Does Literature help EFL learners to improve language?

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Abstract— The study intends first to investigate that after giving a proper input of literature, does the performance of the students change (in terms of improving LSRW skills and developing an interest in literature?) For this the students had a regular class of one hour daily including literary texts and BEC handbooks. Students were examined at the initial level before these classes and assessed again after a period of six months to find out if there is a significant difference in their performance. Students were assessed through certified exams like BEC and iTEP. The investigator, being a certified and trained Cambridge Examiner, assessed the students at the initial level on her own abiding by the set norms of these examinations and conducted the standard exams of BEC and iTEP again after a period of six months to find out the differences. The study is primarily focused on the students of Jaipur, Rajasthan who belong to different colleges of Jaipur i.e. JECRC college, Sitapura, UDML, Kukas and JECRC University, Jaipur.

Keywords— EFL, Pedagogy, experimenting, English language teaching, BEC, iTEP, literature

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I. INTRODUCTION

Teaching and learning are two different theories which are conjoined on the grounds of pedagogy as the theory of teaching comes from the theory of learning. That is why these two terms build up a cross-way, but each way is supposedly approached differently by its respective practitioner; learning part by learners but teaching part by teachers. Such interdependence of these different perspectives might be the source of pedagogical achievements and thereby the major motive behind the conduct of this study.

Felder and Brent claim that "Learning begins when you, the teacher, learn from the learner. Put yourself in his place so that you may understand what he learns and the way he understands it"[1] The statement asserts that learners have different skills, strategies, and styles from those of their teachers. Some of them are visually-oriented, some learn by experimenting, while others prefer to learn by working in groups. Similarly, the teaching style of teachers is supposed to be different. Some teachers are excellent, some teach mainly through demonstration; others are more comfortable with theories and abstractions, while some others may resort to their own specific styles of various types in their career. Felder and Henriques (1995) define learning styles as "The ways in which an individual characteristically acquires, retains, and retrieves information."[2] They are durable ways of approaching a learning situation which are not usually amenable to change. On the contrary, the term teaching style, according to Conti[3] (2004), refers to the distinct qualities displayed by a teacher that are consistent from situation to situation regardless of the subject matter. Felder[4] (1993) argues that teachers' teaching style reflects either their own learning styles or the way they were taught in college classes given these points, the major challenge would be what happens when the learners are confronted with a teaching process which is in contrast with their preferred learning style?

The pedagogy needs to be altered with time keeping in mind the level, language skills and mindsets of students. As it has been an incessant and continuous tradition in the Asian countries, especially North India, of communicating in the National language whether the context is official or unofficial and that has been the reason of keeping less interest in communicating in English. Thus to improve their efficiency in the foreign language, English, it was thought of as an experimental task to teach English Literature to EFL students of non-litearture background so as to assess whether the students actually develop interest in literature and learn the language in a better way.

II. PURPOSE AND SETTINGS OF THE STUDY:

The study intends first to investigate that after giving a proper input of literature, does the performance of the students change (in terms of improving LSRW skills and developing an interest in literature?). The study was performed to find out whether the literary competence of students assist them to acquire more positive response to the literary texts and also to find out if the students have developed the skills of experiencing the world created by and within the literary texts. Also it was intended to find out whether there is an impact of literature on the growth and development of students in terms of applying the LSRW skills in real life situations. For this the students had a regular class of one hour daily including literary texts and BEC handbooks. Students were examined at the initial level before these classes and assessed again after a period of six months to find out if there is a significant difference in their performance. Students were assessed through certified exams like BEC and iTEP. The investigator, being a certified and trained Cambridge Examiner, assessed the students at the initial level on her own abiding by the set norms of these examinations and conducted the standard exams of BEC and iTEP again after a period of six months to

find out the differences. The study is primarily focused on the students of Jaipur, Rajasthan who belong to different colleges of Jaipur i.e. JECRC college, Sitapura, UDML, Kukas and JECRC University, Jaipur.

III. Participants

The participants of this study consisted of 230 college students and their ages ranged from 18 to 22 with the average of 20. The heterogeneous groups or participants of this research consisted of girls and boys from all sorts of academic backgrounds. New methods and the activities related to ELT with the use of literature were applied. At the time of data collection, they had studied English as a foreign language and their English level was lower, and during the data collection period they had one hour of sessions every day.

