to reflect on their lives, learning, and language where students can question, interpret, connect and explore the language. Literary text is fertile with ideas to critically look at. Literature has many advantages both for the students and the teachers. Using literature in the EFL classroom gives the students challenging experiences where the students can develop their abilities in literary language competence. For the teachers, using literature is like giving opportunities to themselves to enhance their literary competence.

Some approaches in teaching literature

Before talking about approaches in teaching literature, let take look on the Transactional Reading Theories by Rosenblatt (1978) in reading literature which influences the literature instruction and how it is generally viewed and taught across different curricula. These theories also involves in approaches applied in literature teaching. Literature in English is studied for various purposes by different grades of readers. Generally, it is a source material for the development of literacy skills and the basic language skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking (Ezenandu, 2012). For beginning and intermediate readers, literature serves as the avenue for the students to practice skills learnt in the language classroom. On the other hand, advanced readers explore the world of the literary text for the opportunity of pleasurable reading, for the development of the mind and other vicarious experiences.

Rosenblatt (1938 in Abdullah & Zainal, 2008) claimed that when it comes to reading a literary text ‘there is no such thing as a generic reader or a generic literary work’. She argued that in reading for literary text, the reader must have the experience, must ‘live through’ what is being created during the reading. Reading literature involves two kinds of reading, they are, efferent reading and aesthetic reading. Rosenblatt (1978) distinguishes between the efferent stance, in which the reader is primarily concerned with what he will carry away as information from the text, and the aesthetic stance, in which the reader focuses primarily upon the experience lived through during the reading. In efferent reading approach, the readers focused on the information to be acquired, the logical solution to a problem, and the action to be carried out before, during and after

reading a text. It is reading for facts and information which the readers select out the desired referents and ignore or subordinate affects. (Shen, 2011).

Meanwhile, in aesthetic reading approach, readers' primary concern is with what happen during the actual reading event where the readers' attention is directly on what is he living through his relationship with that particular text. The aesthetic stance reader would permit focus on private meaning making of the text. This is when the reader would be able to live through the meaning making process by relating it to personal associations, feelings and ideas. Aesthetic reading will fuse the cognitive and affective elements of consciousness into a personally lived-through poem or story. This kind of reading is seeking for pleasure.

However, aesthetic and efferent approaches are not two separate categories; they do not contradict each other, it depends on the stance of the reader while reading a text. The stances in reading literary texts depend on the aims of the readers in reading the texts. Both of the reading stances have their own ways in read and enjoy the literary texts. In a reading process, the reader may shift his or her attention at times from experiential interpretation to efferent analysis or from a general idea searching to be reinforced by an aesthetic illustration (Rosenblatt, 1978). This circumstance influences the literature instruction and how it is generally viewed and taught across different curricula. These two reading theories influenced the instructions and approaches in teaching and learning literature in EFL classroom.

According to Abdullah & Zainal (2008) readers' stance have influenced how literary texts are explicated which may also lead to how literature instruction is shaped. Therefore, there are three major factors that played important role in the way of literature is understood and interpreted are the development in modern literary theories, the marriage between literature and language teaching and how the evolution in educational theories and practices. Theories of education such as constructivism and active learning also influenced in the paradigms of literature instructions. In traditional approach of teaching literature, learners are normally expected to arrive at the correct interpretation or adopt a particular right answer especially for assessment purposes where teachers control the discourse and there is minimal interaction in the classroom (Cazden,2000 in Abdullah & Zainal,2008). In other words, the growing concern about the pedagogical

within the literature instruction support learner centered learning environment that facilitated the establishment of learning (Langer, 1992 in Abdullah & Zainal, 2008).

The influence of the theory of constructivism and its implication in the classroom, some educationist have developed framework for instructional ideas in literature instructions. A general categorization of approaches to teaching literature is the study of literature as a cultural artifact from the use of literature as resources for language learning which is provided by Malley (1989 in Khatib & Rahimi, 2012). He explains two approaches in teaching literature; they are critical approach and stylistic approach. Critical approach is the traditional approach where the students concentrate on aspects of the text such as plot, characterization, setting, point of view, motivation, value, psychology, etc. It needs a great amount of preparation and work on students' language and literary competence. In this approach, students should both be competent in the language and familiar with the literary conventions. Therefore, the results of this approach where the students memorize technical critical terms without deep understanding and repeat the opinions they had been exposed by rote. Meanwhile, stylistic approach is the approach focused on literature as text. Students concentrate on textual discoveries which lead to interpretations of the text. Language is the priority in this approach and linguistic elucidation and description precedes interpretation. The purpose of this second approach is the focus of attention where literature can be considered as a source of teaching and learning language.

