

Enhancing Students' Motivation in Literature Classrooms

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Abstract

This paper aims to introduce fresh ideas into teaching poetry which would arouse students' motivation. Motivating students in literature classrooms is a challenge for many teachers nowadays. Teaching English used to be linked with the study and appreciation of English literature, and this constituted the principal justification for teaching the language. However, over the past twenty-five years, the strength of this justification has evaporated; nowadays a much stronger justification for learning English is provided by the evident usefulness of having a practical, communicative command of the language. The research questions are (1) How can teachers arouse students' motivation in literature classrooms? and (2) How can literature give EFL students exposure to the target culture? In this paper, the descriptive library research method is used. This paper presents the teaching of Shakespeare's sonnet, "Sonnet No-2" with interactive activities under the three reading stages: pre-reading, while-reading and post-reading. Through language-based activities, it was found that literature lessons more thought-provoking, stimulating and interesting than being taught in conventional ways. At the same time, students got the opportunities to practise their language skills in discussion, prediction and brainstorming activities. Based on these interactive activities, further innovative activities may be designed for appreciating more poems in English literature. This paper will also give insights into facing the challenges of the 21st century literature classrooms.

Keywords: literature, interactive activities, language skills

Introduction

At present, most of the teachers in universities have faced with the problem of the shortage of literature teachers probably because the language policy of Myanmar has laid emphasis on teaching linguistics and applied linguistics. It is the fact that with the rise of linguistics, the importance of literature has declined, resulting in the popularity of teaching the language skills. As a result, there is little room for literature in the curriculum and syllabus of colleges and universities.

Another factor for the shortage of literature teachers is that it is only the qualified lecturers with some years of experiences in teaching who could give lectures on literature very well. In Myanmar, there have been trainings on literature for the promotion of teaching literature, but the number is quite small. Every year, new appointees are given two months training at NCEL (National Centre for English Language) called UPFATE. However, these trainings equipped new teachers with teaching four language skills and presentations skills. Moreover, teaching literature is not included among the course component. As a result, these young teachers who have had no previous trainings in teaching literature find it difficult to teach such subjects as poetry, drama and the novel. So, there has been a need to introduce more trainings on teaching literature.

In this paper, teaching literature is presented, not in the conventional ways of lecturing, but in the form of language-based activities to arouse students' motivation in the classroom. The teaching method will be demonstrated using language-based activities to study Sonnet 2 by William Shakespeare, England's national poet and the greatest dramatist in English language.

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Aims

- to inject fresh ideas into teaching poetry to increase students' motivation.
- to improve students' language skills through language-based activities and
- to enhance students' communicative skills in learning literature.

Research Questions

- (1) How can teachers arouse students' motivation in literature classrooms?
- (2) How can literature give EFL students exposure to the target culture?

Literature Review

According to Carter and Long (1991), language-based approaches are generally studying the literary text, not as a product but in terms of the processes of reading. Accordingly, the teacher has to come closer to the text, working with students. A relevant and meaningful experience is established through direct contact with the text. Such an approach implies that the language teaching classrooms are applied to the teaching of reading literature in a second or foreign languages are drawn. In other words, the standard EFL procedures involve the following: cloze, prediction, creative writing, rewriting, role-play, etc. are deployed for purposes of opening up the literary text and releasing its meanings. In such language-based, students-centered activities, students are engaged with a text in such a way as to develop their perceptions. In such activities the channels of communication will be one-way. In the 1980's, however, things started to change in language teaching since the teaching of literature is now often seen within the framework of three main models: the cultural model, the language model and the personal growth model.

The cultural model is seen as a means of transmitting important ideas and feelings, also sometimes in the target language. With regard to the language model, priority is given to teaching literature for its use in language development. Literature is used as a tool to teach certain vocabularies and structures. The personal growth model, the third model, connects what students read with what they have personally experienced, thus creating a genuine liking for literature not confined solely to the classroom.

According to Collie and Slater (2011), literature offers a bountiful and extremely varied body of written material which is 'important' in the sense that it says something about fundamental human issues, and which is enduring rather than ephemeral. A literary work can transcend both time and culture.

According to Lazar (1993), in many countries around the world, literature is highly valued. If students are familiar with literature in their own language, then studying some literature in English can provide an interesting and thought provoking point of comparison.

To use the terms of Richards (2015), the essence of CLT is the assumption that learners learn a language through using it for authentic communication. It was assumed that learning would be an outcome of engaging in meaningful communication.

Related Research

In the research "Language-based Approaches to Understanding Literature: A Creative Activity Module", Dhillon and Mogan (2014) discussed the teaching of literature using language-based approaches to help students to explore the literary text and enhance their language skills. The purpose of that article is to provide creative suggestions on teaching literature to motivate and facilitate students in learning and appreciating literature. Creative activities are used to explore the short story entitled "The Necklace" by Guy de Maupassant. Students are engaged in exploring the text in a fun and creative way. The creative activities allow them to discover how the language of the text works and the intended message. A framework for language-based approaches for teaching literature to ESL learners is also provided. The activities are categorized based on the four main skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing, and focus on areas such as general understanding, theme, setting, characterization, language, and point of view. The activities can be adapted by teachers according to the students' level of proficiency and other literary texts brought into the classroom.

