A Pedagogical Examination of Literature-Based Programs in Fostering Analytical Abilities in Higher Education

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Abstract

Literature plays a fundamental role in the process of teaching and learning because it is an effective teaching tool that provides multisensory classroom experiences. It is a learning methodology that can be applied in various fields to nurture students' high order thinking and reflective reasoning. Beyond its significance in improving language competency, literature stimulates students' cognitive abilities as it necessitates them to go beyond the text surface to comprehend the hidden meaning and messages that lie beneath the literal surface of the literary works. To do so, students go into a mental process of analyzing, connecting and evaluating the literary texts. This study investigates the efficiency of incorporating literary texts into instructional programs to boost students' analytical skills in different educational areas. The findings of the study indicated that students enrolled in literature-based programs showed better reflective thoughts, wilder imagination, intensified abilities in reasoning and evaluation. Furthermore, riveting diverse literature serves in providing students with a platform of discussion on identity, culture, sense of belonging and power dynamics. This inclusive learning process can enhance the curriculum and equips students with the required abilities to move from passive to active learning.

Keywords: collaborative learning, analytical skills, mental and emotional engagement, information literacy, cognitive empathy

Introduction

In recent years, literature has gained a primary position as an integrated pedagogical approach to be incorporated in educational programs to establish an effective learning environment. Literature is not about telling stories, but it is an elaborative teaching strategy that works in developing students' ideas, evoking their emotional and social responses, and reflecting on culture and human behavior. Studying literature is an educational methodology that focuses mainly on promoting generative learning and thinking in which students make sense of what they learn through application and critical thinking. With generative learning and thinking, students are involved in mental operations like induction, deduction, connections, analysis and synthesis. This mental functioning imbibes students with skills that are highly demanded in the 21st century like analytical abilities, creativity, and independent learning (Glăveanu & Kaufman, 2019; Said-Metwaly et al., 2021).

One of the primary concerns of the educators in knowledge providing pedagogy is to create a environment of applied and problem-based learning that focuses on teaching students how to think rather than what to think. Among the many benefits of incorporating literature in educational classes like language, enjoyment, cultivating aesthetic reception, and imagination, literature also serves as a catalyst for analytical skills and logical reasoning. In literature classes,

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students are engaged in a mental process of inference, and connection rather than a rote learning that focuses only on absorption of information (Zajda, 2021). This study focuses on the impact of literary-based structured programs on triggering and fostering students' empirical abilities. Literature is a source of extensive multifariousness and heterogeneity that presents various complex characters, different perceptions, experience, moral conflicts and a rhetoric language that employs artistic devices (Banks 2008b; Lin and Jackson 2019a). Though the language of literature is a panoramic and expressive, yet it is enigmatic, puzzling and very often oblique. It is a sophisticated language in which information is not straightforwardly transferred. It is a language that overburdened with layers of meaning and carries multiple interpretations and depths due to its linguistic intricacy, thematic depth and semiotic features. Such a multifaced setting requires sharpened intellectual skills to understand the author's meaning and intention. A literature-based program is an educational paradigm that transforms the traditional teaching patterns from education on teaching into education on training that relies mainly on the application of information and prior knowledge to construct a new one rather than only swallowing it. It is effective in igniting and integrating students independent learning to escalate their abilities of reflection, analysis, synthesis and evaluation.

Additionally, literature-based program is a teaching methodology that provides students with the vigor and vitality to skip generalization, cultural and ethnic stereotypes and culture monolithic understanding that very often leads to negative outcomes. Students are motivated to widen the horizon of their cultural experience through exposure to cross-cultural experience and cultural exchange. This exposure to various cultures can enhance students' cultural sensitivity and cultural awareness which excite them to appreciate and respect other people's points of view and their inherent values. Appreciation of other cultures narratives, and social-emotional competencies are incumbent components not only to build a character with keen emotional intelligence and social cognition but also to generate students' positive self-concept and identity (Andrade & Carvalho, 2024). Such reflective articulation can ease the individuality of a diverse culture that might breed prejudice, communication barriers and stereotyping if students interpret other cultures through explicit ethnocentrism. In such a cornucopian class of heterogenous elements and characters that embrace diverse viewpoints, students are enticed to engage in a rational and evidence-based thinking that is fundamentally required to construct an insightful understanding of human experience (Liu et al., 2014; Mardiani and Baharuddin 2023). Intellectual abilities are obtained and nourished with more engagement in various cultural contexts, characters' experience and historical events (Do & Slater, 2017).

