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Use of Literature in Learning English and its Effectiveness: A Case Study on the Department of English Students at Shahjalal University of Science and Technology (SUST)

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Abstract

This research aims at exploring the use of literature and its effectiveness in learning English involving English department students to develop both basic language skills such as listening, reading, writing and speaking and language areas i.e., vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation. English students, those studying literary texts, are reading a version of the language which is rich in metaphor, simile, allusion and ambiguity, and those are the elements that deepen their thinking and understanding of the material they are reading as well as the English language. When English is taught through literature, it creates the power of self-belief in students, and hence, influences learner's behaviours, motivation and attitudes towards English language learning. (Keshavarzi, 2012) Literature provides the kind of subject matter that has the power to motivate learners and help them in exploring the possibilities of usages and meaning that enhances their language competence in a great way. Since the literary texts "explore the resources of language to its highest capacity, the learner, therefore, is inspired through the reading of the literary texts to learn the language in real-life situations and communicate fluently" (Keshavarzi, 2012, p. 557). Therefore, literary texts help them to acquire the language as a means of communication. The objectives of this study are – to identify what kinds of problems the students are facing while using literary texts in the process of learning English; to prioritise the activities of the students as per their academic needs in comprehending texts; to explore how arranged skill development sessions may help the students improve their language skills and to recommend the strategies to be taken so that the students may effectively use literature to improve their English language skills.

Keywords: Literature, learning English, effectiveness, case study, SUST

Introduction, Background of the Study and Statement of the Problem

This study aims at exploring the use of literature in learning English and its effectiveness; in both basic language skills such as listening reading, writing, and speaking and language areas i.e., vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation. Literary texts “offer a rich source of linguistic input and can help learners to practice the four language skills – speaking, listening, reading and writing in addition to exemplifying grammatical structures and presenting new vocabulary” (Rahayu, p. 1). English students, those studying literary texts, are reading a version of the language which is rich in metaphor, simile, allusion and ambiguity, and these are the elements that deepen their thinking and understanding of the material they are reading as well as their language skills. When English is taught through literature, it creates the power of self-belief in students, and hence, influences learner’s behaviours, motivation and attitudes towards English language learning. (Keshavarza, 2012, p. 559)

Literature develops learners’ strategies; they listen and read for general meaning, and predict and guess the meaning of unfamiliar words. Literature helps students to go “beyond the surface meaning and dive into underlying meanings; that is, it enables students to go beyond what is written and dive into what is meant” (Keshavarza, 2012, p. 557). Literature provides the kind of subject matter that has the power to motivate learners and help them in exploring the possibilities of usages and meaning that enhance their language competence in a great way. Since the literary texts “explore the resources of language to its highest capacity, the learner, therefore, is inspired through the reading of the literary texts to learn a language in real-life situations and communicate fluently” (Keshavarza, 2012, p. 557). Literature evokes feelings through words, pulls learners out of the graded grammatical forms and helps them to communicate in a way that attracts language learning.

Language learning requires acquiring four skills: reading comprehension, writing, listening and speaking. Literature has proved a good source that fulfils these four skills. literature is the culture of the people using that language. the present paper will

debate the reasons behind using literature as a good source in teaching the English language. (Keshavarza, 2012, p. 554)

Literature forces the students to read more and more as well as deeply. Literature helps in the incorporation of linguistic competence into communicative competence by putting language into use in different social situations. But when we examine the exam scripts and take oral viva or presentation of the students; we find the ineffectiveness of using literature by the students in recent years. It seems that they are gradually losing their cognitive capacity and skills in using literature due to the lack of motivation, methodology and mechanics.

This study considers the following questions to address the study problem of this research project:

- (i) Why should students use literary texts in the process of learning the English language?
- (ii) How do the students carry out the purposes of using literary texts?
- (iii) What problems are the students facing in using literature in developing language skills?
- (iv) What measures should we take to focus on the effectiveness of using pieces of literature for learning English?

