



Literature: A Natural Source for Teaching English in ESL/ EFL Classrooms

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Abstract

This paper explores the ways in which literature function as a source and as a meaningful context for teaching and learning English as a second language or foreign language. It claims that literature is an authentic, stimulating and appealing material to the learners. Therefore, it encourages interaction, promotes language development and motivates learners in the process of learning. Traditionally it is taught as an academic subject without considering its potential in ESL/EFL classrooms. The paper argues that literature can be used as an effective source for teaching English language and the target culture; furthermore, it is used as a natural context for integrating language skills and systems. This paper demonstrates how a poem is used as a natural source or a material for developing English language and integrating the four language skills, grammar and vocabulary through communicative tasks and activities.

Keywords: literature, authentic, source, language skills, integration, culture

1. Introduction

Literature in language teaching has got long tradition and it has been an academic subject in many countries. Once teaching English meant teaching English literature. For example, it was central to classical teaching whose aim was to understand high culture. Grammar Translation Method used literature as the content to translate sentences from mother tongue to English and vice versa. Literature played an important role in English language teaching during the early 20th century. However, literature gradually started losing its role in English language teaching because of the popularity of audiolingualism in 70s and Communicative Language Teaching after 80s. Recently due to the globalization, the focus of English language teaching has changed from “the small scale production of scholarly elites to the mass production of large numbers of functionally competent users of the language, literature came to be regarded as, at best, an irrelevant and, at worst, positively harmful” (Maley, 2001, p. 180). As a result, scholars are divided into two groups: pro literature and anti literature. Interestingly, there is an attempt to bring back literature as the source of authentic material for teaching and learning English language. This paper discusses how literature can be used as a natural source or material for learning and teaching English in ESL/ EFL Classrooms.

2. Materials

There are three ways of learning a second language or a foreign language: natural learning, self study and classroom work. Very few can afford to go and live in the place where the language is spoken and learn the language by interacting with the people there. Quite some study a second or a foreign language by themselves using materials like books, CDs, cassettes, multimedia, computer programs, video tapes, and the internet. The vast majority of the learners learn it formally in a classroom with the help of teachers and materials. “Materials’ include anything which can be used to facilitate the learning of a language. They can be linguistics, visual, auditory or kinesthetic, and they can be in print, through live performance or display, or on cassette, CD-ROM, DVD or the internet” (Tomlinson, 2001, p. 66). In other words, materials can be either print or electronic. The most common form of material used in the classroom is print material i.e., text book because of its convenience in presenting language items to be taught and learned.

2.1 Why do we Need Materials?

Everyone wants materials- teachers, students, parents, researchers, authorities, administrators and even publishers though their purposes are different. Language learners need appropriate materials to learn a language effectively (Mutaiara, Zuhairi & Kurniati, 2007). Materials help learners learning and developing all the language skills (Tafari, 2009). According to Tomlinson (2001) materials have got four functions: instructional, experiential, elicitive and explorative. Materials inform about the language, expose language use and stimulate learners to use the language. Furthermore, they guide learners to discover language items. Materials play a very important role in the classroom since they are used to learn and teach language skills and systems (Gujjar, 2007). They help learners self “discovering the language, using corpuses for their development, use extensive reading, personalize the process and experience spoken grammar in use” (Tomlinson, 2008, p. 8). In short, materials are commonly used for the following purposes in the classroom.

- To engage students cognitively, linguistically and culturally.
- To provide experience of the language use.
- To stimulate language use.
- To help learners discover language.
- To provide meaningful contexts.
- To practice language items.
- To provide opportunities for learning.
- To present language items.
- To help teachers prepare the lesson.
- To facilitate learning and understanding.
- To save time in teaching and learning.
- To transfer learning contents to the students.
- To make the lessons or concepts more concrete.

Second or foreign language learners need opportunity to learn and use the target language. The opportunity includes the materials used in the process of learning, the activities that expose language to learners and the chances to practice and use the language inside and outside the classroom. In most cases materials are the only opportunities for EFL/ESL learners to learn English in the class.

2.2 Simplified Vs Authentic

Since materials are very important in an EFL/ESL Classroom, the question is which materials are to be used: simplified or authentic? The answer is not conclusive. Scholars, researchers and educators differ on their views. Simplified materials are those which have examples of language specially written for learners. They are made easy for language learning since they have high frequency of occurrence of target language items. According to Tomlinson (2001), explicit teaching and learning use materials which “contrive examples of the language which focus on the feature being taught” (p. 68).

