

The Pedagogical Role of Literature in a Multilingual Classroom

Ashish Awasthi & Ram Prakash Gupt

Abstract

Literature has a broad educational role in multilingual classrooms, fostering language learning, critical thinking, cultural awareness and personal development. The revival of the use of literature in the language classroom has been accompanied by increased research articles in this field. Studies have examined the kind of relationships and language that emerge from literary conversations in the classroom, as well as the perspective of teachers and students. Crucially, the way that students respond to using literature in their language classes depends on the kind of task and methodology that are employed in the classroom. This research paper aims to explore the importance of literature in increasing teachers' pedagogical ability. The paper will also focus on the mediums to make the role of literature more important and simpler in a multilingual classroom.

Keywords: Pedagogy, multilingual classroom, literature, NEP 2020, foreign language.

Introduction

Indians are accustomed to changes of cultures and languages from birth; therefore, multilingualism and multiculturalism are ingrained in their genes. In a bilingual and multiethnic pluralistic society, education must advance in such a way that all the constituent groups feel engaged in the process of governing and constructing their country. Furthermore, it is imperative to fulfil the distinct goals of every sector of the country in order to satisfy the diverse ethnic, religious and linguistic clusters.

In a multilingual classroom, students from diverse mother tongues appear as knowledge seekers in a social environment. In addition to, serving as a medium of communication, a mother tongue is a cultural construct that is integral to the social, emotional and cognitive development of those who speak it. The reputation of the homeland and the mother tongue in teaching English as a first language or a non-native language setting has been underlined by applied linguistics worldwide. Most people emotionally identify with their country just as they do with their mother tongue. A child's mother tongue is the language it uses to identify and categorise the world around him. It is the language one uses to communicate one's core ideas, opinions, feelings, pleasures, sorrows and other perspectives. We may say with certainty that having one's mother language enhances one's awareness of the outside world.

The capacity to comprehend and utilise two or more languages is known as multilingualism. It requires having the capacity to use every skill (LSRW) in those languages. Someone who understands and speaks two or more languages is known as a polyglot. American linguist Bloomfield (1993) once said that a person who can speak and understand numerous languages naturally can be referred to as multilingual.

Nevertheless, several contemporary scholars have questioned this conventional understanding of multilingualism. A claim is made that a monolingual person's native-like competency cannot serve as a proxy for a multilingual person's proficiency level. According to contemporary scholars, multilingualism ought to be evaluated from a different angle. Cenoz and Genesse in the book *Beyond Bilingualism: Multilingualism and Multilingual Education* point out interesting facts about multilingual speakers. They believe that these speakers own "a larger linguistic repertoire than monolinguals but usually the same range of situations in which to use that repertoire" (1998, p. 18) which results in them having extra "specific distributions of functions and uses for each of their languages." (1998, pp. 18-19) They put out claim that being multilingual requires using, "several languages appropriately and effectively for communication in oral and written language." (1998, p. 17) This concept of multilingualism, however, has certain drawbacks of its own because it does not define the precise level of ability required to qualify as multilingual. Some scholars through their considerable study believe that "schools that aim for multilingualism are likely to set different goals for each language" (1998, p. 19). It is again contradicted by Cenoz and

Gorter who point out that “achieving native-like competence need not be the goal of multilingual education. Rather, the goals would differ in each language and should be based on learners’ needs in a language.” (2011, pp. 339-343)

Literature and its Pedagogical Role

Because of migration, globalisation and cultural variety, multilingual classrooms are more prevalent in today’s educational environment. For teachers, this setting offers both opportunities and challenges, especially when it comes to language learning and cultural education. Literature is essential in these situations because of its intricate web of linguistic and cultural narratives. This analysis examines the pedagogical role of literature in classrooms with multiple languages emphasizing the advantages, difficulties, and practical implementation techniques.

Reading literature exposes language learners to real language input, which is crucial. Literary works, instead of textbooks, provide various complex grammatical structures, colloquial idioms, and vocabulary in context. Students’ general language competency improves due to this exposure and helps them recognize linguistic nuances. Through literature one can discover many civilizations, eras, and viewpoints. Students who read stories from several cultures develop empathy and understanding in addition to an emotion of global citizenship. It supports students’ growth in intellectual competency and appreciation of cultural variety. Students are urged to reflect critically and analytically when they interact with literature. They pick up skills in text interpretation, underlying topic identification, and weighing opposing points of view. In a bilingual classroom where children are open to a wide range of cultural settings and viewpoints, this ability is very beneficial.

