

THE ROLE OF ENGLISH LITERATURE IN HIGHER EDUCATION: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

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Abstract

The study of English literature is a vital component of higher education because it helps students to develop their critical thinking, cultural sensitivity, and communication skills. In addition to cultivating in students a mind that is both inquisitive and empathic, it provides them with the tools necessary to investigate human experiences that span both space and time. Despite this, the future of the area is being threatened by issues such as the diminishing passion of students, the prevalence of technical and professional programs, and the influence of digital media. At the same time, there are opportunities in the field of digital pedagogy, foreign curriculum that encompass a variety of perspectives and contemporary challenges, and multidisciplinary approaches. Bringing to light the scholarly, cultural, and social value of English literature, this study investigates the shifting role of English literature in higher education and sheds light on its significance. It also discusses the challenges that English literature faces in today's academic world as well as the potential solutions that may be implemented to overcome those challenges.

Key words: English, international language, HR institutes, entrepreneurship, immigration

Introduction

English literature has been a vital component of higher education ever since the beginning of time, particularly in schools that place an emphasis on the liberal arts and the humanities. Through the study of literary works, students strengthen their connection to language, imagination, and the human condition. This, in turn, leads to the development of interpretive skills that extend far beyond the constraints of the classroom learning environment. By reading literature, one can develop abilities such as empathy, cultural sensitivity, and the ability to think critically about identity, power, and representation. These are all qualities that can be achieved through reading. On the other hand, within the context of the 21st century, higher education is challenged with shifting goals. Due to the proliferation of subjects such as science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, as well as the focus placed on employability and education that is driven by the market, the humanities have been pushed to the background. This has resulted in the humanities being pushed to the background. When it comes to establishing their continuous relevance in an educational and professional environment that is experiencing rapid change, departments of English literature all around the world are having a tough time doing so. Literature continues to be an essential component in the process of

growing persons who are introspective, articulate, and ethically sensitive, despite the fact that these problems are there. This study's objective is to investigate the dual characteristics of English literature in higher education, including the obstacles that it faces and the opportunities that are currently emerging. Specifically, the study will focus on the opportunities that are currently emerging.

Because it meets the need for a more nuanced understanding of human nature, which is lacking in more quantitative sectors like science and commerce, higher education in the arts and literature is essential to our survival (Eagleton, 1996). This requires that we have a better grasp of human nature. Over the past few years, there has been a noticeable decrease in the number of students who choose to major in these subjects. The reason for this is that, as a result of the current economic climate, there are fewer prospects available to graduates who have degrees in English literature and associated humanitarian sciences. On the other hand, the development of globalization is responsible for the dominance of English as a worldwide language. According to Yano (2015), English is without a doubt the language of the world, regardless of whether one is discussing culture, industry, or science. Because of the developments that have been made, English literature can now be utilized in a broad variety of new field of work. According to Genc and Bada (2010), everyone who aspires to be a researcher needs to have high English language abilities in order to comprehend the complex terminology that is used to discuss scientific discoveries and papers.

Additionally, it is beneficial in the business sector, particularly for prospective business owners who need to be able to communicate in English in order to establish companies, launch advertising campaigns, and keep up with the ever-evolving conditions of the global market. The author Isphording (2015) makes the observation that in order for immigrants to thrive in the United States of America and other nations where there have been extraordinary waves of integration, they need to become proficient in the English language. Despite the fact that English literature and other humanitarian subjects are currently experiencing a shifting academic climate, this should not dissuade individuals who have a strong interest in these fields from pursuing them through further education. The only thing that is required is for them to accommodate themselves to a new and challenging market and put their skills to use through the appropriate channels.

The Academic Role of English Literature

Through the study of English literature, students are able to improve their analytical abilities, interpretive abilities, and language learning abilities, all of which are useful talents in higher education. Reading challenging books, analyzing them, and engaging in critical reflection on them are all necessary components of any appropriate literature education. Not only does this approach improve verbal proficiency, but it also contributes to increased cognitive flexibility and creativity.

Literary studies contribute to the development of interdisciplinarity further. Students are able to build a more well-rounded perspective through the act of reading fiction, poetry, and theater since it exposes them to a wide variety of historical periods, locations, and ideas. The topics of gender, social justice, and environmental concerns are addressed in feminist and ecological literature, for instance. Postcolonial literature, on the other hand, is responsible for initiating discourses about resistance, globalization, and

identity. Additionally, literature is an excellent medium through which diverse cultures can be discussed with other individuals. Students get the opportunity to develop an appreciation for the variety of international literature by reading works produced in English as a global language. This provides students with an introduction to a wide range of literary traditions, ranging from Dickens and Shakespeare to Chinua Achebe and Arundhati Roy. Therefore, an individual's capacity for empathy, moral imagination, and communication across cultural boundaries can be improved by the study of English literature.