Students who are involved in reading literature are more up to have a higher level of cognitive empathy with people in real life (Aram & Aviram, 2009; Mar, Tackett & Moore, 2010). Empathy is sensing other people's feelings, emotions and perspectives, understanding them and learning how to carefully select the best ways to assist and comfort them in their situations (Kidd and Castano, 2013). Reading literature is a source of absorbing experience that enriches students' sense of empathy and emotional intelligence to build rational connections with other cultures (Blair, 2005). Due to its various and wide array of human experience, studying literature can promote emotional intelligence and vicarious or sympathetic experience that can enhance empathy-related brain connections. Students regularly involved in sympathetic experiences are up to develop a higher level of empathy. The various spectrum and emotions students experience in reading literature can provoke their brains' responses in the same way of really experiencing the events. Some researchers claim that a lack of exposure to stories may impede students' empathy development (Pinsent 1996). Literature intensifies students' ability of mind reading that

heightens their unification with the fictional characters (Mumper & Gerrig, 2017). This unification which imitates social experience is necessary to understand and appreciate human conflicts and the intricate human relationships from inside rather than of merely an outside observer. The emotional opportunity to live other people's lives can improve students' ability and compassion to understand complex emotions and moral conflicts. This can prepare students to obtain critical assessment abilities not only students of dead-end thinking that relies only on shallow absorption of information. Students of enhanced emotional intelligence and social conscious individuals with a higher level of sympathy and empathy.

There is a symbiotic and intrinsic relationship between studying fiction and developing imaginative repertoire and cognitive faculties (Passmore,1967; Oatley, 2016). Imagination, as a terminology, is the ability to conjure up something that does not exist. This ability of conjuration is a form of creativity in which individuals think up various possibilities (White 1990) and make unanticipated things come into being. The ability to make unforeseen things come into being is a form of creativity that focuses on the quality of these things as being imaginative, and novel. Both creativity and critical thinking are complimentary and mutually fortify cognitive abilities of problem solving and decision making. Creative thinking develops innovative ideas whereas critical thinking scrutinizes, filters and chooses the best possibilities based on logic and analysis. Both, imagination and reasoning critical thinking are involved in creating something new. No fresh ideas existed without imagination, and these fresh ideas are untested illusion without reasoning or critical thinking. With imagination, students visualize words, expressions and sentences in the literary texts and connect them with mental images to evaluate and assess (Scott, 2013). Consequently, literature-based programs in education can aid not only in language competency but also promote and encourage panoramic and inclusive classroom setting that inspires effective reciprocal teacher-student interaction. Such positive class collaboration enables teachers to design operative activities and practices that elicit deeper learning and greater academic accomplishment. This is a productive relationship between literature and education in which the former nurtures and validates the latter. A learning process that emphasis students' involvement and collaborative interaction foster a deeper level of comprehension and high-grade outcomes (Laal & Laal (2012); Sukert et al. 2020). Several studies have emphasized the importance of creativity and critical thinking in shaping and improving students' wellbeing in life and academic success (Nakano and Wechsler, 2018). This collaboration effectively functions in enhancing the learning process, promoting students' understanding as well as accelerating the achievement of education objectives.

With literature, as a source of authentic real-life representation that widens the doors of imagination, students are motivated to enlarge their mind's capacity and the power of visualization that take them to a wider space. Enlarging the mind capacity and visualization, students start to create mental images to understand complex emotional conflicts of various characters and events embedded in fiction. Students usually have a pleasant appeal to react emotionally and spontaneously to imagined situations. The appeal to practice imagination stimulates human brain to think, infer and draw connections to constitute an unshaken understanding that comes from reasoning.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Background of the study

Several studies have shown and stressed the significance of studying literature in developing students' critical thinking skills (Kramsch, 1993; Paul & Elder, 2020). These studies show that students engaged in studying and evaluating literary texts are up to improve their ability to analyze human experiences and assess multiple perspectives and points of view. This ability is especially significant in enabling students to be emotionally involved in moral and emotional situations, so increasing their capacity for reflective judgment and ethical reasoning (Facione, 1990, 2015).

Studying literature has a potential in enhancing students' analytical skills and mental abilities because in literature classes, students are cognitively engaged in reasoning, connection and interpretive discussion (Lee 2014). Several academics postulates that literature work effectively in developing students' mental abilities (Lazar, 1990; Carter and Long, 1991; Bottino, 1999; Fisher 1999). Fiction is the best arena in which students' mental abilities are nurtured and nourished due to its abundance of various human experience, characters, and moral conflicts, perspectives. It assists students to establish a reflective connection between the literary material and actual experiences. For strategic institutions, fiction-base programs have become a compelling requirement especially in a highly sophisticated educational environment with an astonishingly massive and rapid evolution of information and teaching approaches in globalized interconnections (Paul & Elder, 2020). Literature-based educational curriculum nourishes not only students' cognitive skills, cultural awareness and creativity but also has conspicuous workability in providing teachers to have a roadmap to enact a class of quality education that teach students with necessary skills for their academic and professional life (Lee & Chen, 2024; Shulman, 2023). The human conflicts and quandaries experienced by characters in literary works can teach students how to handle uncertainty and complex situations in life and how to evaluate them (Edwards & Ritchie, 2022).

