

Current Research Trends in English Literature: A Step-by-Step Guide for Pre-Doctoral Research

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Abstract

English literature is a constructive discipline that examines and incorporates various facets of society and the world at large. It studies several societal norms, cultural and historical ethos, values, beliefs, traditions, innovations, diversities and disparities around the globe and beyond. This branch of knowledge has enabled individuals to investigate and learn about the historical, modern, contemporary and global trends of the world as a system. It is this body of thought that has inspired a multitudinous array of individuals to delve into their realm of imagination and inspire the masses with their reflective writing skills. We as researchers can reflect the reality through English literature and can also view it as a core discipline to explore newer fields. English literature conveys the rich tapestry of human experiences, emotions, and thoughts across different cultures. It serves as a mirror reflecting the complexities of human existence. The present research study aims to examine the modern trends in English literature and how their multidisciplinary essence has germinated various innovative branches of studies. It aims to highlight and illustrate how recent trends in digital humanities, food and game studies and environmental humanities have paved a new field of emerging research fields. Embracing diverse authors from various backgrounds, these modern trends provide a platform for underrepresented voices, fostering a broader spectrum of ideas and perspectives. The integration of literature with the other forms of discipline encourages cross-disciplinary dialogues, allowing the ideas to flow freely between the already existing and new emerging literary fields. This research study aims to deduce that English literature has been revolutionized as a result of globalization and holds a strong relationship between lesser-known and emerging fields of study.

Keywords: Literature, English, Trends, Multidisciplinary, Global

English literature has undeniably played a pivotal role in comprehending the intricate tapestry of the world history, serving as a

profound mirror that reflects the ever-evolving cultural aspects, ethos, values and traditions. As Edward Said astutely noted in his seminal work, “Cultural and

Imperialism”, the exploration of literature from different epochs and geographies allows us to discern the intersections between colonialism, power dynamics, and literary representation (Said, 1993). This interconnectedness enables us to delve into the nuances of cultural exchange, the impact of imperialism, and the evolution of identities, making it an indispensable lens through which we can navigate the annals of the human history. Defining the scope of English literature proves to be a more challenging endeavor when juxtaposed with the relatively defined boundaries of science and social sciences. Unlike the empirical and methodologies rigor found in the latter disciplines, the contours of English literature are fluid and multifaceted. While science and social sciences often deal with quantifiable data and well-established methodologies, literature is an ever-expanding realm of human expression that encompasses diverse genres, cultures, historical periods, and interpretations. It thrives on subjectivity and the richness of language, making it resistant to rigid categorization. English literature’s inherent complexity lies in its ability to evolve, adapt, and reflect the ever-changing tapestry of human experience, which defies easy confinement within predefined boundaries, setting it apart from the more delineated

domains of sciences and social sciences. English literature cannot be simply termed as a perception of senses, rather it is the basic “*sin qua non*” of holistic living (Bennett) that has experience a number of changes from ancient times to the present. It has been growing, flowering, and alluring its readers to enlighten their brains to catalogue and research the impacts of past events on contemporary writing and forecast future ramifications.

Simultaneously, it has enabled a vast number of researchers to develop congenial links with the other branches of knowledge through various fiction and non-fiction essays and novels. A scholar might use literature to reflect on reality and regard it as a work of art that allows for the exploration of new subjects of study during pre-doctoral research. In the current scenario, English literature has left no stone unturned in getting in-tuned with its all sorts of different fields ranging from space and technology to post-humanism via community, media and film studies and many more. With the development of technology, it has become easy to mirror reality and use it as a platform for communicating with people around the globe using the lingua franca of the day. Therefore, it embodies a manifestation of wonderful ideas, innovative ideologies, creative writings and facts in the form of

informative journals, fiction and non-fiction novels, diaries, prose, poetry, articles and essays. Thus, literature holds the capacity to inspire the present and future generations. English being one of the most widely spoken and understood languages, has encompassed different genres of life with different mentalities of readers and writers, a piece of work may be interpreted in different ways, but the style of literature is very important as it can motivate or demotivate any reader. However, it is crucial to comprehend the various variants and literature styles used in writing and communicating literature. Through the experiences and visions of the writer, the reader can conclude and form their perspectives.

Modern literature can be analysed from a variety of angles, allowing readers to express their creativity. Current trends of literature, amongst other areas, are guided by advancements in cultures, technology and digitalization. In today's world, literature is predominantly accessed digitally and is different from its evolutionary cousin. In the past, authors and historical events received a lot of attention, but in today's fast-paced society new trends have been created in the literature that includes brief and difficult novels which allow writers to express their creativity. With so many fresh literary

trends, writers of the present times must be aware of the expectations of the reader, making sure they are not just expansive in their approach but also think critically and outside the box. It becomes even more relative as individuals in today's society particularly the younger generation do not engage in long sentences, detailed descriptions and paragraphs. Thus, inventing newer fields and developing their links with literature has become a new trend to keep our scholars engaged in innovative research.

It is digitalization that has helped academicians to expand the realm of literature. The ways that literature is communicated and viewed have changed as a result of intense globalisation, orientations and expansions in cultural studies and various technological developments. Various tools like social media, mobile applications, blogs and internet content have helped our writers to express themselves creatively.

