

EXPLORING THE ROLE OF LITERATURE IN DEVELOPING SPEAKING AND WRITING SKILLS OF LEARNERS

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Abstract

This paper investigated the role of literature in developing speaking and writing skills among students at higher secondary school level in district Swat Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), Pakistan. Literature reveals that current practice of teaching English at higher secondary schools uses GTM, Grammar Translation Method (GTM), in which word to word translation is done and language is taught through first language. Studies have revealed that literature plays a key role in developing speaking and writing skills of students. Most of the previous research is reported on primary school level. There is a dearth of studies on how literature plays a role in developing speaking and writing skills of students at higher secondary level. Moreover, in the current literature, the role of literature especially short fictions and other similar content has been overlooked and underestimated related to developing speaking and writing skills of students. For this purpose, the researcher conducted a survey to find out the role of literature in developing writing and speaking skills of students at higher secondary school level. To collect data, the researcher designed and administered a structured questionnaire to 302 students. The students were selected through random sampling method. The findings of the study testify that teaching of English language through literature helps them develop speaking and writing skills. The study also found that there was a significant difference in the perceptions of female versus male students towards the role of literature in developing speaking and writing skills. Based on the results, the paper suggests that literature (short fictions) may be used as source text for developing speaking and writing skills of students.

Keywords: Literature (short story), speaking skills, writing skills, higher secondary school

Introduction

Literature is the foundation of language learning. It plays a key role in developing all skills of language especially speaking and writing. In this study, literature means the use of short stories or other related contents. Short stories are apparently one of the suitable options among literary genres owing to its promising nature of enhancing the learners' four skills; listening, speaking, reading and writing. Short stories have been chosen because of their effective, motivational and cultural enrichment embedded in them. According to Collie and Slater (1990) literature has approved stuff, cultural improvement, language development and individual involvement. As many educators and professionals argue that it is not feasible to teach English without teaching culture as well (Sivasubramaniam, 2006). Vernier et al. (2008) consider the teaching of cultural as a fifth skill for language learners that "enhances students' overall learning experience." It is not enough just to have linguistic competence when communicating with someone in a foreign language. Specific cultural references from geography, pastimes and historical events and personalities always appear in language, and each culture follows special rules regarding formal and informal address and conversational routines. Only memorizing vocabulary and grammar points do not make one proficient in a foreign language unless one knows sociocultural rules native speakers use when they communicate with one another. Not knowing the cultural component of language is problematic (Murdoch, 2002). The objective of

this study is to explore the role of literature as technique for enhancing language proficiency with particular focus on speaking and writing skills of students at higher secondary schools in district Swat, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

In Pakistan, teaching of English starts from primary level and continues until university. Although, it is taught as a compulsory subject, yet most of students lack the expected proficiency at the graduate and even the post-graduate level (Bilal, *et al.*, 2013). Mostly, in all the government institutions across the county, English language is taught through grammar translation method which focuses only on grammatical rules, not the language as a composite whole. Furthermore, English is divided into many grammatical units such as narration, voices and essay writing which make the language learning as a boring activity for learners. Apart from this, in this method of teaching, language is taught in isolation not related to real life situation. Consequently, the learners do learn different grammatical units of the English language but they are unable to make creative use of language (Chiang, 2007).

Researchers believe that teaching second language (English) through literature using “Communicative Teaching Approach” helps students learn language in general whereas speaking and writing in particular. However, the researcher to test his hypothesis has selected short stories from the whole body of literature for this study. According to Hines (2005), it is better to use literature rather than a communicative textbook because it can change the learning approach from focusing on grammar to creative thinking. He believes that literature-based programs focus on the interpretation of the language and this allows students to experiment with the language. It can be assumed that literature allows learners to be creative in their thinking and also provides students with a platform to use the language. According to language researchers, learning Second Language in a non-native speaking community is a challenging task. Learners apply lots of efforts and time to learn target language in the classroom setting (Aghagolzadeh & Tajabadi, 2012). Learners learn grammar and vocabulary with guidance provided by their teachers. Only linguistic and grammatical knowledge is not sufficient to be competent in Second Language. For example, teaching SL (Second Language) through grammar translation method in which word to word translation is done, teacher uses native language for teaching target language. Language thus, learned does not serve need of learners because it is both ineffective and unnatural (Boughey, 2002).