IV. Instruments

In order to collect data, the instruments used in this study were some literary texts, BEC Handbook (Business English Certificate by Cambridge University), BEC Examinations and ITEP examinations which are a qualification at intermediate and pre-intermediate levels recognized by educational institutions as well as other sectors, and shows that a person can deal with everyday English at these levels. BEC helps students to find out their strength and weakness in listening, speaking, reading and writing. It provides real situations in which students can use English. Reading skills, such as skimming and scanning are tested. Students are expected to understand different kinds of texts such as public notices and signs, packaging information, communicative messages (e.g. notes, emails, postcards); read texts (e.g. from journals, websites, leaflets, newspapers and magazines) of a factual nature and show understanding of the structure of the language, as it is used to express notions of relative time, space, possession, etc.; scan factual material for information in order to perform relevant tasks, disregarding redundant or irrelevant material; read texts of an imaginative or emotional character and appreciate the central sense of the text, the attitude of the writer to the material and the effect the text is intended to have on the reader.

### A. Details about BEC and ITEP examinations:

Define abbreviations and acronyms the first time they are used in the text, even after they have been defined in the abstract. Abbreviations such as IEEE, SI, MKS, CGS, sc, dc, and rms do not have to be defined. Do not use abbreviations in the title or heads unless they are unavoidable.

- Business English

  Cambridge English Language Assessment is the part of the University of Cambridge and has been providing English Language assessments and qualifications for over 100 years. The exams referred to in are BEC exams which are of three different levels, B1, B2 and C1 with the names, BEC Preliminary, BEC Vantage and BEC Higher.

- CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference)

The CEFR describes language ability on a scale of levels from A1 for beginners up to C2 for those who have mastered a language. This makes it easy for anyone involved in language teaching and testing (learners, teachers, teacher trainers, etc.) to see the level of different qualifications. It also means that employers and educational institutions can easily compare qualifications and see how they relate to exams they already know in their own country.
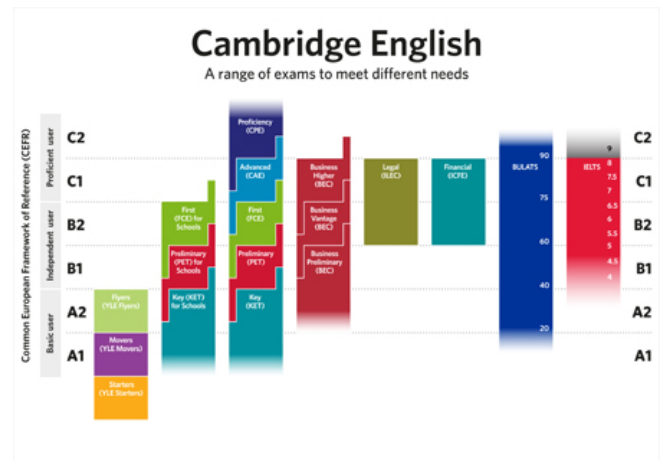
1) iTEP (International Test of English Proficiency)

iTEP, one of the globally recognized English certification, is a USA based company established in 2007, specialized in online English language proficiency assessment & on demand training.

iTEP is an English certification accredited by Ministry of HRD, Govt. of India, the Academic Credentials Evaluation Institute (ACEI) & Accrediting Council for Continuing Education & Training (ACCET) & Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL).

There are four iTEP exams[5]:

iTEP Academic is used by colleges, universities for admissions purposes.

iTEP SLATE evaluates high school, secondary school, and middle school students, and is used by boarding schools and academies[6].

iTEP Business measures the English skills needed for a work environment. It is used by companies to screen new hires, make decisions about promotions and assignments, and evaluate English training programs.[7]

iTEP Hospitality measures the English skills necessary to work at restaurants, hotels, resorts, and cruise lines that serve English speakers. The test lasts 30 minutes and evaluates speaking and listening. It is typically administered onsite by an employer for hiring and promotional decisions.[8]

iTEP Academic, SLATE, and Business each have a "core" version and a "plus" version. The "core" versions are Internet-based, last 60 minutes, and test reading, grammar and listening.The "plus" versions last 90 minutes in total and also test writing and speaking, requiring the test taker to submit writing and speaking samples via computer. Results are available instantly on the multiple-choice "core" sections, and the speaking and writing results are graded in 5 business days. The "plus" exams retail for $99USD and can be scheduled within 3 days, making iTEP one of the most flexible and least expensive options among its competitors, which include TOEFL and IELTS. Institutions and businesses administering iTEP exams on-site receive discounted rates.[9]

V. PROCEDURES

The materials were given to students during their classes. The aim of this was to motivate them for individual reading of literary texts, and towards independent self-reading[10]. These full-length texts are: "Pied Beauty" and "To Christ our Lord" by G. M. Hopkins; "Success is Counted Sweetest" by Emily Dickinson and "The Gift of Magi" by O. Henry.

