Literature as a Pedagogical Tool for Enhancing English Language Skills in Indian Higher Education under NEP 2020

Dr. Syed Wajahat Hussain
Associate Professor of English
SKC Government Degree College Poonch

Abstract

Literature plays an important role in developing language proficiency and competency by providing learners with meaningful exposure to authentic language in diverse contexts. Literary texts such as novels, short stories, poetry, and drama help learners expand their vocabulary, improve grammatical accuracy, strengthen reading and writing skills, and develop speaking and listening abilities. In addition, literature encourages critical thinking, creativity, interpretation, and cultural awareness. By engaging with different characters, themes, perspectives, and social contexts, learners develop a deeper understanding of language and its practical use. The integration of literature into language teaching therefore creates opportunities for both linguistic and personal development. This paper examines the significance of literature in language learning and highlights how literary texts can contribute to learners' overall proficiency, communicative competence, and appreciation of language and culture.

Keywords

Literature; Language Proficiency; Language Competency; Communicative Competence
Vocabulary Development; Reading Skills; Writing Skills; Critical Thinking; Cultural Awareness; Language Learning.

Introduction

Literature plays a significant role in improving language proficiency and communicative skills. It exposes learners to language in meaningful, authentic, and varied contexts. Through poetry, short stories, novels, plays, and essays, learners encounter vocabulary, grammar, sentence structures, idioms, and different styles of expression that may not be fully represented in conventional language-learning materials.

Vocabulary Development

One of the most important contributions of literature is vocabulary development. Literary works introduce learners to new words and expressions within a context, making their meanings easier to understand and remember. Regular reading also helps learners recognize how words are used naturally and appropriately in different situations.

Vocabulary development refers to the process of learning new words, understanding their meanings, and learning how to use them correctly and effectively. Literature plays an important role in vocabulary development because literary texts expose learners to a wide range of words and expressions in meaningful contexts.

Through novels, short stories, poems, and plays, learners encounter new vocabulary, idioms, phrases, synonyms, antonyms, and figurative expressions. Instead of learning words in isolation, learners see how they function in actual sentences and situations. This makes it easier to understand, remember, and use new words.

Literature also helps learners develop contextual understanding. For example, even when a reader does not know the exact meaning of a word, the surrounding sentences, characters, and events can provide clues

to its meaning. This encourages learners to guess meanings from context and become more independent readers.

Regular exposure to literary language also improves word choice and expressive ability. Learners gradually become familiar with different ways of expressing ideas, emotions, and opinions. As their vocabulary increases, they can communicate more accurately and confidently in both spoken and written English.

Thus, literature is an effective tool for vocabulary development because it provides learners with rich, authentic, and memorable language experiences.

Reading Comprehension

Reading comprehension is the ability to understand, interpret, and analyse written texts. Literature plays an important role in developing this skill because it encourages learners to read carefully and understand both the explicit and implicit meanings of a text. When learners read literary texts, they must understand not only the literal meaning of words but also implied meanings, characters' intentions, themes, emotions, and cultural references. This develops critical and analytical reading skills and encourages learners to think beyond the surface of a text.

Literary works such as novels, short stories, poems, and plays expose learners to different ideas, situations, characters, and writing styles. While reading, learners learn to identify the main idea, supporting details, themes, characters, setting, and sequence of events. They also learn to make inferences and understand meanings that are not directly stated.

Literature further develops critical thinking skills. Learners are encouraged to question the author's ideas, interpret characters' actions, compare different perspectives, and form their own opinions about the text. This makes reading an active process rather than simply recognizing words.

Another benefit is the development of reading strategies. Learners practise predicting what may happen, using context clues to understand unfamiliar words, summarising information, and identifying important details. These strategies can be applied to academic, professional, and everyday reading.

Therefore, literature significantly improves reading comprehension by helping learners become active, analytical, and independent readers. It not only strengthens their understanding of language but also develops their ability to interpret and critically evaluate written information.

Writing Skills.

Writing skills refer to the ability to express ideas, thoughts, opinions, and information clearly and effectively in written form. Literature plays an important role in developing these skills by exposing learners to different forms, styles, and structures of writing.

Through reading novels, short stories, poems, plays, and essays, learners observe how writers organize their ideas, construct sentences, develop paragraphs, and create coherent texts. This exposure helps learners improve their grammar, sentence structure, vocabulary, punctuation, and overall organization.

Literature encourages learners to develop their creative and critical writing abilities. After reading a literary work, students may be asked to write summaries, character sketches, reviews, personal responses, or alternative endings. Such activities encourage them to express their own ideas while applying the language they have learned.

