The Role Of Literature In An Integrated Development Of Grade 7 Amharic Language Reading And Writing Skills

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1. Abstract

The aims of this study were to investigate the roles of literary texts in an integrated development the process of reading and writing skills. Data was gathered by means of pre and post tests and interviews. The grade seven students of Serako elementary school participated in this experimental study. Out of all grade seven sections, section B and D were selected by the simple random sampling techniques and grouped as experimental and controlled consecutively. In the beginning of the study, the pre-test was administered to measure the reading and writing competence of the students. Then the experimental and controlled groups were taught both skills through literary texts and regular materials with the rate of three days per a week and 90 minutes per a day for six consecutive weeks. After the experimental teaching, a post- test was administered and the result of the two tests was analyzed by various statistical techniques. The average result of the pre- test, as computed by ANOVA, it showed that there was no significant difference in reading and writing ability of the participants’ two groups. However, the post- test result of the ANCOVA computation demonstrated that, there was statistically significant mean score difference (of about 47%) between the two groups. The difference caused that the experimental groups taught using literary texts which make it possible the development of reading and writing skills in an integrated manner. The technique helped the experimental groups to score a better than the controlled. The interviewed students, who taught through literary texts, suggested that the lessons were enjoyable. Besides, the teacher stated that the students enjoyed the teaching learning process, they actively participated and they demonstrated progress in terms of explaining and writing what they had heard earlier. As a matter of fact, literary texts have a notable role in the development of students’ integrated Amharic language reading and writing skills. The findings of the study suggest that such texts should be given emphasis in the process of teaching these skills in the target language.

Key terms: literature, text, integrating reading and writing

2. Introduction

The basic objective of language teaching is to effectively develop learners’ ability to communicate and utilize the language. To realize this objective, it is necessary to enable students to develop the required ability in the four major skills (speaking, listening, reading and writing) in an integrated ways. In addition, the transmitting (speaking and writing) and the receiving (listening and reading) purposes, this ability of using language includes the knowledge of the structure and the grammar of the language in which the message is transmitted Baye (1986).

The bond among the four language skills is in separated and firm. Although attempts are made to focus on only one of them during the process of classroom teaching, the presence of one skill in the other is inevitable. For instance, it is mandatory that there exist a listener in each speech act and a reader in every writing process that is why Ruddel (1997) argues that their presentation is always integrated.

Among written materials which facilitate the integrated and successful development of language skills, literary texts are worth mentioning (Lindsay and Knight 2006, Williams 1984, Harmer 1991, and Hill 1986). In addition to help students’ active follow up and participation during both mother tongue and second language teaching, literary texts consolidate their skills by rendering the lessons sound and attractive. That is because since literature is a worth of art that presents social
realities in the forms of ideas, using these works in language education helps students to learn the works in relation to realistic language use and develop their competence Hill (1986).

Moreover, since literature is not only something that is transmitted in language but also a means of expression of ideas which involves the art of an advanced use language, it no doubt enables students to properly express their ideas, think deeply using the language, develop their creativity, and think in the language beyond the intended target Carter and Long (1999).

However Zemenfes (1991) cites a number of scholars to confirm that one of the problems encountered in the process of using literarily texts in language teaching relates to the methodologies or techniques that teachers follow to do their job. That is, in some language classes, teachers focus on teaching the literature alone, while they are bound to use the texts as practice materials to develop language skills. In 2015, this researcher conducted a study entitled: an investigation on the integrated effective use of Amharic literary texts to teach language skills: secondary school in focus. The study showed that the teachers used the texts to make literary analysis rather than directing students to practice reading, writing, and speaking on the basis of the texts. It was such teachers’ erroneous use of the texts that aroused this researcher to pursue the issues and clearly show the value of literary text usage in teaching integrated language skills.

2.1. The reasons for using literature in the language teaching

Using literature in language teaching enables students to develop their skills and edify their disciplinary concerns. According to Zerihun (1998), literature is a creative work written from people to people by people. When literature, a domain in which truth and beauty coexist, is used for language teaching, it enables the teaching to present the realistic and conceptual services of the language so as to help learners to highly develop their communicative skills, which are the final goal of all language education. Mckay (1982) as saying literature plays a very important role in developing all language skills. That is because literature is a work of art that contains language use which represents a variety of social strata, and as such its potential to develop learners’ linguistics competence is great.

