

Using Literary Theories for Teaching Literary Genres in University Courses

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Abstract

Teachers need abundant proficiency on literary theories in addition to the reading techniques when they give lecture about multicultural literature in English language classes. Though they follow classical, new criticism, mythological and archetypal, the formalist, feminish or reader-response methods of literary analysis in their multicultural literature reading, they should have knowledge, for example, on postcolonial criticism when they deal with Eurocentric inclination. Teaching English has become a major necessity for developing areas in Asian countries due to globalization. The general purpose of this paper is to discuss the problems related with the novel tendency of teaching English for Asian educational system. This paper discusses the requirements of educational system in Asia for teaching English as well as on the mode of training English applicable skills. It also discusses the qualification and improvement of teachers' ability to teach literature which helps them change the educational system ensuring that studies are more enjoyable. The current study presents various trends in English literature that could be employed by both the teachers and the students.

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Introduction:

English as a global language was not completely perceived in the early 1950s to the 1970s, but the prominence of English language as a global one came to be known only in the 1980s. There was a growing perception of the language becoming a universal language, which resulted in famous authors making daring proclamations like “English is the global language”(Crystal, 1997, p. 1). A questionnaire was presented to various people from all over the world by the British Council in the year 1995 (Paul Iles, 1995). Of the 1,398 respondents who undertook the survey almost 96.3% of them suggested that they either strongly consented or moderately consent that English was and will stay put in the upcoming years as the most prevailing language of the world communication systems.

Apart from this 79.2% responded that they neither consented nor strongly consented for the idea of having another language contesting the role of English as the major language of the world. Fishman (1996, p. 628) suggested that the present world is governed by massive trade, technology and banking systems apart from human sciences and other qualifications, and all these applications predominantly use English for communication so as to ensure participation from the whole world. This is despite how well founded and guarded by the local traditions, languages and cultural identities may be. Crystal, (1997) and Graddol, (1997, 2006) noted that this change has resulted in English becoming the global language. After the proclamation given by Fishman, it has been noted more obviously how the belief has been made more evident all across the globe.

The observed significance of English and also the need to be able to communicate in English language has unfortunately not been reflected on the educational system in the countries of Asia. When students were asked about the teaching and learning methodology of English in classrooms, members of the group disclosed many intricate patterns of the issue. Even though English skills are regarded as extremely beneficial, many people in Asian countries view education only based on examinations point of view. The 400 L. Pan, D. Block / System 39 (2011) 391e402 suggested that the highly ingrained nature of the Asian culture to be examination centric making it hard to make use of the CLT method of educational system which was meant to be followed by the teachers. Hence the general issue was that the Asian educational system viewed their education as examinations instead of seeing it as learning approaches. In these situations, English has been quoted as a unique and integrated system that contained two ideologies, which served two different, but interconnected operations in the modern Asian countries.

On one side Block, (2010) noted it as a product, as quoted by examination results that helped provide employment in the job market. From this view, it is not an issue if the examination results included competence in communicative skills and all that the result shows is a certificate of having passed the examination. On the other side it is noted that for those Asian nationals who are in touch with other non Asian nationals,

their English skills are more pronounced, compared to the Asian nationals who have no means of communication with non Asian nationals. Hence it is very crucial to note that English becomes a key language for Asians if they wish to play their life in a global scale, especially since the whole world is moving at a global level.

At the upper intermediate and higher levels, students are expected to have a good grip over the language. Similar to the situations in other parts of the world, English literature is taught in Asian countries for many reasons. The most common ones are that literature provides easy access to motivating content material and cultural background, encourages language acquisition, expands students' language awareness, develops students' interpretative abilities and educates the whole person (Widdowson, 1975; Mullane, 1984; Brumfit, 1985; Spack, 1985; Akyel & Yalcin, 1990; Carter & Long, 1991; Lazar, 1993). Collie and Slater (1987) say that literature can provide valuable authentic material, cultural enrichment, language enrichment and personal involvement. According to Osburne's (1987) survey of master's level English language teacher trainees in a Chinese university, the trainees have more interest in literature than linguistics and methodology. Du (1990) also reported that, in his survey of Chinese students' attitudes towards the courses offered by a university, 42 out of 58 students (84%) indicated a "strong liking" for and a "great interest" in literature. He claimed that in general there is a great potential in all the Asian countries for the use of English, and thus for literature in English.