On the other hand, the materials that are not prepared for teaching and learning purposes are called authentic material. Scrivener (2005) differentiated exposure as authentic and restricted based on the source of target language items that come from. If they come from a realistic or natural text, they are authentic whereas if they are from a simplified text with unnatural examples of target items, they are restricted. Authentic texts expose the real language, motivate learners to learn and provide informal learning opportunities.

Nowadays more researchers and educators are in favour of authentic texts because simplified texts over protect the learners, deprive them of the opportunities to acquire language and don't prepare the learners for language use (Tomlinson, 2001). Furthermore, they contain artificial language items taken away from the real life.

2.3 Authentic Materials

The primary purposes of authentic materials are different. For example, news papers inform the people about the current affairs whereas product labels give the customer necessary information about the product. The most common authentic materials used in ESL/EFL Classrooms are different kinds of subject books, journal articles, magazines, product labels, news papers, different kinds of forms and brochures, pamphlets, films, TV channels, radio programs and internet websites. All these contain real language, enrich the language input and also give a different perspective of the target language inside the classroom. However, they lack emotions, feelings and experiences that motivate learners and engage them in learning. If language is studied or taught using texts devoid of emotions and feelings, it will be “bland, repetitive, completely forgettable. To remember something, we need to be surprised by an odd idea or use of words” (Scrivener, 2005, p. 360). Learners learn by interacting with the material if it is motivating, challenging, interesting and attractive to them (Wilson & Lianrui, 2007). Literature has what other authentic materials lack.

2.4 Literature as an Authentic Material

Literature is not created for teaching but it is created for enjoyment. A piece of literary work is produced to express the writer's ideas, thoughts, experiences, feelings etc. According to Duff and Maley (1990) literature is genuine linguistic material, not an artificial textbook of linguistic items. Brumfit and Carter (1986) similarly states that “a literary text is authentic text, real language in context, to which we can respond directly” (p.15). Literature provides meaningful context for language learning through its natural, original content and authentic language. It exposes real language use inside the classroom as Collie and Slater (1990) state that since literature is not written for teaching language, it exposes real life language items. As a result, the learners become familiar with varieties of linguistic structures and communicative functions. Literature can remove what Scrivener (2005) has pointed out “language teaching can be a bit dull if we constantly look at linguistic points using only predictable textbook examples” (p.360). Literature can engage learners with its interesting contents and themes. For example, short stories and novels consist of situations and events of real life. Poetry deals with variety of topics, which often presents strange and odd ideas. Tomlinson (1985) points out that literature can be used as a resource in the teaching of language because it exposes authentic English and gives the learners opportunities to develop communication skills by involving them into poems, stories plays, novels and

autobiographies. Bates (2000) argues that poetry can provide all kinds of foreign language learning experiences to learners: humour, thought, and creativity. Scrivener (2005) claims that poetry “stimulates, wakes us up to see things in new ways, hear things in new ways, think of things in new ways” (p.360).

Literature exposes authentic language to the learners and challenges them to be imaginative and creative and gets them to interact naturally. The learners understand the richness, complexity and vitality of language through literature. Literature stresses that English is not just an object of studying and passing an exam, it is a language of expression, thought, feeling, emotion, imagination and creation. Furthermore, literature provides the feel of the language.

3. Language Teaching Through Literature VS Teaching Literature

Is language teaching through literature a synonym for teaching literature? Both are different in aims and ways of using literature in the class. The former focuses on teaching English language skills and systems whereas the latter focuses on teaching literature itself. Teaching literature uses literature as the subject matter and treats it as a content subject like economics, commerce or physics. Furthermore, the purpose of teaching literature is to appreciate literary quality or satisfy intellectual quest. In contrast, in language teaching literature is used as the means or a material to improve the language skills and systems just like any other language learning material. In other words, it is one of the materials or texts used in the classroom to teach the target language.

4. Uses of Literature in an EFL/ESL Classroom

Literature stimulates learners’ motivation, ignites their imagination, and develops their creativity; therefore, it can be used as the natural source or material in an ESL/ EFL classroom. Since literature provides many linguistic and communicative opportunities to the language learner, the teacher can design tasks “based on material capable of stimulating greater interest and involvement” (Carter and Long, 1991, p. 3).

