

Impact of Including History in Teaching Literature and Language

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ARTICLE INFORMATION

The Faculty Journal of Arts
Rajshahi University
Special Volume-6
ISSN: 1813-0402 (Print)

Received : 10 March 2025
Received in revised: 27 April 2025
Accepted: 16 March 2025
Published: 25 October 2025

Keywords:
Pedagogy, history, literature,
language, cultural context.

ABSTRACT

This paper intends to explore the significance of history being incorporate into learning language and literature, as students would be able to understand literary works better through background-documented histories. Incorporating history into the teaching of literature and language offers an extensive approach that enhances students' understanding of both texts and contexts. Analyzing literature within its historical, social, and cultural settings divulges much about the authors' intentions, situations and issues related to the works of literature. With the help of this interdisciplinary approach, students can probe into the historical, cultural, and sociopolitical influences that have moulded literary works. Through the contextualization of literature into its historical setting, learners can gather knowledge, understanding and insight into the forms and complexities of language including the changes of meaning and the function of a specific language in reflecting and forming societal values. Additionally, as students come across a variety of understanding and opinions spanning different eras and geographical locations, studying historical contexts fosters and nurtures critical thinking, empathy, and cultural understanding. The process includes the usage of project activities and history lectures with original works including audio, video presentation to enrich critical and analytic skills. Literary studies, when done side by side with the history of a text, allows students to view works of literature as their particular time and place call, which instigates empathy and awareness about cultural context through educational richness. This approach encourages students to establish connections between the past and present in their academic and personal lives.

Introduction

The aim of any language and literature course is to equip learners or students with the capability to understand any kind of text from multiple perspectives. In order to analyze a text from various layers of standpoint, historical context can be considered as the primary source of information. The origination of a text depends on the social setting, communal culture, and political atmosphere of a society. Besides, cultural setting, sociopolitical atmosphere and historical context reveal the intention of generating any literary piece to a great extent and they also reveal author's objective to create the particular literary piece. At the same time, contextualizing of a literature piece can enhance the possibilities of learning the particular language. It enhances the understanding of vocabulary, their usage and even the grammar. So, this paper's objective is to facilitate the learners in learning literature and language by incorporating historical context so that they can comprehend any literary text or the language by connecting the past with the present.

Methodology

Both the qualitative method and quantitative method have been used to conduct this research work. These methods are used for a better comprehensive analysis. Interviews have been conducted as a part of the qualitative method. Interviews have been taken with several educators who have and have not incorporated history in their literature and language classrooms. Besides, surveys have been conducted on different age group of learners and educators to analyze their

experiences of using history in language and literature class rooms. To conduct the survey, a questionnaire has been prepared and distributed through a Google Form. Use of the Google form made the survey quick and easy for the researchers and for the participants who have participated in the survey. By combining the two methods, the study intends to explore and analyze the outcome of the research and present an overview on incorporating history in learning literature and language effectively.

Discussion

Interviews have been conducted with several educators and learners to continue the analysis and these interviews have provided important insight regarding incorporation of history in learning language and literature. In various institutions and departments, history as a course has already been introduced and is being taught as a medium of learning literature. These courses are designed to teach language and literature fruitfully, but at the same time, these courses lack potential and durability in learning literature and language.

Most of the case history courses have usually been taught in the beginning of a program. In these curricula, history is used to teach as a separate course where the main concern is to inform or teach the learners the basic facts of the past. On the other hand, the focus on the development of literature and language is often ignored. Therefore, these courses fail to reach their main objective of introducing history in the language and literature program because learners often fail to connect history with literature and language. Besides, they tend to forget what is usually taught in these courses after completing the courses. As a result, incorporating history in literature and language programs to some extent fails to serve its main purpose. Most of the interviewed educators and learners acknowledge the situation. So, this article intends to find a way to incorporate history in language and literature learning effectively.

Comprehension tasks build on compare-and-contrast activities as a means of producing spoken and written language. (Colăcel 2016, 44)

Compare and contrast activities may introduce in language learning and in comprehension literary texts. Course teachers can include task-based activities to make the learners enthusiastic towards comparing and contrasting the culture of a specific literary piece with the culture of their own. In this way they can identify the true essence of a literary piece as well as understand the language.

As a part of quantitative research questionnaires have been used and these questionnaire have been prepared for both educator or teachers and learners or students. Most of the participants are students. A good number of educators have also been participated in the survey and there are also scholars, enthusiasts and authors who have been participated in the survey. So, basically it can be said that a good number of participants from different sectors and different age groups have been participated in this survey where their valuable insights assist to continue the research. Among all the participants 91.7 % participants consider that integration of history helps improving literature and language learning where only 3% participants believe that teaching history is unnecessary in language and literature classrooms. 26.2% participants are highly agreed to the fact that integrating history in learning literature is highly beneficial. On the other hand, 61.9% participants agreed to the same point that integrating history in learning literature and language is beneficial. There are some other questions as well. For example, 26.2% participants highly agreed and 53. 6% participants of the survey agreed to the point that incorporating history in language and literature courses make the course and class room more interesting. Creative ways can be invented and introduced to incorporate history in language and literature learning classes. 46.4% participants believe that including history in language and literature classrooms may have significant influence on interpreting and analyzing any text or literary piece. Besides, 26.2% participants believe that including history helps in developing critical faculty and 25% believes that it creates cultural awareness. Some also believes that including history in language and literature classrooms can also help in developing writing skills and helps in enriching the command over vocabulary. 56% people used to think that including history in language and literature classrooms have significant impacts in learning or interpreting or analyzing literary pieces and even in learning vocabulary and grammatical structures and their uses of a particular

