



RESEARCH ARTICLE



GLOBAL SKILLS THROUGH LITERATURE

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ABSTRACT

The 21st century has brought significant changes in almost all aspects of life, however, the one most affected by the rapid transformation is education. The first two decades of 21st century education were mostly characterized by frameworks prepared by organizations like UNESCO, OECD, and Partnership for 21st Century Skills (P21). These frameworks focused on skills and competencies necessary for 21st century students but were criticised for being overtly careeristic overlooking the overall wellbeing of the students. However, the frameworks weren't rejected in toto but were improvised to accommodate objections raised. It was broadly agreed that the contemporary world is witnessing rapid advances in digital technologies, intensified globalization, cutthroat economic race, and greater mobility leading to more diversity in the workplace. Hence, the role of education is even broader to equip the students with skills and competencies that will help them to flourish now and in the future. Educators, business leaders, academics, and governmental agencies unanimously agreed that all students need skills critical for lifelong learning and success. This paper intends to investigate the importance of teaching English Literature at the undergraduate level in an age when learning is driven by integrated and usable knowledge, skills, and competence-based curricula.

Keywords: *Global Skills, English Literature, 21st Century Education, Critical Thinking, Creative Thinking, Collaboration, Digital Literacy, Intercultural Citizenship, Emotional Regulation, Wellbeing*



INTRODUCTION

With the advent of the Information Age policymakers, academicians, and educational institutions realized that they faced a challenge to prepare students for the types of skills needed for “jobs and technologies that don’t yet exist...in order to solve problems that we don’t even know are problems yet” (Did You Know 2.0). They concluded that graduates with a degree need to have a solid conceptual grasp of difficult topics and the capacity to apply creativity to them to produce novel thoughts, theories, inventions, and information. They must be able to comprehend scientific and mathematical reasoning, critically analyse what they read, and communicate themselves both orally and in writing. They must acquire comprehensive and practical knowledge. (Sawyer, 2005, p. 2) To deal with this unspecified, educators, businesses, and policymakers came up with different frameworks for future education. Each of these documents outlined the skills, expertise, and knowledge that students need for 21st century learning.

The World Health Organization has defined life skills as, “the abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life”. They identified 10 fundamental life skills significant for everybody: *problem-solving, critical thinking,*

effective communication skills, decision-making, creative thinking, interpersonal relationship skills, self-awareness building skills, empathy, and coping with stress and emotions. (Module 7: Life Skills)

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) proposed four pillars of education *Learning to know, Learning to do, Learning to live, and Learning to be.* They reworked to build capacity for “commoning actions and strengthening the common good” and reoriented them to:

- Learning to study, inquire, and co-construct together
- Learning to collectively mobilize
- Learning to live in a common world
- Learning to attend and care (Four Pillars of Education, 2023)

In 2018 the OECD came up with the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) framework which is a multi-dimensional construct that requires a combination of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values applied to 4 key dimensions Dimension 1: Examine local, global, and intercultural issues. Dimension 2: Understand and appreciate the perspectives and worldviews of others. Dimension 3: Engage in open, appropriate, and effective interactions across cultures. Dimension 4: Take action for collective well-being and sustainable development. (PISA 2018 Global Competence.)



Fig. 1 Global Competency Framework (OECD, 2018, p.11)



However, the one that got the most traction was P21. It was a coalition of the American business community, education leaders, and policymakers. They formulated a framework for 21st century

learning that describes the skills, knowledge, and expertise students need to master to succeed in the 21st century.