4.1 Developing language

Literature brings about meaningful and stimulating communicative activities since it consists of information and linguistic structures dressed up in emotions and personal feelings in multi socio-cultural contexts. The learners meet standard and non- standard language examples in literature, which increase their knowledge about the language rules and functions. According to Povey (1967), “literature will increase all language skills because literature will extend linguistic knowledge by giving evidence of extensive and subtle vocabulary usage, a complex and exact syntax” (p.40). Learners learn discourse function of vocabulary and language structures occur in meaningful context, which helps them to develop communicative competence. Collie and Slater (1987) point out that the learners develop both linguistic and communicative competence since literature consists of real linguistic structures, language use and communicative situations. Nina and Violeta (2012) claims that literature balances both receptive and productive skills since it inculcates good reading practice, develops learners’ word power and structures, and provides ideas for genuine communication. Furthermore; Lazar (1993) argues that literature promotes language acquisition.

Teachers can prepare learner centered activities and tasks because literary texts like stories and novels have wide range of vocabulary, dialogues and contents, which “stimulate the imagination, offer learners specimens of real language use, allow for group discussions and individual exploration, and are intrinsically more dialogic” (Alam, 2007, p. 381).

4.1.1 Reading

Literature is ideal for both intensive and extensive reading since it promotes reading habits, improves reading skills and increases students’ reading interest. McKay (2001) claims that literature becomes ideal reading content for EFL learners since it integrates language skills and encourages close reading. He further adds that it is an ideal source for extensive reading because learners’ engagement with literature increases their reading interest. Literature enhances learners’ critical reading since literary texts have multiple layers of meaning. According to Lazar (1993):

Literature is a particularly good source for developing students’ abilities to infer meaning and to make interpretations. This is because literary texts are often rich in multiple levels of meaning, and demand that the reader/learner is actively involved in ‘teasing out’ the unstated implications and assumptions of the text (p. 19).

Literature enables learners to infer meaning from the context and "in using literary texts educationally, it is easy to force the process of interpretation into our attention precisely because literary texts often resist easy interpretation" (Duran, 1993, pp. 160-161). Meaning in literature is highly suggestive and associative; therefore, each reader can interpret differently which leads to interactive discussion and genuine exchange of ideas (Maley, 1989). Furthermore, “ in reading literary texts students have also to cope with language intended for native speakers and thus they gain additional familiarity with many different linguistic uses, forms and conventions of the written mode: with irony, exposition, argument, narration, and so on” (Collie & Slater 1987, p. 4).

Literature consists of varieties of subject matter and has wide range of interesting themes and topics which can be used effectively in a second or foreign language teaching context to develop all kinds of reading skills like predicting, skimming, scanning, in-depth reading and critical reading.

4.1.2 Listening and Speaking

Literature exposes not only native variety but also non- native variety of English to the learners. Furthermore, it introduces variety of dialects, registers and idiolects. As a result, the learners have greater opportunities to improve their aural and oral skills. For example reading literature aloud will improve pronunciation and listening skills, particularly,

global listening. Story telling and books on tape can improve listening skills since they are different from traditional unnatural listening comprehension from the tape.

Literature promotes communication since it is rich in multiple meaning and develops “a sharper awareness of the communicative resources of the language being learned” (Widdowson, 1975, p.80). According to McKay (2001) “perhaps the greatest benefits of using literature in the language classroom lies in its potential for developing students’ speaking skills, particularly their sociolinguistic and pragmatic competence” (p. 327).

Literature is an effective source for developing different listening skills like top- down, bottom- up and analytic. Teacher generated or learner generated plays and skits can improve both listening and speaking skills. Unlike the artificially written dialogues in traditional text books, dialogues in stories and novels are natural and provide the real context for meaningful interaction. Furthermore, they provide speakers’ role relationship, back ground information and a chance to understand the appropriateness of language. Many communicative tasks can be designed using literature. For instance, role-play real play, simulation (Scrivener, 2005) information gap activities and opinion gap activities are some of them. Literature can also be used to generate class discussion, pair work, group work, panel discussions and debates.