It may be difficult to obtain a wide range of literary writings in several languages. Educational institutions may lack the resources necessary to offer a broad selection of literature that represents the variety of backgrounds of their students. To deal with the language and cultural variety in their classrooms, teachers must be well-prepared. This entails possessing the pedagogical abilities to employ literature as a teaching tool successfully to be aware of the languages and cultures that are portrayed.

Advantages of Pedagogy in a Multilingual Classroom

If an English teacher has multilingual proficiency and he/she is fluent teaching in the native tongue would be simpler for him/her. The New Education Policy 2020 is also encouraging a multilingual method in the English classroom teaching. India is a multilingual nation. This multilingualism should be taken as an advantage. Consequently, the use of multiple languages in English instruction has increased. A creative language teacher must use multilingualism as a resource, a classroom method, and an objective because it is an integral part of a child's identity and a common characteristic of the Indian linguistic landscape. Furthermore, this gets the best use of a readily available resource, but it is also a means to guarantee that every child in the English class feels safe and accepted and that no one is left behind because of their language background to take part in every activity.

Learning many languages can increase a learner's cognitive capacity and foster greater literariness and originality in language use in the context of teaching and learning a language. Such an instructional, though, might be predicated on reader-response techniques, translation strategies, and other ideas. Here, an effort is ready to investigate the many methods of multilingual pedagogy for teaching language through literature.

Difficulties of Pedagogy in a Multilingual Classroom

There is a lot of disagreement over how language acquisition and literature are related. At the end of the twentieth century, the elitist study of literature as a foreign language became a legitimate source of language. By attempting to apply humanistic methods to the teaching of literature in a communicative language, Hall identifies the evolution of the view that sees literature, "as potentially playing a role in facilitating the learner's access to this English-using culture." (2005, p. 55)

Implementation of Pedagogy in a Multilingual Classroom

The selected readings that represent the variety of languages and cultures in the classroom can be significant strategies. Popular books written by writers with diverse cultural origins must be translated in order to accommodate a range of interests in reading levels of learners. In this process, one should be sure that genres and themes are mixed.

Through scaffolding instruction, students must be provided with

various competence levels of help. This can involve guided reading sessions, vocabulary development and pre-reading exercises. To aid the understanding of the learner, summaries, translations and images must be included in literary textbooks that allow students to examine and debate literature in small groups. Students with various degrees of linguistic competency levels can also be paired or grouped to promote peer learning. As a result, they can acquire new insights and learn from each other.

Teachers can make use of technology to gain access to a greater variety of literary materials. Additional resources and assistance can be obtained through e-books, audiobooks and online literary databases. Apps and resources for learning a language can also help with vocabulary development and understanding. They can use culturally sensitive teaching strategies by relating literary topics to the backgrounds and experiences of students. They can invite students to present their cultural narratives and discuss how they connect to the literature they are reading. Thus, the learning environment becomes more engaging and inclusive. It is advantageous to invest in professional development for educators to improve their ability to oversee multilingual classrooms and make good use of literature. Planning collaborative meetings, workshops and classes can offer insightful information and useful tactics.

For teachers to distinguish between acquisition and learning is one of the most critical components of teaching language and literature. They should distinguish between acquisition and learning and view acquisition as the fundamental step in becoming proficient in a language. When learning is the deliberate internalization of linguistic rules, acquisition is an unconscious process that includes the realistic development of language skills. It results in an overt familiarity with the linguistic processes and the aptitude to express this knowledge. In actuality, acquisition cannot follow learning.

In a multilingual classroom, storytelling may be the most effective method for learners to learn a language since it puts them all on the same mental-emotional communication platform. A key concept of successful language acquisition is the use of storytelling techniques as students can only acquire or retain information that they are engaged actively. As Brierly points out, "Perhaps the most basic thing can be said about human memory after a century of intensive research is that unless detail is placed into a structured pattern, it is rapidly forgotten". (1980, p. 105)

Interpreting literature is an investigation in which readers make use of their pasts and feelings to generate meaning. The reader and the text engage in a transaction that creates meaning during that transaction, learners fill in the gap in the text by drawing on their prior knowledge and disposition. Numerous recent investigations have demonstrated that using literature to create active meaning-making in the classroom improves students' language proficiency. Literary talks provide excellent conversation, which is very beneficial for language development.