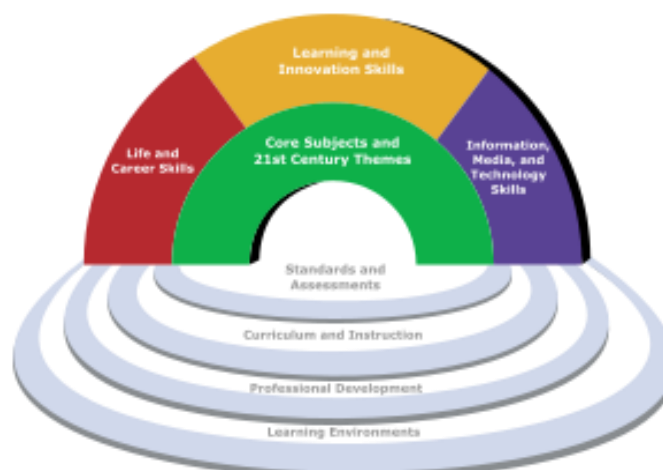


Fig. 2 The Framework for 21st Century Learning
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The skills have been grouped into three main areas: **Learning and Innovation Skills**, **Life & Career Skills**, and **Information, Media, and Technology Skills**. It was the source of the '4Cs'— Critical thinking, Communication, Collaboration, and Creativity— that became the cornerstone of all educational policy in the first two decades. (P21's Frameworks for 21st Century Learning)

GLOBAL SKILLS

Global skills are the abilities, skills, values, knowledge, and attitudes that shape our behaviour and enable us to work and live in a globalized and interconnected world. They are part of a holistic concept of competency that will enable us to grow and thrive in a culturally diverse world. And though these competencies are a lifelong learning process, they can be modelled and shaped through education. With latest technological developments, rising economic competitiveness, and businesses fostering higher workforce diversity have resulted in talents moving between jobs and between geographies. Therefore, the need for global skills is now more than ever. English Language Teaching Expert Panel at

Oxford University Press published a whitepaper called **Global Skills: Creating Empowered 21st Century Citizens** grouping them into five interdependent skills clusters. OpenAI. (2023) summarizes them as:

Communication and Collaboration: the ability to express, listen, and cooperate with others effectively across different contexts and cultures.

Creativity and Critical Thinking: the ability to generate, analyze, and evaluate ideas and solutions in a complex and changing world.

Intercultural Competence and Citizenship: the ability to appreciate, respect, and interact with people from diverse backgrounds and perspectives, and to contribute to local and global communities.

Emotional Self-regulation and Wellbeing: the ability to manage one's emotions, cope with stress, and maintain a healthy and balanced lifestyle.

Digital Literacies: the ability to use, create, and share digital information and media safely and ethically.



So, in an age when learning is driven by global skills where does the teaching of Literature fit in? How teaching Literature as a subject in higher education can help the students to achieve the required skills, knowledge, attitudes, and competencies and to cope with the challenges ahead and succeed in the future in education, work, and society.

SIGNIFICANCE OF TEACHING LITERATURE: VIEWS

Professor M. S. Ananth, former director of the Indian Institute of Technology, Madras, says, "*We scientists and engineers think if we do A, we will get B. But society is so complex that you don't get B, you get B prime which is very different from B. And to understand that you need a humanities background.*" He argues that there is considerable subjectivity in society and the frame of mind needed to comprehend that can be developed through humanities only. (x.com)

Jeffrey Low, Principal, Bedok View Secondary School, says, "*To me, above all that, Literature education is about teaching young people to appreciate what it means to be human. It is about what it means to care for someone or something and what it means if we lose it. It is asking what is important to us as a person as we relate to the world around us.*" (singteach.nie.edu.sg)

Anthony Kronman in his new book, *Education's End: Why Our Colleges and Universities Have Given Up on the Meaning of Life*, argues that one of the aims of college education is to explore the question of life's meaning. He says that "*for the nurturing of those intellectual and moral habits that together form the basis for living the best life one can*" we must engage students in the great texts of literature, philosophy and history. He believes that only through the precise and analytical reading of great works of Literature and philosophical imagination we can address "*the crisis of spirit we now confront*". Kronman thinks that "*the highest goal of the humanities and the first responsibility of every teacher*" is to guide the growth of the self and "*bring what is hidden into the open*" and this can be done only through "*revitalized humanism*". *Will the Humanities Save Us?* The New York Times

AIMS OF TEACHING LITERATURE

Literature refers to creative and imaginative writing designed to engage readers emotionally and intellectually through the major literary genres such as novels, drama, and poetry. It expresses human experience, feelings, emotions, and thoughts. Through the artistic use of language, it depicts the socio-cultural, political, and economic situations of human beings. Marxist ideology views Literature as a form of social consciousness and a reflection of life in all its aspects.