Literature is a virtual world that encompasses intrinsic elements of characters, experiences, themes, conflicts of emotions, intentions and across time events from different cultures presented in a picturesque illustration. Such a huge literary canon offers students with the opportunity to conduct reasoning connection between these human experiences and the present. In terms of analysis, characters, stories and events embedded in literature motivate students to think and introspect the characters' motivations, causes, and other issues of the story. With such multidimensional engagement, students are provided with the opportunity to examine and evaluate the characters and their experiences during the events in the story. This active and reflective engagement and collaborative learning stimulate students' cognitive skills and mental thinking (Miller, et al., 2014). Understanding the characters, theme, and the plot of the story is made by such mental interpretation. Many studies have shown that exposing students to human experiences, character and real-world scenarios with complex plots can work effectively in improving their mental and critical thinking through inferring and deriving hidden meanings and moral messages from the story characters and events (Bakir, 2015; Isariyawat et al., (2020). Gareis et al. (2009), and Khatib and Rahimi (2012) noted that literature-based educational programs can promote active students' engagement that elicits student-centered learning environments in which students are the main participants in expressing opinions and ideas, evaluating the depts of these ideas and perspectives.

Furthermore, literary texts equip students with a valuable space to real language use, which is crucial for successful language learning. In this regards, Barzani (2020) believes that engaging in studying literature not only assists students to acquire language structures and vocabulary through contextual use but also provides a teaching methodology that employs information-based technique which nurtures student-centered learning environments. With fiction, students are exposed to a real and natural language that including colloquial idioms and sentence structures that work in broadening students' awareness of complex linguistic structures and cultural distinction.

DISCUSSION

One of the advantages of studying literature, besides the many advantages, is to enhance and promote information literacy as one of the most important skills in the 21st century that is intimately related to critical thinking skills (Afdareza et al. (2020). In studying literature, students start to show keen aspects of inquisitiveness and curiosity. They raise questions about author's meaning and intention, the symbiotic features and contexts of the literary texts. Information literacy requires active engagement, intellectual curiosity, openness and cognitive capacities. Information literacy is a set of skills that enable students to recognize the significance of information and how to evaluate and assess this information. It promotes independent and long-term learning by motivating and improving critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

There is a corelative relationship between Information literacy and critical thinking as the former provides skills like exploring, evaluating, and using information while the latter provides the framework of analyzing, questioning, and synthesizing. Literature is the arena in which these skills are functioning to understand complex issues embedded in literary texts like context, themes, and authorial intent which eventually leading to deeper understanding. Both seek to build educated and discerning students with practical application of critical thinking in the information domain.

In the realm of education and learning, various methodology and paradigm are employed to create an active learning environment. Applied learning is a prominent aspect of active learning environment that focuses on activating students' thinking processes in the field of education. One of the elements that supports thinking as a cognitive process is emotional intelligence in which students learn to understand, manage, and regulate their own emotions to recognize their empathy, manage their social skills and collaboration to achieve overall academic achievement and success. Emotional intelligence and critical thinking skills are essential competencies for university students because both are essential skills required in problem solving and resilience in high-stress environments. The former involves recognizing, measuring, and emotions and the latter involves cognitive analysis, reasoning, and reflective connection. Goleman (1995) believes that emotional intelligence is the knowledge of knowing one's own feeling and employ this knowledge to solve a problem or make decisions. Furthermore, he believes that communication and interaction with others is a source of empathy that works effectively in increasing ones' own emotional intelligence and awareness of other people's feelings. Thus, the more active interaction is a kind of positive experience that leads to higher empathy that becomes a lifelong skill. Emotional intelligence and emotional resilience are obtained by studying literature which exposes students to various cultural dynamics, ethical complexities, and perspectives and themes such as hardship, perseverance, and human connection, all of which are essential for

understanding the human condition which fostering both intellectual and intercultural growth (Chen & Yang, 2016).

CONCLUSION

Apart from providing a wealth of linguistic competency and entrainment, literature is a multiple-folded improvement course and vital component in any learning environment, students' life and society. It creates well-rounded students because it develops their critical thinking skills and evaluation that are becoming increasingly crucial in today's world. Literature's rational relies on its incredible value in introducing students to universal human experience, various characters and conflicts and dialogues which quickens students' hearts and promote their imagination and creativity. The research findings have shown that studying literature plays a vital role in fostering and enhancing students' logical reasoning in the same way that critical thinking abilities work effectively in analyzing, evaluating and comprehending literary works. An up-to-date educational pedagogy emphasizes on applying higher-order thinking strategy and technique in educational setting to achieve productive and long-lasting learning since it involves students in analytical reasoning, problem solving activities to formulate decisions and make logical and intelligent connection.

Furthermore, incorporating literature in educational programs contributes to cultural awareness, information literacy, emotional intelligence and empathetic understanding to enable students achieve greater emotional and intellectual knowledge. Knowledge of literature provides students with the required skills and abilities to interpret complex scenarios, construct logical arguments, and engage with diverse perspectives. Furthermore, literary content as a critical driver of interactive teaching strategies and involvement, it fosters intrinsic motivation and a holistic state of preparation to future careers.

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