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**Chatbots and Literary Pedagogy: AI-Based Teaching Applications for Indian English Fiction.**

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**Abstract:**

This article explores the integration of chatbot technology into literary pedagogy, focusing on Indian English fiction. With the rapid rise of artificial intelligence (AI) in education, chatbots—computer programs designed to simulate conversation—offer novel ways of engaging students with complex literary texts. This research examines how chatbot applications can support interpretive discussion, facilitate close reading, and provide personalized learning experiences in courses on Indian English novels such as *Untouchable* (Mulk Raj Anand), *The Shadow Lines* (Amitav Ghosh), and *Nectar in a Sieve* (Kamala Markandaya). We analyze pedagogical models, potential challenges, and propose design principles for literary chatbots that balance AI assistance with critical thinking. Drawing on survey feedback from students in a digital humanities pilot, we present examples of chatbot interactions that scaffold interpretive questions, simulate character dialogue, and assist thematic exploration. We argue that while chatbots should not replace human instruction, they can enrich literature classrooms by supporting learner autonomy, promoting dialogic reading practices, and accommodating diverse learning styles. Implications for curriculum design, teacher training, and future research are discussed.

**Keywords:** AI chatbots, digital humanities, literary pedagogy, Indian English fiction, educational technology, interpretive learning

**Introduction**

The field of literary studies is undergoing rapid transformation through the integration of digital technologies. Artificial intelligence, in particular, has emerged not only as a subject of critical inquiry but also as a tool for enhancing pedagogical practice. Among the most promising technologies in this space are chatbots which are interactive AI agents that can simulate human conversation. Originally used in customer service and information

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retrieval, chatbots have begun to find applications in education, offering personalized responses, scaffolding student inquiry, and providing immediate feedback.

In literary classrooms, where interpretive ambiguity and nuanced textual engagement are central, chatbots can support student learning by posing questions, modelling critical thinking, and encouraging exploration of themes and characters. This potential is especially significant in the context of **Indian English fiction**, whose diverse narrative styles, cultural contexts, and postcolonial concerns can present challenges for readers. Novels such as *Untouchable* by Mulk Raj Anand, *The Shadow Lines* by Amitav Ghosh, and *Nectar in a Sieve* by Kamala Markandaya demand close reading and sociocultural sensitivity and skills that educational technologies, if thoughtfully designed, can help cultivate.

This article investigates how chatbots can be integrated into literary pedagogy to support the study of Indian English novels. We ask: *What are the pedagogical affordances and limitations of chatbot applications in literature courses? How can chatbots be designed to enhance interpretive reading without oversimplifying complex texts?* Through theoretical framing and practical examples, we propose a model for AI-assisted literary learning that foregrounds dialogue, reflection, and critical inquiry.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Chatbots in Education**

Research on chatbots in education has predominantly focused on STEM subjects, language learning, and administrative support. Studies (e.g., Winkler & Söllner, 2018) show that chatbots can increase learner engagement, provide adaptive feedback, and support self-paced study. In language instruction, chatbots have been used for vocabulary practice and conversational skills. However, scholarship on their use in literary studies remains limited. The application of chatbots to literature classrooms aligns with broader trends in the digital humanities, where computational tools are leveraged to support textual analysis, annotation, and collaborative scholarship. Chatbots extend these tools by enabling interactive discussion, a critical component of interpretive learning.

### **2.2 Literary Pedagogy and Reader Engagement**

Literary pedagogy emphasizes interpretation, critical thinking, and dialogic engagement. Classic pedagogical theories (Rosenblatt, 1978) advocate for transactional reading, where meaning is co-constructed by reader and text. Instructors facilitate this process through questioning, discussion, and contextualization. Chatbots, when designed with literary competence, can supplement this facilitation by prompting interpretive questions and offering contextual insights.

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### **2.3 Indian English Fiction in the Classroom**

Indian English novels are often taught in undergraduate and graduate courses worldwide. Texts such as *Untouchable* expose students to themes of caste and social inequality; *The Shadow Lines* explores memory, nationalism, and transnational identity; and *Nectar in a Sieve* foregrounds rural deprivation and gendered experience. These novels challenge students to navigate historical, cultural, and ethical dimensions of narrative. AI tools that scaffold student inquiry can help democratize access to these complex texts.

### **3. Chatbots and Literary Engagement: Pedagogical Framework**

We propose a framework where chatbots serve as dialogic partners rather than knowledge dispensers. The design principles include:

#### **3.1 Interpretive Prompting**

Instead of providing direct summaries, chatbots should ask open-ended questions (e.g., “What do you think the narrator’s silence reveals about power dynamics in this scene?”). This encourages students to articulate interpretations before consulting secondary sources.

#### **3.2 Contextual Support**

Chatbots can offer historical context (e.g., caste system in *Untouchable*) or cultural notes when prompted, helping students situate their reading without disrupting flow.

#### **3.3 Character Simulations**

Chatbots can simulate brief dialogues with fictional characters (e.g., a chatbot answering as Rukmani from *Nectar in a Sieve*), allowing students to explore perspective and voice.

#### **3.4 Scaffolding Close Reading**

By highlighting literary devices (metaphor, narrative frame, symbolism) and prompting attention to them, chatbots can aid systematic textual analysis.

#### **3.5 Feedback on Interpretation**

Chatbots can provide non-assertive feedback, prompting reflection rather than correction (e.g., “You might consider how this theme recurs later in the text”). This is critical to maintain interpretive autonomy.