Objectives of the Study

1. To analyze the academic and intellectual role of English literature in higher education.
2. To identify the major challenges faced by English literature programs in modern universities.

Research Method

This study examines English literature's changing role in higher education using qualitative descriptive methods. Globalization, technological advancement, and changing labor markets present literature programs with new problems and opportunities. Qualitative research can reveal trends, perspectives, and attitudes about English literature as an academic and professional area.

Trends in Humanitarian Enrollment

Undergraduates pursuing degrees in English literature and related creative disciplines have been falling at a consistent rate. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2017), the number of English students in the US has been steadily declining, going from around 54,000 in 2010-2011 to just under 43,000 in 2015-2016. The number of bachelors with English and literary degrees has increased at a rate not seen since the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s, and many people are speculating about what might be behind this trend.

The best case scenario is that more and more women are opting out of the conventional route of majoring in humanitarian studies. Between 2012 and 2014, the percentage of women majoring in humanitarian studies declined 8.7 percentage points, which is in line with the long-term trend of dropping enrollment and graduation rates (Jaschik, 2016). This, say other scholars, is because women are increasingly seeking degrees in STEM disciplines, which were traditionally held in high regard by men. Women make up 30% of STEM graduates in 2017, although they are underrepresented in STEM occupations as a whole, opting instead for careers in healthcare or academics (Noonan, 2017). The most popular bachelor's degree program, natural sciences, seen its percentage increase from around 12% in 2005 to nearly 18% at the end of 2014, as shown in Figure 1. After a temporary slump around 2005, the engineering industry is showing indications of improvement with the introduction of new majors and programs. Several scholars had postulated a STEM migration, and their results provide support for that theory.

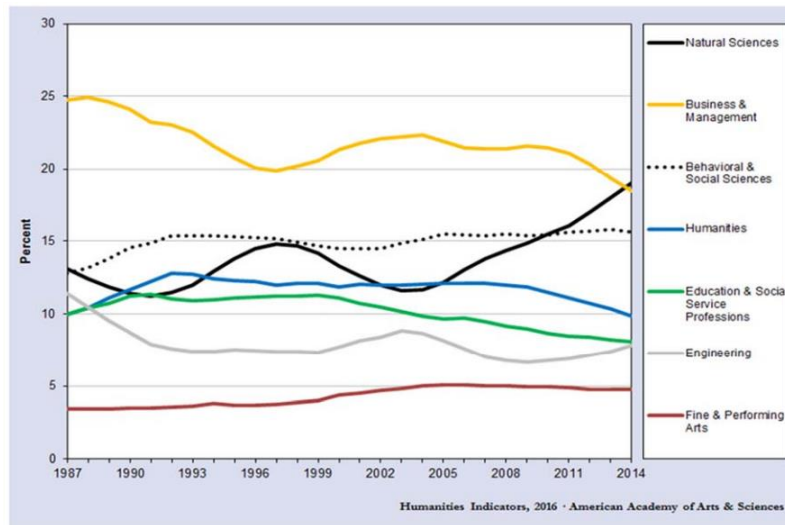


Fig. 1 Variation of percentage of bachelor degrees earned per major between 1987 and 2014 as cited from Jaschik (2016)

One school of thought holds that colleges and universities would rather prioritize science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) and business studies over humanitarian studies, and not a lack of interest on the part of students (Jaschik, 2016). Donations and contributions to STEM-focused colleges have increased dramatically due to the high economic potential of these fields. Instead of launching a history degree that would not bring in any money, a university would rather launch a technological department that could lead to a groundbreaking. For the first, a large donation to the university is more probable than for the second. The need for more financing has put tremendous pressure on academics to publish, particularly in the STEM fields, and while this tendency may not appear negative at first look, it has been increasingly apparent over the past few decades (Grimes et al., 2018).

"Publish or perish" is a term that was invented to describe the circumstance. The present trend of prioritizing quantity above quality has contributed to a surge in scientific misconduct, as highlighted by Pinto et al. (2008). In spite of the fact that most errors are really minor, fabrication, falsification, and plagiarism pose the greatest threat to the credibility of research (Sox & Rennie, 2006). Retraction rates as low as 0.02% annually across all disciplines are a clear sign that publishing pressure is lowering standards for all manuscripts, particularly those in the STEM fields (Van Noorden, 2011).

