AD EDUXIAN JOURNAL
A Quarterly Multidisciplinary Blind Peer Reviewed & Refereed Online International Journal
Google Scholar Indexing PIF: 1.048(I2OR), 3.125 (IIFS) & 3.8(SJIF)
Vol (3), Issue (2), April-June 2026 ISSN: 3048-7951

Contemporary Pedagogy in English Literature: Traditional Practices, Challenges, And Pedagogical Innovation In Teaching Of Drama

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DOI: http://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.23863867

Review: 31/06/2026 Acceptance: 09/07/2026 Publication: 31/07/2026

Abstract

This paper examines traditional practices, major challenges, and innovative approaches in the pedagogy of English literature, with particular attention to genre awareness and student-centred learning. It discusses literature's recreational, recognitional, redemptive, and revelatory functions and considers how theme-only explanations, static character analysis, and teacher-centred instruction can limit literary appreciation. Using a review-based approach and examples from short fiction, the paper proposes genre-sensitive reading, creative writing, film adaptation, dialogue, and classroom performance as ways to deepen engagement. The example of R. K. Narayan's "An Astrologer's Day" illustrates how performance-based activities can help learners explore irony, subtext, and moral ambiguity.

Keywords: English literature pedagogy, innovative pedagogy, genre-based teaching, student-centred learning, short fiction, drama and performance.

1. Introduction

Literature plays an important role in shaping culture, language, imagination, and social understanding. Different literary genres—including poetry, drama, short stories, and novels—have distinctive structures and purposes, and each requires suitable teaching strategies. Short fiction, for example, often uses a focused incident, a compact narrative structure, and a limited cast of characters to explore complex human and social concerns. When teaching relies only on summaries or memorisation, students may miss the genre's artistic qualities and opportunities for interpretation. Contemporary pedagogy therefore needs to move beyond fixed, teacher-dominated routines and create space for inquiry, discussion, performance, and creative response.

2. The Nature and Functions of Literature

Literature is a meaningful use of language that can offer aesthetic pleasure, insight, and critical self-reflection. The source text identifies four functions, described as the "4Rs of Literature":

1. **Recreation:** Reconstructing and experiencing realities beyond ordinary experience.
2. **Recognition:** Recognising individuals, diverse human conditions, and social contributions.
3. **Redemption:** Encouraging reflection on and possible change in human behaviour through empathy.
4. **Revelation:** Recording history and illuminating past, present, and possible future realities.

2. Need and Significance of Literature Pedagogy

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The pedagogy of literature is as important as the pedagogy of language. Traditional methods continue to be used in many classrooms, and students may not always be supported in recognising the distinctive features of individual genres. A purposeful approach should help learners understand not only what a literary text says, but also how its form, language, structure, characters, and context create meaning. This need is especially significant in contemporary classrooms, where learners benefit from active participation and opportunities to connect literary study with their own experiences.

3. Objectives, Scope, and Research Question

3.1 Objective

To study existing practices, major challenges, and innovative approaches in the pedagogy of English literature, with particular reference to drama and related classroom performance.

3.2 Scope of the Study

The paper reviews traditional practices in the teaching of English literature and considers ways to make classroom pedagogy more effective and functional. The source material refers to poetry, drama, short stories, and novels, while much of its detailed discussion and illustrative material focuses on short fiction.

3.3 Research Question

What existing practices, major challenges, and innovative approaches characterise the teaching of English literature, particularly in relation to genre awareness and drama-based classroom activities?

4. Research Methodology

The paper adopts a review-based and analytical approach. It draws on the literature and examples identified in the source document and considers teaching practices across poetry, drama, short stories, and novels. The discussion is organised around existing classroom practices, pedagogical challenges, and possible innovations. The example of R. K. Narayan's "An Astrologer's Day" is used to illustrate how a short story can be adapted into a dramatic classroom activity. No primary data collection or statistical analysis is reported in the source material.

5. Traditional Practices: Limitations and Alternatives

The source document identifies several conventional approaches that may narrow students' engagement with literary texts. These include concentrating on the theme in isolation, overemphasising character descriptions, presenting the author's philosophy as the only valid interpretation, and positioning the teacher as the sole authority. A more innovative approach relates themes and characters to genre, social conditions, structural irony, and students' own interpretations.

