

ENHANCING THE LITERARY COMPETENCIES OF LITERATURE LEARNERS THROUGH ACTIVITIES – AN ACTION RESEARCH

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Background of the Study

A competency based curriculum has been introduced to state schools in Sri Lanka since 2006 where the main focus of teaching and learning is to develop specific competencies in each subject. The text books and Teachers' Instruction Manuals contain activities to facilitate in the development of relevant competencies for each subject. Consequently there had been a revision in the G.C.E (O/L) English Literature syllabus as well. But interviews with teachers who teach O/L English Literature in state schools and the students who learn O/L English Literature whose medium of instruction is their mother tongue revealed that little attention has been paid to enhance the literary competencies of the Literature learners. Classroom observations confirmed this.

Teaching and learning process in the O/L English literature classroom was highly exam oriented where the teachers dictated lengthy notes and students tried to memorize and reproduce these notes at the examination. Majority of the students who have offered English Literature as a subject at the G.C.E (O/L) examination had not developed adequate competencies to approach a new literary text on their own. Teachers who teach English Literature were not aware of the literary competencies that could be developed through Literature.

Literary competencies and Language competencies are mostly inter-related. Educationists such as Brumfit (2000), Collie & Slater (2001), Chambers & Gregory (2006) and Baurain (2007) etc. have suggested ways to enhance literary competencies through activities. According to them enhancing literary competencies of the learners of Literature will contribute towards their overall personal development as well. Thus there is a need to find out whether literary competencies could be enhanced through activities.

Methodology

The overall purpose of this action research was to examine the feasibility of using activities to develop the literary competencies of learners who study English Literature in the state schools where English is taught as a second language. Six competencies were selected from the list of literary competencies and a test was administered to a sample of G.C.E (O/L) English Literature students to identify their level of competency. Then activities were designed to develop the six selected competencies and the same test was repeated at the end of the intervention in order to identify the contribution of activities in developing the literary competencies. Interviews with teachers who teach English Literature and students who have offered English Literature at the G.C.E (O/L) examination, questionnaires to teachers of English, classroom observations and activity sheets were used as data gathering instruments.

Outcomes of the Study

The students' achievement in relation to each competence had been at a very low level before the

intervention but at the end of the intervention they displayed a considerable progress in the competencies where more than one activity was introduced to develop the particular competence. The students were merely passive listeners before the intervention but when activities were introduced they became active participants in learning and displayed a great enthusiasm to learn literature.

The teachers who had a negative attitude towards the ability and interest of the students to learn literature gradually changed their attitudes towards the end of the intervention and admitted that the activities facilitated in their teaching and made teaching and learning more interesting.

Conclusions

Activities can be used successfully in enhancing the literary competencies of the learners who learn English Literature. Students will be motivated to learn Literature and they will be actively engaged in tasks. Activities will also provide a scaffold for the teachers who teach English Literature and give them direction and support to facilitate in developing the literary competencies of the students.

References

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