4.1.3 Writing

The biggest challenge for ESL/EFL teachers in the classroom is to find suitable material for writing since there isn’t any ideal material for the learners that give all sorts of ideas for writing. The teachers can find very useful, effective and interesting material from literature for writing since it contains variety of themes, topics, contents, ideas and experiences. Furthermore, it deals with all domains of life. In fact, there is no area which is untouched in literature. Collie and Slater (1990) states that learners develop their language especially their written language through literature by understanding the characteristics of written language, by reading contextualized text or content, by learning sentence structures, sentence connectors and transitional words.

All kinds of writing skills can be developed through literature. Literature is very useful to teach different types of academic writing. For instance, narrative essays, descriptive essays, cause and effect essays, opinion essays, comparison essays and evaluative essays are taught effectively through literature. Personal interpretation analysis and evaluative writing are developed because learners write with evidence supporting their views. According to Hişmanoğlu (2005), literature can be used to teach all kinds of writing activities like controlled, guided, and free since it contains abundant varieties of themes and topics. Apart from formal paragraph and essay writing, literature promotes other writing activities like paraphrase, summary, and adaptation.

4.1.4 Vocabulary and Grammar

Vocabulary is contextualized in literature. In addition, it is associated with emotions and feelings in stories and novels. In poetry words are connected with strange and odd ideas. Therefore, vocabulary can be developed naturally and effortlessly. Learners will improve their passive vocabulary tremendously; moreover, literature helps the learners to transfer their passive vocabulary into the active vocabulary. Learners acquire their most of their vocabulary through extensive reading (Krashen, 1989). In L1 children acquire their vocabulary on the lap of their mother and this learning atmosphere can be duplicated in the classroom to some extent through literature since each word is associated with the life of people in multi socio- ethnic contexts.

Grammar can be taught contextually and meaningfully since grammatical structures appear in meaningful contexts and meaning comes before the form. Since the functions of the structures are exemplified in dialogues and situation in stories and novels, language functions are taught effectively through literature. Poetry makes the learners curious about grammar since it uses grammatical items in an unusual way. Van (2009) argues that literature provide opportunities for learners to learn syntactic, pragmatic, cultural and discourse function of the language because it is full of real life events and incidents.

4.2 Integrating skills

Generally, language learner feel bored and exhausted when they are repeatedly exposed to teaching or learning of skills one after the other in individual skill based lesson. “If all the skills are dressed in story’s ‘attire’ the learners are going to welcome the lesson and naturally acquire expected skills or outcome. Thus, stories are the best means to integrate all the skills- listening, speaking, reading, and writing” (Jose, 2008, p. 68). Not only stories, but also novels and even poems are used to integrate language skills and systems naturally. Literature has high potential for integrating language skills effortlessly and naturally. In other words, literature is the natural material for integrating four language skills and language systems.

4.3 Teaching Culture

It is not possible for the learners to visit native speakers’ country to understand the cultural norms of English. According to Collie and Slater (1987), the alternative way to know the target language culture is through its literature like novels, plays and short stories, because they enable learners to understand how communication takes place in the country in which the pieces of work was written or set. Although these are imaginary, they present all aspects of life in contexts. “It is through dialogue with others that learners discover which ways of talking and listening they share with others and which are unique to them” (Kramsch, 1993, p. 27). In other words, literature helps learners to understand the characters’ thoughts, feelings, customs, traditions, possessions; their style of speaking and specific behavior in certain contexts. Literature provides “an ideal context for exploring cultural difference” (McKay, 2001, p. 329). Similarly,

Lazar (1993) points out that cultural difference can be taught through literature. According to Stewart (1982), each language learning moment consists of learning the target-language culture. Furthermore, literature helps the learners to understand the verbal and non verbal aspect of English. For example, short stories, plays and novels enable learners to understand how communication naturally happens in real life situation because characters from different socio-economic, religious, regional and ethnical background live and events take place in real like situations and colourful settings.

5. Sample Material

The poem 'Mending Wall' written by the great American poet Robert Frost who lived from 1874 to 1963 is used as the modal material to teach English language. Learner centered tasks are designed to teach both language skills and systems. For instance, jigsaw reading, an adaption of jigsaw listening (Scrivener, 2005) communicative activities like role play, real play and simulation are designed. In fact, all the skills and system like grammar and vocabulary are integrated. The material and activities are suitable for intermediate, upper intermediate and advance level students. It might take 10 to 15 lessons to teach these activities depending on the level of the students and number of the students in the class.