language. So, including historical context can lead to better understanding and comprehension. Moreover, incorporating historical context assists in understanding cultural diversity and how to respond towards cultural diversity. Culture of a community dominates its language as well as literature. In order to have a sound knowledge of the culture, one must have assistance from the history of the community. In broader sense history gives the understanding of culture of a society or a country.

In many of the literature departments history is being taught as a course and in many of the departments it is not being taught at all. 40.5% participants agree that they have experiences of being taught history in the process of learning literature, language and the rest of the participants are taught often or rarely but 69% of the participants agreed that incorporating history in literature is essential and can serve the purpose of learning language and perceiving literature. Moreover, 59.5% participants recommend including historical context in all kinds of literature/language courses. So, the aim is not to incorporate historical elements in the learning process of literature and language only rather the aim of this research is to incorporate historical contexts or elements in an effective way so that the learners develop their ability to perceive and execute their understanding.

The culture of the nation is at the heart of teaching English as a foreign language. Culture is a byword for what has come to be known as the modern nation. (Colăcel 2016, 45)

Basically, to understand the culture one must know the history of the society or the nation. Understanding cultural diversity leads towards better understanding of literature so that analyzing and interpreting can be possible properly.

The role of the language teacher as a carrier of cultural messages is central to certain understandings of language teaching. Implicit in the concept is that the culture and values that underpin a language cannot be divorced from the language itself, and that an appreciation of certain key cultural concepts are required for a true understanding of the language being learnt. (O'Connell 11)

A literature and language teacher must concentrate on the culture as well, so that the learners may get the glimpse of the cultural diversity and can better perceive the reality. At the same time language and culture are inseparable. By emphasizing on cultural context, language acquisition and learning can be possible in a comfortable way and incorporating historical context can assist in understanding a society and culture. So, incorporation of historical context should be included in an effective way.

Fictional and real-life stories in the teaching of English have always contributed to a multitude of learning opportunities. However, literature and history have already convinced many teachers that they are not worth the trouble. The two of them seem to enjoy the same level of cultural prestige, or insignificance for that matter, in EFL teaching. (Colăcel 2016, 43)

In learning English language as an international language one must know the British culture and the culture of the European subcontinent as English is a prominent language over there and the Departments of English of various universities are bound to design their courses with literatures that are close to the origin of the language. So, in teaching English literature teachers are bound to describe and teach the history and culture of European societies so that the learners can get the overall view of the literary piece. Otherwise, students from the other continents or students from Asia or Indian subcontinent or the students from countries like Bangladesh will fail to understand the scenario of a literary piece of the English society. Besides, there is no harm in enlightening the learners about various societies and culture. History is already being incorporated in the Departments of English in various universities of Bangladesh but the incorporation fails to attract the attention of the learners to a great extent. Generally, most of the English departments in Bangladeshi Universities offer history as a solo course or they do not offer any course on history at all. As a result students fail to connect historical references to other courses where applying historical context in analyzing and interpreting text is a must. On the other hand, those who fail to have knowledge about the specific history of a specific community and culture fails to connect the literary piece with the culture and fails to interpret the piece from multiple points of view. For example, a foreign learner can never understand the connotation of the word "Mir

Jafar” unless the learner has the knowledge of the Bengali history and culture. The name has originated from Arabic language and the meaning of “Mir” is “Prince” and the meaning of “Jafar” is “stream” which in no way shows any negative connotation. So, any foreign learner who does not know the history of the person associated with the name can be misled. Cultural barrier will lead him to misinterpret the word that will lead the learner towards misinterpreting the whole literary piece. So, incorporating history is a must for better understanding and learning.

Results and Conclusion

Including historical context helps enhancing the ability to comprehend and learn any literary piece and language. Effective incorporation can be possible through effective classroom activities. First of all, most of the courses should be designed through the inclusion of historical context. For example, if a course’s title is “19th Century British Literature” then one or multiple classes should be allotted for explaining the historical context of the related area and time so that the learners can get the overview of the circumstances before diving into the river of the literature of that era. The classroom can be teacher centered or the students can also make their own choices for how they want to learn.

The ongoing debate on didactic approaches to teaching literary texts proves that education based on highbrow culture has increasingly come under criticism (Hinnov, Harris, Rosenblum, 2013).

Students can learn through specific practices such as using specific tools. Audio visual activities can be included and visual representation by the students can also be invented and used. Through this way language learning can also be improved. Even “less able learners can be given dual language texts or labels which have words written in both the native language” (Bentley 80). Several other initiatives can be taken to improve the inclusion of historical context in learning literature and language. Research can be conducted for the improvement of the technique of incorporating and teaching history in literature and language classrooms.

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