



Reimagining Language Pedagogy through Literature: A Study of Isabel Allende's Narrative Power in Enhancing English Language Skills

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Abstract— The teaching of English as a second language (ESL) in India continues to face challenges arising from the dominance of the mother tongue, rigid syllabi, and limited exposure to authentic communicative contexts. Traditional grammar-based methods often fail to inspire learners, particularly in technical institutions where literature is marginalized. This article argues that the integration of literature—especially world literature—offers a transformative pedagogical resource for language teaching. Using Isabel Allende's *The House of the Spirits* as a case study, the paper explores how literary texts foster linguistic competence, expand vocabulary, and cultivate cultural awareness among learners. The study draws upon classroom experiments conducted with B.Tech students at IPS Academy, Indore, comparing outcomes of traditional grammar teaching with literature-based pedagogy. Findings reveal that literature-based teaching improved learners' vocabulary, confidence, and communicative skills. Critical perspectives from scholars such as Brumfit, Maley, Krashen, and Sage, along with intertextual insights from Allende's other works (*Eva Luna*, *Paula*, *My Invented Country*), underscore the universality, creativity, and affective engagement literature brings to ESL classrooms. The paper concludes by advocating for curriculum reform that embeds literary texts into ESL pedagogy to nurture not only linguistic competence but also critical imagination and intercultural dialogue.



Keywords— English Language Pedagogy, Literature in ESL, Isabel Allende, *The House of the Spirits*, Vocabulary Building, Literary Pedagogy

I. INTRODUCTION

Language teaching in India has historically been shaped by colonial legacies, multilingual complexities, and shifting pedagogical paradigms. While English has acquired the status of a global lingua franca, its acquisition in the Indian context is fraught with challenges. The proverb “water changes at every mile, speech changes at every four miles” aptly captures the diversity of India's linguistic landscape, where learners often struggle to reconcile English with entrenched mother tongues and regional dialects.

Despite decades of policy emphasis, the teaching of English in technical and professional colleges often remains examination-oriented and grammar-heavy, leaving students

unprepared for real-world communication. Scholars such as Lycan (2018) remind us that language is not merely a system of rules but a medium of thought, identity, and emotion. Yet, in many classrooms, the emphasis on mechanical correctness overshadows the imaginative and cultural dimensions of language learning.

This article proposes a re-envisioning of English pedagogy through the inclusion of literature, particularly the rich narrative worlds of Isabel Allende. Literature offers authenticity, emotional resonance, and exposure to diverse linguistic registers, providing learners with both functional competence and imaginative engagement. As Maley (1989) notes, literature fosters universality, personal relevance, and variety—qualities absent in dry grammatical drills. Through

a classroom-based study comparing traditional and literature-oriented pedagogy, this paper examines how literary texts—especially *The House of the Spirits*—can revitalize ESL teaching in India.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The relationship between language and literature has long been debated in pedagogical theory. Brumfit and Carter (1986) famously described literature as “an ally of language,” insisting that literary texts expose learners to authentic linguistic use and broaden their communicative horizons. Maley (1989) argued that literature offers learners non-trivial, memorable, and personally relevant content, which encourages deeper cognitive and affective engagement. Similarly, Sage (1987) suggested that literature serves as a dynamic medium to integrate the four core skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

Contemporary research corroborates these views. Krashen and Mason (2004) observed that literature fosters extensive reading practices, leading to natural vocabulary acquisition and greater grammatical sensitivity. Shahid (2016) further emphasized that literature motivates learners by combining enjoyment with skill development. More recent studies, such as Ashrafuzzaman et al. (2021), highlight that literary texts provide a cultural dimension to language learning, enhancing empathy and global awareness.

At the same time, challenges persist. Some critics note that literature may intimidate learners who lack strong foundational grammar. Bhela (1999) pointed out the interference of the mother tongue in acquiring second-language structures, a concern especially pertinent in multilingual countries like India. Yet, scholars like Butler (2006) argue that integrating literature from diverse traditions enables learners to see language as a living entity rather than an abstract system.

Within this debate, Isabel Allende's works offer unique pedagogical value. Her narratives, steeped in magical realism, interweave history, politics, exile, and identity, thereby exposing learners to both linguistic richness and cultural depth. *The House of the Spirits* introduces complex yet accessible storytelling, engaging learners with universal themes such as family, power, and resilience. Adams (2001) observes that Allende's fiction foregrounds exile and identity, issues that resonate with young learners navigating cultural dislocation in the globalized world. Similarly, Said (2001) reminds us that exile in literature speaks not only to displacement but also to the search for new modes of expression—a process akin to second-language acquisition.

Other works by Allende expand these pedagogical possibilities. *Eva Luna* foregrounds storytelling as survival,

mirroring how learners use narrative to build communicative confidence. *Paula*, with its intimate autobiographical voice, models expressive writing and emotional vocabulary. *My Invented Country* offers learners reflective prose on memory, nationhood, and belonging, aligning with intercultural competencies valued in global communication. By drawing on these texts, educators can design literature-based pedagogy that integrates vocabulary building with cultural imagination.