Rationale:

Employment of Asian students has been defined by the growth of the economy through various ways like technology, guidance, testing and standard. It has been suggested that in order to preserve the standard of human resource in professional courses like technological education there is a need for a lot of concentration. This would in turn result in education system for technological studies reaching newer heights.

In the developing world, English has emerged as an essential language to learn and been a common tool to communicate in the world. English is a prime language for expression one's own feelings and technological usage. The use of literature in this regard may help build up the overall command over the language which may be reflected in technical use.

Teaching of English is a growing field in the training education of Asian students. The vitality of English teaching for Asian students with regards to achievement of goals set by organizational as well as licensed credentials has been discussed and is often linked to the learning outcome of the students. In developing countries like China and India, national level recognized organizations struggle to implement common, open and accurate accreditation models, which has been a problem of

English teaching for bright students. Finding the chances of bilateral acceptance and migration of students would assist for international recognition. So, English teachers and researchers should meet with new orientations and teach English differently. Technology students trained well with professional usage of English in schools can be a specialist in technology.

Teaching Multicultural Literature in English Language:

Teachers need abundant proficiency on literary theories in addition to the reading techniques when they give lecture about multicultural literature in English language classes. Though they follow classical, new criticism, mythological and archetypal, the formalist, feminist or reader-response methods of literary analysis in their multicultural literature reading, they should have knowledge, for example, on postcolonial criticism when they deal with Eurocentric inclinations. Inadequate knowledge on theoretical contexts between English teachers' leads their students to study the ambiguous depictions of cultural groups carelessly while they read. So, deciphering multicultural literature with postcolonial literary theory will support the students to consider the problems in Eurocentric illustrations of development. According to Mingshui Cai (2002), we have to take multicultural literature to make the experts in that topic instead of merely conveying information. He indicates that "when using multicultural literature in the curriculum, it is imperative to move from informing to empowering students. To empower students is to help them develop the ability to identify, critically analyze, and even take action to solve problems related to cultural differences." (p. xviii)

Students could actively react to the problems of multicultural literature due to transformation from informing to qualifying the students. Students can understand the concepts by appropriate explanations. For example, postcolonial literary theory can be taught by explaining the association between postcolonial and multicultural literatures, which are closely related though they are the same completely. Multicultural literature includes world literatures (translated to or originally in English) like immigrant literature, ethnic (or minority) literature, and Native literature, whereas postcolonial literature is defined precisely as "writing by those peoples formerly colonized by Britain, though much of what it deals with is of interest and relevance to countries colonized by other European powers, such as France, Portugal, and Spain" (Ashcroft et al., 1989. p.1).

Teaching Mechanisms:

In 1990s, research started to delineate literature teaching in foreign language classrooms. But those studies were position-based instead of data-based studies, which determine the result of literature teaching on learning a foreign language.

Advancer learners of English appreciate good literature even if they are not able to perceive the entire contents (Erturul, 1995). She also pointed out that the students have to improve their literary proficiency, which would help them understand symbolic meanings in the literature. On the other hand, poetry brings the learning of rhythm and sound system among students (Çubukçu, 2001a; Himanolu, 2005) and encourages them to be learners (Erturul, 1995). Though some studies in 1990s encouraged literature usage in EFL classrooms, new curricula reduced the weekly literature courses, which was reinforced by Turker (1998) as to be followed in all levels of instruction. Akyel (1995) commented that the teachers may not like to teach poetry in classrooms due to their lack of knowledge in poetry although poetry provides precious language for EFL students. EFL teachers should be able to differentiate each genre as each genre has its own practical usage. Erturual (1995) reports that while the short stories are short and time saving with less words and imaginations, poetry on the contrary, have in-depth of imaginations, accent and rhythm. She also describes that drama contains dialogues, which would be very useful as they are a part of regular communication. She claims that novels are not applicable in classroom teaching as they are lengthy but they are recommended for reading outside the classroom and called as “breath reading” or “extensive reading” for the overall improvement of skills of the student

A study conducted with fourth year prospective teachers of English language revealed that most of the prospective teachers believe that literature courses are important for their English language education curriculum (Arikan, 2005). Novel methods of teaching and learning by using literature are valuable resources of improving language learning in Asia. As an example, literature theory can replace language-based methods for teaching literature (Çubukçu 2001b; Ünlü, 2002; Arikan, 2008). Additionally, computer technology like internet has to be included with traditional classroom-based activities for teaching literature (Kartal and Arikan, 2010; Arikan, 2008). Students have interests to work with tools given in the virtual world for learning American and British literature (Arikan, 2008).