Liach (2007) quotes Duff and Maley (1990) and Widdowson(1983) to show that there are three criteria that make us use literature as a tool for language teaching. In the first place, the linguistic criterion defends that literature should be used in language teaching. Because it provides the learner with genuine, authentic samples of language, and with real samples of a wide range of styles, text types, and registers. It is important for language learners to exercise with a variety of registers, styles and genres. The second criterion is methodological and refers to the fact that a literary text has multiple interpretations, these generate different opinions among learners and this leads to real, motivated interaction with the text, fellow students and with the teacher use of literature in the language classroom are the active role of the learner and the literary text as the central focus of attention. Learners become active, autonomous, and central to the learning process. Finally, the motivational criterion is of great relevance because a literary text shows the real feelings of the writer and this generates a powerful motivation in the learner. In addition to enabling to easily transfer the lesson to the learners, language education offered will the assistance of literature urges and encourages students to create and write their own stories, develops individual capacity to think, and enhances the ability to understand the languages.

2.2. How the reading and writing skills are taught in integration through literature

As has been attempted to mention earlier, literature has a great value of making the teaching interesting and attractive in that it creates a lively classroom atmosphere. Activities designed especially with the aim of developing the reading and writing skills need to be interconnected. As Brokk (1983), Blook (1997) and Nelson and Clafee (1998) explain, in the teaching-learning process of language, the presentation of reading and writing in integration has a significant role in developing the skills in an interconnected manner. Inter connected activities which enable students to read as they write or write as they read need to the included in the teaching. The presentation of literary texts for teaching these
skills is preferable because literature is a particular good source for developing student’s abilities to infer meaning and to make inter perception Lazar (1993) “This is because literary texts are often rich in multiple levels of meaning, and demand that the reader/learner is actively involved in 'teasing out' the unstated implications and assumptions of the text.” Therefore, in the process of giving meaning to what they read, students understand, guess, relate, use back ground knowledge, explain analyses and generalize.

3. Objectives

The major objective of this study is to explain the role of literary texts in the integrated development of the reading and writing skills. In this connection, the study will attempt to answer the following questions.

1. What is the role of literature in the development of the reading and writing skills?
2. Will the experimental group score a better result after they are taught on the basis of literary texts?

4. Method

In order to meet the objective of this study, the experimental method, which involves the administration of pre and post teaching tests to both experimental and controlled groups is chosen.

4.1. Study participants

The Serako full cycle elementary school was chosen to participate in accordance with the appropriate sampling technique. Besides, the administration of the school agreed to our request and offered to cooperate.

The focus group of this study were 7th grade students who attend the school in 2017. We confirmed from the administration that 250 students were placed in five sections without any specific set. Thus, the simple random sampling technique was used in the attempt to select sections, out of the five sections, 100 students in the section B and D were made to participate in the work. Then, section B and D formed the experimental and controlled groups by means of the simple random sampling technique respectively. Next, the two groups were taught for six weeks, at the rate of three periods per week and 90 minutes per period.

4.2. Material preparation

As the initial cause for this study is showing the role of literary works have in the development of the reading and writing skills, attempts have been made to accommodate the theoretical discussions Hill (1994), Lazar (1993), Carter and Long (1991) and Tylor (2000) raise to be taken to consideration in the preparation of such texts for teaching the experimental groups. In order to design texts and exercises necessary and appropriate for grade level, the objective of the curriculum were thoroughly examined.

Thus, texts and activities based on three of the literary genres were selected for the study with due consideration to the age and understanding capacity of the learners. These included folk tales, poems and short stories. In order to control problems relating to text quality, language levels of difficulty and issues of appropriates in the process of using these texts for teaching, the subject teachers of the grade level and M.A degree graduate Amharic teachers were made to check the materials and provide were made according to comments.