A pre-experimental reading and writing paper format of a BEC and iTEP test was given to them. During the experimental study poems and short stories were introduced because short stories are often ideal ways of introducing students to the literature in the foreign language classroom and poems direct the students to think in their own unique ways. During reading comprehension exercises such as pre-reading questions, true or false questions, who said what questions, and what-comes-next questions were included in reading activities. In short, the characters, the plot, language, and topic issues were dealt with reading activities. After reading, types of activities were differed. For writing, activities such as writing a summary or a recommendation, re-writing the story from a character's point of view or a letter to a character were included; for speaking, activities such as role-plays, dramatization or interviewing with the characters were included. Also students were asked to analyze the given poems stylistically so as to generate interest in literature[11]. Also projects such as drawing illustrations, preparing a series of pictures for comics, or posters were included.

VI. RESULTS

According to the data obtained and showed in various tables below, the results were better than expected. It is shown that experimental application has contributed better to academic success of the students in the examinations held by ITEP and BEC. It can, therefore, be claimed that the experimental application has affected the academic success of the students positively, at a significant level. In the Tables below, findings about the differences in academic success of the students after the experiments are summarized.

iTEP

There were a total of 230 students who appeared for iTEP tests and the results are as follows:

	Before	After
Advanced	5	17
Upper Intermediate	17	70
Intermediate	33	37
Elementary	116	64
Beginner	59	42

Table 1
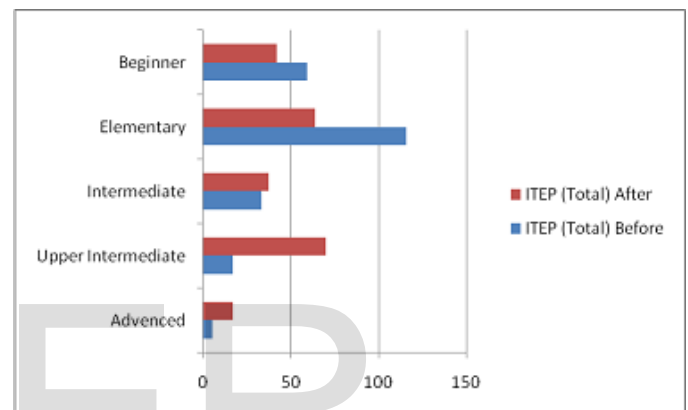
Figure 1

BEC (Business English Certificate)

The students also appeared for BEC and the results are:

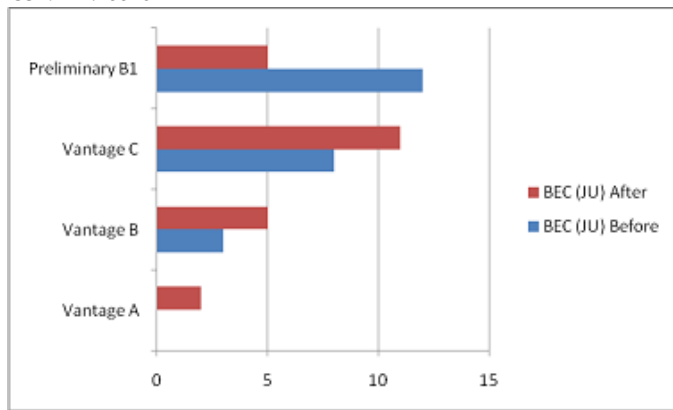|	Before	After
Vantage A	0	2
Vantage B	3	5
Vantage C	8	11
Preliminary B1	12	5

Table 2

Figure 2

VII. DISCUSSION

Our results suggest that the use of literature[12] in ELT increases the motivation of students at university level. We have identified that the performance of students studying English[13] through literature was better than studying English without literature[14]. Also the use of literature[15] in ELT improved students' writing performance and positively affected their attitude[16] to both reading and language learning.

We observed that literature should be included in ELT classrooms[17] as a complement to curriculum because it provides comprehensible input[18] necessary for the English language acquisition and develops the students' abilities[19], as students may build new vocabulary as well as they expand their understanding[20] of words they already know (Ono, Day & Harsch, 2004).

In summary, our study reveals that the use of literature[21] in ELT classrooms may motivate[22] students better than abridged and simplified reading passages in students' course books. The results show the motivational effects[23] of the use of literature in ELT, so literature can be used as a positive stimulation to motivate students, and a good means to improve reading and writing skills[24]. In our study it is also proved that especially short stories are ideal[25] literary means for classroom usage[26]. Our results imply the importance of the use of literature in ELT[27], and that literature should be part of teaching-learning process. We had this study in Jaipur, Rajasthan and got positive results about motivation, and reading-writing[28] in ELT; however, further research should explore the issue in a different country, and with students at different levels.

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