Critics have always questioned the justification of teaching Literature in schools and colleges more so than ever in the digital age. However, Literature like all other disciplines has a role to perform and has some reasons to be included in formal education. They can be summarized as:

- Develop a humanistic outlook on life among students
- Provide aesthetic, intellectual, and emotional pleasure
- Enhance language skills
- Develop their capacity for critical and creative responses to literature
- Analyze and assess the techniques authors employ to produce effects and meaning
- Expand empathy and cultural understanding
- Judge human actions and analyse their impact on culture and society

We will take each of the five skills and see whether teaching Literature as an academic discipline can help students to attain them.

COMMUNICATION AND COLLABORATION

One of the arguments that is pushed in support of teaching Literature in higher education is that it helps students develop language in a better way. Gives students a hold over the nuances of the English language. It is argued that Literature is the best use of language hence Literature education helps the students to develop a knack to appreciate writing in various forms with anticipation that this will train students to write well. Professor Michael Burke says that the classical strategy of teaching rhetoric



“involving (i) knowledge, followed by (ii) analysis, followed by (iii) production, forms a sound basis for the successful creative writing classroom of today” (Bruke, 2014, p. 25). According to Hemings et al. (2016), the aim of teaching English in higher education is to develop students' skills to critically engage with a text and appreciate the intricacies and complexities of the texts/language in a variety of contexts, including their socio-cultural and historical contexts. They conclude by saying that to reach this end English Literature is undoubtedly a good means.

One of the methods used to teach Literature is Close reading. It is the practice of carefully examining a text to comprehend its meaning, form, and structure. This method uses inter-reliant skills of reading, analysis, and communication. In other methods, students are required to write critical analyses in a variety of formats including essays and research papers. They evaluate the devices authors use in creating meaning and effects applying critical and theoretical approaches.

Collaboration means the ability to work with others to accomplish a common goal. It encourages students to exercise flexibility and trains them to learn and share. Heble and Mehta (2013) found that when students share ideas and pool resources to do collaborative writing in Literature, they benefit from it. The research also highlighted that as students re-read and revise their work and the works of other participants, it improves their writing skills. Wood et al. (2001) reiterated that “*group activities to read, discuss, and analyse literature ... reinforces their ability to work collaboratively.*” The project-based learning though seen more as a science teaching method when applied to Literature has its own benefits. Some universities choose to teach literature through performance. It is a way to teach literature by bringing the book to life.

With the aid of this approach, students are able to comprehend the text whether it is drama, poetry, or storytelling in a more engaging manner and foster their own creativity.

CREATIVITY AND CRITICAL THINKING

As in P21's 4Cs, critical thinking and creative thinking were seen separately but soon researchers found that the skills required to develop the two had more common ground than differences. Hence, it made sense to combine the two skill sets into one all-inclusive model. Experts include interpretation, analysis, evaluation, inference, explanation, and self-regulation as the very core of critical thinking. If we compare these cognitive skills with the curriculum aims of teaching Literature, we find a strong correlation between the two. Most universities design their Literature course of study around the identification, analysis, interpretation, and description of the themes, values, and ideas embedded in the prescribed literary texts. It is precisely because of this connection that Lazere argued that “literature...is the single academic discipline that can come closest to encompassing the full range of mental traits currently considered to comprise critical thinking.” (Lazere, 1987, p. 3) Students are encouraged to use different types of reasoning and gather and assess evidence, arguments, assertions, and views and effectively analyse them to make informed judgments. In Literature, we teach students how to make connections between information and opinions from different points of view and synthesize them to draw conclusions.

