

**TEACHING LANGUAGE SKILLS THROUGH LITERATURE: AN EXPERIMENT****P. RAJ KIRAN**

Assistant Professor

Dept of English

Gudlavalleru Engineering College

Gudlavalleru. A.P

**Abstract**

*English has been the language of the globe, international communication, commerce and trade, the media and popular culture, and all these effects to motivate learning the English language. Moreover, English is no longer viewed as the property of the English-speaking world but is an international commodity. Further, this expansion has also influenced the teaching of English language in the classroom. The present language classroom is vastly different from that of the 20th-century classroom teaching. The present experiment offers an analysis of the recent study in the classroom of seventy students, which provided the means to identify current and emerging trends in Language learning.*

**Introduction**

The focus in language education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is not only on grammar, memorization and rote learning but also using language and cultural knowledge as a means to communicate and connect to others around the globe. Geographical and physical boundaries are being transcended by technology as students learn to reach out to the world around them, using their language and cultural skills to facilitate the connections they are eager to make. Today, the idea that learning a second language is an opportunity to a higher-level job or an international position is an outdated formula. Today knowledge of another language is one of a number of skills which may help an individual acquire better and meaningful employment.

Literature is a vast source of learning and teaching the English language. Literature cannot be limited to stories or remarkable cultures. But literature, in fact, is the application of a language. Therefore, it is understood that literature provides a great opportunity to evolve and improve one's language skills. It provides ample opportunities not only to apply the existing skills but also to sustain interest through instruction in a novel and more advanced applications. Therefore, stories and short stories accommodate themselves as demonstration learning, which leads to a learner-centered approach proving the value of language learning through stories and speech. The present work would like to present the second-year B. Tech English textbook included by JNTU Kakinada. The text titled "Life, Language and Culture Explorations – I" for the 1<sup>st</sup> semester and "Life, Language and Culture Explorations – II" for the second semester. These two are customized course books which contain five short stories each and aim at introducing the learners to life skills. Literature mirrors life. This course book and its sequel Life, Language and Culture: Explorations – II contain stories that are handpicked to



present life in its myriad hues. These slices of life reflect culture, and it is essential to understand their richness in holding different societies together and to get a holistic view of life.

Reading, understanding and interpreting literature help in chiseling language skills. The literary pieces presented in this book also present samples of contemporary language use and their nuances. Besides exposing the learners to the nuances of English, the overall goal of the book is to help them relate language to their own personal development, which in turn helps them in their professional life. The literary pieces in the book help them in generating ideas, raising and enjoying in the discussion of issues which are sensitive as well as of global interest. The short stories and historical narratives expose the learners to various dimensions like gender, environment, culture, human relationships, ethics, aesthetics, social responsibilities as well as the philosophy of life.

Further, it can be said that the specific goals of the book are to enable the learner.

- To understand various cultures and traditions
- To understand inter-personal relationships
- To be sensitive to issue related to life
- To develop critical and analytical thinking
- To attain confidence to face life in any eventuality.

It can be said that the Life, Language, and Culture: Explorations – I and II present a symbiosis of aesthetic and functional aspects of the English language. The literary extracts and the activities/ exercises aim at achieving the goals of the book. While the literary extracts mirror life and culture, and present models of contemporary English, the activities/exercises aim at developing comprehension and critical thinking. 'Project work' at the end of each chapter aims at taking the classroom learning to 'life experiences'. It is hoped that the contents of the book will serve the purpose of honing the language and life skills of the learners. This book will also help the students:

1. With Integrated skills activities as they combine the readings with other language work
2. Pre-reading activities provide learners with cultural, topical, and historical information
3. Literary analysis exercises help students recognize literary elements and write or speak about literature
4. Journal writing encourages learners to respond to the text
5. Culture points help enrich the course by expanding the versatility of the book fraternity.

This experiment was attempted in the class of 70 students in the English language laboratory. It was found that there was much enthusiasm among the students in learning the new short stories which were prescribed for the second year students, semester 1. The textbooks



contain five short stories such as *O. Henry's* "The cop and the anthem", 'Bade Bhai Saab' by *Munshi premchand*, *Morning Bells* by *Jayashree Mohanraj*, 'Tsunami Religion' by *Anjali Prashar* etc. All these short stories have culture, literature, the language in them. Language in the sense the text is full of a variety of diction and expressions. The students need to read the entire text or the story and bring out an analytical note of the story and later present them in the discussion hour. Not only preparing a critical appreciation but also doing exercises at the end of each short story. For instance let us take the short story "The cop and the anthem", by *O. Henry*. Students should go through the pre-reading vocabulary which includes new vocabulary and phrases. The story deals with the protagonist of the story who doesn't do anything but still wants everything for free. Soapy, the protagonist of the story is a man in his crumpled clothes and grown beard sits on a bench and plans for his future as he wants to protect himself from the winter as it was Christmas time. He decides that the prison (he calls it as an island) is the best place for him where he can get food and shelter for free of cost. He trails many a time to get arrested. At first, he eats till his stomach full and complains that he cannot pay the bill, but unfortunately he doesn't get arrested. Not only once but he tries more than three times but eventually fails. Finally, he listens to the anthem in a church; he repents and decides to live honestly and happily hereafter. Due to his misfortune he then gets arrested by the police. The author, through this story takes care in presenting the theme 'man proposes and God disposes'. The students after comprehending the story they answer the exercises which come at the end of the text. The short questions test the level of comprehension of the students. The remaining questions deal with the Writing style, Vocabulary by theme, Culture point, and few activities to conclude the exercises.

