



Intersection of Critical Pedagogy and Digital Humanities: Significance in Teaching English Language and Literature

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Abstract

Critical pedagogy and digital humanities are changing English language and literature teaching. Critical pedagogy helps students think independently and question social and normative ideas. Digital humanities use technology to improve access, collaboration, and analysis. The study explores in what manner students move from passive learning to active participation through digital tools. It looks at digital storytelling, multimedia projects, and interactive lessons. Teachers actually play a key role in guiding students and shaping discussions. This study also examines challenges like digital literacy gaps and ethical concerns. With the right approach, digital resources can prepare students for academic and professional accomplishment. This combination modernizes or contemporizes education, helping learners develop critical thinking, creativity, and adaptability in a digital world.

Keywords: active learning, autopoiesis, critical pedagogy, digital humanities, interdisciplinary studies, literary analysis, digital storytelling, collaborative education, technology in literature, digital literacy, experiential learning, educational transformation, textual interpretation, ethical considerations, skill development, academic engagement

Introduction

The synthesis of critical pedagogy and digital humanities offers a transformative approach to teaching English language and literature. Critical pedagogy encourages student's empowerment, social engagement, and the questioning of established norms. Whereas, digital humanities integrate technology to enhance textual analysis and accessibility. This interaction equips educators with innovative tools for inclusive and dynamic literary studies. It moves beyond traditional "print-based methods", incorporating digital annotation, computational analysis, and visual mapping. Students actively engage with texts by collaborating on digital projects, exploring archives, and creating multimedia interpretations. This argument is stabilized with N.S. Prabhu's argument, he says,

"... view is that a teaching method is a form of scientific theory or scientific claim to truth in

the matter of how languages are learnt by human beings..." (2019, pg.235).

He argues that no teaching method is universal, this idea aligns with the tenets of critical pedagogy of Paulo Freire. Freire throughout his academic journey has only emphasized on learners' progress, and development of their critical consciousness. The learner's role evolves from passive absorption to active participation. Digital storytelling, interactive simulations, and multimodal composition enable students to construct meaningful narratives. This approach enriches literature by integrating historical, political, and global perspectives. By combining critical pedagogy with digital humanities, educators foster critical thinking and interdisciplinary connections. The classroom transforms into an interactive space where students analyse texts, challenge societal structures, and leverage digital tools for deeper engagement. This



method modernizes English language and literature education, preparing learners for contemporary discourse in an increasingly digital world.

Redefining the Learner's Role in the Digital Age

Education has shifted dramatically in the digital age, transforming learners into active participants rather than passive recipients. "One central feature is that the elements of the language curriculum should relate to this issue of the student's life and the things in their life that are problematic" (Ortega, 2012.pg. 02). Ortega's arguments are appreciable, as traditional models emphasized memorization and structured lessons, but digital advancements have encouraged independent exploration, collaboration, and creative engagement. Students now interact with literature and language dynamically, utilizing technology to shape their understanding. Self-directed learning has become a defining feature of modern education. Digital platforms provide access to a vast array of resources, allowing students to tailor their studies to personal interests and pace. Instead of relying solely on textbooks, learners analyse texts using digital annotations, visual mapping, and interactive storytelling. These tools encourage critical thinking, enabling students to form unique interpretations of literature rather than simply absorbing established analyses.

Collaboration is Another Key Transformation

Digital spaces connect learners beyond geographical limitations, fostering discussions with diverse perspectives. Online forums, virtual classrooms, and shared research platforms encourage students to exchange ideas, co-create content, and engage in meaningful dialogues. This interconnected approach broadens perspectives, ensuring literature is studied in relation to social, cultural, and historical contexts. Technology also empowers students to become creators rather than consumers of knowledge. Digital storytelling, multimedia compositions, and interactive simulations allow learners to craft narratives that reflect their own experiences and interpretations. Instead of merely studying texts, they participate in shaping discourse, contributing original insights and creative interpretations. However, this is quite a complex task before a teacher. B.S. Jadhav argues that:

"The most important challenge for a teacher is that she should try to hold the interest of the learners. If the text fails to interest them, the teacher should explore new ideas and incorporate them into her repertoire" (2011. pg.66).

