

## Effective Study of English Literature through the Well-Equipped learners: An Experiment

**Prof. Dhanappa M Metri,**

Department of English,

Sangameshwar College,

Solapur, Maharashtra-413004

[e-mail-metri\\_dmm@yahoo.com](mailto:dmm@yahoo.com)

### ABSTRACT

Teaching English literature to the Indian learners of different cultural backgrounds is like planting an alien plant on Indian soil. The international demand for the discipline has made it an indispensable part of learning in most of the colleges in the country today. Developing linguistic proficiency to find a secure job is the main objective of the learners. The committed faculty know well that the learners are examination-oriented. As a result, they are denied the aesthetic pleasure of teaching English literature. Readily available material keeps the learners away from the original texts. This paper intends to share successful experiments that equip the learners adequately.

### KEYWORDS

English literature; Linguistic proficiency; Examination; Learners; Aesthetic pleasure.

### Introduction

The positive blogs on the topic, *Have BA and MA literature courses lost their charm in India?*, on *BBC Teaching English* of the British Council validated the researcher's feelings about the study of English literature in India today. The course has been converted into a memory test rather than the study of literature. This picture may vary as mentioned in the National Knowledge Commission Report: *Of course, every problem does not exist everywhere. And there are exceptions.* NKC report (2009).

Hence the opening line of *Anna Karenina*, the classic by the Russian novelist Tolstoy, "All happy families resemble one another but each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way" applies to the state of English studies in India.

It can be further understood from the observations of Sanjukta Dasgupta during the Panel Discussion held on 10.03.2007 at the centre of Women's and Gender Studies, University of British Columbia:

English Literature teaching methods, syllabi content, the varying ideologies, and the theoretical approaches, all of which are inevitably determined by location, race, gender, and a class of knowledge producers. When the main discipline happens to be the study of English literature in India it becomes increasingly more problematised.

The picture is completely paradoxical because, on one hand, the learners have fully developed departments with well-equipped libraries. On the other

hand, many institutes run the same course in an uncondusive environment. The main purpose of this paper is to share the author's experiment with teachers similarly placed and motivate them for better job satisfaction and self-actualization.

English literature in India is no more studied to fulfil Lord Macaulay's dream of nurturing the Raj in India. Linguistic proficiency and literary pleasure are the perceived objectives of studying English Literature but the unchanged teaching methodology, evaluation techniques, and the ill-equipped lethargic learners are cumulatively responsible for its unenthusiastic pursuit. Dhanappa (2012) opines:

The learner of the world's great literature pursuing it only to improve the linguistic proficiency, through the readymade cheap material is a mockery of the study of literature.

They refer to guides and bazaar notes and download the matter from the free sites to prepare for the written examination. As a result, the teachers are far away from getting job satisfaction and the learners are nowhere close to the objectives of studying English literature mentioned in the UGC curriculum.

In the Preamble of UGC Model Curriculum for English (2001) for Honors and MA students, it is clearly stated that the students should have a serious interest in the discipline and be able to employ advanced language skills, critical understanding, and human values derived from it in the future lives and careers. Hence, such programs should at appropriately graded levels, include literary history, critical theories and concepts, the history and structure of the English language, and general linguistics. They should take account of the cultural, historical, and social background of the texts and concepts studied and the context of other literature and cultures. They

should also allow the scope to develop advanced functional and applied skills in the English language. This may be particularly necessary at the BA honours level, after which a large number of students may be expected to branch out into various professions employing such skills.

#### **The Present Picture:**

Dhanappa (2013) states:

An enthusiastic teacher, (forgetting the statement, *he is the best teacher who teaches less!*) of English literature overenthusiastically provides everything: summary in the mother tongue, readymade answers, possible questions, etc, killing the curiosity and the creativity of the learners. As a result, the discipline is losing its charm without the involvement of the learners.

The over-enthusiastic teachers provide everything from the examination point of view and the learners hold the notes and the guides close to their hearts like the Bible. They get the degree sans passion for one of the most creative literature in the world. They depend on the notes dictated by the teachers or those available in the market and reproduce them in the written examinations before getting the degree in special English. The examiners evaluating the answer scripts helplessly allot marks to borrowed answers. The learners aspiring to be teachers, technical writers, creative writers, scriptwriters or the staff at a call centre are so ill-equipped that they are unfit for the career they aspire to. Lucky should be the teacher who has graduated in English to his credit with expected vocabulary speak grammatically correct sentences, pronounce acceptably with proper intonation and read English literature other than the prescribed texts.

#### **The Experiment:**

The above-discussed picture is almost common everywhere makes a teacher drawing a six-digit salary, ask the

question to oneself, did he/she make a mistake in selecting his/her career? It is well known that the present learners of English literature are ill-equipped and so they do not pursue it with passion. To motivate them providing basic study tools may be helpful.

Primary data was collected through a questionnaire from the students of English literature regarding their exposure to English literature and the study material they possessed. It was analyzed and the author observed that 98% were ill-equipped, even without the basic tools. An experiment to equip the learners coming from poor and just the above poverty line was a challenge. Messages in the margins of notebooks were written to inform parents about the need to equip their wards with a quality dictionary, grammar book, textbooks, magazines, and journals. The poor learners were also equipped through the cooperation of the previous batches and the teacher's contributions. The best possible use of the central library of the institute was made. The innovative technique of collecting cheap study material from second-hand books and junk depots was also practised.

**The outcome:**

The author could teach *As You Like It* and the *Heart of Darkness* as every learner in his class possessed the texts. The study was strengthened with the judicious application of the ICTs. He witnessed the gradual development of love for literature among the learners. Most of the learners, without English medium background, started reading and rereading the original texts.

It was heartwarming to see the learners finding the translated copies of the texts for further pleasure. What's more, the learners started to cross the boundaries of studying one text and finding pleasure in reading the other books of the same author. The teacher's hidden desire of taking the study beyond the text was fulfilled. Learners developed a passion

for the subject and started studying English literature independently in depth. Auto learning enhanced self-respect and boosted the morale of the learners.

Attendance of learners in classes increased remarkably and the problem of indiscipline was solved with an academic solution. The teacher could not succeed in motivating all the learners but he is happy to see a majority of them pursuing their studies independently that too with passion. The experimenter feels partially successful like a mother who thinks her baby is still half-fed. His learners now have the basic study tools to study English literature (such as a dictionary of literary terms, English pronouncing dictionaries, Roget's Thesaurus, grammar books, original texts, useful websites, etc).

**The scope and limitations of the experiment:**

This experiment is useful only to the learners pursuing the study of literature seriously going beyond the examination point. The teacher who has won the confidence of his students only can implement it successfully. It needs professional commitment from the teacher who is ready to derive job satisfaction from the present examination-oriented system.

**Significance of the experiment:**

Readymade material can maximize marks in the written tests but does not help the seriously pursuing learner. The objective of character building of the learners through literature is impossible if they are poorly equipped. The study of English literature in particular and any other subject, in general, has turned examination-oriented. This practice will promote the need for experts in language and literature.

**Conclusion:**

The author is convinced that the study of English literature in many Indian institutes has turned purely examination-oriented. The faculty have the responsibility of equipping and enabling the learners to study the course with

passion. Preparing the human resources suited to the globalization era is the need of the hour.

The present experiment demands that the learners of English literature be placed on the right track after making them free from examination anxiety. They should be encouraged to get rid of the

guides and are brought back from the coaching classes. Values and quality research one expects from posterity is impossible unless the learners of English pursue it fully equipped and utilize the given opportunities. This ensures the emergence of good learners who create a value-based society in turn.

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