

LITERARY ELEMENTS IN TEACHING ENGLISH IN INDIAN COLLEGES: GRAMMAR AND SPEAKING ASPECTS

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Abstract. This article examines the pedagogical role of literary elements in teaching English in Indian colleges, with particular attention to grammar and speaking skills. In many Indian higher education contexts, English functions as a language of academic mobility, professional access, and intercultural communication; however, students often face difficulties in grammatical accuracy, oral fluency, pronunciation, confidence, and contextual language use. The article argues that literary texts—short stories, poems, dialogues, drama extracts, narrative passages, and character-based situations—can be used not only for literary appreciation but also as practical material for grammar teaching and speaking development. The study is based on qualitative content analysis of twelve published articles and research sources related to literature-based English language teaching, ESL/EFL pedagogy, Indian college English teaching, grammar instruction, communicative competence, and classroom activities. The results show that literary elements are especially productive for speaking and oral fluency, grammar in context, vocabulary and idiom development, pronunciation and intonation practice, critical-cultural discussion, and creative classroom interaction. The article concludes that literature-based English teaching in Indian colleges should be organized through integrated, task-based, and communicative methods rather than through purely lecture-based literary interpretation.

Keywords: literary elements, English teaching, Indian colleges, grammar in context, speaking skills, literature-based pedagogy.

INTRODUCTION

English teaching in Indian colleges occupies a complex position because English is simultaneously a subject of study, a medium of higher education, a professional skill, and a means of national and international communication. A recent systematic review of English as a second language in India identifies linguistic and cultural barriers, inadequate infrastructure, limited teacher training, and the need for learner-centered approaches as major challenges in the Indian ELT landscape. In this context, the use of literary elements in English teaching offers a valuable methodological possibility. Literature provides authentic, meaningful, emotionally engaging, and culturally rich language. Unlike isolated grammar drills or mechanical speaking exercises, literary texts present grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, discourse, and pragmatics in context. A short story may demonstrate tense sequence, reported speech, modality, cohesion, and narrative structure. A poem may help students notice rhythm, stress, intonation, metaphor, and lexical choice. A dramatic dialogue may become the basis for role-play, pronunciation practice, turn-taking, and spontaneous speaking. The problem addressed in this article is that literature in Indian colleges is often taught mainly as content: plot, author biography, theme, symbolism, and historical background. While these aspects are important, they do not always directly improve students' practical command of English. Therefore, this article proposes a shift from "teaching literature only as literature" to "using literary elements as language-teaching material." This does not reduce literature to grammar exercises; rather, it uses literary language as a living resource for developing communicative competence. The aim of the article is to examine how literary elements can support grammar and speaking instruction in Indian college English classrooms.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The use of literature in second and foreign language teaching has a long theoretical foundation. Arthur's early article on reading literature and learning a second language argued that literary reading can contribute to language learning

when it is pedagogically guided and connected with linguistic development. McKay later emphasized that literary texts must be carefully selected and approached in a way that promotes interaction between the reader and the text rather than passive reception. McKay's article is frequently cited in ESL literature pedagogy and is indexed with the DOI 10.2307/3586470.

Hişmanoğlu's article *Teaching English Through Literature* is particularly relevant to this study because it explicitly connects literature with both basic language skills—reading, writing, listening, and speaking—and language areas such as vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation. This supports the central argument of the present article: literature in Indian colleges can be used not only for literary analysis but also for practical language development.

Savvidou's integrated approach to teaching literature in the EFL classroom also supports this position. She argues that literature can be a powerful pedagogical tool and explains that language-based activities such as cloze exercises, prediction, jumbled sentences, role-play, summary writing, and creative writing can be connected with literary texts. In relation to Indian colleges, this means that a poem, short story, or drama extract can be converted into grammar and speaking activities without removing its literary value.

Khatib, Rezaei, and Derakhshan reviewed the place of literature in EFL/ESL classrooms and described the movement from grammar-translation traditions to communicative approaches. They also proposed methodological models for integrating literature into language teaching. Their study is useful for designing college-level activities because Indian classrooms often contain both traditional examination-oriented practices and communicative language needs.