Mending Wall

Robert Frost (1874 – 1963)

Something there is that doesn't love a wall,
 That sends the frozen-ground-swell under it,
 And spills the upper boulders in the sun;
 And makes gaps even two can pass abreast.
 The work of hunters is another thing:
 I have come after them and made repair
 Where they have left not one stone on a stone,
 But they would have the rabbit out of hiding,
 To please the yelping dogs. The gaps I mean,
 No one has seen them made or heard them made,
 But at spring mending-time we find them there.
 I let my neighbor know beyond the hill;
 And on a day we meet to walk the line
 And set the wall between us once again.
 We keep the wall between us as we go.
 To each the boulders that have fallen to each.
 And some are loaves and some so nearly balls
 We have to use a spell to make them balance:
 'Stay where you are until our backs are turned!'
 We wear our fingers rough with handling them.
 Oh, just another kind of outdoor game,
 One on a side. It comes to little more:
 There where it is we do not need the wall:
 He is all pine and I am apple orchard.
 My apple trees will never get across
 And eat the cones under his pines, I tell him.
 He only says, 'Good fences make good neighbors.'
 Spring is the mischief in me, and I wonder
 If I could put a notion in his head:
 'Why do they make good neighbors? Isn't it
 Where there are cows? But here there are no cows.
 Before I built a wall I'd ask to know
 What I was walling in or walling out,
 And to whom I was like to give offense.

Something there is that doesn't love a wall,
 That wants it down.' I could say 'Elves' to him,
 But it's not elves exactly, and I'd rather
 He said it for himself. I see him there
 Bringing a stone grasped firmly by the top
 In each hand, like an old-stone savage armed.
 He moves in darkness as it seems to me,
 Not of woods only and the shade of trees.
 He will not go behind his father's saying,
 And he likes having thought of it so well
 He says again, 'Good fences make good neighbors'
 (www.poets.org/poetsorg/poem/mending-wall)

Task 1

Warming up Activity

Make notes about the things that you like and you don't like. Then discuss in pairs.

<p>Things that I like</p> <p>-----</p> <p>-----</p> <p>-----</p> <p>-----</p> <p>-----</p> <p>-----</p> <p>Things that I don't like</p> <p>-----</p> <p>-----</p> <p>-----</p> <p>-----</p> <p>-----</p> <p>-----</p>

Task 2

Predicting and Skimming

Work in small groups. Look at the title of the poem and discuss these questions. Then skim through the poem and check your answers.

1. What is the poem about?
2. How many characters are there in the poem?
3. Where are they?
4. What are they doing?

Task 3

Scanning

Read the questions. Scan the poem and write the answers.

1. Who has made the gap on the wall?
2. Who owns an apple garden?
3. Who owns a pine garden?
4. What is the philosophy of the neighbour?

Task 4

Jigsaw Reading

You are in two groups: Group A and Group B. Group A will get a set of questions (Question Set 1) and Group B will get another set of questions (Question Set 2). Read the poem and answer the questions.

Then you make pairs by choosing the students from the other group. The students from Group A will get the Chart A and the students from Group B will get the Chart B. Complete the charts by asking and answering.

Question Set 1

Question Set 2

1. What happens to the wall every year? How does it happen?
2. What does the fence represent?
3. Who does the poet represent to?
4. Who is more active in the poem?

1. Who does the neighbor represent to?
2. Why does the poet think that the mending wall is against the nature?
3. What is the poets' view on the fence?
4. What is the poets' argument against mending the wall?

Chart A

The neighbor represent to	
Mending wall is against the nature because	
Poet's view on the fence	
Poet's argument against mending the wall	

Chart B

What happens to the wall? Why?	
The wall represent to	
The poet represent to	
The more active person in the poem is	

Task 6

Vocabulary

Read the poem to find the words that match these definitions.

1. A person who lives next your house. -----
2. To hold something in your hand. -----
3. The season between winter and summer. -----
4. A person who chases and kills animals for food or for fun. -----
5. A structure usually made of bricks or stones separating one area from another. -----
6. A structure usually made of wood or metal that separates two areas or built around an area. -----

7. A small mountain. -----

Task 7

Guessing the Meaning

These words are from the poem. Write a synonym for each word.