Thus the students could learn new vocabulary or expressions such as footman for a *servant*, blue coats for *police* (slang), ready-tied four in – *hand for tie or knot*, loafed for *walked idly* (slang), a cinch for *easy task*, suds for *buy me a beer*, racket for *noise* etc. I also found that few students calling their lazy friends 'Soapy' as the origin of the word Brute is from *Brutus in 'Julius Caesar'*.

The literary pieces, which have been chosen for the study, give them insights into the contemporary language use and the nuances. The overall goal of this book is to help them relate language to their own personal development, which in turn helps them in their professional life. The texts also have a project at the end of the exercises. The project for the cop and the anthem is:

*"Find out approximately how many homeless are there in your town. You may get the information from the Municipal authority or the police. Choose one such homeless person and see his/her life during a day. If possible, talk to the person and know his/her life better. Write down a brief account of the person's daily routine in about 300 words. Read it out in the next class"*.



Language comprises of four basic skills – listening, speaking, reading and writing. This part of the project enhanced them in developing all the four skills simultaneously. As a part of project work, a few students went around the town to find the homeless persons and observed and a few interacted with them and made a brief report of it. The report what they prepared had fulfilled the etiquette of writing a report, and when they finished the report they came to the class and presented them before the class and thus they read and answered for the queries raised by some students in the class. They are asked to make a presentation and that turned into a discussion as the class resumed. All the remaining listened to the presentation carefully and enthusiastically to know their mate's presentation and take an opportunity to ask him/her questions. The students were trained to infer the meaning of difficult words from context. The students were carefully monitored by the teacher. The proposed process for the students to teach language in the classroom is only possible when the teacher is prepared. The teacher was able to prepare with all his/her techniques in all aspects such as introducing the short story to the students, making them to understand all the difficult vocabulary even before finding them in the text.

### **Stage one: Warm-up**

A warmer activity was planned to make the students comprehend the meaning of the title and guess the theme of the short story. This took a good amount of time and a few forms: a small discussion that the learners do in pairs, a whole class discussion, a guessing game between the teacher and the class and a brainstorming of some vocabulary around that topic. The teacher also planned the warmer activity that looks at the source of the literature that was studied. The teacher then tried to elicit what the students already know about the writer and his writings. Next, the teacher gave the students some background details to read (be careful not to make this too long or it will detract from the rest of the lesson; avoid text overload!). Described in detail, what way this piece of literature is well-known (maybe it is often quoted in modern films). The teacher found the warmer activity to be more proper to teach literature.

### **Stage two: Pre-reading**

- Pre-teaching vocabulary: The words that seem confusing and difficult to learn and remember were approached with caution. The teacher minimized the number of words to less than ten for each session, if the teacher has to teach more than ten words, there would be a good chance for the student to find the text too difficult.
- Predicting: The teacher gave students some vocabulary from the extract and asked them to guess what happens next. The teacher chose a story and read a couple of lines and asked them to make predictions about it.



- Giving students a 'taste': The text was read (with their books closed, or papers turned over) at normal speed, even quickly. Then, the teacher requested the students to compare what they have understood by allowing them to work in pairs. Then the students were asked to report back to the teacher.

### **Stage Three: Text Comprehension**

With the help of stories and poems, the teacher read the thing to the students so that they can get more of a "feel" for the text. With very reminiscent pieces of literature or poetry, this proved to be productive. The students were allowed to read the text for themselves. It is necessary to allow the students to approach a piece of literature first before giving them any specific task related to the text.

When the students have read it, the teacher had set comprehension questions and asked them to explain the significance of certain keywords of the text. Besides this, the teacher also used another technique of checking comprehension by asking the students to explain to each other (in pairs) what they have understood. This was also followed up by more subjective questions:

*"Why do you think X said this?"*

*How do you think Soapy feels?"*

*What made him do this?"*

### **Stage four: Language comprehension**

At this stage the student gets to grip the difficult words in the text. The teacher observed, the students gaining a clear idea of the unfamiliar words that get from context. The teacher also looked at certain elements of style that the author has used. The experiment involved the suggestion of words which the author has chosen. For example, if the text says:

*"She had long skinny arms," what does that say about the author's impression of the woman?  
Would it be different if the author had written: "She had long slender arms"?"*

### **Stage Five: Follow-up activity**

As the text was completed with a piece of literature, it led to many follow-up activities.

- Asked the students to act out a part of the scene of the story, in groups.
- Asked the students to improvise a role play between two characters in the book.



- Asked the students to write what they think is going to happen next, or what they think happened just before.
- Asked the students to re-write the scene. They modernized it and wrote the story in a single tense then made them to read out their version.
- Asked the students to personalize the text by talking about if anything similar has happened to them.
- Asked the students to read out the dialogue but to give the characters special accents which work on different aspects of pronunciation.

### **References:**

1. *Life, Language and culture: Explorations- I (2012) Cengage learning India Pvt.Ltd.*
2. *Life, Language and culture: Explorations- II (2012) Cengage learning India Pvt.Ltd.*