Rationale of the Study

- (i) I. Relationship of the objectives to existing relevant knowledge on the research field: English literature has an immense “scope and significance in the process of teaching-learning the English language” (Sawant, 2014, p. 2). According to Collie and Slater, there are four main reasons which lead a language teacher to use literature in the classroom. These are valuable authentic material, cultural enrichment, language enrichment and personal involvement. (J. Collie, and S. Slater, 1990, p. 3)

Literature provides learners with a wide range of individual lexical or syntactic items.

Students become familiar with many features of the written language, reading a substantial and contextualised body of text. They learn about the syntax and discourse functions of sentences, the variety of possible structures, and the different ways of connecting ideas, which develop and enrich their writing skills. Students also become more productive and adventurous when they begin to perceive the richness and diversity of the language they are trying to learn and begin to make use of some of that potential themselves. Thus, they improve their communicative and cultural competence in the authentic richness, the naturalness of the authentic texts. (Hismanal, 2005, p. 55)

- (ii) II. Relevance of the proposed study to national or regional priorities: English is the common language of today's world which is called a global village. Bangladesh is connected with this new approach emphasising on development and digitalisation of every sector. In this context, English as a language is playing a vital role in the daily life of the people of this country. Sylhet is importantly and significantly concerned about this reality.

Objectives of the Study:

The general objective of this study is to explore the effectiveness of the use of literature in learning English and engaging the English Department students in it. The specific objectives of this study are:

- (i) To identify what kinds of problems the students are facing while using literary texts in the process of learning English.
- (ii) To prioritise the activities of the students as per their academic needs in comprehending texts.
- (iii) To explore how arranged skill development sessions may help the students improve their language skills.
- (iv) To recommend the strategies to be taken so that the students may effectively use literature to improve their English language skills.

Methodology

Using literature in learning the English language helps to create an overall classroom environment that can motivate the students. This

study investigates how students are using their given, taught literary texts in developing the skills in learning English because a second language environment will enhance learners intrinsic reading motivation” (Morrow, 2004, p. 21).

This study follows the experimental study method, which enables a researcher to closely examine the data within a specific context of some experiments. By including both quantitative and qualitative data, an experimental study helps explain both the process and outcome of a phenomenon through complete experiment and analysis of the investigation. This study includes two questionnaire surveys.

The “Text and Activities” method is the most common approach to using fiction and poetry in the classroom. In this study, literary texts will be used for explaining and understanding, as well as simulating readers for practising language skills. The analysis will be emphasised with the linguistic inputs that readers/students can get, such as the grammar structure and vocabulary and the use of the literary work for practising 4 (four) language skills.

Maley (1989) lists some of the reasons for regarding literature as a potent resource in the language classroom as follows (p.12):

- (i) Universality
- (ii) Non-triviality
- (iii) Personal Relevance
- (iv) Variety
- (v) Interest
- (vi) Economy and Suggestive Power
- (vii) Ambiguity

When selecting the literary texts to be used in language learning, this study considers: the needs, motivation, interests, cultural background and language level of the students. (Amer, 2012, 57) In this study, the literary texts are used for explaining and understanding, as well as stimulating learners to practise the language skills to enrich students’ “appreciation of literary works and all at once improving their language competence” (Rahayu, 4).

Data Analysis

The project selects twenty-five students from different batches of the department on a random basis. The *first survey* was conducted among the students before giving Skill development sessions to them with the following ten questions (Table:1) to know what the students are doing for developing their four language skills; what is the status/ability of their language skills and what they think about received initiatives to develop language skills through reading literature. So that, after giving skill development sessions to them, the study finds out the effectiveness of the project.

Table: 1

No.	Questions
1.	How do you develop your Skill using literary texts that you are taught in the classes?
2.	What Strategy do you follow to improve your Reading Skill through reading literary texts from your syllabus?
7.	How do you develop your Writing Skill using the knowledge learnt from reading texts?
8.	How do you apply your acquired knowledge from the read texts to develop your speaking skill?
5.	How is your present Listening Skill?
6.	How is your present Reading Skill?
7.	How is your present Writing Skill?
8.	How is your present Speaking Skill?
9.	What obstacles/barriers are you facing in developing your four language skills by using English literary text?
10.	Are you receiving proper and perfect guidelines in this regard? If not, what steps/strategies should be taken?