Then, Van (2009) also suggested six approaches to literary analysis, they are: (1) New Criticism, the activities in this approach involves the study of literary devices and formal elements where the texts were selected among the traditional poems which are difficult, unfamiliar and irrelevant to students' lives, (2) Structuralism, in this approach, the text is scientifically discussed by focusing on processes, themes, structures, and mechanical formal relationships into a meaningful hierarchical system, (3) Stylistic, this model approaches literature by analyzing the features of literary language. By relating this approach with aesthetic reading, this approach poses challenges to the learners' communicative competence and teachers' knowledge of literary language, (4) Reader Response, this model in committed in a commitment to the transactional relationship between the reader's personal experiences, opinions, and feeling and the text. It goes with

theories of top-down reading and readers' schemata (5) Language based, this approach facilitates student brainstorming, summarizing, jigsaw reading, etc which enhance collaboration, independence, interaction, peer teaching and motivation. It meets the students' needs in both reading literature, and learning a language as it results in four-skill English, (6) Critical Literacy, this model focuses on the relationship between language use and social power. It is aimed at facilitating students' critical awareness about the role of language in establishing social relations and encourages students to explore how social and political factors shape the language learning.

Moreover, Carter and Long (1991 in Savvidou, 2004) describe three main models to the teaching of literature for ESL/EFL program:

1. The Cultural Model

This model requires learners to explore and interpret the social, political, literary and historical context of a specific text. It encourages learners to understand different cultures and ideologies in relation to their own and also reveal the universality of thoughts and ideas. This model represents the traditional approach to teaching literature.

2. The Language Model

This model also refers to the language-based approach. It enables learners to access a text in a systematic and methodical way in order to exemplify specific linguistic features. It lends itself well to the repertoire of strategies used in language teaching which all form part of the repertoire of EFL activities used by teachers to deconstruct literary texts in order to serve specific linguistic goals. Therefore, this model is disconnected from literary goals since there is little engagement of the learner with the text where literature is used purposeless and mechanistic ways.

3. The Personal Growth Model

This model focuses on the particular use of language in a text, as well placing it in a specific cultural context. Learners are encouraged to express their opinions, feelings and opinions and make connections between their own personal and cultural experiences and those expressed in the text. Another aspect of this model is that it helps learners develop knowledge of ideas and language through different themes and topics.

In teaching and learning literature, there is a shift of literature instruction which influenced the implication of teaching literature in the classroom. The related research indicates a shift concern from the solely linguistic analysis of literary texts in the language classroom to a concern with enhancing inter-cultural awareness, appreciating learners' interpretations of and responses to such texts, and developing the ability to see with different eyes (Oster, 1989 in in Bagherkazemi & Alemi, 2010) .

Those approaches of teaching literature can be applied depends on the goals and interest of the teachers and students in the classroom. Reading approaches also influenced teacher in choosing the appropriate approach in teaching and learning literary texts. Readers' stance gives much different in the ways students read and comprehend the texts. These factors affect the ways teachers and students teach and learn literature especially poetry.

Poetry in EFL classroom

Poetry has been used in teaching and learning English in the classroom. Many educators have attempted to deal with poetry in the EFL classroom. The Northern Territory Department of Employment, Education and Training in Australia (2006) proposed resources in teaching and learning poetry. They state that poetry is language used in a particular ways which involve rhyme, rhythm and metre. It is a way of sharing experiences, telling a story, expressing feelings or ideas. Poetry appeals to the imagination through out the form, rhythm and word choice that can cerate vivid visual images for the audience. Poems can paint powerful, sharp pictures using images and emotive language which stimulates senses.

Among the literary genres used in language teaching, poetry is one of frequent appearance. Poems become favorite tools for language teachers due to their short length, perfectly suitable for a single classroom lesson, their peculiar structure, and their linguistic characteristic features. The evocative character of poetry, its imagery, its appeal to feelings and personal experience make it very interesting and enjoyable for the second/foreign language learners (Llach, 2007). The fact that poetry deviates from normal language that has some unusual ways of ordering words, imaginative meanings to words or combines sounds in a musical, non ordinary way and style deviation makes poetry importance and useful in language classroom. The language teacher should exploit the

deviancies of the poetic language in order to arise the language awareness of the learners towards the way on which language can be adapted or changed to fulfill different communicative purposes.