The teaching material texts prepared with 18 class periods in mind under each literary genre, activities which were concerned with the reading and writing skills were organized in three chapters. Folk tales, which formed the first chapter, included three texts from Kebede (1999) books 1 and 2. Poems were taken from Bewikitu (2001), which short stories were selected from a variety of news papers adapted to fit the purpose of the teaching.
In the folk tales included in the first chapter, integrated reading and writing activities included, that are, understanding the new words in the tales, constructing sentences with the words, completing stories, identifying the activities of the characters in the stories and remembering stories read and rewriting them in brief. In the summery writing in particular attempts were made to monitor the appropriateness of learners understanding of the story.

In the second chapter, three poems included and making sentences that show the meaning of the new words from the texts, understanding the ideas of lines selected from the poems and writing them in own expressions, and explaining the general meanings of the poems were the activities practiced.

In the last chapter two short stories selected from different newspapers were rewritten to make them suitable for the purpose and activities, like identifying and discussing characters, guessing introductions and conclusions of stories from which those parts were removed, taking the roles of particular characters and writing own responses were taken. All of the activities in the chapters were concerned with the integrated development of the reading and writing skills. The experimental group was taught as discussed above, while the control group was exposed to texts and activities designed the usual way. Both groups were taught by one teacher so as the rule out questions of reliability that ensure owing to differences in teachers skills on the job.

4.3. Data collection tools

Essential data for the study were collected through pre and post tests and interviews. The pre test was used to measure the reading and writing skills of the learners had before the study. The post test was employed to check the difference the experimental group which was taught using literary text had shown in comparison with the controlled group.

The pre teaching test scored out of 60% was prepared on the three literary genres. Firstly in the folk tales part the students were made to read a story and explain the ideas in their own way and filled missing expressions in an in completed text. Secondly, in the poems section students were required to provide the meanings of new words and phrases selected from a text and to explain the message desired to communicate in their own way. Finally, learners had to read a one page short story and state the message in their own language and predict the beginning and the end of the text logically in their own way. Each of literary genre questions had 20% marks.

The test set by the researcher, and assessed and improved by her professional colleagues, was administered by herself and the assistance of her other colleague.

The post teaching test was prepared by following similar procedures as the pre test and administered at the end of the teaching. Both tests were meant to assess learners reading and writing skills in an integrated manner. The tests were scored by the researcher and teachers who were M.A degree graduates in teaching Amharic. In the discussion held before scoring, agreement was reached on the allocation of points to questions. The learners result recorded was the average of what the three scorers granted. the inter-rater reliability was calculated by Chronbach alpha and the result was found to be $\alpha = 0.79$ and 0.83 of the pre and post tests, respectively, showed that the level of consensus among scorers was reliable. The semi structured interviews, the other data gathering tool of this attempt, was issued to the teacher and students. The major purpose of the interview was to check the initiative the experimental group which was exposed to literary texts had demonstrated and to examine the progress they made in terms of their reading and writing skill.
4.4. Technique of data analysis

Data collected using tests and interviews were analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively. The tests result had normal distribution or not was checked by a variety of tests of normality. The pre test results of the two groups are analyzed by kolmogorov- smirnov and the result indicates that is normal. In addition to this the correlation of the pre and post test results as scrutinized by graph and it confirmed that the distribution was normal and direct.

5. Result and Discussion

Explain the role of literary texts in the integrated development of the reading and writing skills.. To attain this purpose the control and experimental groups pretest exam mean score, SD and partial η² were determined using analysis of variance (ANOVA) and the result are presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Experimental and Control Groups Pre -Test Reading and Writing Mean Scores as Determined by Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Expected Mean value</th>
<th>F-Value</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Type III Sum of Squares</th>
<th>Sig (2-tailed)</th>
<th>Partial η²</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Experimental</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>29.12</td>
<td>29.120</td>
<td>.005</td>
<td>1.98</td>
<td>.250</td>
<td>.943</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>29.22</td>
<td>29.220</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As indicated in Table 1 the results of analysis of variance showed that the experimental group pre test reading and writing mean score (M=29.12, SD= 6.757) found to be similar to the control a group pre test reading and writing mean score (M = 29.22, SD = 7.161). To see whether there exist difference between the groups observed mean score, the expected amount of participant difference effect tested to control using analysis of covariance and the observed pre reading and writing scores with the estimated marginal means for the experimental group was 29.120 and the control group estimated marginal means was 29,220. As a result of this an increase or a decline of mean scores were not observed at all.

