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The need and importance of integrating language and literature pedagogy: A discourse in the context of Nagaland

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Abstract

This paper situates itself as a discourse on the need to embed the development of language skills within the literature pedagogy in the classrooms of Nagaland. It is built on the premise that education in Nagaland is still inclined towards the traditional paradigm under which English as a subject is not given wholesome treatment. In the English classrooms of Nagaland, textual and literary analysis takes the central stage and the development of language skills is almost neglected. This paper argues that if language skills are not given equal importance students will not be well equipped to face the real-life challenges. In this light, this paper presents a discourse on the need to integrate language and literature pedagogy in the classrooms of Nagaland. It opens with a brief overview on the context and background of the study followed by a review of literature that supports the integration of language and literature pedagogy. To strengthen the argument made, the paper presents a sample task that integrates the development of language skills in a literature task.

Keywords: Language skills, literature, pedagogy, integration, motivation

Introduction

Nagaland is one of the North-eastern States of India which presents one of the most complicated sociolinguistic settings in the country. This multilingual complexity emerges from its multi-tribal composition where each of the 17 officially recognized tribes speaks a distinct language that is intelligible only to members of its own tribe. Kuolie (2006) ^[4] rightly observes that “Nagaland is a small state within Indian Union, yet it has many languages and dialects. Linguistic and ethnic diversity is the hallmark of Nagaland where even each village is said to have its own dialect and clan name.” This multilingual scenario paved the way for English to become the most important language in the State and it enjoys the status of the only official language of the State. It is predominantly used in almost all domains of life such as the school, the church, peer groups, government. This elevated status of English makes way for the general assumption that the quality or standard of English is fairly good. However, the paradox is that despite the extensive use of English in the State, the quality or standard is considerably low. Many students who complete their graduation and even post-graduation are still found to be grappling with expressing themselves in English which can greatly hinder their academic and professional success. The issue highlighted here can be attributed to the traditionalism that still continues to have a stronghold in the education system of Nagaland. Further, English is treated like a subject and not as a language in the classrooms. It may also be stated that English as a subject is heavily literature oriented and all the literature teaching is primarily limited to the study and analysis of literary texts, neglecting the development of language skills. This paper is built on the premise that the imbalance between language and literature in the classrooms of Nagaland is one key factor that is leading to the low proficiency level among learners. In this light, this paper seeks to address the need and importance of integrating language and literature pedagogy to provide a more holistic and comprehensive approach to education.

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Current Scenario of the language and literature pedagogy in Nagaland: An Overview

As already mentioned, there is a huge gap between language and literature pedagogy in the curriculum and classrooms of Nagaland. Based on observation and experience, a few aspects may be highlighted as key factors that are contributing to the problem discussed in this paper. In the first place, one may point out the limited emphasis on explicit language instruction within the literature curriculum. Language skills, such as speaking, listening, reading, and writing, are often overshadowed by the extensive focus on literary analysis. As a result, students may struggle with fundamental language competencies, hindering their ability to express themselves effectively and comprehend complex texts. In this connection, Changkija, (2007) opines that it is alarming to observe how learners' association with English for 10 to 12 years or more is not helping their comprehension and compositional skills. There is still a lack of proficiency in English.

To point out a few instances where students' are facing problems, some students' can grasp what is taught in classes but cannot translate them into writing; some faces the problem of composing and lacks creativity in writing. There are evidences where students' are found incapable of expressing their ideas even in simple English. Further, their low knowledge of grammar is another problem zone. Some students' are found struggling even with basic grammar such as the past tense and the present tense. Then again one may point out that the knowledge of vocabulary is also weak. Most of the students' fail due to English. All these instances point out that the quality of English language teaching and learning in Nagaland is weak.

Another limitation is the scarcity of opportunities for authentic language practice in the literature classroom. Language proficiency is best developed through active usage and meaningful communication, yet classroom activities primarily revolve around passive reading and analysis of texts. Insufficient speaking and writing tasks deprive students of the chance to apply and refine their language skills in practical contexts. The system of education in Nagaland is still curved towards traditionalism though culturally, the shift towards modernism is fairly fast. The language classroom therefore is also stemmed on the basis of "learners learn what teachers teach". A typical Language classroom in Nagaland can be described in the words of Rivers (1987; 10) as "quiet places with inhibited students who dare not try to express what really matters to them".

Moreover, lack of teacher training and resources may also be highlighted as a key factor. Teachers face challenges in integrating language effectively due to a lack of adequate training and resources. Many literature educators do not possess the necessary pedagogical strategies to incorporate language instruction effortlessly. Limited access to teaching materials and professional development opportunities further restrict their ability to implement innovative language and literature integration practices.

The factors presented above are but a few observations derived from experience as an educator for many years. There are bound to be many other factors. However, the purpose of the above has simply been to place emphasis on the need to adopt a comprehensive approach that integrates language and literature pedagogy more effectively, an approach that can foster a balanced and integrated approach

that nurtures both literature appreciation and language proficiency among students.