Different models of teaching literature in class:

There are various models proposed for teaching literature to students in Asian Countries (Carter & Long, Lazar). The teacher can take literature content according to the type of model they select.

Cultural model takes literary content as a product, i.e., input information of the culture focused. It is the classical method, usually applied in university courses about literature. The cultural model looks for the social, political and historical background of a content, literary movements and genres. But content specific language work has not been done so far. This method would be completely teacher-centric.

The language model was meant to be highly learner-centric. While going through the content, learners tend to give importance to the pattern of language usage and the meaning through which they understand English. This model lets the teacher focus on general grammar and vocabulary (for example as given in the course books) or go for stylistic analysis in which the students would be able to elucidate the content with the knowledge on linguistic characteristics of the content. This improves the reading and studying ability of the learners.

The personal growth model is a process-based method and tends to be learner-centric. In this model, learners can portray their own views, thoughts and experiences. It tries to provide the content and the reader interactions to build the language thereby making it unforgettable. Learners are promoted to “make the text their own”. This model identifies the strength of literature, which can make the learners implement their learning in the classroom.

Requirements of Asian students’ education for English teaching:

Global Technology Excellence states three major points as follows. First, students play a significant role to resolve international issues like constant growth and safety, etc. Second, students have to collaborate in the various sectors in the world because of globalization of technology. Third, Government, industry, academy and other technology based associations need to work as a team to provide training to global students. Training given by the industry would be more useful to the students. Global study has to be conducted on existing technology education system, which would insist the importance of English in education and future careers of the students and increase the needs of English teaching in Asia. It is also understood that any further improvement in technical education in English is dependent on the student command over the English language. Such a command over the language is possible only when there is command over English literature.

Improvement of English applicable skills:

In the current scenario, English teaching should develop the ability of the students in listening, speaking, reading, writing and translating. Asian students’ education offers different new opportunities and styles to teachers and students. Developing skills, which need English proficiency, would be beneficial for students particularly in multi-national companies. These skills can be promoted while encouraging teaching of literature with a practical output in mind. Learning and applying informational technology and new applications through English applicable skills brings better convenient openings for advancement in the world. Work place demands English speaking programs and skills. So, we have to enhance the reading skills of students

through encouraging them to read more English classical and modern literature, which would improve their vocabulary and spoken English skills. Words and phrases used in daily life can be improved by communicating with English speakers in native language. English drama and poetry reading would help improving listening skills. Writing short paragraphs on their own and then lengthy articles with the use of reading materials aid for writing skills. Translation of vernacular literature into English can also be practiced to improve command over the English language

Combination of professional knowledge:

Apart from providing basic training, students have to be trained to use foreign language to implement in professional skills, teaching and other applications. This could be achieved by teaching students in the real time environment like asking them to take part in poetry reading competitions, organize plays in order to practice their language skills. By this, students would gain technical knowledge on English language. Following this hands-on training for their job and understanding professional knowledge as well can be made possible if technology students are asked to go work in their industry. In addition, they would be aware of the working environment, problem solving methods, interactions with elder and senior students and team work. Professional knowledge with English teaching gets more importance in Asian students' education and is appreciated by industries.

Training ability of self-learning:

Learning is a continuous process in life to update our knowledge to understand the advanced technologies and meet the age related demands. We would be able to train students to be imaginative and for continuous growth. Self-learning and long-life learning skills are important for both teachers and students. People who do not updated their skills and knowledge would be out of date and lose their jobs. So, we have to learn new skills and knowledge to keep us updated. Learning should continue after leaving classroom also. We have various resources to read such as professional magazines, journals, papers, internet, and in-service training programs. Joining to the organizations and participating in the conferences would get to know recent developments. Internet, distance education, e-learning and air-class would provide broad and different learning. Self learning increases our knowledge and skills anywhere anytime and is a productive life-long learning method.

Conclusion:

Literature is very important for English programs conducted in most of the non-English speaking countries. But teachers over those countries face problem in literature based teaching of English. A very few well prepared curricula with supporting materials is the first problem with teachers in language classroom. Inadequate preparation for literature teaching in TESL / TEFL programs is the second problem. The third issue is that the role of literature ESL / EFL is not defined with precise objectives. Many instructors implement literature in the classroom with no knowledge or training in that area. The teacher plays a crucial role in literature based teaching of English. When choosing literary contents for classroom teaching, many factors such as language skill of the students, interests, age, sex, etc have to be considered to supply with right materials to avoid students getting bored.

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