5.1. Traditional and Innovative Approaches: A Comparison

Pedagogical Vector	Traditional Approach (Limitations)	Innovative Approach (Benefits)
Thematic Focus	Explains unadulterated themes in isolation, often boring advanced students.	Explores theme as part of genre specificity (e.g., distinguishing parables from fables or urban legends).

Pedagogical Vector	Traditional Approach (Limitations)	Innovative Approach (Benefits)
Character Analysis	Over-focuses on static character profiles despite limited growth potential in short prose.	Analyzes characters in relation to social conditions, structural irony, and archetypal design.
Authorial Philosophy	Imposes the author's personal ideology, blocking direct reader-text appreciation.	Encourages student-centered evaluation of hidden realities and subjective interpretation.
Classroom Dynamics	Teacher-centered: The instructor acts as an absolute authority; students passively memorize.	Student-centered: Students occupy the center stage through dialogue, performance, and creative tasks.

6. Major Challenges in Teaching Literature

6.1 Teaching a Genre Without Exploring Its Distinctive Features

Stories are deeply rooted in social life and oral traditions. However, teaching a short story involves more than reading or summarising it. Students need opportunities to identify genre features, narrative structure, point of view, and the ways a text differs from other forms of storytelling. Genre-sensitive teaching can also help learners understand how stories are constructed.

6.2 Developing Appreciation of Literary Artistry

A major challenge is encouraging students to read closely and appreciate the artistic qualities of a literary text. Attention to language, imagery, narrative choices, tone, and structure can help students move beyond plot recall towards aesthetic and critical understanding.

6.3 Moving Beyond Teacher-Centred Instruction

When teachers dominate classroom interpretation, students may become passive recipients of explanations. Literary appreciation is strengthened when learners participate actively, ask questions, compare interpretations, and support their views with textual evidence. Student-centred teaching should therefore be an important principle of literature pedagogy.

7. Innovative Practices in Literature Pedagogy

7.1 Building Genre Awareness

Teachers can help students identify the nature and purpose of each literary genre. Learners may compare narrative forms, examine how structure shapes meaning, and discuss why a particular text works as a short story, play, poem, or novel.

7.2 Placing Students at the Centre of Learning

Students should have opportunities for self-discovery, questioning, collaborative discussion, and independent interpretation. The teacher's role shifts from providing a single explanation to facilitating exploration and helping students develop reasoned readings of texts.

7.3 Encouraging Creative Writing

Inviting students to write their own short narratives can help them understand the choices and difficulties involved in constructing a story. Such activities can develop imagination, language use, narrative organisation, and a deeper appreciation of literary craft.

7.4 Selecting Texts for Their Educational Value

The selection of literary texts should take account of instructional value, accessibility, relevance, and opportunities for discussion. Appropriate text selection can support both literary appreciation and the development of critical thinking.

7.5 Using Film Adaptations and Performance

Where suitable adaptations are available, film can help learners visualise a narrative and compare the choices made in written and visual forms. Drama-based activities—such as role-play, script adaptation, dialogue writing, and performance—can encourage students to explore character motivation, subtext, conflict, and interpretation.

8. Illustrative Example: R. K. Narayan's "An Astrologer's Day"

In "An Astrologer's Day," an astrologer who relies on observation and calculated guesses encounters Guru Nayak, a man connected to a violent incident in the astrologer's past. The encounter creates tension and reveals the story's irony and moral ambiguity.

Traditional limitation: A lesson limited to plot recitation or copied character descriptions may overlook the text's irony and ethical complexity.

Innovative intervention: The teacher can guide students to examine the narrator's presentation, the protagonist's choices, and the moral ambiguity of the encounter.

Classroom activity: Students can work in groups to adapt the confrontation into a short dramatic script, write dialogue in an appropriate local context, and perform the scene. They can then discuss how performance choices communicate subtext and tension.

9. Conclusion

Effective literature pedagogy should combine close reading with active and creative participation. The practices discussed in this paper suggest that an exclusive focus on themes, character summaries, or teacher-led explanations may restrict students' opportunities to appreciate literary form and develop independent interpretations. Genre awareness, creative writing, film comparison, discussion, role-play, and performance offer practical ways to deepen engagement. The example of "An Astrologer's Day" demonstrates how a narrative can become a collaborative dramatic activity through which students investigate irony, conflict, and moral ambiguity. Teachers should select methods suited to the text and learning objectives.

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