Teachers must adapt their methods and help students develop digital literacy skills. However, not all students have equal access to digital tools, creating digital literacy gaps that need to be addressed. Digital literacy is now an essential skill, preparing students for a world where information is constantly evolving. Despite these advancements, challenges remain. Access to digital resources is not universal, creating disparities in learning opportunities. Some students struggle with digital literacy, requiring guidance to navigate technological tools effectively. Ethical considerations surrounding data privacy and responsible technology use must also be addressed to ensure safe and equitable learning environments. As education continues to evolve, learners will play an increasingly active role in shaping their academic journeys. By embracing digital tools responsibly, they develop analytical, creative, and collaborative skills essential for the modern world. The digital age is not merely changing the way knowledge is consumed; it is redefining by what means learners engage with and contribute to it.

Wider Expansion of the Study

Transformative impact of critical pedagogy in teaching English language and literature in the age of digital humanities is undeniable. Digital humanities and critical pedagogy are interconnected because digitalization of humanities books have enabled in accessing the required study material which were once scarcely available in libraries. Now students have access to different books that they like to read. By reading books that are available in free or paid digital libraries like Internet-Archives, WeLib, Zlibrary, Obooko, Scribd, Tenorshare, PDF Drive, Genealogybank, or public digital libraries like INFLIBNET have enabled access to lakhs of books in science, humanities and social sciences they can enrich their knowledge and aptitude. The recent progress in digital humanities has contributed for critical and novel evolution of humanities. Three decades ago, for instance, access to classical texts in literature remained scarce, students should either depend upon their teachers or few specimens-copies



available at central libraries of universities for information. Even though print media has grown in faster phase, it does not provide access to all the books because some books are either expensive or non-availability of manuscripts to bring them to print version. This is also true because preserved manuscripts or classical texts cannot be brought to print version because of their chemical treatment which demands watchful handling of them.

But, twenty first century has paved way for rapid evolution of digital technology, which has led to digitization of available manuscripts and classical texts to digitalize and make them available to readers across the world. Digital libraries have given access to billions of books accessible to students of humanities at present. Now students can get access to classical texts that are scarcely available in their university libraries, just by subscribing to some of the above-mentioned digital libraries. However, digital humanities are not about free or subscribed access to available books on digital libraries, it stops with access to resources and books. Here comes the significant role of critical pedagogy. Digital humanities also create autopoiesis amongst learners. Ian Buchanan says that this process comprises self-involvement in critical theory. The same idea can be probably applied here in collaborative education of critical pedagogy and digital humanities. In pertinency, learners develop self-creation or self-organizations through collaboration of the both.

Developing Critical Consciousness through Digital Humanities

Digital humanities and critical pedagogy are indispensable in present trends of teaching English Language and Literature. The critical pedagogy as discussed previously aims at rising critical consciousness in learners. Developing critical consciousness or aptitude happens with philosophical teaching of any subject. Philosophy is nothing but teaching the essential and historical knowledge of particular subject and provide freedom to develop their personal observations. This process requires even teachers to be advanced in the concept that they teach, for which they must read themselves first. Once the teacher has read, he or she must instruct the students to refer to historical aspects of that particular concept. For example, teaching the novels of Charles Dickens has their reference to the social,

economic and political history of England. Similarly, William Shakespeare's plays are not mere theatrical or entertainment art, relatively they speak about the society, people and culture of Shakespeare's time. Before teaching these texts, teacher must invoke students or learners to refer to the cultural, economic, social and political history of England, without which if the teacher teaches these texts, then this will serve the specific purpose of passing examinations only. This process of study of a text is called New Historicism in literary and critical theories.

New Historicism essentially accentuates on referring to historical developments of a text. Thus, referring historical past of a text requires availability of resources and books, students can be guided by teachers to refer to digital libraires. Digital libraries not only provide required books to the seekers but also related or integrated resources through hyper-links. Hyper-links further help students to explore deeper research of their related subjects and come out with new understandings. These new understandings and findings are crucial for students to develop their critical consciousness. In teaching methodology, the procedure is called developing "referential skills" of learners, this is probably known as "instructional materials". These instructional materials like digital humanities will definitely arouse curiosity and critical consciousness in learners by serving the objectives of critical pedagogy.