In the Indian context, Ravi's article in the *Journal of English Language Teaching* argues that literature provides authentic communicative situations and can enhance students' communicative competence. This is directly related to speaking practice because literary dialogues, conflicts, character interactions, and narrative situations can be transformed into oral classroom tasks.

Shermila's article *Incorporating Literature in ESL Teaching and Learning* is also important for Indian college pedagogy. The author states that literature can create an interactive climate and may be used through brainstorming, role-playing, word association, situational scenes, and prediction. These activities are especially useful for speaking classes because they reduce fear, encourage participation, and give students meaningful content to discuss.

Chouhan's study *Teaching English Language through Literature: A Critical Study* states that literary texts provide rich linguistic input, motivate students, and create opportunities for learners to express themselves. This supports the use of literary elements for both grammar and speaking: grammar becomes contextualized, while speaking becomes purposeful and interpretive.

Jeya Gowri and Ilankumaran's study on the transition from schooling to college is relevant because many Indian college students enter higher education with uneven English proficiency and face difficulties in communication, accuracy, and confidence. Their article is indexed with DOI 10.14419/ijet.v7i3.6.14972 and addresses second-language skill development in the school-to-college transition.

Zakarnah and Mahmoud's review of teaching English through literature found that literature supports imagination, creativity, critical thinking, cultural diversity, listening, writing, speaking, controlled writing, and language acquisition. Although their study is not India-specific, its findings are applicable to Indian colleges because it identifies the broader ESL value of literature for language-skill development.

Altun's article similarly argues that literature can improve language skills, cultural understanding, and critical thinking, and that literary texts can help students internalize language in a natural and engaging way. For grammar and speaking instruction, this suggests that literature can make form-focused learning more meaningful.

Finally, Winson, Arunkumar, and Rao's systematic review of English learning in India emphasizes the need for innovative teaching strategies, learner-centered approaches, and teacher development. This strengthens the rationale for using literary elements not as an ornamental part of the syllabus but as a practical classroom resource for grammar and speaking.

METHODOLOGY

This article uses a qualitative content-analysis method. Twelve published academic sources were selected according to the following criteria: relevance to literature-based English teaching, relevance to ESL/EFL pedagogy, connection with grammar or speaking skills, relevance to Indian college or comparable higher education contexts, and availability of DOI or URL.

The selected sources were analyzed in three stages.

First, each source was reviewed for its main pedagogical claim about the use of literature in English teaching. For example, Hişmanoğlu was coded for literature as a tool for teaching language skills and language areas; Khatib, Rezaei,

and Derakhshan were coded for methodological models; Ravi, Shermila, and Chouhan were coded for communicative and Indian classroom relevance; Winson, Arunkumar, and Rao were coded for the Indian ESL context.

Second, the findings were grouped into six pedagogical functions: speaking and oral fluency, grammar in context, vocabulary and idiom use, pronunciation and intonation, critical-cultural discussion, and creative classroom activities.

Third, a model of classroom application was developed for Indian college English courses. The model does not claim to present experimental test scores. Instead, it synthesizes published literature into a practical framework that may later be tested through classroom observation, pre-tests, post-tests, student interviews, and teacher reflection journals.

RESULTS

The content analysis shows that literary elements can support English teaching in Indian colleges through six major pedagogical functions.

Pedagogical function	Literary element	Grammar aspect	Speaking aspect
Speaking and oral fluency	Dialogue, conflict, character interaction	Question forms, reported speech, tense shifts	Role-play, debate, retelling, interview
Grammar in context	Narrative sequence, description, exposition	Tenses, clauses, modifiers, conditionals	Explaining events, describing characters
Vocabulary and idiom use	Figurative language, idioms, collocations	Word formation, lexical grammar	Contextual vocabulary use
Pronunciation and intonation	Poetry, drama, rhythm, repetition	Sentence stress, punctuation awareness	Recitation, dramatic reading
Critical-cultural discussion	Theme, symbolism, setting	Modality, argument structures	Group discussion, opinion exchange
Creative classroom activities	Story completion, rewriting, performance	Transformation, sentence combining	Improvisation, storytelling

The highest functional value was identified in speaking and oral fluency. Literary texts naturally contain conflict, emotion, dialogue, point of view, and social situations. These features give students something meaningful to speak about. Instead of asking students to speak on artificial topics, teachers may use literary situations: “Interview the protagonist,” “Defend the antagonist,” “Continue the dialogue,” or “Retell the story from another character’s point of view.”