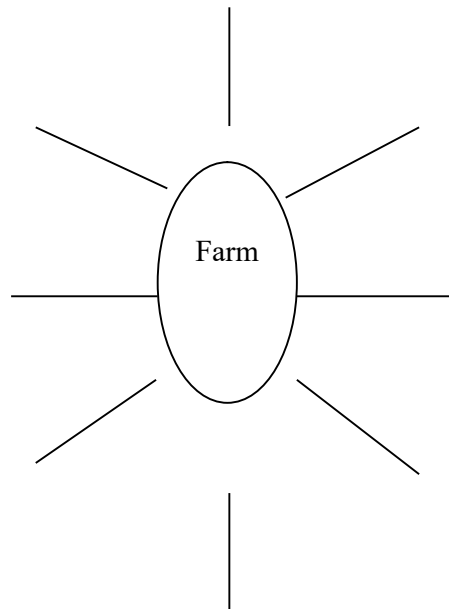
Words	Synonyms
mend	
hide	
frozen	

let	
gap	
rough	
ground	
walk	
offence	
behind	
mischief	

Task 8

Vocabulary Skill

Work in groups and complete the diagram. Read the poem and find out all the words that go with the word farm.



Task 9

Rewriting the Poem into Prose

Work in groups of five. The poem is divided into five stanzas. Each group will get a stanza. Rewrite the stanza into prose (paragraph).

Make new groups of five by choosing one student from each group. You will take turn to dictate your prose (paragraph) to the group. When one dictates others will listen and write.

Task 10

Role Play

You are in pairs. Each one will take one of the following role cards with instruction. Do role play using the role cards.

Student A
 You are the poet. You don't like the wall.

Student B
 You are the neighbor. You believe in the wall.

Task 11

Grammar

Read the poem again and underline all the verbs. Then put them in appropriate columns

Has/have + verb 3	Verb 1 (s form)

Task 12

Study the lines that contain the verbs and write them against the meaning.

1. It expresses habits, routines and talks about something that happens repeatedly.

2. An action happened in the past, but has a result in the present.

Task 14

Complete the sentences using the correct form of verbs

1. My brother never ----- dinner.
2. My brothers ----- in a factory.
3. I ----- three languages.
4. The children ----- to school by bus.
5. I ----- a new phone. Do you want to see?
6. She ----- out. She will come back after half an hour.
7. My brother ----- the job. He doesn't have a job now.
8. I ----- anything today. So I am very hungry now.

Task 15

Using Grammar

1. Work in pairs. Discuss your routines and habits.
2. Write about the things that you have done so far. Then tell your partner.

Task 16

Writing

Write a comparison essay. Compare and contrast the characters of the poet and the neighbour. Write the first draft and then read and make necessary changes by adding more ideas, deleting irrelevant ones and changing.

Task 17**Real play**

Work in groups. Think of an experience or an incident that you have had with your neighbor or you have witnessed. Explain it to your group. Write roles cards and do real play.

Task 18**Discussion**

Do you agree with the statement? Why or why not? Share your idea with your partner.

‘Good fences make good neighbors’

Task 19**Simulation**

There is no road in your village. The villagers want to construct a road, but the land lord refuses to give his land. The village council has called a meeting to discuss the issue. Work in group of four. Each one will take one of the following role cards with instruction. Do role play using the role cards.

<p>Student A</p> <p>You are the member village council</p>
--

<p>Student B</p> <p>You are the land lord</p>

<p>Student C</p> <p>You are the government official</p>

<p>Student D</p> <p>You represent the village people</p>
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6. Conclusion

Literature appeals to learners because of its imaginative power, creativity and emotion. Since literature is authentic and meaningful, it can motivate learners and satisfy their needs. In an ESL/ EFL classroom literature functions as the means to teach English language but not the end of the English language teaching. Therefore, literature is used as a source or one of the materials for teaching and learning English. Furthermore, it can be used as one of the most natural contexts for integrating language skills and systems in the classroom. Multi dimensional use of language can be explored through literature. Learners get meaningful context of language use because literature is full of instances of real life language use. The learners can get native-like competence in English and they become creative, critical, and analytical learners. Furthermore, literature encourages personal involvement of learners by familiarizing the learners with the norms and behavior of the people of the target language and by giving socio-political background of the target language society. Therefore, literature ensures cross- cultural communication in the classroom and increase intercultural communication. Literature develops learners’ linguistic competence, communicative competence and sociolinguistic competence and cultural competence.

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