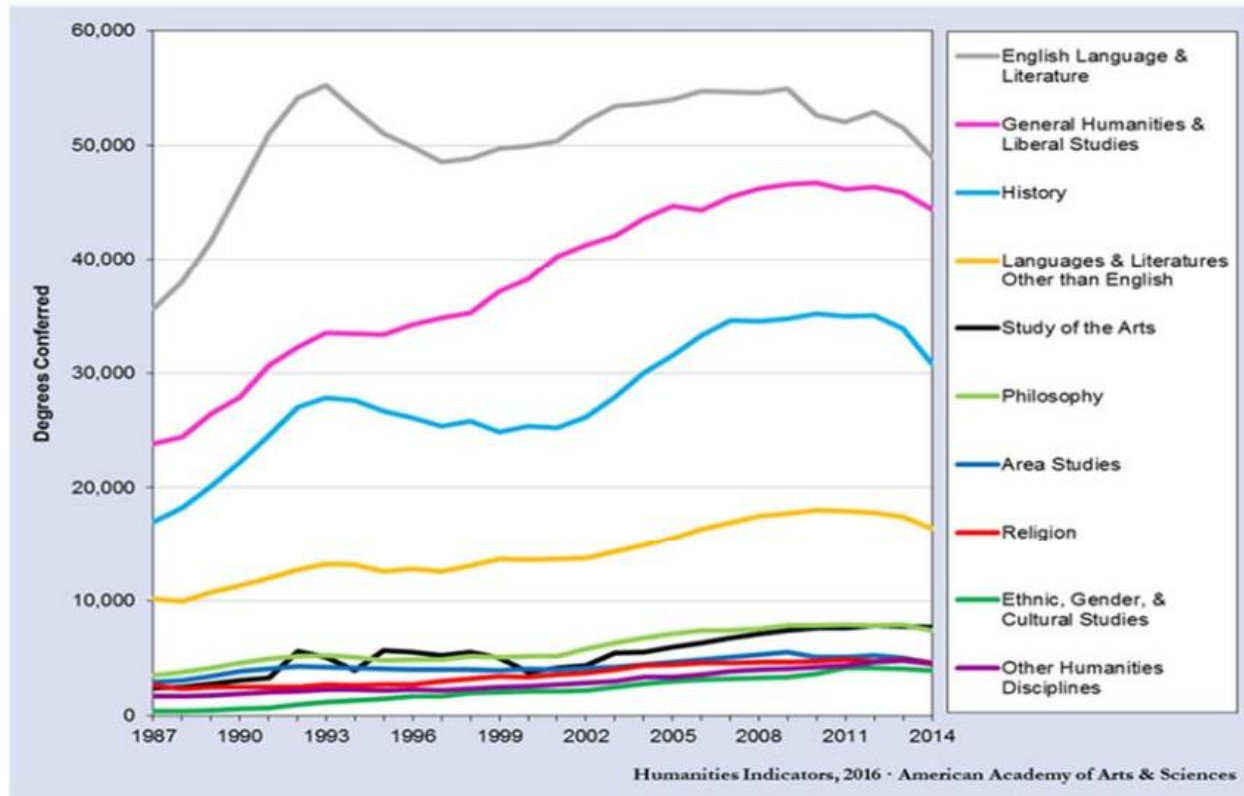


Figure 2 The variation of percentage of humanitarian degrees per major as cited by Jaschik (2016)

The considerable need for English language skills among the various occupations is clearly illustrated by Figure 2. There has been a consistent uptick in enrollment for other humanitarian studies programs, but it will be challenging to keep up the current level of enrollment without new offerings. With the right resources, English literature may be a successful field of study. Graduates and those thinking about entering the workforce today have many opportunities and incentives to choose from. In the chapters that follow, we'll talk about these benefits and possibilities.

Recognition of English as the International Language

English is the language that is considered to be the global language, and it is the language that practically all university majors are taught in, both in part and in its entirety (OECD, 2016). English has become the most popular and pervasive language in the world. The number of tertiary students, which are students who are enrolled in countries in which they do not have citizenship, has climbed substantially from 0.8 million in the 1970s to 4.6 million lately (OECD, 2017). This indicates that the world is getting even closer to one another in terms of education. These numbers are anticipated to rise, and English will emerge as a significant factor in this phenomenon. This is due to the fact that four out of the six major destinations of these students will be to countries that speak the English language, such as the United States of America, the United Kingdom, and Australia. This is also a recurrent problem in nations that do not have English as their major language, such as Germany, Turkey, the Republic of Korea, Japan, and other countries (Al Khalil, 2016).

As a result of the fact that students in these nations are taught English in addition to their own native languages, English is even included as a significant component of the curriculum even before students reach the tertiary education phase. As a result of these policies, many nations recognize English as the preeminent worldwide language. As a result, they aim to train their young people and provide them with an advantage that will help them succeed in their future academic endeavors. The Chinese government is one of the many countries that has come to the realization that the ability to communicate in English is an essential component of their success on a global basis.

Opportunities and Emerging Trends

English literature in higher education adapts to new academic and practical realities despite mounting hurdles. The field offers many chances for innovation, relevance, and interdisciplinary involvement that match 21st-century educational and career trends.

