

# Use of Novels to Teach ESL to the Technical Students in the Engineering Colleges—A Study

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## Abstract

**Objectives:** This study proposes for analyzing the usage of novel as a teaching tool to English learners in India. Teaching of English as Second Language (ESL) to speakers of English outside Britain poses peculiar problems. Previous literature works are not written properly for the purpose of class room learning and teaching. This article lists out reasons for teaching English through novels in ESL classes. It is proposed to find out whether the novels can enrich the students' knowledge of English culture and whether they can enhance their language skills. **Methods:** For the purpose of the present study, a class consisting of 50 students was identified. A pretest was conducted to assess the level of understanding of linguistic skills, vocabulary and the knowledge of grammatical structures of the students. After the completion of the project, a test was conducted to find out the improvements in the learners. **Findings:** The data of the pre-test and post-test are analysed. It is evident that the use of novel as a teaching tool has kindled the interest of the learners in knowing about a foreign culture. The experiment has also proved that the innovative use of the novel has improved the language skills of the learners. **Applications:** This method of teaching English through novel can be used in the English taught countries as a second language. Use of novel as a tool is both innovative and useful to the non-native learners.

**Keywords:** Class Room Teaching-Pedagogical Reasons for Teaching English-Linguistic Skills, Non-Native Learners, Teaching of English as Second Language (ESL)

## 1. Introduction

Teaching of English as Second Language (ESL) to speakers of English who are living outside Britain poses specific problems. Literary works are mostly not written for the purpose of class room teaching and learning. There are two major reasons that make a language teacher uses literature as a tool in the class room. The present course materials contain the examples taken from real life situations. So, the learners are introduced with actual language used in life in a classroom context. Literature can be acted as an enrichment tool to such materials, particularly

during the first introductory level. While studying literary texts, students are exposed to understand the language spoken by native speakers; in due course of time, they are able to use different language forms such as communicative functions and their meanings<sup>1</sup>. According to the authors<sup>2</sup>, there are two major reasons viz., cultural embellishments and language enhancement, which make a language teacher to use literature as tools in the classroom. In addition to these two major reasons, personal relevance, variety of themes and suggestive power are the other reasons necessitating the practice of literature as a teaching tool in the classroom context.

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## 2. Novel as an Innovative Teaching Tool

It is an accepted fact that novels can enrich the students' knowledge of English culture and they can enhance their language skills. Like any literary genre, the novel demands a fair amount of time to read. The reading of the novel is an activity of pleasure. This article lists out many reasons for teaching English through novels in ESL classes. Earlier studies have presented valid fights on English through novels in ESL classes for teaching. They claim that teachers should teach novels because they give pleasure, which are authentic experiences for the students and help them to understand another culture. The students gain control over the usage of the language and in a short period of time, they are able to analyze the novel critically. Due to the personal involvement, novels are beneficial in the learning process. Comprehending the significances of language composition or phrases, becomes less important than pursuing the improvement of the story. The student is very much interested to know what happens as events unfold, which leads to climax; the students feel closer to certain characters and shares their emotional responses. As a results, there is incremental effects upon the learning process of language. At this point of time, selection of the literary text in relation to the desires, interests, expectations and level of language for the students is important. In such a way, the learner's personality undergoes a transformation, overcoming the crisis of identity; he is changed into an outgoing person. There are good novels available for non-native learners. But there are many views about the definition for a good text.

## 3. Criterion of a Good Novel

The authors<sup>3</sup> state that a better novel "seeks, without pandering, to satisfy and please. It is intellectually and emotionally significant". Yet another author<sup>4</sup> observes that a novel addresses both the complex situations and adult difficulties. It engages the students emotionally, intellectually and linguistically. Suitability of novel for second-language learners, should have language clarity, cultural variations and a good story telling technique. Readability of a work written by a foreign writer largely be influenced by how free it is from lexical and grammatical errors<sup>5</sup>.

## 4. Present-Day Scenario

In the present century, many interesting tools are being adopted to teach English in the classrooms. Availability of various information is fast doubling and tripling in a very short time. To cope with this rapidly changing trend, teachers have to use effective tools to teach English to the modern students. Language and Culture are inseparable in the formulation of programmes for teaching ESL. Awareness of the foreign culture and exposure to the situations make ESL learners to understand the second language better. This will inturn lead to tolerance. Guidelines are available to the teachers to link language teaching and cultural understanding. National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project provides valuable information to make the students appreciate the foreign culture; compare the foreign culture with their own culture and to understand the ESL better<sup>6</sup>.

Literature is used as a tool to create an interesting experience, exposure and variety in ESL learning process. Generally, unabridged novels are suitable for advance level learners. Audio recordings, films, supplementary texts and exercises are identified. The aim of the present study is to describe the implementation and outcome of the multimedia experiment that focuses on Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*. There is a connection between non-detailed reading and efficiency in language learning. The main aim is to develop the habit of reading among students<sup>7</sup>.