A review of literature on the benefits of integrating language and literature

The integration of language and literature in education has been recognized as a crucial approach for enhancing students' language proficiency, critical thinking skills, and literary appreciation. Several studies have emphasized the importance and benefits of this integration, highlighting its significance in educational settings. In the first place, the integration of literary texts into language learning can play a significant role in increasing learners' motivation which is a key aspect in enhancing learning. Duff and Malea (1990) ^[3] says: "Literature is more likely to engage with and motivate a learner than artificial teaching inputs because it is generated by some genuine impulse on the part of the writer and deals with subjects and themes which may be of interest to the learner."

According to Lazar (1993) ^[5], literary texts are highly stimulating and captivating because they expose students to intricate themes and unconventional language usage. Novels and short stories, in particular, can be more engrossing as they involve students in the suspense of unraveling the plot. It has been argued that literature serves as an excellent resource for developing students' abilities to infer meaning and make interpretations (as cited in Lazar, 1993) ^[5]. This is because literary texts offer multiple layers of meaning and require active engagement from the reader/learner to uncover the implied implications and assumptions within the text.

Reading, as one of the fundamental language skills, holds a significant position in language learning, with the attainment of good reading proficiency being a primary objective. Literature, due to its requirement for careful analysis and in-depth exploration, can contribute to the improvement of learners' reading abilities. McKay (1982) ^[6] suggests that literature can enhance overall reading proficiency, leading to the achievement of academic goals. Additionally, she states that "to the extent that students enjoy reading literature, it may increase their motivation to interact with a text and thus, ultimately increase their reading proficiency" (p.531). Similarly, Spack (1985) ^[8] points out that; "by interpreting texts and considering alternative interpretations, students come to understand in a fundamental way how meaning can be created through reading" (p.706).

On the whole, it may be stated that the literature supports the importance of integrating language and literature in educational settings. By integrating language skills and literary analysis, educators can create a more comprehensive and engaging learning experience for students. This integration not only fosters language proficiency but also promotes critical thinking, cultural understanding, and aesthetic appreciation. Carter and Walker (1989) ^[2] assert that because literature, itself, is language; it can serve well to the language learning purposes.

A Sample Classroom Task

In the light of the above, this paper presents a sample classroom task that integrates language and literature. The activity was adapted from *The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison. The prompt that can be given to the students is given below; By all rights, we should hate Cholly Breedlove, given that he rapes his daughter. But Morrison

explains in her afterword that she did not want to dehumanize her characters, even those who dehumanize one another, and she succeeds in making Cholly a sympathetic figure. There is no excuse for Cholly's actions. We cannot forgive him for his violence and brutality. In no way can we justify what he does. Yet Morrison makes us understand his story, experience it from the inside out. He is a monster, no doubt, but we empathize with him. Judges reading this story have often said that the story forces them to see offenders appearing before their bench from a new perspective. Each offender has an interior self, a complex story of his own. It makes judgment more difficult, but more humane. It makes us all consider the difficult relationship between compassion and judgment, mercy and justice.

Consider the story of Cholly and write a story centered on Cholly Breedlove-trace his life using the information given in the text. Your story must try at bringing mercy and a chance to renew his life. Your story must also include a letter written in the character of Cholly to his wife and daughter apologizing for his acts and asking for another chance. Whether they accept him or not is up to you.

Analysis of the sample task

The task above provides an example of how development of language skills can be integrated into the teaching of literature. The task presented here is a literature task that has been designed as a writing task to encourage creativity, empathy, as well as provide a platform for the application of language skills in a meaningful context. Several language elements can be developed through the task presented. In the first place, the students can build their vocabularies through this task. Through this task, they can learn new words as they try to express Cholly's emotions, thoughts and reflections. They can learn a range of words that convey remorse, redemption, forgiveness, renewal and mercy among others. By using a diverse and appropriate vocabulary, the task can enhance language skills development.

Then again, the students can employ various sentence structures, including simple, compound, and complex sentences. By incorporating a variety of sentence structures, the students can experiment with painting a vivid picture of Cholly's life, experiences and internal struggles to evoke emotions and create a more engaging story. As they try to explore the transformation of Cholly, they can learn so many things. This task would encourage textual comprehension while also encouraging them to critically analyze the textual details as they begin to create their own story, one that would provide an account of Cholly's transformation.

Further, the inclusion of a letter from Cholly to his wife and daughter provides an opportunity to develop letter-writing skills of students. Cholly's letter can demonstrate elements such as a salutation, apology, expression of remorse, acknowledgement of past mistakes, plea for forgiveness, and expressions of hope for a renewed relationship.

Conclusion

Built on the premise that the educational system in Nagaland is still curved towards traditionalism, this paper has been an attempt at presenting the need for education to move towards the transformative approach. It has highlighted how the English classrooms in schools and colleges are predominantly literature classrooms where

reading aloud and textual analysis become the central focus of learning. Such a treatment of the subject limits the learning of students and hampers the success of students both academically and professionally. It is a well-known fact that proficient language skills are paramount in achieving success. In this light, the paper has presented a discourse on the need to integrate language and language as it encourages students to think deeply and critically about the text, improving their ability to analyze and evaluate information. On the whole integrating language and literature not only enhances language skills but also provides students with a rich and meaningful learning experience that promotes both linguistic and personal development.

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