

Teaching English Literature and the ICT

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Abstract: We live in the world of multimedia and Information technology and the internet offers a plethora of information that is available easily to everyone. Today, the notion of “Teaching is an art” is challenged. The teachers enter in the classroom where all students are well equipped with internet on mobile that gives instant information on any topic. In such milieu, teaching language and literature demands the teacher to be creative and resourceful. Moreover, teaching a second language or foreign language and its literature to the learner who has less exposure to the cultural and linguistic dimension of that language makes it a tight rope for the teacher to walk on. However, teachers today are fortunate with the advanced technology and multimedia and are at advantage with an access to these information and communication technology, popularly called ICT. The paper illustrates how teaching of literature, teaching of all major forms of literature: Poetry, Drama and Fiction, can be made more effective and enjoyable with the use of Information and Communication Technology. The paper also explores the possible new interpretation and understanding of the given text in a context with the new available technology and with all the information it offers the teachers. The paper is written with an assumption that teachers are computer literate to avail of the ICT. However, the paper does not claim that ICT is a substitute for a human teacher but, asserts that ICT can give more insight into the text and open the spectrum of perspectives and makes teaching literature a more fulfilling activity.

Key words: Technology, Teaching, Literature, Pleasure, Productive, Resourceful

The teaching of literature today has become more effective and innovative with the avenues that the ICT offers. The ICT has brought a whole new technology in the classroom and not only has it made teaching effective and productive but, it has also made teaching an enjoyable exercise for both learner and teacher. The word productive is used to convey that it guarantees “constructivist nature of learning and the collaborative nature of teaching” (Choi and Yeom, 1996; Marton, 1994). Because ICT material involves or allows an interaction, it is assumed that learning will be its product.

The ICT, i.e. the “Information and Communication Technology (ICT) includes radio and television, as well as newer digital computers and the internet.” (Kavita Chauhan, 2011: 129) ICT encompasses internet and its services and email and brings the whole world at one’s finger tips. “The internet carries a vast array of information resources and services, most notably the interlinked hypertext document of the *World Wide Web (www)* and infrastructure to support email. World Wide Web browser software, such as internet explorer, Firefox, Opera, Apple Safari, and Google Chrome let users navigate from one web page to another via hyperlinks embedded in the documents. These documents may also contain any combination of computer data, including graphics, sounds, text, video, multimedia, and interactive content including games, office applications and scientific demonstrations.” (Ashok Singh Rao, 2011: 83-85)

Another aspect of the ICT is Data Transfer. “File sharing is an example of transferring large amounts of data across the internet.” (Ashok Singh Rao, 2011: 83-85) The rapid advances in ICT create new effects such as strong information, retrieving information, handling, distributing and utilizing information.

Another crucial feature of the ICT is that it is user friendly though some research on the use of ICT shows the anxiety of teachers using the computer and the internet. The extraction of the information is easy. “Through keyword driven Internet research using search engines like Yahoo and Google, users worldwide have easy, instant access to vast and diverse amount of online information. Compared to printed encyclopedias and traditional libraries, the World Wide Web has enabled the decentralization of information.” (Ashok Singh Rao, 2011: 92)

The part of “Technology” in ICT conveys, “In English, technology includes cameras, audio equipment, computer technology, video equipment, overhead projection devices, scanners, printers, CD equipment – almost any device that can access, present manipulate and communicate words, sounds and images to enable us to create meaning.” (Ashok Singh Rao, 2011: 92). So the ICT offers teachers an array of technology to make the optimum use to create meaning in the literature classes. Because, literature is open for the interpretation and every experience enables to have a new insight into the text.

Today, the use of ICT in general and its services in particular has become the need of the hour. The question arises as “In what way the use of ICT is relevant?” The answer is: there are two kinds of reasons for using computer technology in English. First there are benefits to teachers and students from including computer technology in any learning area. Firstly, for teachers, computer technology can:

- a) Allow for the easy production, storage and retrieval of prepared materials such as certificates and work required sheets. This has overcome the tradition method of carrying the dog-eared notes with no addition to it over the years.
- b) Free up communication with other teachers.
- c) Help teachers to find information easily. The texts which are out of print or yet to be printed or not easily available in the printed form can be obtained online. The critical appreciation of the text and the related articles on the internet are available. At times the interpretation of the text is posted online and allowed to post online that gives an insight into the text from a different perspective.
- d) Assist good teaching and replace it.

Secondly, there are the challenges and opportunities presented by computer technology that makes it an increasingly important part of English in Particular. They Include:

- a) The emergence of new kinds of texts and consequent need to teach students to create and use these texts effectively.
- b) Changing social practices associated with communicating via computers and consequent need to teach students how to make judgments about appropriate use of different avenues of communication.
- c) The pervasiveness and power of texts created through computer technology and the consequent need to teach students to be critical readers and viewers of such texts.