Materials and Methods

The descriptive library research method is used to demonstrate the present research. The research is also presented with the communicative language teaching activities under the three reading stages: pre-reading, while-reading and post-reading. Some modifications of the activities in the previous research are also made.

Language-based Activities

Sonnet No.2 by William Shakespeare

When forty winters shall besiege thy brow,
 And dig deep trenches in thy beauty's field,
 Thy youth's proud livery, so gazed on now,
 Will be a tatter'd weed, of small worth held:
 Then being ask'd where all thy beauty lies,
 Where all the treasure of thy lusty days;
 To say, within thine own deep-sunken eyes,
 Were an all-eating shame and thriftless praise.
 How much more praise deserved thy beauty's use,
 If thou couldst answer 'This fair child of mine
 Shall sum my count and make my old excuse,'
 Proving his beauty by succession thine!
 This were to be new made when thou art old,
 And see thy blood warm when thou feel'st it cold.

Pre-reading

(Warm-up activities)

1. Ask Ss write down the meaning or definition of the sonnet (to test Ss' background knowledge) (a three-minute activity)
2. T introduces Ss to the history of sonnet (to arouse Ss' motivation) (T-L)
Get a copy of the map of Italy.

Can you find a group of islands at the tip of the country's foot? Yes, what do you call them? (to ask /find out Ss' background knowledge/schema)

Ans: Sicily islands

What are the people of Sicily islands called? (to test Ss' knowledge of morphology)

Ans: Sicilian

T explains that the Sicilian makes uses of a particular form of poetry that consists of fourteen lines that this form was adopted in the sixteenth century by a British explorer Sir. Thomas Wyatt. This is the origin of the sonnet. (T explains)

While-reading

1. Topic Discussion (T-S)

Distribute hand-outs to Ss to unscramble the lines (a three- minute activity)

(Think-Pair-Share)

Show the video-clip (to check their answer)

T introduces Ss to two types of sonnet

- Italian or petrarchan sonnet with the set structure of an octave and a sestet
- Elizabethan or Shakespearean sonnet with the set structure of three quatrains followed by a couplet

What is the structure or style of this poem? So, what type of poem is it?

- Three quatrains followed by a rhyming couplet, Elizabethan sonnet

2. Vocabulary(L-L)

T introduces Ss the use of imagery to understand the beliefs and ways of life in Shakespearean times

- winters, besiege, brow, deep trenches (military images)

Look for the synonyms of the following definitions in the poem. (a three-minute activity)

1. consuming
2. long narrow hole
3. useless
4. torn
5. possession
6. youths
7. continuous series
8. small plant
9. hollow
10. surrounded by a military force

Answer Keys

1. all-eating
2. trenches
3. thriftless
4. tattered
5. livery

6. lusty days
7. succession
8. weed
9. sunken eyes
10. besiege

Post-reading

1. What is the overall theme of this sonnet? (a five-minute activity) (group work)
 - age-shaming and gender discrimination of their era
2. Let Ss find out the interesting vocabularies that shows age-shaming and gender discrimination) (Think -Pair-Share)
 - all-eating shame, thriftless, tattered weed, his beauty etc.
3. Group work discussion about Shakespeare's attitude towards women and present days norms (five in each group). (a five-minute activity)

Do you accept Shakespeare's norms in present days situation? Two or three groups are randomly chosen for their presentation.
4. Ask Ss to create a sonnet based on their own theme.

Findings and Discussion

In the pre-reading activities, students' schema or background knowledge is tested. Their prediction is also encouraged so that teachers learn students' opinions and views. While-reading activities start with Topic Discussion: students have an opportunity to make contributions to teacher-student interactions. Students' engagement with the text they are reading is considerably high, resulting more or less in student-oriented approach. Matching exercises test students' applying their critical skills to reading comprehension. The exercises raise students' awareness of the poet's use of rhetorical devices or figures of speech, as well as his choice of sounds, words and imagery. The post-reading activities give a chance to students to practise their presentation skills. Because they have to collaborate in groups, the collaborative learning takes place during the activities. It is therefore recommended that activities appropriate to the right level of students should be introduced.

During the activities, most of the questions used by the teacher are lower order thinking skills questions (LOTS). In almost every line, the features of language used by the poet need to be analyzed to arrive at the correct meaning. Moreover, students have to make inferences from the context so that they can get the poet's message. As a result, they can develop their higher order thinking skills (HOTS) extensively. Because of the complexity of language which students need to work out, they can also develop their evaluating and critical thinking skills. Finally, teaching this sonnet can give the students the opportunities to develop both the LOTS and HOTS levels at the same time. However, the class size should also be considered in practical situations.

Conclusion

Teaching Literature is a subjective approach towards the study of a literary text. Instead of launching the lecturing method in the traditional way, language-based activities are recommended in that students not only enjoy themselves in engaging in the activities but also improve their language skills. Through the language-based activities, teachers can integrate the four language skills in teaching. At the same time, by designing language-based activities, teachers can have a chance to enhance their professional skills in lesson planning.

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