Poetry as a way to develop students' literacy competence has some benefits in EFL classrooms. According to Panavelil (2011) the benefits of poetry in EFL classroom are: (1) It can be used as a valuable resource to introduce and practice language by exposing students to authentic models –real language in context which can develop their language skills, (2) it provides students with an opportunity to enrich their vocabulary in a new way by offering meaningful context which can be used and remembered effectively, (3) It encourages students in developing their creativity where they can discover interesting ideas for creative writing simultaneously, (4) It is motivating as it generates strong emotional reactions, (5) it provides students with insight into developing cross – cultural awareness which help them in acquiring fluency in the target language, (6) it deals with universal themes and human concerns which offers opportunities to project students feelings and emotions, thus fostering personal involvement in learners.

Bringing up poetry in the EFL classroom sometimes is hard for the teachers. One of the challenges is the choice of poetry which suits for each student. The types of poetry that can be used are plenty. However, a teacher should be extremely careful while choosing the text that she/he wants to deal with in the classroom. Poetry which will be taught to students should have an appropriate level of complexity that challenge but not intimidate. It includes themes and contents that resonate with students which encourages discussion between class members, provoke emotional responses from the students and do not require too much teacher-centered model (Rush, 2001). Moreover, the needs of the students, their motivation, interest and cultural background should be taken into consideration while selecting a poem for the classroom teaching (Panavelil, 2011). The poem that selected should be in an appropriate in length and of level of students' comprehension. The selection of the poems is the most important thing in teaching poetry because it influences the students' reactions, perceptions, and motivation in learning poetry especially for the EFL learners.

In teaching and learning poetry, Parkinson & Thomas (2000) state three ways in encouraging students to learn poems, they are:

1. Paraphrasable meaning: students indicate what the poem is about- events descriptions, emotions, etc- by using different words.
2. Linguistic features: a systematic description of the language of the poem, based on the concepts of regularity, deviance, polysemy, and mimics.
3. Personal reaction: include an account of how this has changed in the course of rereading and analysis and an attempt to find objective reasons for subjective reactions.

Teacher can choose and use several approaches in teaching and learning literature in teaching poetry to EFL learners. Those approaches can be suited to students' need and interest in learning poetry. Savvidou (2004) suggested another approaches in teaching and learning literature that is integrated approach. This approach is the combination or the integration of cultural model, language model and personal growth model in teaching literature. According to Savvidou (2004) what is needed in teaching literature in the EFL classroom is an approach which can attempt to integrate the elements of those approaches that make literature accessible to learners and beneficial for their linguistic development. There are three main reasons for integrating these elements; they are, linguistic, methodological and motivational. Linguistically, by using a wide range of authentic texts learners were introduced to a variety of types and difficulties of English language. Methodologically, literary discourse sensitizes readers to the processes of reading and the last one is motivationally, literary texts prioritize the enjoyment of reading since the response to literature itself is important. Interpretation of texts can bring the learners' personal responses by touching on significant and engaging themes (Duff and Malley, 1990 in Panavelil 2011). These reasons emphasize the use of integrated approach in teaching and learning literature especially poetry.

Integrated approach is a linguistic approach which utilises some of the strategies used in stylistic analysis which explores texts, literary and non literary, from the perspective of style and its relationship to content and form. It involves the systematic and detailed analysis of stylistic features of a text in order to find out not just what a text means but also how it comes to mean what it does (Short, 1996 in Savvidou, 2004). This approach taught language skills by incorporating a set of text-based which students centered activities.

In an integrated approach, teachers guide the students and also become a participant. In this approach, the classroom activities will be divided into three categories; pre reading activities, while-reading activities and post-reading activities (Panavelil, 2011). In pre reading activities are kind of warming up which can provide a forum to elicit from students their feelings and responses to ideas and issues in a prescribed text. While reading activities aim at helping the students to experience the text holistically by developing a fruitful interaction between the text and the reader. Post reading activities encourage students to reflect upon what they have read and they generate thoughtful discussion on different issues related to both language and literature arising from the text.

In pre reading activities, it is useful to involve students into activities that will create the right attitude for receptivity and enjoyment with the result that they are inspired to read the poem again and again. The activities involve the students who will be asked to make use of their experience of life and their imagination and intelligence which will enable them to guess what may happen in certain situations. The title of the poem, illustrations, keywords, warmers, language exercises are some activities that can be used in the pre reading activities for generating inferences.

