

Balancing Literature and Communication: An English Education Dilemma

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Abstract: *The shift from literature-based English education to a focus on spoken communication has created challenges for educators, particularly those trained in literary studies. Many teachers struggle with the increasing demand for oral proficiency, often lacking formal training in phonetics and modern teaching methods. This transition has also led to the neglect of reading and writing skills, impacting students' overall linguistic development. Additionally, educators from rural backgrounds face difficulties due to limited exposure to native pronunciation and technological resources. The diminishing role of literature in curricula raises concerns about the loss of creativity, analytical thinking, and cultural awareness in language learning. This paper advocates for a balanced approach that integrates literature with communication skills, ensuring comprehensive language development. It recommends curriculum revisions, teacher training programs, and interactive pedagogical strategies to bridge the gap between literary expertise and communicative competence, ultimately fostering well-rounded English learners.*

Keywords: Literature, Communication, Linguistic Development, Pedagogy, Curriculum

I. INTRODUCTION

English education has long been a dynamic field, continuously adapting to societal needs. In recent years, there has been a discernible shift in focus from literature-based learning to communication skills, particularly in spoken English. While communication skills are undoubtedly essential for students in an increasingly globalized world, this shift has led to a critical dilemma for English educators. Many teachers, particularly those with a background in literature, struggle to meet the growing demands for proficiency in oral communication.

Additionally, the overemphasis on spoken English has resulted in the neglect of fundamental language skills such as reading and writing, which are integral to comprehensive language development. This paper critically examines the challenges faced by English teachers, especially those from rural backgrounds, in adapting to these changes. Furthermore, it highlights concerns regarding the diminished role of literature in English education and its implications for students' creativity and critical thinking. Finally, this study advocates for a balanced pedagogical approach that integrates literature with communication skills, ensuring holistic language development.

History of Communication Competence in India

Communication competence in India has evolved over centuries, influenced by historical, cultural, and educational transformations.

Ancient and Medieval Periods

In ancient India, communication skills were deeply embedded in oral traditions. The Vedic education system emphasized memorization, recitation, and debate, as seen in the Gurukul system. Sanskrit, Pali, and Prakrit were widely used in scholarly discourse, and texts like the Upanishads and Buddhist sutras promoted philosophical debates, fostering rhetorical skills.



During the medieval period, Persian and Arabic became dominant in administrative and literary communication under Mughal rule. Courtly communication and poetry flourished, with languages like Urdu emerging as a blend of Persian and local dialects.

Colonial Era and English Education

The British colonial period marked a turning point. Lord Macaulay's 1835 Minute on Education promoted English as the medium of instruction, shifting the focus from classical Indian languages to Western-style communication skills. English proficiency became a key factor in administration, law, and education. The establishment of universities in Calcutta, Bombay, and Madras reinforced English as the language of the elite.

Post-Independence Developments

After India's independence in 1947, there was a push to promote Indian languages alongside English. However, English retained its significance in higher education and global communication. The Three-Language Formula (introduced in the 1960s) aimed to balance regional languages, Hindi, and English in school curricula.

In the late 20th century, globalization and economic liberalization (1991) increased the demand for English proficiency. The rise of Information Technology (IT) and Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) industries further emphasized spoken English and soft skills.

21st Century and Present Trends

Today, communication competence is a crucial part of education and professional success. With the introduction of digital learning, online courses, and soft skills training, there is a growing emphasis on spoken English, business communication, and personality development. However, concerns remain about the neglect of reading and writing skills, particularly in rural areas. Efforts to balance literature with communication skills continue, aiming for a more holistic approach to language learning in India.

The Shift in English Education: From Literature to Communication

Traditionally, English education in India and many other countries has been deeply rooted in literature. The study of poetry, drama, novels, and essays has been instrumental in developing students' analytical and interpretative skills. However, the growing emphasis on employability and global communication skills has led to a paradigm shift. Institutions now prioritize spoken English proficiency, presentation skills, and professional communication, often at the expense of literary studies. This shift has left many literature-trained teachers feeling ill-equipped, as their expertise lies in textual analysis rather than spoken discourse. Consequently, English educators are pressured to transform their teaching methods, incorporating more interactive and skill-based approaches to language learning.