Creative thinking is seen as generating new ideas and then critically analysing and evaluating them to select the most appropriate idea to move ahead. Duffy (1998) explained creative thinking as the ability to see things in new and original ways, to learn from experience and relate it to new situations, to think in unconventional and unique ways, to use non-traditional approaches to solve problems, and to create something unique and original. Halpern (2013, p. 370) says, "Creative thinking is a multistage process that consists of identifying a problem, deciding what is important about the problem, and arriving at a novel way of solving it." So, when students read literary texts, it stimulates their visualization and imagination skills. It provides them inspiration and ideas to look beyond the set



parameters of thinking which in turn opens the creative realm for them to exist in. Noted psychologist Jerome Bruner, co-founder of Harvard's Center for Cognitive Studies, in his research, found that literature serves as a catalyst for the kind of highly inventive or creative thinking that is necessary to drive economic growth. According to him, people are "infinitely capable" of adhering to their current beliefs, even if those beliefs hinder effective action. However, Bruner claimed that when we critically examine and comprehend imaginative stories, we improve our capacity to suspend disbelief and imagine new possibilities for ourselves, our families, our workplaces, and our society (Bruner, 2009).

INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE AND CITIZENSHIP

Intercultural competence and citizenship are defined as a combination of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values that make people aware and respectful in their interactions and dealings with culturally diverse people. This requires us to recognize and challenge cultural prejudices and stereotypes and facilitate friendly living in multicultural communities. It demands us to behave responsibly and caringly in our local and global roles on issues such as environmental challenges and sustainable living. So, how can Literature prepare us for such roles? Like language Literature too is an element of culture. Literature engages us with culturally different societies. When we read a text, we move beyond the imaginative boundaries into historically, geographically, and culturally different societies. The study of literature besides making us aware of our distinctiveness also enlightens us about the uniqueness of others. Literary studies enable us to critically examine ideas, values, and themes that appear in literary and cultural texts and assess their impact on culture and society. It is like a bridge that takes us into different imaginative realms to show us the relationships between culture, power, and social identities such as race, class, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, disability, etc. This broadens our viewpoint and makes us more open to accept and appreciate our own (multi)cultural identities and the culture of others. It helps to build trust among a diverse group and work together as global citizens.

Rodríguez and Puyal (2012) proved that literary texts are excellent resources to help students develop tolerance and empathy. They concluded that "literary texts in English contribute to developing their intercultural competence since they help to erase prejudices, to enhance empathy for others, to avoid monolithic perspectives, to reduce contempt towards other cultures, and to counter racist attitudes." (Rodríguez and Puyal, 2012)

The findings of the research of Martin et al. (2021) conclude that intercultural citizenship education and global citizenship education can be effectively introduced to youngsters through Literature. Their findings emphasize emphatically that literary texts trigger a discussion among students on universal values related to ethics, morals, human rights, and racial equality.

EMOTIONAL SELF-REGULATION AND WELLBEING

Emotional Self-regulation and wellbeing are two interrelated skills concerning a person's physical and mental health. Emotional self-regulation is understanding, acceptance, and modulation of one's own and others' emotional responses. Wellbeing is a state of being happy, healthy, and satisfied with one's life. Emotional self-regulation enhances wellbeing by helping the person to cope with stress and negative emotions.

The relationship between emotion and Literature is as old as Literature itself. Aristotle wrote that the purpose of tragedy is catharsis, the purgation of emotions, particularly pity and fear (Britannica, 2023). Long (2013) says, "*Literature is the artistic record of life...appeals to our emotions and imagination rather than to our intellect... is occupied chiefly with elementary passions and emotions, — love and hate, joy and sorrow, fear and faith, which are an essential part of our human nature: and the more it reflects these emotions the more surely does it awaken a response in men.*" Literature explores the widest human interests and the simplest human feelings, emotions, and passions, their needs, and their relationships with society. He asserts that the purpose of the study of Literature is to know men, both their outward and inner nature. He claims that