The second most important area was grammar in context. Literary texts allow students to see grammar as meaning-making. For example, past tense forms in a short story are not merely grammatical forms; they organize narrative time. Modal verbs in a dramatic scene express obligation, possibility, hesitation, or moral judgment. Relative clauses help describe characters and settings. Reported speech can be practiced through character narration.

Vocabulary and idiom use formed the third major area. Literary texts contain collocations, idioms, metaphors, culturally marked expressions, and emotionally expressive vocabulary. These elements are particularly useful in Indian colleges because students often know dictionary meanings but struggle to use words naturally in speech.

Pronunciation and intonation also emerged as a significant area. Poetry and drama are useful for rhythm, pause, stress, tone, and emotional expression. Reading a poem aloud or performing a dialogue can develop oral confidence and phonological awareness.

Critical-cultural discussion was identified as another important function. Literature provides moral, social, and cultural problems that stimulate opinion-based speaking. This is useful for college students because academic and professional English requires argumentation, explanation, agreement, disagreement, and evaluation.

Creative classroom activities formed the final category. Literary materials support rewriting, dramatization, prediction, role-play, storytelling, and group performance. These activities integrate grammar and speaking in a student-centered way.

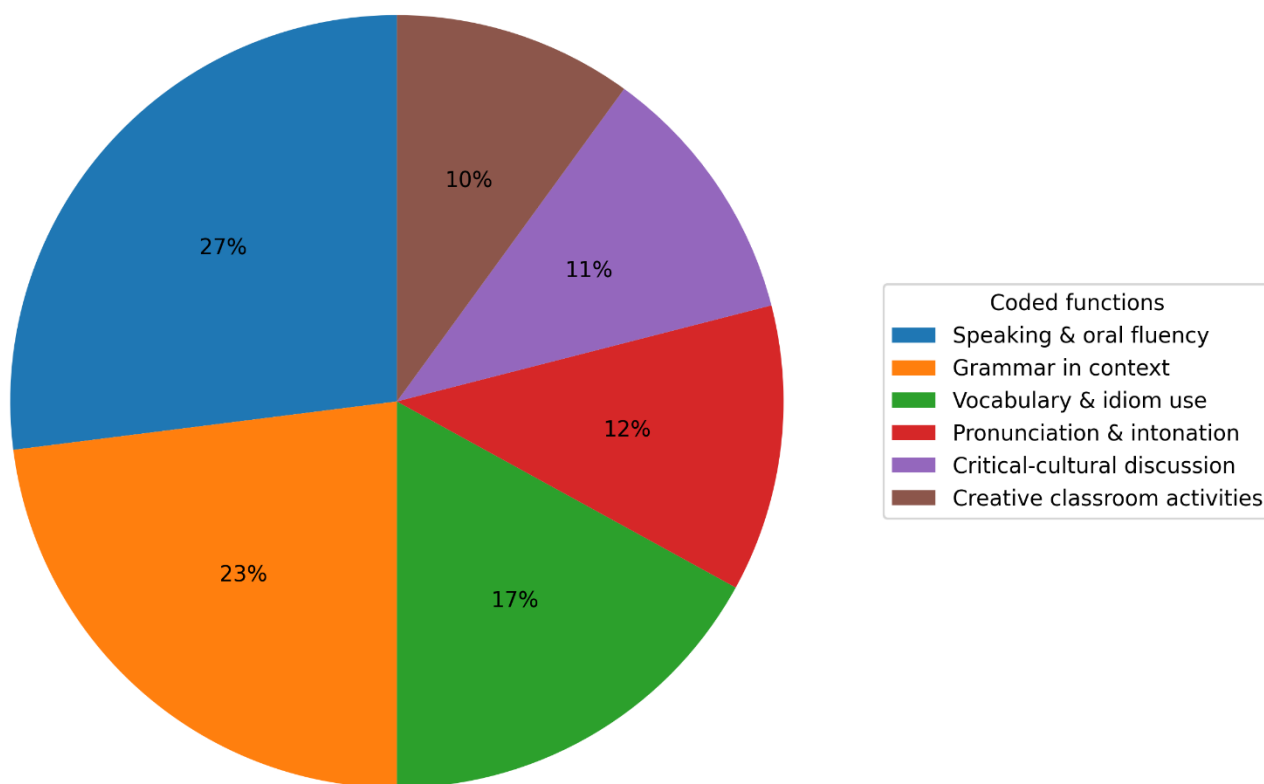


Figure 1. Pedagogical functions of literary elements in college English teaching

The pie chart presents the following distribution of coded pedagogical functions: speaking and oral fluency — 27%; grammar in context — 23%; vocabulary and idiom use — 17%; pronunciation and intonation — 12%; critical-cultural discussion — 11%; creative classroom activities — 10%. These percentages represent a literature-based analytical model rather than classroom test results.

DISCUSSION

The results suggest that literature-based English teaching can be highly effective in Indian colleges when literary texts are used as language resources rather than only as objects of literary history. This is consistent with Hişmanoğlu’s position that literature can support both language skills and language areas, including grammar and pronunciation.

For grammar teaching, literary elements help solve one of the common problems of college English instruction: the separation of grammar from communication. In many classrooms, grammar is taught through isolated rules and sentence-level exercises. However, literary texts allow students to observe how grammar works in real discourse. Tense, aspect, voice, modality, reported speech, and clause structure can be taught through narrative, dialogue, and description. This approach corresponds with Khatib, Rezaei, and Derakhshan’s argument that literature can be integrated into communicative and methodological models of language teaching.

