

RESEARCH ARTICLE



LITERATURE AS A PEDAGOGICAL TOOL IN TECHNICAL ENGLISH INSTRUCTION: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

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ABSTRACT



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Teaching English through literature has been the core of English Language Teaching (ELT) curriculum for ages. However, with the emergence of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), literature has become less valued in ELT, and technical writing skills, a transactional approach to communication, and an activity-oriented approach to language instruction have replaced literature-based skills. In this paper both these curricula are analysed and special attention is laid on the advantages of teaching and learning through literature, especially at the UG level of engineering students in India. Literature reading is the process of diving into the aesthetic world of literature, where the students, particularly graduate ones, are on the lookout for more books and more literature, and gradually devote more reading time. Nowadays, with so much time spent on digital media and a desire to use generative AI tools to craft their own electronic summaries, students forgo the richness of literature and show little enthusiasm for reading beyond what has been assigned to them. Unintentionally, it negatively affects their linguistic assimilation and language skills.

It suggests that the study of literature is vital to students' personal and professional lives, as it can help them enhance their empathy, social skills, and language acquisition. The paper proposes a new pedagogical model, called a hybrid model, which aims to bring literature back into technical and communicative English for engineering students. It presents a framework based on the existing English Language Teaching (ELT) framework and the authors' classroom observations.

Keywords: *Literature in ELT, Communicative Language Teaching, Engineering English, Reading Culture, Language Acquisition.*

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1. INTRODUCTION

A very important aspect of any language acquisition is literature, and the spread of language has always been under the wing of literature. Literature demands everyone's attention, and its impact on students is the same. It is good to incorporate literature that catches students' attention, urges them to read, and prompts them to talk about the lessons. Literature may not necessarily be fiction; it can also cover topics that are interesting, such as career choices, career preparation, and biographies of successful entrepreneurs. This, in turn, can provide opportunities for students to have discussions in the class.

Most of the time, engineering education in India is highly technical and outcome-oriented. In the past three decades, the CLT approach has been adopted. It has become the mainstream approach for English-language programs in technical colleges, with a focus largely on soft skills, group discussions, presentations, writing, resume-making, interview skills, etc. While these resources are helpful, the absence of literature in English engineering has left a handicap for learners who are able to conduct scripted communicative tasks but struggle with vocabulary, idioms, literary expressions, or extended reading and independent thought. It is central in this paper to reconsider the place of literature in the English classroom, though not as a substitute for communicative skills classes, but rather as a supplement. In some ways, literature should be used alongside communicative skills classes as an integral part of those classes.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Collie and Slater (1987) argued that literary texts can provide "authentic material, cultural enrichment, language enrichment, and personal involvement," which are not realistically provided by CLT coursebooks. Carter and Long (1991) suggested three general approaches to the use of literature in language teaching: the cultural model, the language model, and the personal growth model. They proposed three main models: 1. the model of literature as a repository of a society's values; 2. the model of literature as a source of a society's language awareness; 3. the model of literature as a catalyst for the learners' own response and feelings. Lazar (1993), on the other hand, showed how techniques could be applied in the classroom to help students develop literary texts, gradually build their vocabulary, become aware of grammatical rules, and, at the same time, enhance their communicative competence.

Widdowson (1975) observed that when the reader reads a poem or a short story, he or she is engaged in a procedure similar to that of communicative competence, which the teacher seeks to instill. The second major language-learning theory related to literature is Krashen's Input Hypothesis (1985), which holds that the more comprehensible and captivating the input, the more likely words will be acquired. According to him, comprehensible, interesting input provided through a well-constructed short story or novel is more effective for language acquisition than the grammar exercises found in most texts.

During the same period, there has also been a trend of scholars and other professionals who



supported the belief of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and others, such as Hutchinson and Waters (1987), who favour a needs-based, functional approach to teaching English to students with limited time and narrowly focused professional objectives. The above-mentioned tension between the humanistic tradition, with an emphasis on literature, and the ESP tradition, which includes a theoretical foundation, forms the basis of this research.

3. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The majority of engineering colleges in India follow the syllabus set by State Technical Universities or autonomous boards, which mainly concentrate on teaching students English in the context of technical communication, including grammar, technical vocabulary, letter writing, email, resume preparation, group discussions, etc. Literary texts are frequently discussed based on a few short excerpts, mainly for reading comprehension, with no appreciation of their aesthetic or cultural contexts. In the majority of cases, the few optional literary texts prescribed are again valued for technical knowledge, moral and ethical aspects, or motivational and dogmatic aspects, but usually without aesthetic elements or the pleasure of literature in its purest form.

4. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The following objectives guide the study:

1. To critically compare the literature-based approach and the Communicative Language Teaching approach as pedagogical methods for teaching English in engineering colleges.
2. To propose a pedagogical framework for teaching English that reintegrates literature into the engineering curriculum without

compromising communicative competence and employability goals.

5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study is qualitative and analytical, drawing on a review of existing pedagogical research on ELT curricula and on classroom observations and informal feedback collected by the researchers during various semesters of their English teaching with first-year and second-year engineering undergraduates at an autonomous engineering college. Additionally, it integrates the opinions of engineering students, who were asked to express their reading preferences, reading habits, and interests in fiction and non-fiction texts.

6. COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING AND LITERATURE-BASED TEACHING: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

The Communicative Language Teaching approach was developed to address the flaws of the noted grammar-translation and audio-lingual methods, which emphasized accuracy and fluency over functional competence and task-based learning. Typically, in the engineering English classroom, the CLT curriculum includes group discussion, interview skills, technical report writing, email etiquette, and presentation skills, which are clearly required for employability. The limitation of this method is its sole objective: to enhance employability skills. The drawback is that it does not inspire students to read literature for the love of reading beyond academic pursuits, or to appreciate its aesthetic and cultural values that are essential and inseparable parts of literature.



The typical Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) practiced in technical educational institutions in India is mainly activity-oriented. Literature-based teaching, by contrast, involves extended, authentic, real-life communication, with exposure to idioms, literary devices, narrative structures, and cultural nuances that scripts for communicative tasks cannot recreate. If presented carefully and well, a good short story or a good poem that catches their interest can help build vocabulary, deepen understanding of complex sentence structures, lead to discussion, and develop the critical thinking and articulation that recruiters say they want in on-campus settings.

The objectives of exercises and activities proposed in the CLT approach, which include vocabulary building, grammatical accuracy, sentence construction, debate, discussion, presentation, reflective writing, etc., can also be achieved through the literature method. In addition to these objectives, literature can also inspire the students to read further in pursuit of attaining knowledge.

7. WHY LITERATURE FOR ENGINEERING STUDENTS

It is often said that, due to the heavy technical course load of engineering students, they do not have the time or interest to read the literature. Writing such as career narratives, biographies of scientists and engineers, contemporary short fiction (related to workplace and campus life), well-written non-fiction about problems encountered by students, and narratives about everyday life can undoubtedly catch students' interest. A better way to motivate engineering students is to use stories to communicate real-world problems that address questions that might arise in their lives, e.g.,

questions about career ethics, emerging technology, and the value of perseverance, rather than didactic or traditional lectures on moral values and ethics.

So long as a student encounters literature in conjunction with their professional imagination, three things typically happen. Firstly, students are exposed to the text because it is personally relevant, rather than just a requirement of education. Secondly, the use of student knowledge and interpretations in class enlivens classroom discussion, as they incorporate knowledge from their own experiences, which is often not found in the text itself. Third, and most important, for language acquisition purposes, the students start unconsciously using the syntax, vocabulary, and rhetorical patterns of the text because they read with genuine interest, not driven by the pedagogical need to do so.

8. LITERATURE AS A CORRECTIVE: REVIVING THE READING CULTURE

It is safe to assume that with the systematic introduction of literature relevant to students' personal and professional lives, students' reading habits can improve gradually. If a text is perceived as relevant, students tend to read the whole text; if it is perceived as imposed, they usually search for a summary in AI. Classroom discussions on interesting literature can further discourage students from using AI to generate shortcuts.

9. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Considering that literary material is selected for its relevance to students' career interests and everyday needs, participation in classroom discussions increases significantly, as noted by semester-to-

semester classroom observations and informal student feedback, compared to sessions focusing on traditional course book material. Extracts on technology, entrepreneurship, and campus life were more engaging for students than extracts selected solely for moral or ethical value. The findings are not based on a large-scale controlled study, but rather confirm the theories of Collie and Slater, Lazar, and Krashen as discussed above, and therefore imply that the relevance-based model of using literature as part of English language teaching in technical education in India is most desirable and needs to be adopted on a wider scale and empirically tested at greater length.

10. CONCLUSION

Unfortunately, certain consequences of this shift towards an exclusively skills-based, communicative approach in engineering English curricula are unexpected: a diminished opportunity to teach extended authentic language and increased exposure to shortcuts provided by social media and Generative AI. A curriculum based on literature can positively impact students' reading habits, enrich language learning, and help create engineering graduates with a deep sense of language who engage in reflection and enhance their ability to communicate effectively. Reintroducing relevant literature as a pedagogical need for the here and the now in the light of the accelerating impact of AI on literacy practices among pupils.

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