But, selection of instructional materials again depends on the different stages learning. "What needs to be done by the educational experts is prescribing different levels of linguistics achievement for different periods of study of English" (Ramabhadracharyulu and Sarojin, 2013, pg. 13). This statement suggests that educational experts should define specific linguistic achievement levels for different stages of English learning. This structured approach ensures that students progressively develop their language skills, moving from basic proficiency to advanced comprehension over time. Still, Instructional materials are stressed at primary and secondary school learning but university education does not directly speak about this. Hence, digital humanities shall be considered as the significant instructional material in Teaching English Language and Literature at universities to fulfil the constitutional goals of imbibing the spirit of inquiry and rational or critical thinking. However,



teacher's role is also undeniable in making this process successful.

Teacher's Role in Developing Critical Pedagogy through Digital Humanities

Teachers as the society and community builders must understand their role in moulding and chiselling the personality of students. Critical pedagogy as a dialogic process of teaching and learning approach involves both teacher and student as co-creator of knowledge. Knowledge is not linear process of transaction; it is a dialogic or two-way transaction. Dialogism as a method of learning helps in developing conscious debates and deliberations of a text or a subject in the classrooms. Debates, arguments and deliberations assist students or learners to discuss social, cultural, political and economic issues related to their texts. The hyper textuality on the other hand, prompt them to relate the current societal issues with historical past and come out with solutions to these rising issues. This not only create critical consciousness but also social and political concern about their society. Davis and others also argue on the same lines, stating that:

“Digital pedagogy also includes transparency of teaching practice, even when that practice does not work out, as the keyword “Failure” highlights” (Davis. et, al. 2020)

They highlight the preparedness of the teacher to adopt the practice even if it fails. Preparedness of a teacher is important in this process, As Freire says a teacher should not be an egoist, who refuses to learn from his or her students. If this dialogic learning process has to be successful then teachers should keep away their egos, an egoistic person can never help himself or others to progress. Paulo Freire and Giroux suggest for teachers' preparedness to learn from their students and modify the pedagogy according to their needs. Moreover, curriculum is not about incorporating whatever a teacher is comfortable to teach with. Moderately, it is about what a learner can explore for himself or herself by learning a particular text. On the other hand, curriculum has to relate the text with practical life of a student, it should enable him or her to come out with their real-life experiences. This is also called as “experiential learning” in teaching methodology or pedagogy. So, pedagogy should help learners in developing experiential learning through the texts or

concepts they learn, for which teachers must show their inclination to reform curriculum and pedagogy. Experiential learning or experience-based learning can help students to develop their emotional, intelligent and social quotients. In turn, this moulds an individual into a critical thinking intellectual being. Intellects are of two types one is pseudo and other one is intrinsic. Pseudo intellectuality is developed by blindly following or believing what others say; whereas, intrinsic or natural intellectuality develops gradually by thinking and questioning about what is learnt. An individual's personal experiences must relate to what one learns, they should not be parallels. So, to develop these holistic qualities in learners or students, teachers must develop critical pedagogy with reference to digital humanities.

In this process teachers not only develop critical pedagogy but also develop critical consciousness of learners. Also, instructional materials like digital libraries and digital humanities help students to gradually develop their referential-skills, experiential-learning skills, debating or oratory skills and questioning skills. Critical pedagogy along with digital humanities not only develop critical consciousness but also focus on skill development of learners. The process requires a multi-tasking role of a teacher, who on the one hand develops critical pedagogy and on the other hand co-creates a curriculum with dialogic teaching and learning process. Critical pedagogy and digital humanities in teaching help in “Comprehensive and Continuous Learning”. Learning is not a process that stops after clearing exams, it is an ongoing process creating new experiences in over-all development of a student, of course a teacher also. Moreover, students learn to adjust themselves to the social environment of educational institutions through enhancing their skills. Comprehensive or critical and continuous learning boosts confidence in learners to face critical situations with developed emotional and intelligent quotients. Therefore, teacher's role in developing critical pedagogy through dialogic teaching and learning process not only co-create curriculum but also emphasises the need for technology-based learning. Naturally, this is what is required in Indian English classrooms.