Furthermore, literary texts provide examples of different writing styles and techniques, such as description, narration, dialogue, comparison, and imagery. By analysing these techniques, learners can understand how language can be used effectively to communicate different purposes and emotions.

Literature also improves coherence and cohesion. Learners become familiar with how writers connect ideas logically and use appropriate linking words and expressions. This enables them to produce writing that is clearer, more organized, and easier to understand.

Thus, literature contributes significantly to the development of writing skills. It provides learners with models of effective writing and opportunities to practise accurate, creative, coherent, and meaningful written communication.

Speaking and Communication Skills

Literature contributes to speaking and communication skills as well. Classroom activities such as discussions, role-plays, debates, and dramatizations based on literary texts encourage learners to express their opinions and emotions in the target language. Such activities provide opportunities to practise language in an engaging and meaningful way.

Literature plays an important role in developing speaking and communication skills because it provides learners with meaningful opportunities to use language in different contexts. Literary works such as novels, short stories, poems, and plays introduce learners to natural dialogue, expressions, and different ways of communicating ideas and emotions.

Classroom activities based on literature, such as group discussions, role-plays, dramatizations, debates, and storytelling, encourage learners to speak actively. By taking part in these activities, students improve their pronunciation, fluency, vocabulary, sentence formation, and confidence.

Literature also helps learners understand how language changes according to context, situation, and relationship. For example, conversations between characters can demonstrate formal and informal language, polite expressions, emotional language, and conversational strategies. This helps learners communicate more appropriately in real-life situations.

Another important benefit is the development of critical thinking and self-expression. Discussing characters, themes, and events encourages learners to express opinions, give reasons, ask questions, agree or disagree respectfully, and respond to different viewpoints.

Literature can also develop empathy and intercultural communication. By experiencing the thoughts, feelings, and experiences of different characters and cultures, learners become more aware of perspectives different from their own.

Therefore, literature provides a rich and engaging environment for developing speaking and communication skills. It helps learners become more fluent, confident, expressive, and effective communicators in both academic and everyday situations.

Cultural Knowledge

Furthermore, literature provides valuable cultural knowledge. Literary works reflect the traditions, beliefs, values, social conditions, and historical experiences of the communities in which they are produced. Understanding these cultural aspects enables language learners to communicate more appropriately and develop greater intercultural awareness.

Literature is an important source of cultural knowledge because literary works reflect the traditions, beliefs, values, customs, history, and social life of the people and communities they represent. When learners read literature, they gain an understanding of cultures beyond their own.

Novels, short stories, poems, and plays introduce learners to different lifestyles, festivals, social practices, relationships, traditions, and ways of thinking. This helps learners understand how language is connected to the culture in which it is used.

Literature also develops cultural awareness and sensitivity. By exploring characters from different social and cultural backgrounds, learners can recognize different perspectives and learn to respect diversity. This reduces cultural misunderstandings and promotes tolerance and empathy.

In addition, cultural knowledge helps learners understand idioms, references, humour, symbols, and expressions that may be difficult to understand without cultural context. As a result, learners can communicate more appropriately and effectively in real-life situations.

Literary texts can also provide insight into historical and social issues. They may portray events such as migration, inequality, conflict, social change, or struggles for freedom, allowing learners to connect language learning with broader human experiences.

Thus, literature not only improves language proficiency but also broadens learners' understanding of the world. It helps them become culturally aware, open-minded, and effective communicators.

Motivation and Emotional Engagement

Literature can also increase motivation and emotional engagement. Unlike isolated grammar exercises, stories and poems can stimulate curiosity, imagination, and empathy. When learners become emotionally connected to a text or character, they are often more willing to read, discuss, and explore the language.

Motivation and Emotional Engagement

Literature plays an important role in increasing motivation and emotional engagement in language learning. Unlike isolated grammar exercises or vocabulary drills, literary texts often contain interesting stories, memorable characters, emotions, conflicts, and real-life experiences that capture learners' attention and encourage them to participate actively.

Stories and poems can create an emotional connection between learners and the language. When students identify with a character, experience curiosity about a story, or respond emotionally to a poem, they become more interested in understanding the text. This emotional involvement can make language learning more enjoyable and meaningful.

Literature also encourages imagination and creativity. Learners can predict events, imagine different endings, discuss characters' decisions, or create their own stories and dialogues. These activities make learners active participants rather than passive recipients of information.

Furthermore, literary discussions provide opportunities for learners to express personal opinions, feelings, and experiences. When students feel that their ideas are valued, their confidence and willingness to communicate can increase. This can reduce anxiety and create a more positive attitude towards learning the language.

Literature also helps develop empathy by allowing learners to experience situations from different characters' perspectives. Understanding the emotions and struggles of others can make the learning experience more personally meaningful.