Table:2

No.	Question	Students' opinion
1.	How do you develop your Skill using literary texts that you are taught in the classes?	Concentration and understanding, using a sound system, hearing native speakers, avoiding irrelevant discussion, recording the class lecture, focusing and attention, reading loudly, watching movies, and dramas, listening to audiobooks, concentrating on the pronunciation of the

		words, understanding inner meanings, hearing carefully
2.	What Strategy do you follow to improve your Reading Skill through reading literary texts from your syllabus?	Selecting topics, screaming and screaming, fast reading, reading loudly, reading many times, focusing on unknown words, spelling, vocabulary, through reading, finding meanings, group study, reading more short stories, and novels, following sentence structure, fixing time to complete reading, follow google translate, highlight the words, finding logical meanings, synonym and antonym
3.	How do you develop your Writing Skill using the knowledge learnt from reading texts?	Focus on ideas and information, write regularly, write a summary, follow sentence structure, note takings, rewriting, focus on new words, and phrases, focus on grammatical mistakes, critical writing, writing summary, paraphrasing, style of writing,
4.	How do you apply your acquired knowledge from the read texts to develop your speaking skill?	Follow fluency and accuracy, record the reading to hear again, mark the quotes, share my opinion, group discussion, follow native speakers, practice regularly, follow public talks,

Table 2 shows students' feedback on the four questions which are based on their strategies and abilities to develop language skills.

Table: 3

No.	Question	Very poor/ 50-60%	Poor/ 60-70%	Good/70- 80%	very good/ 80- 90%	Excellent/90- 100%
5	How is your present Listening Skill?		4 (16%)	20 (80%)	0	1(4%)
6	How is	1 (4%)	7(28%)	15(60%)	0	2(8%)

	your present Reading Skill?					
7	How is your present Writing Skill?	3(12%)	7(28%)	15(60%)	0	0
8	How is your present Speaking Skill?	3(12%)	11(44%)	11(44%)	0	0

Table 3 shows students' present language skills of learning, reading, writing and speaking. The data shows the status of the student's learning ability before receiving lessons in skill development sessions.

Table: 4

9.	What obstacles/barriers are you facing in developing your four language skills by using English literary text?	Lack of practice, knowing vocabulary, unknown words, poor grammar, lack of confidence, lack of motivation, nervousness in speaking, lack of arranging workshops, difficulties in understanding the perspective of literary texts, language barrier, availability of audiobooks
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The data of Table: 4 provides the feedback of the students; what they consider as the obstacles/barriers to developing their language skills?

Table:5

No.	Question	Yes	No	Opinion
10.	Are you receiving proper and perfect guidelines in this regard? If not, what steps/strategies should be taken?	5 (20%)	20 (80%)	Motivation, arranging the seminar, presentation, effective language classes, classes on methods, proper assessment and feedback,

Table 5 shows that 20% of students think that they are receiving proper and perfect guidelines to develop their language skills. And, 80% of students say that they are not receiving that in this regard.

Work Plan/Activity:

The study has followed the following work plan as mentioned in the proposal (Table: 6).

Table:6

Project Duration	From-to		Time	Division	
One Year	July 2019- June 2020	July-August 2019	September-December 2019	January-April 2020	May=June 2020
		Ist Questionnaire, Distribution of Selected Books among Research Students	Arranging (first 4) Language Skills Development Sessions	Arranging (second 4) Language Skills Development Sessions	2 nd Questionnaire, Final report preparation and submission

According to the demand of developing students’ English language skills through using literary texts, the research has conducted eight Skill Development Sessions to improve the selected students’ ability and skills in learning English. Each session follows the plan which is given below (Table:7):

Table: 7

Name of the Session	Total Sessions	Duration of a session	Each Session Activity					
English Language Skill Development	8	4 hours	1st hour	2nd	And	3rd	hour	4th hour

Sessions								Cognitive Analysis
				30min	30min	30min	30min	
				Listening	Speaking	Reading	Writing	
			Language Skills	Development				

Eight (8) English Language Skill Development Sessions have been arranged during one year period of the project. Six selected literary texts (*The Metamorphosis*, *A Doll's House, 1984*, *Wuthering Heights*, *Things Fall Apart* and *Hamlet*) from the syllabus (BA and MA) of the department were provided to twenty-five (25) Research students. Each Session has been conducted on a particular prescribed text. Six texts have been comprehended in six sessions. The beginning session was for conducting the first questionnaire survey and a discussion on "how to improve four language skills?" The ending session was to give feedback to the students and conduct a second questionnaire survey.

