



THE ROLE OF LITERARY TEXTS IN ENHANCING LEXICAL COMPETENCE

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Abstract: *This article explores the benefits and strategies of using literary texts as a tool for improving lexical competence. Developing and expanding lexical competence is an essential component of language learning and can lead to improve reading comprehension, writing proficiency, and overall communication skills.*

Key words: *lexical competence, language teaching, literature, literary texts, strategies*

Language is a vital tool that allows people to communicate and interact with one another in their everyday lives as a communication medium. As English is used in every part of contemporary society, mastering the language has become essential. In the main spheres of the twenty-first century, English is therefore utilized as a worldwide language. In order to help language learners in developing the four abilities of speaking, reading, writing, and listening, English language instructors use a wide range of strategies. Literature has been frequently used by English teachers to support their students' vocabulary growth and educational goals. In this regard, using literary texts to teach and acquire vocabulary is an effective tool for both vocabulary acquisition and instruction.

Literary text is one of the most important source of information and is considered the main type speech activities, contributing to foreign language learning. It is a potentially worthwhile source to help learners with language development, cultural improvement and personal growth. Carter defines literature as "a body of written texts, produced by a culture and highly valued within that culture over a period of time" [1]. The incorporation of literature in the language classroom has always been debated because of its linguistic difficulty. However, the integration of literature into language classrooms dates back to over two decades. Since the late 1970s, literature has gained popularity as a tool to assist language learners in making significant improvements in their development of language ability. On the one hand a number of researchers postpone using literature in language learning because they are of the opinion that literary texts cannot be understood unless learners become linguistically competent. On the other hand, several researchers support the inclusion of literature in language learning at all levels for fostering linguistic fluency.

According to Ellis and Brewster, literary texts allow teachers to introduce or revise new sentence structures and vocabulary [2]. Teaching vocabulary should serve the development of the four language skills. Ghanbari and Marzban mention that vocabulary can lead the learners to be more confident in utilizing the language [3]. Vocabulary plays a significant role in language learning, and lexical competence is an important component of language proficiency. Limited lexical knowledge can lead to



frustration and demotivation in language learners. Vocabulary acquisition is a core element in language mastery and is essential for developing communicative competence. Research has shown that vocabulary is a stepping stone to high-level language skills and that a lack of vocabulary knowledge can be an obstacle to language learning. Lexical competence refers to the ability to understand and produce words in a language. It is an essential aspect of both linguistic competence and communicative competence, as it enables individuals to effectively convey their thoughts and ideas through language. Lexical competence includes not only knowing the meaning of individual words but also understanding how to use them in context.

Literary texts are imaginative and creative writings. The invented language in these works opens unlimited opportunities for language instructors to choose suitable materials for their students. Mart explains that “literature is a rich source of meaningful input for language learners, and it is useful to enhance language proficiency” [4]. Teachers can benefit from the ‘rich source of meaningful input’ of literature in their material adaptation. Lao and Krashen present the results of a comparison between a group of students that read literary texts and a second group that read non-literary texts at a university in Hong Kong [5]. The group who read literary texts showed improvement in vocabulary and reading. Three activities can be added to “The Wisdom of Solomon,” to help students to acquire more vocabulary. These activities are related to form, meaning and use respectively.

A. Complete the word form chart below. The first word has been done for you. Remember that some words do not have all forms.

Participle	Adjective	Noun	Verb
speaking	speakable	speaker	speak

There can be as many words as the instructor thinks necessary but not too many so as not to make students lose interest in the activity that should be included in every story. This activity helps students to learn more vocabulary, and it also teaches them how to use a dictionary.

B. Write the letter of the definition/synonym in column B that most closely matches each word/phrase in column A.

In this activity, the words/phrases in column A come from the story students are reading. The definitions and/or synonyms provided in column B must match the meaning of the words/phrases in the context of the story to help students to understand how a different word/phrase can be used in the same context.

C. Choose the word/phrase that best fits each sentence, drawing upon the list under column A in the previous activity. You may need to add -s to a plural word or to a 3rd person singular of a verb in the present tense, -ed to the past tense of regular verbs, etc.

In activity c, students practice using the words that they already understand the meanings of them.

When integrating literary genres in ELT, material adaptation is very crucial. Teachers should consider the level of their students and their interests. Students can show their interest in the selection of the materials. They can be given more than one choice. In case, if they do not like one short story, they will choose another one. Material selection based on learners’ level and interest serves five distinct purposes. First, learners show



more engagement in learning. As a result, they participate more, will be more active and energetic. Second, the first benefit works to encourage them better. Engagement will lead to more encouragement. Third, learners feel motivated once they are engaged and encouraged positively. Fourth, the above-mentioned will work to stimulate them in the process of learning the language. And they will use all their efforts to show better. Finally, students will learn how to synthesize. They acquire specific skills to link different ideas and create something new.

Vocabulary teaching is effective when the students are involved and motivated to depend on themselves. Indeed, instructors should help language learners to use their own techniques if needed. According to Ghanbari and Marzban, the teaching of vocabulary is successful when the learners are allowed to use their own strategies to learn the vocabulary [3]. At this point, it is better to distinguish between the traditional and communicative approach of teaching vocabulary. Traditionally, students are given a list of words to be memorized. In fact, the memorization of words is not enough, but teachers should guide their students to learn the correct spelling of the words, their meanings, and their uses, or different uses. After gaining knowledge of the basic words, learners should be familiarized with parts of speech. This familiarization is important for two reasons. First, by knowing nouns, verbs and adjectives, students will be acquainted with the functions of the words that they have learnt. That means they will know whether the words are names, actions, or descriptions. Instructors can deepen the discussion about nouns and verbs. This is done by explaining the types of nouns. Second, the next step will be introducing sentence patterns, or how to put these words in the correct order. Through vocabulary discussion inside the classroom, students' knowledge about the usage of words in the accurate position must be developed.

In spite of the fact that the incorporation of literature in language learning has always been debated, it is possible to say that it has a key role in language proficiency development. Literary texts are authentic materials in which real examples are presented to readers. When readers are engaged in literary texts, they are at an advantage to realize how grammatical structures and vocabulary are connected to each other. In other words learners have a chance to see how language operates in text. As learners become aware of how language features function in text, they apply the same strategies in their communication. Moreover, literature has the potential to develop language awareness, language skills, cultural enrichment and personal growth of learners. As long as teachers pay attention to the selection of materials they use in the language classroom, learners benefit from literary texts.

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