With considering the whole lot of technology available for the retrieval of the information at the fingertips within an instant, which is just a screen away it becomes essential for teachers to be computer literate. The definition of computer literacy centers on a few competencies or abilities, identifiable as “open” behaviors. (Bradley, 1996; Reid, 1997; Stein, Creig and Scollary, 1997) as quoted by Ashok Singh Rao. The characteristics are the following:

- a) The individual knows how to use word processing software, an email and a browser for internet navigation.
- b) The individual is capable of registering or of downloading information on a diskette (or some other external saving unit) so as to recuperate and print it elsewhere.

- c) To these behavioral “competencies” Stein, Craig and Scollary (1997) add a *cognitive dimension*, one that is also recognized by the Australian National Board for Employment, Education and Training (NBEET, 1995): the ability to use ICTs to identify and search efficiently for specific information in order to build knowledge and develop critical and creative thinking.

The Role of ICT in Teaching Literature

“An ancient Chinese proverb states that one picture is worth a thousand words. Pictures and other visual aids: maps, slides, films, graphs, models, certainly do make an impact, though they seldom replace word altogether.” (Ellison John Kahn, 1991: 509) The visual aids enable speaker to communicate information more quickly, and listeners to absorb it more readily. A simple formula emerges.

Reviews of a range of studies on the effects of ICT on students' motivation, conducted by Cox, have identified a number of specific motivational aspects, including *enhanced commitment to the learning task, enhanced enjoyment and interest, increased self esteem and increases in independence and confidence* (Cox, 1997; 1999). ICT material allows or involves an interaction; it is assumed that learning will be its product. Thus this material guarantees the *constructivist nature of learning* and the *collaborative dimension of teaching*. (Choi and Yeom, 1996; Marton, 1994).

The use of ICT becomes valuable if it allows the learner to develop key skills in understanding and interpreting literature. The ICT enables in the words of D. Greenwood as quoted by Claudiu Margan, the “*kinesthetic learning*” which ‘enables the use of a much greater range of effects; the use of varying type fonts, wide use of colour, the addition of sound and graphics, and kinetic effects for example. The potential of such effects has been shown to have a highly motivating effect on students especially those who are likely to think in terms of *spatial rather than verbal models*. (Bridley S. etal 2007) A plot overview or a character description on websites such as *sparknotes, Cliffsnotes, Enotes, or wikipedia* give students the easy way out when they are faced with a literary topic so they do not seem to help that much. There are, however, resources which can prove highly interesting and motivating for students.

The type of learning mentioned above, the *kinesthetic learning*, draws the teacher’s attention to the importance of the visual element in motivating students to become involved in the study of literature. VLEs (Virtual Learning Environments) can also present themselves as online discussions on a literary topic, set up or moderated by the teacher. Starting with secondary education, Nettelbeck points out, online discussions allow students to formulate and reformulate their ideas in response to literary

texts and to share them with their fellow students. There are other advantages as well, such as:

- online discussions are a valid pedagogical tool in respect of the text response outcomes;
- online discussions are successful in encouraging students to 'engage in a reflective activity with someone outside of their normal social groups;
- online discussions not only provide students with an additional mode in text response, but also make available to some students a preferred mode of expression. (Nettelbeck, D. 2000: 137)

Coming to terms with the digital era can be a difficult task for English teachers, but it is a challenge that they have to face in order to keep up with the times and manage to provide motivation and necessary skills to their students. So it is essential to make use of eBooks, Audio Books on MP3 files, online publication, Digital text or Cyber-texts an umbrella term for different types of digital text such as hypertexts, Kinetic texts, generated texts, texts employing agent technologies and so on.

One of the best ways to encourage curiosity among students regarding a certain literary topic is to introduce them to what methodologists call a **Virtual Learning Environment** (VLE). VLEs can be those websites which are designed like spider webs, very well organized and once you enter such an environment you cannot leave it without having learnt something. Examples of such VLEs are the **Victorian Web** and the **Romantic Circles**, which provide thousands of links and references to an enormous quantity of resources, from the e-texts of almost any literary production of the period to detailed descriptions of the social, political, historical and economic context, with cross-references to major literary works. VLEs do not actually save effort on the part of the student but extend possibilities of going beyond the traditional classroom setting. Such an approach places the student at the centre of learning and activates what D. Greenwood calls 'kinesthetic learning',

Teaching Shakespeare with the use of ICT, and teaching literature in general with ICT, is often restricted to the e-text of the literary work discussed. The interaction between literatures and the computer has to deal with texts, but especially with those characteristics which are emphasised by ICT: software, audio and video content and so on. In the following section, some ideas of making Shakespearean drama more appealing to students are provided.