After conducting eight skill development sessions, the study finds that students become engaged and spontaneous in the learning process. They tried to receive the best from the sessions according to their ability. In the sessions, students' presence was 97% (average). 100% of students have participated in the two questionnaire surveys. Their feedback is discussed in the following part of the final report.

Result and Discussion

The research students have given their feedback before and after joining skill development sessions. Therefore, the results of this research are discussed comparatively in the below tables and figures:

Table: 8 (Frequency distribution with percentages of the students)

Questions	Before study					After study				
	Very poor/ 50-60%	Poor/ 60-70%	Good/ 70-80%	very good/ 80- 90%	Excellen t/90- 100%	Very poor/ 50-60%	Poor/ 60-70%	Good/ 70-80%	very good/ 80-90%	Excellen t/90- 100%
How is your present Listening Skill?		4 (16%)	20 (80%)	0	1(4%)	0	0	9(36%)	14 (56%)	2(8%)
How is your present Reading Skill?	1 (4%)	7(28%)	15(60%)	0	2(8%)	0	0	10(40%)	8(32%)	7(28%)
How is your present Writing Skill?	3(12%)	7(28%)	15(60%)	0	0	0	1(4%)	14(56%)	10(40%)	0
How is your present Speaking Skill?	3(12%)	11(44%)	11(44%)	0	0	1(4%)	1(4%)	14(56%)	8(32%)	1(4%)
How is the Research Project helpful for improving your Listening Skill?						1 (4%)	5(20%)	8(32%)	10(40%)	1(4%)
How is the Research Project helpful for improving your Reading Skill?						2(8%)	3(12%)	5(20%)	12(48%)	3(12%)

How is the Research Project helpful for improving your Writing Skill?						1(4%)	4(16%)	8(32%)	9(36%)	3(12%)
How is the Research Project helpful for improving your Speaking Skill?						1(4%)	2(8%)	8(32%)	10(40%)	4(16%)
How do you rate your feedback on the effectiveness of the Research Project?						0	3(12%)	6(24%)	10(40%)	6(24%)

Table: 8 shows a comparative picture of the status of the student’s language skills before the study and after the study under the project which is shown skill-wise in the following figures comparatively. This table also shows the other feedback from the students on the effectiveness of using literature for developing language skills after attending the project activities.

Assessment

This study considers a three-step comparison of the feedback and assessments which are received and done to justify the effectiveness of this research project. Before beginning Skill Development sessions for the research students, this study conducts a survey where the students provide their feedback on their language skills which are given below:

Table: 9

Questions	Before study				
	Very poor/ 50-60%	Poor/ 60-70%	Good/ 70-80%	very good/ 80-90%	Excellent / 90-100%
How is your present Listening Skill?		4 (16%)	20 (80%)	0	1(4%)
How is your present Reading Skill?	1 (4%)	7(28%)	15(60%)	0	2(8%)
How is your present Writing Skill?	3(12%)	7(28%)	15(60%)	0	0
How is your present Speaking Skill?	3(12%)	11(44%)	11(44%)	0	0