Contemporary writers have the opportunity to engage in real-life experiments to discover innovative ideas and revolutionary concepts for their literary creations. Through this approach, authors can ensure heightened reader engagement and curiosity towards their literary outputs. Furthermore, individuals can enhance their understanding of literature by establishing

associations between novel concepts or information and their pre-existing knowledge.

Objective of the research study

This research article aims to examine the current trends in the field of English literature. It also attempts to assist the scholars and researchers in their pre-doctoral analysis of the findings of the research topics, and literature review and select the corresponding areas of research.

Methodology of the Research Study

The comprehensive methodology of this research study involves a thorough literature review. In the realm of English literature, the methodology of the comprehensive research study relies on a multifaceted approach that encompasses a wide array of sources such as primary sources, that act as a foundation. Secondary sources like academic journals, critical essays, and literary critiques offer valuable insights and scholarly perspectives. Additionally, through well planned literature scrutiny, relevant publications and grey literature sources were used to provide a deeper understanding of the literary works (Somani 20). With the help of literature research, a holistic approach must be used to encompass the diverse sources which are indispensable. Within this research study, four questions were framed and

analysed keeping track of how they could be a blueprint for future researchers.

1. What is the new field of studies in literature?
2. What are the suggested readings?
3. What are the key theorists associated with the corresponding field of study?
4. How the new existing forms of literature are relevance in the contemporary times?

Literature search related to Database

Conducting a thorough database literature review in the field of English literature is an essential step in the academic research. To study the ongoing trends in the present-day literature, the following electronic databases were searched: the ResearchGate, Academia, Scribd, JSTOR, Google Scholar, MLA International Bibliography and TES YouTube Videos. The following keywords were included in the preliminary search: 'Modern' 'Current' 'New fields in English Literature' 'Online Studies'. The search provided results in the form of an online database. To make my research study, concise and precise, I omitted the research papers which revealed an extended or in- depth knowledge of the newer fields and only considered the ones which provided basic assistance to the scholars about the field.

New Field of Study

The following fields of study were investigated:

- Food Studies
- Game Studies
- Environmental Humanities
- Digital Humanities

Food Studies

Food Studies is an integral field of research within the cultural studies, offering valuable insights into the intricate relationship between food and culture (Kvale, 2017). Scholars in this domain explore the multifaceted dimensions of food, encompassing its production, consumption, symbolism, and impact on society. Food is not merely sustenance, it serves as a powerful symbol of identity, tradition, and globalization (Mintz, 1996). This interdisciplinary approach to food studies is crucial for understanding how culinary practices shape and reflect the cultural values, norms and historical changes (Scholliers, 2018). By examining food through the lens of cultural studies, researchers gain a deeper appreciation of how the gastronomic realm influences human societies, making it a fundamental area of exploration in the field (Wilk, 2006).

Moreover, food studies within the cultural studies provide a unique vantage point for analyzing the interplay between food and

identity. Food choices often act as markers of cultural affiliation, helping individuals define their sense of self (Kvale, 2017). For example, the preparation and consumption of traditional dishes can reinforce cultural heritage and foster a sense of belonging (Mintz, 1996). Conversely, the adoption of global culinary trends can reflect the influence of globalization on cultural identities (Wilk, 2006). This dynamic relationship between food and identity underscores the significance of food studies in cultural studies, where researchers delve into how food practices contribute to the complex tapestry of human cultures (Scholliers, 2018).

Furthermore, food studies offer a critical lens through which to examine societal power structures and inequalities (Kvale, 2017). The food industry, including production, distribution, and marketing, plays a pivotal role in shaping dietary choices and access to various foods (Wilk, 2006). Scholars in cultural studies analyze how these factors intersect with race, class, and gender, influencing who has access to nutritious food and who does not (Mintz, 1996). This perspective highlights the role of food in perpetuating or challenging social hierarchies and inequities (Scholliers, 2018). Therefore, food studies within cultural studies contribute

significantly to the understanding of the social justice issues related to food and its distribution (Wilk, 2006).

The research areas in this field could revolve around:

- Food Industry
- Anthropology of food
- Food Citizenship
- Globalisation and food cultures
- Cooking & Food Magazines

Major theorists who could be under the study can be:

- Sidney Mintz
- Mary Douglas
- Saru Jayaraman
- Arlene Voski Avakian
- Alan Voski Avakian
- Pat Caplan
- Jack Goody

Recommended readings include –

- Food Studies: An Introduction to Research Methods (2000)
- Critical Perspectives in Food Studies (2012)
- Routledge International Handbook of Food Studies (2013)
- Food and Femininity (2015)
- Literature and Food Studies (2017)

Game Studies

The study of games, the act of playing them, as well as the players and cultures they are surrounded by, is known as game studies, commonly referred to as ludology

(from the Greek words ludus, "game," and -logia, "study," "research"). an area of cultural studies that examines various elements of game design, players, and the function the game plays in its community or culture using techniques from, at the very least, folkloristics, cultural heritage, sociology, and psychology. Game studies, which include all forms of gaming, including board games, sports games, and more, are sometimes conflated with the study of video games, but this is only one area of interest. Originating in anthropology, game studies have since varied in terms of methodology to incorporate sociological and psychological viewpoints. How did games operate in society is one of the topics that social scientists investigate? They frequently engage with human psychology using empirical techniques like surveys and carefully designed lab studies.