Today's world views the dialogic approach as ground-breaking in the pedagogical domain of learning. Dialogic pedagogy is highly valued by critical pedagogues because it puts the student at the centre in the process of learning. This is a learner-centric approach which means that the foundation of schooling is the learner's own background of knowledge and understanding. With the use of critical pedagogy, students will get an acceptance of their roles in society as well as the underlying meanings of the words that serve as world metaphors. While teaching and learning literature necessitates an understanding and sparking of creativity, a teaching-centric pedagogy does not offer students any room to use their own creativity. Through the learning of literary texts and the exploration of language use in them, a dialogic approach can deliver learners with a space to explore their own creative talents. This will support their growth in both creative and critical talents. The same problems have also been brought up by Petrosky (2011) regarding getting students to ask probing questions through writing, speaking, and interpretive discussions about texts they are studying in class which can bring forth multiple possible responses that can be argued from the text. In these lessons, students learn to use the text to substantiate their responses, they learn to up-take from and build on others' comments in discussions, and they learn that the text is a linguistic artifact whose construction by an author is a legitimate subject for inquiry." (2011, pp. 137-138)

Reading literature is an investigation in which readers make use of their nostalgia in order to construct meaning. Readers and texts engage in a transaction that creates meaning while learners use their prior knowledge and disposition to complete the text's gaps. Numerous recent investigations have demonstrated that using literature to create active meaning-making in the classroom improves students' language proficiency. Good conversation, which is extremely beneficial to

language development, arises from literary discussions and the desire to work out of meanings.

Folktales and other literary storytelling have been used to teach communities values and customs from very early times. In this reference, Culler defines “literariness” as the unique impacts of the pleasure and meaning-making that literature produces as a medium of expression. Literature conveys ideas through language and creates instructional and evocative meanings. Culler has enumerated the subsequent characteristics of literature as,

1. Literature as the ‘foregrounding’ of language,
2. Literature as the integration of language,
3. Literature as fiction,
4. Literature as an aesthetic object,
5. Literature as an intertextual or self-reflexive construct.

(2007, pp. 28-34)

Literature is regarded as the best use of language because it is “foregrounded” in language; as a result, it is the best medium for teaching language and concepts. When creating meaning, literary expressions arouse feelings, imagination, and creativity. DeMaria points out:

Writers do not make up things in order to conceal. They invent stories in order to reveal things about human nature and experience. We do the same thing when we dream. We represent inner feelings to ourselves in symbolic form. We make up situations and characters and sometimes nightmarish happenings, but these inventions are an expression of some inner truth about ourselves. One might even argue that *fiction is truer than fact* because sometimes the real truth can only be told by indirection, by the invention of revealing situations. (2020, pp. 4-5)

In the 1930s, the structuralist and formalist methods of literary analysis gave rise to the reader-response theory. The emphasis shifted from being mostly on the text’s inherent properties to being on how readers actively engage with the text to create meaning. I.A. Richards remarks on how one’s emotional reaction to literature might vary. Padley also notices in the reader-response theory that:

The reader and the text are always located in history, and the act of reading in any historical period is informed by the conventions and expectations of that period...The process by which the reader acquires lived experience and perceptions of the world is crucial to

the development of the reader's interpretative skills and the ability to produce textual meaning from the act of reading. (2006, pp. 187-188)

Considering this perspective, the reader's own knowledge—beliefs, culture and emotions—plays a substantial part in building the implications of a book, relatively, than the words themselves as an ordered structure.

Reader response techniques can be built into our pedagogical framework to teach language through literature, allowing students to create the meaning of the text by reflecting on their personal contexts. This method can be very beneficial for a bilingual classroom since it allows the students' shared cultural customs to be incorporated into the multicultural classroom setting. This would be an example of learner-centric pedagogy, wherein the knowledge and cultures of learners can be intact.

Conclusion

There are numerous ways to use literature in a multilingual classroom. When choosing and grading activities and materials, the material design must consider the possibility that some politically and culturally sensitive language items would be absent, which might result in misunderstandings and obstacles. The goal should be to increase one's literary and linguistic proficiency and to foster an understanding and respect for all languages and beliefs of the many linguistic communities. Maintaining and enhancing the rich multilingual legacy that exists in our nation would be greatly aided by the appropriate discretion that gives way to learner-centric and dialogic approaches.

Literature has a broad pedagogical role in multilingual classrooms, providing important advantages for language learning, cultural awareness, critical thinking and interpersonal relationships. But it also brings with it difficulties that call for thoughtful strategies and calculated preparation. Through a mixture of strategies, including the critical reading of various literary works, scaffolded instructions, collaborative learning, integration of technology and culturally responsive teaching practices, educators can effectively use literature to enhance the multilingual classroom experience.

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Ashish Awasthi is a research scholar in the Department of English at CMP College, University of Allahabad, Prayagraj.
ashish.bblc@gmail.com

Ram Prakash Gupta is an Assistant Professor in the Department of English at CMP College, University of Allahabad, Prayagraj.
ramprakashgupt@gmail.com