In addition to this, teacher is an authority in classroom and it is necessary for students to get correct answer. With students studying grammar deductively rather than inductively hamper them using language creatively and effectively, though this method gives much mental exercise and helps the learners grow intellectually (Lao & Krashen, 2000). The fundamental objective of this method is to enable the students to read and write mechanically rather than critically and creatively. Besides, in this method of teaching, speaking and listening are given no importance, and pronunciation is ignored (Fecteau, 1999). Vocabulary memorization and grammar is emphasized at the cost of communicative competence. Ultimately, students end up with a lot of knowledge about the target language, but do not know how to use them in the real life situation or context other than school and college. This method of teaching is directed only to promote rote learning (McKay, 2002). This study aimed to investigate the effectiveness of literature in teaching speaking and writing skills at higher secondary school level in Swat, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, Pakistan.

Research objectives

The main objectives of this study were:

1. To find out the role of literature in developing speaking and writing skills at higher secondary school level.
2. To compare the attitude of male and female students towards the role of literature in improving speaking and writing skills of students at higher secondary school

Research questions

Research questions of the study are as follow

1. What is the role of literature in improving speaking and writing skills at higher secondary school level?
2. What is the perception of both male and female students towards short stories in developing speaking and writing skills?

Methodology

The nature of the study is quantitative. Survey questionnaire was used based on cross sectional approach. The method was adopted and the data was collected once during the study. This method helps in collecting large data from a sizeable number of participants in a short time research (Gay *et al.*, 2006). All the male and female intermediate institutions in district Swat constitute population of this current study. According to the District survey report (2016) the total number of the institutions in the target area are twenty (20) whereas, the total strength of the students are 1400. Out of this, 302 students were selected using the Kregice and Morgan (1970) sampling technique. The researcher used simple random sample technique to collect data. The sample was taken from the attendance register randomly selected from ten institutions out of twenty, ten each from schools and colleges using basket technique.

Research instruments

To gain quantitative information from the respondents, a set of questionnaires was used as the instrument to collect data and appointments with the students were taken on different occasions. Questionnaire was used to gain quantitative information as it “enables the researcher to collect data in field settings and the data themselves are more amenable to quantification than discursive data such as free-form field notes, participations observers’ journals, and the transcript of oral language” (Nunan, 1992:143). Munn & Drever (1993) add that, using questionnaire saves time, the respondents of the study can remain anonymous, possibility of a high return rate and the questions are standardized.

Pilot study

Before the actual data collection period, the researcher conducted a pilot study because pilot study is needed to guarantee the validity and the reliability of the items in the questionnaires. It is important to conduct a pilot study as “you want to find out roughly how long the questionnaire takes to answer and if there is any features of it that are likely to put people off and so reduce the likely response rate...you want to ‘de-bug’ the questions. Is the wording clear, using terms familiar and unambiguous?” (Munn & Drever, 1993). Piloting is an important step in empirical and it cannot be ignored. Otherwise, the results of the study would be affected and jeopardized (Zhong, 2010). And by doing pilot procedures, researcher can avoid a great deal of frustration and possible extra work later on. Munn & Drever (1993) mention that in picking the pilots, “avoid anyone to whom it will be sent in the study itself.” Therefore, the respondents for the pilot study were senior who had already experienced this stage.

The instrument was piloted on 60 students. The pilot study respondents were from third and fourth semester respectively, University of Malakand, KP province. They studied in the advance level and who had some background knowledge of what is being asked in the questionnaires and they were familiar with the terms used in it. They were asked to answer the questionnaire and

identify problems like what are the words that seems unclear, words that they did not understand, instruction that is confusing and any sentences that they thought was not suitable. The respondents were asked to go through the questionnaire and discuss any problems that they encountered while they went through the text.

Results of the study

The result of the study is presented here. For this purpose, descriptive and inferential statistics were applied. The descriptive statistics was utilized to prepare, organize the data. To do this, the mean, mode and standard deviation were calculated. The inferential statistics was used to make gender-based comparison of the data.

Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 illustrates the descriptive statistics of the role of literature in developing speaking and writing skills of students. The number of respondents was 302. The five category response statements were coded with the Likert rank: strongly agree=5, agree=4, neutral=3, disagree=2, strongly disagree=1 to obtain mean score in each category.