The humanities-based approaches emphasize:

1. How do games generate meaning?
2. How do they reflect or subvert wider social and cultural discourses?

More in-depth techniques, which are also used in other media fields like television and cinema studies, such close reading, textual analysis, and audience theory.

‘Game design’ approaches are closely related to

- Engaging in creative endeavors
- Examining game mechanics and aesthetics
- These influence the creation of new games

The research areas in this field could revolve around:

- Ludology v/s Narratology
- Game design
- Gamification of learning
- Audience and Interactivity theory
- Feminist game studies and Queer game studies.

The major theorists include –

- Jesper Juul
- Garry Crawford
- Janet Murray
- Jane McGonigal
- Michalis Kokonis
- Frans Mayra.

The recommended readings include –

- An Introduction to Game Studies (2008)
- The Routledge Companion to Video Game Studies (2014)
- Game Research Methods: An Overview (2015)
- Games, Game Design and Game Studies: An Introduction (2015)
- Forms and Functions of Endings in Narrative Digital Games (2020)

Environmental Humanities

The environmental humanities emerged from Western academic thinkers, and indigenous, post-colonial, and feminist thinkers who have provided major contributions. The emphasis is on the fact that social and cultural concerns are fundamentally profoundly entwined with economic and political agendas and represent significant environmental challenges that range from the geological to the biological. Creating fresh environmental imaginations, developing fresh discursive strategies, and adjusting the political and economic systems are some of these elements. For instance, changes to the Earth's climate affect all facets of the material, social, and cultural fabric of the globe, down to the level of the person and his or her way of life, according to Rossini (2012). Because of this, Earth scientists are not the only ones that are concerned about environmental issues. As their sneaky indications of precariousness and hazards have long stretched into the social domain, a sphere where they have also rooted, they are also social, cultural, philosophical, and political. Only a few of the circumstances that need rethinking the social in ecological terms and vice versa include food shortages, poverty, water and air pollution, social inequities and gender

disparities, energy demands, and health concerns associated to climate change.

The reading materials could revolve around:

- Animal studies
- Bioregionalism
- Cultural geography
- Eco musicology
- Political ecology
- Systems ecology

Major theorists include –

- Andrew Pickering
- Timothy Morton
- Cary Wolfe
- Anna Tsing
- Bruno Latour
- Deborah Bird Rose

The recommended readings include –

- The Environmental Humanities: A Critical Introduction (2017)
- The Routledge Companion to the Environmental Humanities (2017)
- The Cambridge Companion to Environmental Humanities (2019)
- Introduction to the Environmental Humanities (2021)
- The Cambridge Companion to Environmental Humanities (2021)

Digital Humanities

During the early 2000s, a novel field emerged known as Digital Humanities, spurred by the rapid advancements in communication technology and the digital

revolution. This discipline brings together digital technologies and the humanities in captivating ways. Particularly relevant in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has greatly impacted traditional educational methods, this approach demands a shift from conventional norms. In the realm of English Literature research, scholars must liberate themselves from the confines of printed text and confidently navigate the fluid dynamics of interdisciplinary engagement. The roots of digital humanities trace back to humanities computing in the 1940s and 50s, and it has since evolved into a multidisciplinary field that bridges social sciences such as history, philosophy, archaeology, anthropology, statistics, linguistics, literature, arts, library and information science, media studies, design, and more. In the dynamic landscape of digital humanities, science and technology are no longer distinct domains; rather, they coalesce into a unified approach. Digital humanities operate on a dual foundation: the methodical utilization of digital resources within the humanities and the humanistic analysis of applying digital resources. To illustrate, consider the realm of history. Here, the digital humanities approach involves innovating analytical methodologies for historical research, encompassing creation, documentation,

preservation, curation, and beyond. It also entails crafting digital tools for tasks such as data mining, data mapping, hyper-textualization, information retrieval, and visualization. Engaging with digital humanities surpasses mere digitization of existing documents and processes. It necessitates the development of a diverse skill set to tackle a thrilling amalgamation of tasks, including creation, computation, curation, and analysis. Scholars in this field might delve into areas like web design, software programming, technical writing, and game studies. Moreover, they can explore contemporary vocations like Data Manager, Data Designer, Digital Curator, Digital Designer, Information Architect, Data Scientist, and Metadata Analyst.

1. Some of the digital humanities projects that have been taken from western universities are –
2. Mapping the Republic of Letters of Stanford Humanities Centre
3. Women Writers Project of the North Eastern University in Boston
4. Perseus Project of Tufts University
5. The Global Shakespeare and Performance Archive
6. The Rossetti Archive
7. The William Blake Archive, and
8. Jane Austen's Fiction Manuscripts Digital Edition

Other interesting projects include curating digital exhibitions and museums on anything ranging from painting and music to food. Spatial history projects and projects on medical humanities.

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