To see whether there is a significant difference between groups the data was further analyzed by analysis of variance (ANOVA) showed that F(1.98)=.005, P =.943. The F value, therefore portrayed that there was no statistically significant mean score difference between the two groups. The partial eta square (Partial η²=.001) was found to below and this clearly indicates that there was no significant difference in pre reading and writing mean scores.

After the existence of the pre test reading and writing scores indifference was determined, the experimental group had made to learn with literary texts, whereas the control group also made to learn with the regular material which was different from the experimental group. Then after post reading and writing tests administered. The pre reading and writing scores covariance applied and the analysis was done with the help of analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) and the results of post test scores presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Experimental and Control Groups Post-test Reading and Writing Mean Scores as Determined by Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)
As indicated in Table 2 the results of analysis of variance the experimental group post test reading and writing mean score (M = 56.70, SD = 12.431) was higher than the control group post test reading and writing mean score (M = 41.50, SD = 8.954). With this calculation between the two groups are reading and writing results the effect was made to control with the help of analysis of covariance. The expected reading and writing mean test scores of experimental group found to be 56.7 and the control group was also 41.5. As a result of this, no indication of an increase and decrease in scores observed between the two groups. To test whether there exists significance mean scores between the groups the data was analyzed with the help of analysis of covariance and the results found to be $F(1,97) = 85.956, p = .001$. These results showed that there was statistically significant mean score difference between the two groups.

On the basis of this ($F(1,97) = 85.956, p = .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .470$) The partial eta square found to be.470. This indicated that the observed score difference between the two groups had higher effect size. The results revealed that 47% of variance difference was observed in reading and writing score by the group taught with the literary text method than the group taught with the regular material. This result is in line with (Lindsay and Knight (2006), Lazar (1993), Block (1997) and Nelson and Claffee (1998), Williams (1984), Liach (2007), and Hill 1986) that, literature has a great value of making the teaching-learning interesting and attractive. It creates a lively classroom atmosphere which facilitates the integrated and successful development of language skills. The results obtained from the interviewed students too, who taught through literary texts, suggested that the lessons were enjoyable. Besides, the teacher stated that the students enjoyed the teaching-learning process, they actively participated and they demonstrated progress in terms of explaining and writing what they had heard earlier. As a matter of fact, literary texts have a notable role in the development of students’ integrated Amharic language reading and writing skills.

6. Conclusion and recommendations
The main aim of this study was to examine the role of literary texts in the integrated development of the reading and writing skills. A controlled pre-post experimental design was employed. Both the controlled and experimental groups were given a pre-teaching test in order to measure the reading and writing skills they had before the launching of the research. The result showed that there was no significant difference in the reading and writing skills of the two groups. Thus, after the two groups were taught reading and writing based on different texts for six weeks (three days per week and 90 minutes per day) they were given a post teaching test. The data attained showed that the result of the learners in the experimental group was much higher than that of the controlled group. That is because literature enhances the reading and writing skills in a variety of ways. For instance, its capacity to entertain and arouse interests helps learners to have a better attainment to the texts and participate actively in the teaching learning process. Thus the findings of this study show that if literary texts are used for teaching language skills success is certain to be scored. The following are comments that have drawn from this study:

That the role of literary texts is paramount in developing the reading and writing abilities. The researcher carried out a pre–survey analysis of grade 7 Amharic textbook, in the text book ten passages are included and only one is a literary text. Therefore, it is important to point out that if
literature, which has been denied attention so far, is selected and included in a way that fits the grade level, it will produce a better result.

Since literature relaxes learners and helps them improve their skills without boredom, particularly in the lower grades. it is preferable for textbook writers to include it.

If other professionals in the field of teaching Amharic discharge their responsibility by showing their share to the advancement of the standard of language teaching, they will contribute their share to the advancement of the standard of language teaching.

References


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