all great acts originate from an ideal and to know that ideal we must study Literature. And often this becomes the strongest rationale for including Literature as a teaching subject. Literature helps students to understand life in a better and more humane way. When students read a literary text, they develop a bond with the characters in the book and try to look at the world through their experiences and perspectives. They develop a relationship with the characters and become thoughtful about how they feel and how they think. Many empirical studies including that of Gerrig (1993), Mar et al (2006), and Bal & Veltkamp (2013) have shown that when people read fiction, they are emotionally transported into the story increasing empathy. Literary texts expand readers' understanding of the nature of human existence and the complexities of life and make them more competent to envision a better society in which they live.

Literature provides aesthetic, intellectual, and emotional pleasure to the students. Literature fosters creativity, imagination, and curiosity. Mastandrea et al found that *"the aesthetic value of artwork and their use in educational programs may affect psychological and physiological states, thus promoting well-being and enhancing learning."* They found that *"experiencing art is a self-rewarding activity, irrespective of the emotional content of the artwork."* Empirical studies suggest that the better the understanding of art, the higher the pleasing aesthetic experiences. Leder et al. (2004) suggested a "psychological model of aesthetic experience and judgments" and found that the probability of positive aesthetic emotion is greater when there is a satisfactory cognitive comprehension of the artwork. Moreover, Sarasso et al in their work confirm the millennial-old link between aesthetic emotions and knowledge acquisition. They exhibited how *"aesthetic perception is deeply rooted in the adaptive control and reciprocal modulation of active behaviour and perceptual learning along the perception-action cycle."* (Sarasso 2020) Carney and Robertson (2022) studied five research evaluating the impact of fiction on mental health and wellbeing and found evidence that fiction can have a positive impact on wellbeing.

DIGITAL LITERACIES

Digital literacies refer to technical, cognitive, and social abilities to use digital technologies to create, evaluate, and share information through a growing and ever-changing range of multimedia networks.

The advent of new millennia has seen unprecedented growth in digital technology impacting every aspect of life including the teaching and learning process. In a technology-driven world, therefore digital competence has become a necessity. And though the Literature syllabus in universities doesn't directly include any module on the development of digital skills but meanderingly it does help students to develop these skills. Digital literacies encompass a vast collection of skills including that of creativity, critical thinking, collaboration and effective communication to research, evaluate, produce, and share information ethically. Students are encouraged and guided to collect, comprehend, assess, and synthesize material from a variety of written and electronic sources fairly and righteously observing the highest ethical principles.

Canals-Botines and Alonso (2023) say that the use of technology in Literature implies an innovative pedagogical approach that embraces multimediality interaction to favour creation, collaboration, and connection-making. To achieve this end a European Key Action 2 Project called *Digital Literature Educational Competences for Teachers: Intercultural Inclusive Good Practices (DILECTINGS)* is working to formulate strategies and guidelines to effectively apply and assess Digital Literature. They defined Digital Literature as "literature intended as authentic materials with cultural value—is an engaging and interactive narrative form delivered via digital media, encompassing the language of books, films, web pages, radio, etc." The project aims to "promote and scale-up Digital Literature Literacy (DLL) and Literature Digital Reading (LDR) Skills in European schools through achievement, assessment and exchange of specific digital competences in both educators and students."

**CONCLUSION**

The teaching of Literature engages students in discussions and higher-order thinking skills like complex judgmental skills, critical thinking, creativity and problem-solving. This besides giving pleasure to students helps them to understand and express their notions about life and relationships, ideals and principles, values and beliefs, and interests and dislikes. Additionally, literature aids in the development of the cognitive abilities and socio-emotional perspectives that youth will require to lead fulfilling lives in the 21st century. Literature teaches students to deal with emotions and trains them to cope with stress. It fills them with self-awareness and empathy. Furthermore, it encourages them to use a higher and more sophisticated vocabulary as well as linguistically more complex structures.

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