Table 1 Means and Standard Deviation for each Item in Students Beliefs about the role of literature in developing speaking and writing skills

	Statements	N	M	SD
1	Learning English through short stories is interesting.	302	2.39	.96
2	I learn English language easily through short stories.	302	2.46	1.04
3	Learning English language through short stories enables learners to learn in a proper context.	302	2.39	1.02
4	Sharing and discussing the events and occurrences in short stories improve my communication skills.	302	2.38	1.12
5	Learning English through short stories improves my writing skills.	302	2.27	1.10
6	Learning English through short stories enriches my vocabulary.	302	3.14	1.27
7	Learning English through short stories enables me to speak and write about the culture depicted through the story.	302	2.23	1.20
8	Short stories make English language learning easy because of their rich vocabulary (phrases, expressions and grammar points)	302	2.18	1.13
9	Learning English grammar rules through short story is easier than learning them in isolation	302	2.44	1.34
10	Reading out dialogues or acting out different roles in short stories improve speaking skills.	302	2.32	1.18
11	Through short story, I learn meanings of words easily because they are directly connected to the situation or context	302	2.05	1.05
12	Learning English language through short story facilitates interaction in classroom	302	2.09	1.11
13	Elements of suspense and surprise in short story motivate learners to read it.	302	1.99	1.00
14	Learning English through short stories develops creative faculty of learners	302	2.09	1.18
15	Learning English language through short stories is easy because learners identify themselves with characters in a story.	302	2.01	1.00
16	I like learning English language through short stories because they often deal with universal themes such as love and war that are not usually available in course books.	302	1.95	1.04
17	Learning English through short stories enables me to learn it at discourse not at a sentence or words level.	302	4.13	1.09

18	Reading short stories enables me to think in English Language	302	1.98	1.05
19	Employing short stories in English Language classroom gives opportunity to students to talk over characters or events in a story	302	2.42	1.36
20	Translating a short story into my mother tongue enables me to learn English language easily	302	2.41	1.33
21	Reading short stories before discussion and writing activity is better than reading them on the spot	302	3.88	1.21
22	It is easier to Learn English language through language games based on a short story	302	4.10	1.19

The resulting data in table 1 show the average or means for students' perception about the extent that literature contributed towards developing their speaking and writing skills. Based on mean scores, majority of the respondents replied that literature did contribute towards their development of speaking and writing skills. The students' responses in the table ranged a mean of 1.95 to 4.13 and the standard deviation ranged from 1.00 to .96. These results show that the students primarily disagreed or strongly disagreed with majority of the statements in this category of the survey.

Comparison of Male and female student perceptions

The information in Table 2 examines the difference between male and female students on their perceptions of the extent that literature contributed to their development of their speaking and writing skills. The mean and standard deviations of both genders are illustrated along with the t statistics and the significance of probability.

Table 2 T-test analysis based on Gender

Statements	Male		Female		t	P
	M	SD	M	SD		
Learning English through short stories is interesting.	2.45	.94	2.31	.97	3.00	.05
I learn English language easily through short stories.	2.55	1.05	2.28	1.00	3.01	.05
Learning English language through short stories enables learners to learn in a proper context.	2.44	1.01	2.30	1.03	.93	.39
Sharing and discussing the events and occurrences in short stories improve my communication skills.	2.36	1.15	2.42	1.06	.11	.89
Learning English through short stories improves my writing skills.	2.40	1.15	2.03	.99	4.54	.01
Learning English through short stories enriches my vocabulary.	3.17	1.34	3.09	1.12	.60	.54
Learning English through short stories enables me to speak and write about the culture depicted through the story.	2.23	1.15	2.24	1.29	.03	.96
Short stories make English language learning easy because of their rich vocabulary (phrases, expressions and grammar points	2.09	1.12	2.30	1.11	5.72	.32
Learning English grammar rules through short story is easier than learning them in isolation	2.39	1.35	2.54	1.32	.99	.37
Reading out dialogues or acting out different roles in short stories improve speaking skills.	2.26	1.11	2.42	1.30	.83	.43
Through short story, I learn meanings of words easily because they are directly connected to the situation or context	2.09	1.08	1.98	1.02	.72	.48
Learning English language through short story facilitates interaction in classroom	2.02	1.07	2.20	1.14	4.11	.01
Elements of suspense and surprise in short story motivate learners to read it.	2.08	1.00	1.82	.98	2.55	.07
Learning English through short stories develops creative	2.19	1.21	1.89	1.07	4.17	.41