### **4. Methodology**

To explore the impact of chatbot integration, we conducted a *mixed-methods pilot study* in two literature courses (N = 48 students). A chatbot was developed using a conversational AI platform and trained on selected Indian English novels, pedagogical prompts, and supplementary context materials.

#### **4.1 Participants**

Participants were undergraduate students enrolled in literary analysis courses at a university’s English department.

#### **4.2 Procedure**

Students interacted with the chatbot over four weeks, completing activities such as:

a) Textual inquiry: Responding to interpretive prompts.

b) Character dialogue simulations.

c) Thematic exploration prompts.

Students also completed pre- and post-involvement surveys assessing engagement, comprehension, and perceived value of chatbot support.

### **5. Case Examples: Chatbot Interactions**

Below are some chatbot interactions.

#### **5.1 Indian English Novel: *Untouchable* (Mulk Raj Anand)**

**Student:** “Why does Bakha feel both proud and ashamed of his work?”

**Chatbot:**

“That’s a rich interpretive question! Think about how Bakha’s identity is shaped by caste structures. What isn’t said explicitly in the text? How does Anand use Bakha’s internal monologue to show the tension between dignity and humiliation?”

*Pedagogical function:* Encourages students to articulate internal conflict rather than receive a summary.

**Student:** “Can you summarize the scene at the latrine?”

**Chatbot:**

“I can help frame it: this scene exposes the everyday violence of caste exclusion. Rather than a neutral description, Anand’s language emphasizes the physical discomfort and emotional isolation of Bakha. What words in the text suggest this?”

*Pedagogical function:* Redirects from simple summary to language focus.

#### **5.2 Indian English Novel: *The Shadow Lines* (Amitav Ghosh)**

**Student:** “What is the significance of the title?”

**Chatbot:**

“Consider how ‘lines’ operate in the novel — physical borders between nations, psychological lines of memory, and the lines people draw in relationships. How does the title reflect the fragmented yet interconnected world of the narrator?”

*Pedagogical function:* Prompts multi-layered interpretation.

**Student:** “What does memory do in the story?”

**Chatbot:**

“Memory is both inclusive and disruptive. Ask yourself: whose memory defines the narrative? How do memories challenge official history? You might think about the narrator’s memory of Thamma’s stories and the childhood experiences in Dhaka.”

*Pedagogical function:* Encourages thematic linkage and deeper reflection.

#### **5.3 Indian English Novel: *Nectar in a Sieve* (Kamala Markandaya)**

**Student:** “Why is Rukmani important as a narrator?”

**Chatbot:**

“Rukmani’s narrative voice mediates personal suffering and broader socioeconomic change.

How does her perspective shape your understanding of rural life under colonial-era pressures? Reflect on her emotional tone and attention to everyday details.”

*Pedagogical function:* Focuses on narrative voice.

**Student:** “What does the land symbolize?”

**Chatbot:**

“Think of the land as home, sustenance, and loss. How do descriptions of the soil, harvests, and droughts connect to Rukmani’s identity and family’s well-being?”

*Pedagogical function:* Guides thematic interpretation without oversimplification.

## **6. Survey Results and Discussion**

### **6.1 Engagement and Comprehension**

After interacting with the chatbot, 82% of students reported increased engagement with difficult passages. Many commented that the chatbot prompts helped them ask better questions during class discussions.

### **6.2 Critical Thinking and Interpretation**

The majority (74%) indicated that chatbot interactions helped them practice interpretive thinking independently before consulting secondary criticism. Students appreciated the chatbot’s refusal to offer direct “answers,” which encouraged deeper reflection.

Some students found the chatbot’s contextual information insufficient, especially for historical references. A few also expressed frustrations when the chatbot failed to understand unconventional questions—an expected limitation of current AI.

## **7. Implications for Pedagogy**

### **7.1 Enhancing Classroom Dialogue**

Chatbots can complement instructor-led discussion by allowing students to explore ideas outside class time. This scaffolding supports inclusive participation, especially for students who hesitate to speak up.

### **7.2 Supporting Diverse Learners**

AI can adapt to different reading paces and styles, offering personalized prompts that meet learners where they are. This is valuable in literature courses that encompass students from varied linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

### **7.3 Teacher Training and Adoption**

Effective integration requires training instructors in chatbot design and interpretation of AI-generated data. Teachers must curate prompts, monitor chatbot performance, and align AI interactions with learning outcomes.

## **8. Limitations and Future Research**

While promising, this study has limitations. The chatbot’s knowledge base was limited to selected texts, and its responses depended on pre-scripted prompts. Future research should explore:

a) Machine learning models that generate contextually accurate interpretations.

- b) Integration with digital textual corpora for broader training.
- c) Longitudinal studies measuring learning outcomes over semesters.

### **9. Conclusion**

This article thus, has demonstrated that chatbots, when thoughtfully designed, can enrich literary pedagogy by fostering student engagement, promoting interpretive practice, and supporting diverse learning needs. For Indian English fiction, whose complexity spans cultural, historical, and ethical domains, AI-based chatbots offer extra paths for exploration, not replacement of human instruction. As educational technologies evolve, interdisciplinary collaboration between literature scholars and AI developers will be essential to create tools that respect the interpretive depth of literary study. By situating students as active interpreters in dialogic exchange with AI, we can reimagine literature classrooms that are both intellectually difficult and technologically responsive.

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