Reading a literary text followed by the film version excite the students very much. They eagerly look forward for the screening of the film. A study on Comprehension Hypothesis asserts that a learner acquires a language better when he receives lots of meaningful comprehensive input<sup>7</sup>.

It is vital to recognise the advantages gained from exposure to literature and other art forms. The previous studies<sup>8</sup> maintain that "the advantages of using audio recordings of the simplified novel to strengthen linguistic skills such as better pronunciation, faster reading speed and improved retention of vocabulary and grammatical structures enhance future readings". The teacher should provide supporting materials, explanation of difficult passages, peer interaction and teacher-student interaction. This will systematically motivate the younger learners to achieve the required language competency and it is called "zone of proximal development"<sup>9</sup>.

## 5. Stages of the Present Study

For the purpose of the present study, a class consisting of 50 students was identified. A pretest was conducted to assess the level of understanding of linguistic skills, vocabulary and the knowledge of grammatical structures of the students.

### 5.1 Stage 1: Writing

Before embarking on the proposed strategy of using the novel as a tool to teach ESL, writing assignments were given to the learners about the life and writings of Jane Austen. The students collected all the details about Jane Austen, her achievements and her literary contemporaries. They came to know about the great writer's values and outlook of life.

### 5.2 Stage 2: Reading

The students were given the enjoyable task of reading the novel, *Pride & Prejudice*. They were allowed to read the novel at their own pace.

### 5.3 Stage 3: Listening and Viewing

The students were shown the film version of the novel. After seeing the film, the students were able to appreciate the novel better.

### 5.4 Stage 4: Speaking

A group discussion was conducted on *Pride & Prejudice*. The students gave critical reviews of the novel. They were able to understand the different culture of English society. A post test was conducted after the completion of the project. The data were analyzed thoroughly. The above mentioned strategy of using the novel as a tool to teach ESL has seen good improvements in the students' usage of LSRW skills; the grammar and vocabulary of the students also have shown remarkable improvements. They understand the social culture of a foreign country better after the implementation of the use of novel as a tool.

## 6. Benefits of using Novel as a Tool

Reading of the novel helps to master the linguistic skills. It also helps to understand the life better. In the novel, what people really perform in daily lives shows the characters

mirror. Novels enhance the quality of human lives. Adoption of the novel as a tool in the second language class room teaching offers the following academic benefits: It enlarges the students' understanding about different cultures and people. It also increases students' motivation to read and it gives students the prospect to make use of their creativity and critical thinking skills. The previous study<sup>10</sup> illustrates the educational importance's of novels as follows: "The novel stimulates their imagination, helps students to identify the emotions of the characters so that they can learn how others cope with situations and problems similar to their own experiences, helps them master the skills that will enable them to acquire information, process this knowledge, identifies problems, formulate alternatives, and arrive at effective decisions".

Reading of the novel develops written and spoken language skills. It assists as a stepping stone for learning and critical thinking activities. The use of novel as a teaching tool introduces an exclusive method of teaching reading skill. It further motivates the students to become lifelong readers.

## 7. Evaluation of the Learners

Teachers employ innovative tests, which requires students to develop their sub-skills of written language, while evaluating their comprehension. Writing tests on Essay topics given by teachers are helping the students to develop their skills in writing and organizing the materials into small paragraphs with usual sentence structure.

Tests are based on facts and open-ended questions to evaluate the comprehension skills of the students. The open-ended questions are allowing the students to think about the outcomes, make comparative analysis and draw conclusions. "Class discussions of each novel should comprise the main idea and supporting details, including who, what, when, where, and how. Details of various social issues such as sexual harassment and child labor, which are often an integral part of the plot, can initiate interesting debate. Discussions can also facilitate vocabulary development"<sup>10</sup>.

## 8. Findings of the Study

The adoption of novel as a teaching tool is a proven strategy in today's foreign language classes. If employed correctly,

the novel transforms the students' reading into an enjoyable activity. Sometimes, students are facing the problem on reading a novel written in a foreign language. But the novel is a useful way of building the learner's vocabulary and comprehension skills. It is only through reading the novels that students enlarge their view of the world and develop their communication skills. The output will be the mastery of critical thinking and language skills by the students.

## 9. Conclusion

By applying innovative language tools, the students are exposed to the understanding of a new culture. They come out of their shells and share their experiences. Further, such cultural and narrative experiences enable the students to learn more about their own culture and compare it with the foreign culture. By this novel method, the students are able to interact critically with other cultures. Their attitude and outlook also undergo a drastic change in the process. The authors<sup>11</sup> report the second language classes as below:

“When reading a story the reader shares the writer's thoughts and feelings as the reader thinks and tries to predict about the future or the conclusion while he is attracted, but reading informational texts wouldn't attract the reader after he gets what's needed from the information written. Besides, that information doesn't move the reader's feelings and emotions, and doesn't motivate the reader toward thinking and predicting”<sup>11</sup>.

It is evident that the use of novel as a teaching tool has kindled the interest of the learners in knowing about a foreign culture. The experiment has also proved that the innovative use of the novel has improved the language skills of the learners.

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