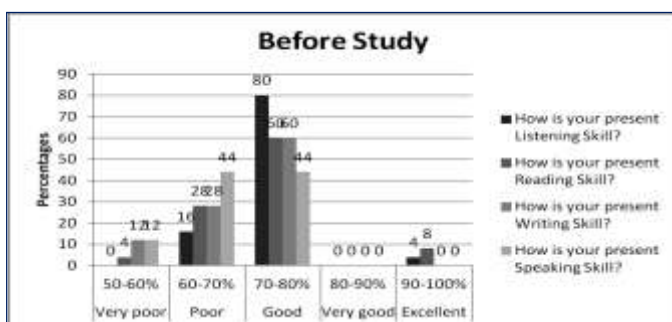


Figure: 1

Table: 09 and Figure: 1 show that before attending the skill development sessions of the research project, 16% of students' listening skill was poor, 80% good and 4% excellent. 4% of students reading skill was very poor, 28% poor, 80% good and 8% excellent. 12% of students' writing skill was very poor, 28% poor and 60% good. 12% of students speaking skill was very poor, 44% poor and 44% good.

During the eight skill development sessions, the study arranges tests on all four skills from prescribed and taught six literary texts. After examining all manuscripts, the study prepares an average result table which is as follows:

Table: 10

Assessments/Skill Tests	Average of Six Skill Tests				
	Very poor/ 50-60%	Poor/ 60-70%	Good/ 70-80%	very good/ 80-90%	Excellent/ 90-100%
Listening	0	2(8%)	11(44%)	10(40%)	2(8%)
Reading	0	3(12%)	9(36%)	10(40%)	3(12%)
Writing	0	3(12%)	13(52%)	9(36%)	0
Speaking	1(4%)	3(12%)	12(48%)	8(32%)	1(4%)

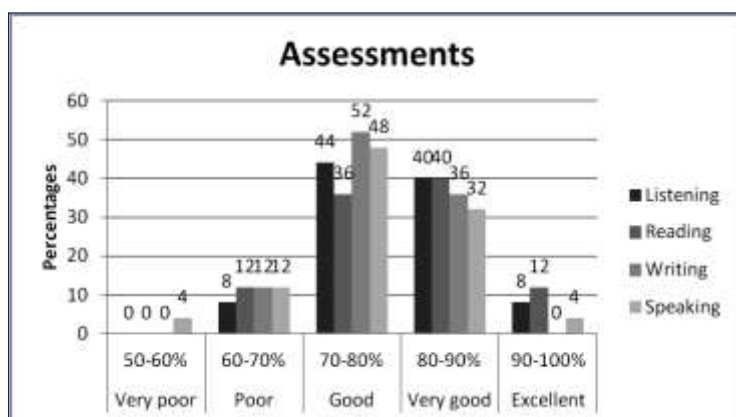


Figure: 2

Table: 10 and Figure: 2 show that among 25 research students, 8% of students' listening skill is poor, 44% good, 40% very good and

8% excellent. 12% of students reading skill is poor, 36% good, 40% very good and 12% excellent. 12% of students' writing skill is poor, 52% good and 36% very good. 4% of students speaking skill is very poor, 12% poor, 48% good, 32% very good and 4% excellent.

After completing all skill development sessions, this study conducts the second and final survey among the respondents to know their development and the effectiveness of using literary texts for improving their skills in the English language. The research students' feedback is given below:

Table: 11

Questions	After study				
	Very poor/ 50-60%	Poor/ 60-70%	Good/ 70-80%	very good/ 80-90%	Excellent/ 90-100%
How is your present Listening Skill?	0	0	9(36%)	14 (56%)	2(8%)
How is your present Reading Skill?	0	0	10(40%)	8(32%)	7(28%)
How is your present Writing Skill?	0	1(4%)	14(56%)	10(40%)	0
How is your present Speaking Skill?	1(4%)	1(4%)	14(56%)	8(32%)	1(4%)