For speaking instruction, literature provides content, emotion, situation, and audience. Indian college students often hesitate to speak English because they fear mistakes or lack ideas. Literary materials reduce this problem by giving them a role, a character, a scene, or a conflict. A student who cannot easily speak about an abstract topic may speak more confidently when asked to perform a dialogue, defend a character, or discuss a moral decision in a story. This supports Shermila’s emphasis on role-playing, brainstorming, word association, prediction, and situational scenes.

The article also supports a blended model of literature and language teaching. McKay’s warning about careful text selection remains important. Literary texts should not be too linguistically difficult, culturally remote, or excessively long for the learners’ level. For Indian colleges, short stories, one-act plays, selected poems, simplified drama extracts, contemporary Indian English texts, and culturally accessible global texts may be more useful than long canonical texts when the goal is grammar and speaking development.

The findings also show that literature-based pedagogy should not be limited to English literature departments. It can be used in general English, communicative English, professional communication, soft skills, and bridge courses.

Ravi's argument that literature provides authentic communicative situations is especially relevant for colleges where students need English for interviews, presentations, group discussions, and academic communication.

A practical classroom model may include the following sequence:

1. **Pre-reading speaking activity:** prediction from title, image, theme, or character list.
2. **Focused reading:** identification of grammar structures in context.
3. **Grammar noticing:** students underline tense forms, modals, reported speech, clauses, or connectors.
4. **Speaking transformation:** students convert the text into dialogue, interview, debate, or role-play.
5. **Pronunciation practice:** students read selected lines aloud with attention to stress and intonation.
6. **Reflective output:** students explain what grammar forms they used and how these forms affected meaning.

Such a model makes grammar communicative and makes speaking text-based, structured, and meaningful.

CONCLUSION

Literary elements can play a significant role in teaching English in Indian colleges, particularly in grammar and speaking instruction. Literature provides authentic contexts, meaningful situations, expressive language, cultural content, and opportunities for interaction. When used methodically, short stories, poems, drama extracts, dialogues, narrative passages, and character-based tasks can help students understand grammar as communication rather than as isolated rules.

The study shows that the strongest pedagogical functions of literary elements are speaking and oral fluency, grammar in context, vocabulary and idiom development, pronunciation and intonation, critical-cultural discussion, and creative classroom activities. These functions are especially relevant in Indian colleges where students need English for academic progress, professional communication, and social mobility.

The article concludes that literature-based English teaching should be integrated into college syllabi through task-based, communicative, and learner-centered activities. Future empirical research may test this model through classroom experiments, student performance assessment, oral fluency rubrics, grammar tests, and teacher interviews.

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