The first thing to do is to browse the Internet for videos of plays or film adaptations on *youtube* or similar websites. Hundreds of play scenes are just a click away and watching such a video seems to be far more motivating for students. Websites such as the one hosted by the *Royal Shakespeare Company*

represent a gold mine for English teachers who want to spice up their lessons with extracts of plays, interviews with actors and directors, etc. It would be a good idea to have the students watch an extract from a play such as Francesca Annis's interpretation of Lady Macbeth's soliloquy in Roman Polanski's movie (movie available at http://www.metacafe.com/watch/626360/the_soliloquy_of_lady_macbeth/) and follow the text of the play in a separate window.

Better yet, one of the most extraordinary Internet resources on Shakespeare on the Internet is an interactive reading of Shakespearean text by Sir Ian McKellen. The actor reads and explains, for instance, the opening soliloquy of Richard III, the students being free to start with the line of their choice. Furthermore, the actor answers a number of questions that students can choose from a menu. The menu also includes a selection of different interpretations of the opening soliloquy in the 1952 film featuring Laurence Olivier, in the 2006 play featuring Conrad Nelson or in the 1995 film featuring Ian McKellen himself.

Applications such as *Google Earth* feature an itinerary function which allows the user to create a virtual trip through different locations, a trip that includes information on each different location and links to further information. This function can prove highly motivating for students when it comes to the study of literary settings. For teachers with limited computer skills, who find it too difficult to create their own literary trip, there is some good news: at www.googlelitrips.org you can download ready-made literary trips such as one on *Macbeth* that can be loaded and run by *Google Earth*.

There are resources for children as well: at <http://librivox.org/tales-from-shakespeare-bycharles-and-mary-lamb/>, teachers can find audio books of the most important Shakespearean plays, retold for children by Charles and Mary Lamb. The imagination of software engineers has produced even computer games, such as *The Seven Noble Kinsmen – A Shakespeare Murder Mystery*, where users have to complete a mystery game, learning loads of details about Shakespeare's period and his work (available at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/drama/shakespeare/>).

For poetry, PoetryArchive@emule.com contains over 5,200 poems by more than 150 authors including 130 classical poets with 5,048 classical poems. University of Reading has E-Resources for E-Books, journals: journal articles for online dictionaries, encyclopedias and other reference sources. Oxford Brooks University has link to all studies in English.

For novels, the links such as www.englishnovels.net/, www.modernlibrary.com/top-100/100-best-novels/, www.friendswood.lib.tx.us/bookinfo/frpubtop150.h

www.fiction.eserver.org, www.friendswood.lib.tx.us/bookinfo/frpubtop150.htm and www.goodreads.com/shelf/show/english-novels are quite useful and the Wikipedia free encyclopedia on www.wikipedia.org also useful for all the information on the text, history, biography, allusions, analysis and study of the novels and writers. BBC has adopted many popular novels and they have DVDs of these novels for screening and for personal collection or for libraries. The use television is quite useful for the screening of movies that are adaptation of classical novels or those prescribed in the syllabus. BBC adaptations are the best as they capture every event and every detail of the novel. In India, the Indian industry has adopted many classical novels and plays and has made movies giving an Indian version of these texts in an Indian context offer another perspective on the text and provides a new dimension. However, these adaptation do not lose the soul and the spirit of the original texts.

Gregory Ulmer, a professor in the Department of English at the [University of Florida \(Gainesville\)](http://www.universityofflorida.edu) and a professor of Electronic Languages and Cybermedia at the [European Graduate School in Saas-Fee, Switzerland](http://www.eurograduateschool.com) has coined a term *electracy*, (i.e. electronic or computer literacy). Ulmer predicts that, in the future, there will be four types of people: those well equipped with both literacy and electracy skills, those doing better in the world of literacy, those doing better in the world of electracy and those left out of both worlds.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the use of ICT is a very powerful assistance in teaching English, so it plays a vital role in teaching literature in particular. Only word of caution is the sifting and gleaning of the tremendous information available on the internet. There comes the human brain and logical and cognitive skills and above all the wisdom of the teacher with his or her intelligence. It has become obligatory for the teachers to upgrade with the latest happenings in the pedagogy and it has become equally absolute necessity for teachers to be updated with the latest technology to keep abreast of the students. Ignoring the role of ICT in teaching may leave behind the teacher as the vast source of information is very easily available to students as well. So the difference is in approach to the information and the experience and wisdom of the teachers should assist the student in making a judicious and appropriate use of the information.

The days of teaching literature based on the literary text alone are coming to an end. It is true that teaching literature in the contemporary world, dominated by multimedia, is becoming more and more complicated for English teachers. We feel, however, that ICT resources may be the answer to the challenge teachers have to face in order to involve and motivate their students in their literary studies.

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