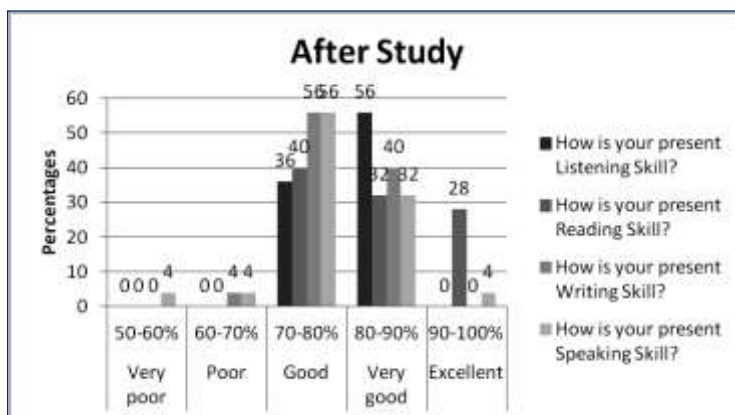


Figure: 3

Table: 11 and Figure: 3 show that 36% of students' listening skill is good and 56% are very good. 40% of students reading skill is good, 32% very good and 28% excellent. 4% of students' writing skill is poor, 56% good and 40% very good. 4% of students speaking skill is very poor, 4% poor, 56% good, 32% very good and 4% excellent.

Therefore, when the study compares the students' language skills before and after the study (shown in Table: 8; Table: 9, Figure: 1; Table: 10, Figure: 2) under this research project, the difference in development and the effectiveness of the use of literary texts for learning the English language is explored. Moreover, the result of this comparative data analysis is justified when we examine the assessment results and the students' closely similar study feedback (shown in Table: 11, Figure: 3; Table: 10, Figure: 2). As a result, it can be said that the objectives of the study are achieved expectedly.

Findings/Outputs:

In a nutshell, this study follows the Case Study Method, which enables the researcher to examine the data closely within a specific context. During the research, two questionnaire surveys are conducted. The first one is done before arranging skill development sessions for the research students (twenty-five students are selected randomly from all batches of the department) which helps to know the gaps in the students, whether they followed strategies and showed strength or ability in language skills. Eight skill development sessions are arranged where six literary texts are taught and after teaching, assessments are also taken on four language skills. Finally, another questionnaire survey is conducted to know the development of the attended students. The data analysis and the discussion of the results show that the research project finds the effectiveness of using Literature in Learning English. The assessment of the tests of the research students justifies the results of the study.

This study finds the following results/outcomes after conducting the research:

- a. The attending students now can use their prescribed taught texts effectively in learning the English language.
- b. The students now have a mature concept as to what they should follow to get the best out of their reading literary texts.

- c. The students know why the pragmatic use of literature is an essential part of their language-learning process.
- d. The research will help the teachers to know what steps should be taken to keep the students interested in using literary texts.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This empirical research has been conducted by practical skill development sessions for 25 selected students from different batches of the department of English at SUST to develop their English language skills of listening, reading, writing and speaking and language areas i.e., vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation by using pieces of literature. The arranged eight sessions have shown the usefulness and effectiveness of the research project. The objectives of the study are achieved and the research explores the demand and necessity of taking effective plans and actions for further improvement of English students' language skills through reading literary texts. The following recommendations are made for further research and action plan:

- (i) There should be a long-term plan and project for identifying students' knowledge gaps in the skill development perspectives/contexts.
- (ii) The English department should provide a more technologically sound classroom environment.
- (iii) Teaching methods, techniques and strategies should be focused on English Language skill development because of facing the use of the English language as a *Lingua Franca*.
- (iv) There should be the availability of audiobooks in the central and departmental libraries.
- (v) Feedback culture from both sides – teacher and student should be established and cared for to continue effectively.
- (vi) Workshops, Seminars, Talks, Group Discussions and Presentations should be arranged regularly with proper notification and effective time management.

- (vii) The English Department should collect recognised versions of Dramas, Movies, Documentaries are based on literary texts and make them available for the students' use.
- (viii) Distinguished Professors from native English countries should be invited regularly.
- (ix) English Debate competitions should be arranged regularly.
- (x) The English Department should ensure that the 'coming and going' of the students every year should be revolved around the environment "English for English".

Acknowledgement

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Appendix 1

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1-Eghifz4-Fb-mselfkvHHQvbuulxuJ-W/edit?usp=drivesdk&ouid=110517976389250995641&rtpof=true&sd=true>

Appendix 2

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1-ObvOvY5Nv33jVbxYdGBkiBv2obMutOO/edit?usp=drivesdk&ouid=110517976389250995641&rtpof=true&sd=true>