In sum, the literature suggests that while ESL classrooms often struggle with mechanical approaches, the integration of texts like Allende's creates spaces for imaginative, affective, and communicative growth. Literature, in Krashen's terms, provides “comprehensible input” that engages both mind and heart, leading to sustainable language acquisition.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative classroom-based research design to explore how literature, specifically Isabel Allende's *The House of the Spirits*, can enhance English language skills among undergraduate students. The research was conducted at IPS Academy, Indore, focusing on first-year B.Tech students in the Cyber Security (C1) and Information Technology (C2) branches.

A comparative approach was adopted: C1 received traditional grammar instruction, while C2 was taught using literature-based pedagogy through aloud readings, role plays, vocabulary games, and reflective discussions.

Implications for Pedagogy and Policy

The study holds implications not only for classroom practice but also for educational policy. First, curriculum designers should integrate literature more systematically into technical and professional programs. Currently, syllabi prioritize utilitarian communication manuals that fail to inspire. Including world literature can foster critical thinking and empathy alongside language acquisition.

Second, teacher training programs must equip educators with methodologies for integrating literature. Many instructors, trained in structuralist traditions, hesitate to use narrative texts. Workshops and professional development initiatives can bridge this gap.

Third, intercultural competence must be recognized as a core learning outcome. In a globalized workplace, engineers, scientists, and managers require not only technical proficiency but also the ability to engage with diverse cultural perspectives. Literature, with its universal themes and specific cultural contexts, is a natural vehicle for this training.

Finally, the affective dimension of learning should not be overlooked. Literature engages emotions, fosters empathy, and sustains motivation. As Krashen's affective filter hypothesis suggests, such engagement is central to successful acquisition. Allende's narratives, rich with human struggle and resilience, exemplify how literature can achieve this.

IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

The findings revealed that students in literature-based classrooms (C2) showed improved vocabulary, confidence, and comprehension compared to the grammar-only group (C1). Interviews highlighted that literature was perceived as 'adventurous' and 'engaging,' while grammar was described as 'boring' and 'mechanical.' Quantitative assessments confirmed higher performance in C2 (85–90%) compared to C1 (70–75%). Themes of exile and resilience in Allende's work also resonated emotionally with students, reflecting Said's view of exile as both loss and opportunity. Thus, literature invigorates ESL pedagogy by merging linguistic and cultural dimensions.

Beyond quantitative results, qualitative insights revealed nuanced dimensions of learner transformation. Students who initially described English as intimidating began to express enjoyment in literature-based classes. For instance, one respondent stated: 'When I read Clara's silence and then her sudden outpouring of words, it felt like my own struggle to find English words to express myself.' Such connections indicate that literature serves as a mirror for learners' psychological and linguistic journeys.

The symbolic motifs in Allende's fiction provided opportunities for linguistic analysis. Magical realism, often dismissed as fantastical, became a powerful pedagogical tool. Students discussed passages where ghosts converse with the living, not as supernatural oddities but as metaphors for memory and identity. These discussions demanded sophisticated language use, encouraging learners to employ modal verbs, descriptive adjectives, and complex syntactic structures.

The contrast with the grammar-only group remained stark. Students in C1 performed adequately in controlled exercises but displayed limited confidence in free expression. By contrast, C2 students demonstrated greater spontaneity in classroom interactions, supporting Krashen's (1982) claim that comprehensible input lowers affective barriers and fosters acquisition.

Interestingly, gendered responses emerged. Female students in C2 connected strongly with Allende's female protagonists, viewing their resilience as inspirational. This engagement translated into more confident oral

presentations, echoing Adams' (2001) analysis of Allende's fiction as a site of identity formation and feminist discourse.

V. IMPLICATIONS FOR LANGUAGE TEACHING

The results indicate the following implications:

1. Integrating literature into ESL curricula enriches vocabulary and engagement.
2. Literature complements, rather than excludes, grammar.
3. Student-centered pedagogy through role play, reading, and discussion empowers learners.
4. Exposure to global narratives fosters intercultural competence.
5. Emotional engagement lowers affective barriers, enhancing learning.

VI. CONCLUSION

This article affirms that literature is not a peripheral supplement but a central component of effective ESL pedagogy. By situating Isabel Allende's narratives within Indian classrooms, students not only acquired linguistic competence but also developed cultural imagination and personal confidence. The findings underscore that literature bridges the gap between functional language learning and holistic human development.

The expansion of English pedagogy through literature aligns with global trends in education that emphasize creativity, critical thinking, and intercultural dialogue. In this sense, Allende's works serve not only as texts to be studied but as pedagogical tools that humanize learning. They invite learners to see language as a living entity, shaped by history, memory, and identity.

Future research should broaden the scope by comparing different literary traditions and learner demographics. Studies might explore African, Asian, or Middle Eastern literatures in ESL pedagogy, examining how diverse cultural narratives shape acquisition. Longitudinal research could also assess how sustained exposure to literature impacts professional communication skills in technical domains.

Ultimately, this study argues for a paradigm shift: from grammar-centered drills to literature-centered pedagogy. Such a shift promises not only improved linguistic outcomes but also richer, more empathetic, and more globally aware learners.

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