Challenges Faced by English Educators

1. **Struggles with Communication Proficiency:** English teachers, particularly those trained in traditional literary studies, may not have received adequate training in phonetics, intonation, and pronunciation. Those from rural backgrounds face additional hurdles, as their exposure to native-like pronunciation and modern pedagogical methods is often limited. As a result, they may experience a sense of inadequacy when expected to teach spoken English fluently.
2. **The Neglect of Reading and Writing Skills:** With the increased focus on spoken communication, students are often trained in conversational English but lack proficiency in reading comprehension and writing skills. Writing is an essential component of academic and professional success, yet it receives comparatively less attention in modern curricula. This shift threatens to produce learners who can converse in English but struggle with coherence, structure, and critical analysis in written communication.
3. **The Decline of Literature in English Studies:** Literature has historically played a crucial role in shaping linguistic competence, cultural awareness, and creative thinking. However, with literature being sidelined in favor of practical communication modules, students miss out on the richness of linguistic diversity,



storytelling, and moral exploration. A literature-inclusive approach fosters imagination and intellectual engagement, which are vital for holistic education.

The Rural-Urban Divide in English Education

- The challenges of English education are exacerbated in rural areas, where infrastructural and pedagogical resources are limited. Teachers in rural settings often struggle with:
- Limited access to language labs and technology: Unlike urban institutions, many rural schools and colleges lack facilities for phonetics training, multimedia learning, and digital resources.
- Lack of exposure to native pronunciation: Rural educators and students often learn English in environments where regional accents and mother-tongue influence shape their spoken English.
- Traditional rote-learning methods: Many rural institutions still rely on outdated grammar-translation methods, focusing on memorization rather than communicative competence.
- Addressing these disparities requires targeted teacher training programs, digital language resources, and a more inclusive curriculum that accommodates diverse learning backgrounds.

Revisiting the Role of Literature in English Education

- Rather than viewing literature and communication as opposing forces, educators must recognize their complementary nature. Literature can serve as a powerful tool for enhancing communication skills in the following ways:
- Developing contextual understanding: Reading literature exposes students to authentic language usage, diverse dialects, and rhetorical styles, which aid in improving spoken and written communication.
- Enhancing vocabulary and linguistic creativity: Literary texts introduce students to varied expressions, idioms, and linguistic structures that enrich their language proficiency.
- Building critical thinking and cultural awareness: Literature fosters analytical thinking, empathy, and cultural sensitivity, skills that are crucial for effective communication in a global context.
- Integrating literature with communication-focused pedagogy ensures that students develop language skills while retaining the intellectual benefits of literary engagement.

Towards a Balanced Approach: Recommendations for English Education

1. Incorporating Communication Skills within Literature Studies

- Educators should adopt interactive teaching methods that blend literature with practical communication exercises. For example:
- Dramatic readings and role-playing: Engaging students in dramatization helps improve pronunciation, intonation, and fluency.
- Discussion-based learning: Encouraging students to analyze and debate literary texts enhances both critical thinking and verbal expression.
- Creative writing exercises: Assigning tasks such as rewriting a story's ending or composing character dialogues can strengthen both written and oral skills.

2. Strengthening Teacher Training Programs

- Workshops on phonetics and pronunciation: Rural and literature-trained teachers can benefit from specialized training in spoken English.
- Technology-assisted learning: Online courses, podcasts, and language apps should be integrated into teacher development programs.
- Collaborative learning networks: Teachers should be encouraged to participate in forums, webinars, and peer-learning platforms.



3. Revamping the Curriculum

- Balanced syllabus design: Curricula should allocate equal weight to literature, writing, reading, and oral communication skills.
- Project-based learning: Encouraging students to undertake storytelling projects, poetry recitations, and book reviews can create a more engaging learning experience.
- Use of multimedia resources: Audiobooks, films, and digital storytelling can make literary studies more interactive and accessible.

II. CONCLUSION

The debate over literature versus communication in English education should not be framed as a binary choice. Instead, a holistic approach that integrates both elements is essential for fostering well-rounded language learners. English educators, particularly those from rural backgrounds, require structured support to bridge the gap between literary expertise and communicative proficiency. By revisiting the role of literature and ensuring a balanced focus on reading, writing, and speaking, English education can cultivate students who are not only effective communicators but also critical thinkers and imaginative learners. The future of English education lies in embracing this synergy, where literature and communication skills coexist to enrich students' linguistic and intellectual growth.

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