Meanwhile, while reading activities, students are going to develop a purposeful interaction between the text and themselves. There are some activities that can be done in this section such as, listening to a good reading of the text, reading of the text, language exercises, and checking against the inferences made about the text in the pre-reading activities. Students often enjoy this section while the poem either on a tape or when it is being read out loudly by the teacher in the classroom. This helps students to 'feel' the language, its rhythm, intonation and sounds. The last activity is post reading activities. Post reading activities are meant to create a suitable situation for the students to express their reactions to reading the text. These activities are meant to deepen students' understanding of the text and also generate interest in the creative use of the language. There are some activities that can be used in the post reading activities, they are; comprehension questions, language exercises, memorizing, creative activities, and role playing.

The poetry entitled *Stopping by Woods on A Snowy Evening* by Robert Frost can be used in applying integrated approach in teaching poetry in EFL classroom. This is the poetry:

Stopping By Woods on a Snowy Evening

Robert Frost

Whose woods these are I think I know.

His house is in the village though;

He will not see me stopping here

To watch his woods fill up with snow.

My little horse must think it queer

To stop without a farmhouse near

Between the woods and frozen lake

The darkest evening of the year.

He gives his harness bells a shake

To ask if there is some mistake.

The only other sound's the sweep

Of easy wind and downy flake.

The woods are lovely, dark and deep.

But I have promises to keep,

And miles to go before I sleep,

And miles to go before I sleep.

Assessing Students' Learning in Poetry

Assessment means looking at what students can do in order to determine what they need to learn to do next. It means whether of individual students or an entire group is done to enhance learning and inform instruction. Assessment is typically holistic, often recorded anecdotally via checklists or simply as credit or no credit. Using many different assessments tools provide a rich picture of students' capabilities as well as a composite of what students are learning (Anneberg learner.com).

There are many ways to assess students' literary competence in poetry, such as:

- a. Group discussions: whole group or small group discussion helps teachers to assess students understanding. In this assessment, teacher can reveal students comprehending in poetry by giving some questions related to the aspects where teacher wants to assess.
- b. Writing: writing such as reading logs provides a useful tool for both students and teachers to track students' progress as readers and thinkers over time. It can reveal the depth of student thinking, the quality of student thinking and the strategies students use when they experience poetry. In this assessment, teacher can ask students to write a poem or to write the meaning of the poems.
- c. Portfolios: it is a useful tool to assess students as developing as developing readers and writers in poetry. It helps develop students' awareness of their growth as readers, writers and thinkers. It also enables students to choose their best work to demonstrate their capabilities.
- d. Self-assessments: it helps students reflect on what they are learning and pushes them to think more deeply about what they are reading, writing and thinking. Teacher can give the questions guidance in helping students to sharpen their reading, writing and thinking of poetry.
- e. Rubrics: it helps students understand the criteria on which evaluation is based. Students can participate in the process of developing rubrics; doing so helps them understand the levels of mastery reflected in different grades, different levels and different aspects in understanding poetry.

Moreover, in assessing students' learning in poetry, teachers should think about their instructional goals. Teachers should determine what language skills they want to assess or evaluate in their students' poetry. In reading, teachers might be using poetry to

encourage responses, develop fluency, and foster understanding of phonograms of words families (Padak, 2001). In writing, teachers' goals include willingness to write, ability to revise, mechanical features of the final draft and forth. Teachers can also assess the role of poetry in the literary program. Certainly reading and writing poems have value beyond practice. Poetry study can become a valuable addition to the literary program.

These kinds of assessment can be chose and applied in assessing and evaluating students literacy development in poetry. Teacher also can create their own assessment to fulfill the goals of their teaching. It is suggested that the assessment used should be appropriate to stimulate their literary competence. The successful of teaching and the development of students' competence can be measured through assessment.

Literature is a part of language where many educationists and teachers used in teaching and learning language. Literature has many benefits both for students and for teachers in developing students' literary competence. Poetry has been used in promoting literature text in teaching and learning language especially in the EFL classroom. Teaching and learning poetry will be interesting depends on the poems which is chosen and the approaches that is used in the class. By using poerty as the materials in the classroom can also improve their sensein interpreting figures of speech. It is suggested to EFL teacher to use poems as a reading material in the classroom sincethat the poems that is chosen should appropriate to the students based on their ages, comprehension, and interest. An appropriate assessment also can help students to develop their literary competence.

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