Therefore, literature can make language learning interesting, enjoyable, and emotionally engaging. By stimulating curiosity, imagination, and empathy, it motivates learners to read more, participate actively, and develop greater confidence in using the language.

Language Competency

In addition, literature develops language competency, which involves more than knowing grammatical rules. Competent language users must be able to select appropriate words, understand different contexts, interpret meanings, and communicate ideas effectively. Literary texts provide rich opportunities to develop these abilities simultaneously.

Language Competency

Language competency refers to the ability to use a language accurately, appropriately, and effectively in different situations. Literature contributes significantly to the development of language competency by exposing learners to rich and varied forms of language.

Through literary texts, learners encounter different vocabulary, grammatical structures, sentence patterns, idioms, expressions, and styles of communication. This helps them understand how language works in different contexts and improves their ability to choose appropriate words and structures.

Literature also develops linguistic accuracy and fluency. Regular reading provides learners with models of well-formed language, while activities such as discussions, presentations, role-plays, and creative writing give them opportunities to practise using the language.

Another important aspect is pragmatic competence—the ability to understand and use language appropriately according to the situation, purpose, and relationship between speakers. Dialogues and interactions between literary characters can show learners how people express requests, emotions, agreement, disagreement, politeness, and other communicative intentions.

Literature further strengthens critical and interpretive abilities. Learners learn to understand implied meanings, symbolism, tone, irony, and different perspectives. These skills help them communicate more effectively and understand complex language in real-life situations.

Thus, literature supports overall language competency by developing learners' accuracy, fluency, vocabulary, grammatical awareness, contextual understanding, and communicative ability. It enables learners not merely to know the language but to use it confidently and effectively.

However, literature should be selected according to learners' language levels, interests, and educational objectives. Difficult or unfamiliar texts can discourage learners if they are introduced without adequate support. Teachers can therefore use adapted texts, guided reading, vocabulary activities, discussions, and creative tasks to make literature accessible and effective.

In conclusion, literature is a powerful resource for language learning. It strengthens vocabulary, reading, writing, speaking, comprehension, critical thinking, cultural awareness, and communicative competence. By engaging learners with meaningful and authentic language, literature not only helps them learn a language but also enables them to use it more confidently, creatively, and effectively.

Works Consulted:

1. Books on literature and language teaching

1. Brumfit, C. J., & Carter, R. A. (Eds.). (1986). Literature and language teaching. Oxford University Press.
2. Carter, R., & Long, M. N. (1991). Teaching literature. Longman.
3. Collie, J., & Slater, S. (1987). Literature in the language classroom: A resource book of ideas and activities. Cambridge University Press.
4. Lazar, G. (1993). Literature and language teaching: A guide for teachers and trainers. Cambridge University Press.
5. Maley, A., & Duff, A. (1989). The inward ear: Poetry in the language classroom. Cambridge University Press.

2. Books on English language teaching and language acquisition

6. Brown, H. D. (2007). Principles of language learning and teaching (5th ed.). Pearson Education.
7. Krashen, S. D. (1982). Principles and practice in second language acquisition. Pergamon Press.
8. Richards, J. C., & Rodgers, T. S. (2014). Approaches and methods in language teaching (3rd ed.). Cambridge University Press.
9. Ur, P. (2012). A course in English language teaching (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press.
10. Widdowson, H. G. (1978). Teaching language as communication. Oxford University Press.

3. Research articles on literature-based language instruction

11. Alvstad, C., & Castro, A. (2009). Conceptions of literature in university language courses. The Modern Language Journal, 93(2), 170–184.
12. Arboleda-Arboleda, A., & Castro-Garcés, A. Y. (2019). Fostering language learning in the university EFL classroom through literature: A task-based approach. GIST – Education and Learning Research Journal, 19, 101–127. https://doi.org/10.26817/16925777.706
13. Hossain, K. I. (2024). Literature-based language learning: Challenges, and opportunities for English learners. Ampersand, 13, Article 100201. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.amper.2024.100201
14. Mart, C. T. (2018). Literature-based instruction: A worthwhile approach for the mastery of a second language. 3L: Language, Linguistics, Literature®. Consult the journal record for the final volume, issue, and publication details before submission.

4. Government policy documents and NEP 2020

15. Government of India, Ministry of Education. (2020). National Education Policy 2020. https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/NEP_Final_English_0.pdf
16. University Grants Commission. (2021). Guidelines for multiple entry and exit in academic programmes offered in higher education institutions. University Grants Commission.
17. University Grants Commission. (2022). Curriculum and credit framework for undergraduate programmes. University Grants Commission.

Copyright & License:

© Authors retain the copyright of this article. This work is published under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY 4.0), permitting unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.