Interdisciplinary Integration:

The growing multidisciplinary nature of English literature instruction is encouraging. Literary studies can complement psychology, history, sociology, cultural studies, philosophy, communication, and media studies. This combination lets students understand literature as social behavior, historical events, and cultural beliefs as well as art. Literary psychology examines trauma, identity, and emotion in texts to connect literature and mental health. Students can better grasp human society by interpreting historical narratives through fiction in literature and history. Interdisciplinary programs open doors for literature graduates in journalism, cultural management, social research, and creative enterprises.

Digital Humanities:

Digital humanities have changed literature education. Large literary archives, interactive databases, and analytical tools make literature more accessible to students and academics online. Online literary databases, e-literature, and digital storytelling platforms help students study works outside of class. Learning and global intellectual exchange are promoted via online forums, digital annotation tools, and collaborative discussion platforms. These tools teach digital literacy and literary appreciation, boosting students' employability in content-driven areas including digital publishing, communication, and cultural preservation.

Cultural and Global Relevance:

English literature connects civilizations in a globalized world. It gives students the analytical and linguistic skills to communicate across cultures and understand varied human situations. English-language writings by Indian, African, and Caribbean authors address identity, postcolonialism, gender, and migration. International curriculum and cultural diplomacy depend on English literature's global relevance. It promotes empathy and global citizenship, which are crucial for modern leadership, diplomacy, and intercultural communication.

Skill Development:

Transferable abilities are a strength of English literature education. Students of literature learn critical thinking, analysis, creativity, communication, and emotional intelligence. These skills are essential for academic success and career success. Literature teaches sophisticated interpretation, diverse views, and clear, deep expression. Public relations, advertising, education, law, publishing, and HR require such skills. Employers want analytical and social abilities, which literary studies develops.

Innovative Pedagogy:

Contemporary English literature instruction uses new and modern pedagogical strategies to make learning more participatory and relevant. Films, plays, podcasts, and creative writing activities help students see literature as a live art form. Multimedia enhances comprehension and engagement by visualizing narrative structures, character development, and socio-cultural contexts. Students develop emotional connection, teamwork, and creativity through experiential learning approaches like literary workshops, dramatizations, and digital storytelling. This immersive and multimodal learning change boosts academic and personal progress.

Issues and Challenges in Modern English Literature

Even while public university EFL programs have access to cutting-edge resources, many feel that the present teaching methods and course materials fall short of expectations and might use some work, particularly in regards to providing more authentic curriculum options. Daily practise chances with literature-related assignments are said to be a certain way to boost EFL students' motivation and attitudes towards the development of necessary English abilities. Having the aforementioned soft skills, such digital literacy, creativity, and invention, is becoming increasingly crucial for young people to stay relevant as the world continues to adjust to the "new normal" brought about by the unique COVID-19 virus. The current job market is very competitive, so students in Nigeria will need to put in a lot of work to acquire those qualities. So, it's not enough to educate children English literature; they need to learn other skills as well. Having a highly effective teaching and learning process is crucial for students to acquire the required skills. But if they aren't learning enough, the high failure rate suggests they won't pick up the skills that English Literature is meant to teach.

When students take English Literature as a topic in school, they will learn a lot more than just how to read and summarize a work of literature. Being well-versed in the book's subject matter is insufficient. Students of literature require reading comprehension, critical thinking skills, and the capacity to engage in deep discussion about the texts they study if they are to attain a more advanced level of understanding. Someone may have to read a piece of literature several times before they finally get it. Reading the content over and again may help students retain more of the information. These kinds of insights could necessitate more questions, more explanations, or more contact with the course materials, classmates, or teacher.

Consequently, all Literature in English courses demand that students read the required works so that they can learn the material.

Conclusion

Course planners of English literature must include elementary content. English literature is significant since it gives originals or adaptations for whatever language competence level. Many books have easy plots, language, and vocabulary. Simple children's books, short stories, picture books, fables, and fairy tales are the most evident. They could motivate students and teachers and make learning more fun if included in the curriculum. Turkish English teachers' unpleasant experience teaching English literature should teach pupils that without a decent knowledge of English, they would never appreciate Shakespeare, Fitzgerald, Wilde, Blake, or Dickens. This deserves praise. Language development and learning difficulties can be similar, making diagnosis difficult. ESL students' natural language development defects may lead to learning issues and inappropriate special education placement. Normal second-language speech, grammar, and semantics problems may mirror monolingual English learners' learning impairments. They may trouble with word order, negation, metaphorical language, sound omission, replacement, and addition. Researchers observed language production similarities between normally functioning ESL learners and monolingual English speakers with learning disabilities. Students learning English as a second language cannot be assessed for learning issues using the same criteria as monolingual students. One need comprehends language development, second language acquisition, and local culture and language to assess ESL pupils for learning obstacles.

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