faculty of learners						
Learning English language through short stories is easy because learners identify themselves with characters in a story.	1.90	.85	2.20	1.20	4.70	.34
I like learning English language through short stories because they often deal with universal themes such as love and war that are not usually available in course books.	1.84	.95	2.12	1.11	9.39	.00
Learning English through short stories enables me to learn it at discourse not at a sentence or words level.	4.13	1.12	4.13	1.03	.01	.98
Reading short stories enables me to think in English Language	1.91	1.03	2.09	1.10	1.07	.34
Employing short stories in English Language classroom gives opportunity to students to talk over characters or events in a story	2.42	1.39	2.43	1.32	1.08	.34
Translating a short story into my mother tongue enables me to learn English language easily	2.58	1.41	2.10	1.13	5.68	.00
Reading short stories before discussion and writing activity is better than reading them on the spot	3.94	1.15	3.74	1.32	1.08	.34
It is easier to Learn English language through language games based on a short story	2.13	1.22	3.13	1.09	1.01	.93

Table 2 indicates that a statistically significant difference with a p value $<.05$ was found in the statements 5, 12, 16 20. The female students disagreed more strongly with these two statements than male students. A significant difference with a p value $<.00$ was noted in statement five. The male students disagreed more strongly with this statement than the female students. A significant difference with a p value $<.01$ was found in the statement twelve. Male students disagreed more strongly with these two statements than female students. A significant difference with a p value $<.02$ was noted in the statement sixteen. Male students disagreed more strongly with this statement than female students. A significant difference with a p value $<.00$ was noted in the statement twenty. Male students remained neutral more strongly to the first statement than female students. To the second statement, female students remained neutral more strongly than male students.

Discussion

It is deduced from the aforementioned responses that the attitude of students towards the role of literature in developing speaking and writing skills of students was positive. As previous studies (Nunan, 1992) also explain that communicative approach is positive as they have time and again emphasized the communicative aspect of authentic and unmodified materials and that too offer proper context for both language teaching and learning. Teaching language skills through short stories provide learners with target language exposure where the learners find themselves in real life situation, and hence have the feelings of achievement and success. Today the role of the communicative approach in foreign language teaching is recommended as it promotes learner-Centre teaching, making the learners more independent, critical, logical and analytical in their thinking, and it is meant for teaching communicative aspects of language, focusing on teaching communicative proficiency rather than on mere mastery of structures.

Many proponents of Communicative Language Teaching have advocated the use of “authentic,” from-life” materials in the classroom. These materials are provided by short stories as they are supreme resource of authentic materials which account for a lot of communicative activities. And for some, Communicative Language Teaching is an insertion of grammatical rules with functional teaching. As Littlewood (1981:1) states, ‘One of the most characteristic features of communicative language teaching is that it pays systematic attention to functional as well as structural aspects of language.’

This asserts the claim that language is acquired through communication, so that it is not merely a question of activating an existing knowledge of the language by practicing and repeated drills, but of stimulating the development of the language system itself. Some of the respondents were of the opinion that short stories offer symbolic and real characters so talking and sharing opinions over them does improve learners' communication skills because language is used in a proper context, and most of us have also gone through the same experience and events. The main purpose of language is to communicate ideas, message, information, our inner feelings and so on. L2 learners do not usually have access to native environment so short story is there to provide them with the much-needed target language exposure.

Besides, short story also exposes learners to specific sociocultural expressions and idioms which are integral part of a language, making L2 learning easy and natural are not usually available in other texts books. Thus, these materials serve the communicative purpose of language teaching and learning. The respondents also stressed the importance of interpretive ability and expansion of language awareness of learners, offered by short stories, and making them to think critically and have high order thinking as well.

Conclusion

On the basis of the responses of the respondents, it can be concluded that there is a positive attitude of students towards the role of literature in developing speaking and writing skills. The objective of the study was to find out the attitude of students towards learning of second language through short stories employing communicative approach, and give suggestions and recommendations for improvement of speaking and writing skills. The researcher through his research study put forth recommendations and suggestions for teachers and policy makers to utilize the fiction genre and communicative approach for improving speaking and writing skills. Thus, through this paper it is inferred that teaching of language through this approach using short stories is synonymous with practical life activities. Most importantly, the role of teacher in this approach is to facilitate interaction and communication process between all participants in the classroom and to participate in the ongoing discussion as independent participant.

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