

Role of Literature in Teaching English as Foreign Language Context



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Introduction and Purpose

As a teaching tool, literature can be used in conjunction with the communicative approach for EFL students (Li Mingsheng, 1997). In Du's (1990) view, language teaching is inseparable from literature teaching in that literature is used as a "reinforcement device" and, therefore, has gained a secure place in the English-learning program, a place "determined by its role in language-skill reinforcement and in cultural orientation" (p.204). However, literature is not only as tool for teaching language, but as a reservoir of ideas, emotions and experiences reflected varied human experiences in the world. Studying literature in context means to study the others' cultures, so learners will have an opportunity to develop their communicative competence and language proficiency to cope with people in cross-cultural encounters.

To enable students to master a language better, literature as a teaching tool, plays a very important role. This article offers the author's insight into the importance of literature in teaching English context, and tries to discover the ways of learning and teaching literature to overcome the barriers of engagement with literature in Chinese EFL context by analyzing a literary work.

Research Method and Main Process

In this article, the focus is to discover the ways of learning and teaching literature to help students overcome barriers of engagement with literature in contexts. Therefore, the researcher chooses a literary work "Cat in the Rain" by Ernest Hemingway to be an example about the stages of literature learning. First of all, the theme of this work is universal in nature—"need", the cat is a symbol of anger, a common emotion for all people. The cat symbolizes women. The work also discusses the relationship between man and woman. In this social background, the man holds the power, and the woman seems to have little control over her direction. In China, this kind of social background and relationship has existed for thousand years, even today. So the students can relate to the themes of this work, and perhaps, they have been in this kind of relationship. Second, much of the vocabulary is familiar. Third, the syntax of this work is more likely to be similar to that which is encountered in language textbooks. Fourth, the language is not dated. Finally, this is the short story, and the style is very simple, therefore, the students can understand the meaning easily.

Results and Analysis

The following is a plan for classroom activities:

- *Pre-Activity*. In this stage the researcher will write the title of the work and the questions on the blackboard to build up interest in the work and get the students to anticipate what they will read about. This is a time for them to guess and predict.
- *Analysis*. The students can read the story silently first, and then think about the following surface-level questions. In this stage, the main purpose is to check whether the students have understood the basic plot.
- *Response*. Using response in the classroom can have a profound impact on how students view the work and how they see their role as readers. Rather than relying on a teacher or critic to give them a single, standard interpretation of a work, students learn to construct their own meaning by connecting the textual material to issues in their lives and describing what they experience as they read. As a teacher, try to make the students in the classroom become active learners. This is the stage of interpretation and evaluation. The aim of this stage is for the students to react to the work, construct meaning from it, and discuss their ideas with each other. The teacher should also motivate and encourage the students to refer to the work as much as possible.

Conclusions

English literature teaching in China has an important role to play. It can help students acquire the language and facilitate their social and cultural competence, and their interpretative capabilities. But as discussed in this paper, there are barriers to engagement with literature in EFL contexts in China. This paper argues that, to address these barriers, students should pay more attention to engaging understanding and analyzing the linguistics, literary and cultural capabilities of text in learning English literature. The teacher should pay careful attention to designing the English literature teaching curriculum and syllabus, selecting appropriate literary texts for the students. Of course, educating qualified teachers and adopting teaching approaches suitable to the Chinese students are equally important. Additionally, the teacher should focus on fostering students' social cultural, linguistic and literary competence and their critical and interpretative abilities, rather than imparting knowledge about literature.