However, ELT or English language teaching remains a tool in the hands of teachers and political community, “ELT is ideological, political and



‘interested’ because it is socially constructed and reflects the interests of certain individuals or groups who are often in position of power” (Jeyaraj, 2016. Pg.588). English Language Teaching (ELT) is more than just a tool for communication, it carries ideological and political weight, often reflecting the priorities of those in power. Rather than being a neutral means of education, ELT shapes social dynamics, influences cultural identity, and emphasises linguistic hierarchies. In many contexts, standard English is positioned as the ideal, sidelining local dialects and alternative linguistic expressions. This reinforces existing power structures, where proficiency in English can determine academic success, employment opportunities, and social mobility. Additionally, curriculum design, teaching approaches, and assessment methods often align with the interests of dominant groups, subtly shaping students’ perspectives on language and culture. Recognizing this, critical pedagogy encourages educators or teachers to challenge these norms, fostering inclusive language learning that values diverse voices and empowers students to engage critically with their linguistic environment.

Applicational Possibilities

The applications of redefining the learner’s role in the digital age span multiple areas in education and professional development. Here are some key ways this transformation can be applied possibly:

1. **Personalized Learning:** Digital platforms allow students to tailor their studies based on their pace, interests, and learning styles. Adaptive technologies help learners engage with literature and language through interactive simulations, multimedia content, and digital annotation tools.
2. **Collaborative Education:** Online forums, virtual classrooms, and cloud-based research platforms foster teamwork. Students can collaborate across geographical boundaries, share interpretations, and co-author projects in real time.
3. **Interactive Literary Analysis:** Traditional text-based study is enhanced through computational tools, digital storytelling, and hypertextual research. These applications enable deeper engagement with literature, allowing learners to analyse themes through digital annotation and linguistic mapping.

4. **Inclusion and Accessibility:** Digital education accommodates diverse learners, including those with disabilities. Adaptive reading technologies, voice-assisted tools, and screen modifications ensure broader access to literary studies.
5. **Interdisciplinary Integration:** Literature is increasingly linked to media studies, philosophy, and history using digital methods. Learners analyse texts in relation to historical movements, cultural trends, and emerging technological advancements.
6. **Creative Content Production:** Learners become creators rather than passive consumers. They engage in digital publishing, storytelling, and data visualization, producing content that contributes to literary and academic discourse.
7. **Ethical and Critical Thinking Training:** As information becomes more digitally driven, education must prepare students to critically assess online content, engage responsibly with technology, and address data privacy concerns.
8. **Career Readiness:** The ability to navigate digital tools is essential for modern professions. Literature students equipped with technological skills gain advantages in fields like research, publishing, content creation, and media analysis.

Maura Ives in “Digital Humanities Pedagogy: Hitting the Wall and Bouncing Back” (2014), reflects on the potential and limitations of digital humanities in education. She emphasizes that technological tools can deepen critical engagement with texts. However, these tools also expose disciplinary boundaries. They reveal the persistent complexity of literary objects. Digital methods show the nuanced, often unruly nature of texts. Traditional anthologies tend to simplify these texts. Ives underscores that digital humanities can both empower and distance us from textual objects.

Digital humanities reshape engagement with literary texts by revealing intricate complexities that traditional anthologies often simplify. The fluid nature of digital editions allows for continuous revision and expansion, challenging the idea of a fixed, authoritative text. By integrating technology into literary study, readers become active participants in meaning-making rather than passive recipients. This evolving dynamic enhances accessibility while also raising questions about textual stability and authenticity. As digital tools redefine literature, they



expand opportunities for exploration but introduce new challenges to interpretation.

Conclusion

To conclude, the integration of critical pedagogy and digital humanities has revolutionized English language and literature education, fostering dynamic engagement and interdisciplinary connections. By harnessing digital tools and collaborative learning, students move beyond passive consumption to actively shaping their academic experiences. Addressing challenges like digital literacy disparities ensures equitable participation, while personalized learning nurtures independent inquiry and intellectual depth. As technology advances, the synergy between humanities and digital innovation will continue to empower learners, preparing them for a future of analytical thinking, ethical engagement, and global discourse.

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