

# Life-Skill Approach to Internationalizing the Humanities: Contextualizing Literary Studies in Higher Education

Anil Singhal  
Assistant Professor of English

*NIT Srinagar / Jammu and Kashmir, India*

Despite perennial claims of universality, the contemporary human sciences typically represent the divided world of the day. To prove their relevance for a post-pandemic world, the humanities schools across the world will have to reassert the actual purpose of teaching the humanities at university level which must be in tandem with the purpose of life itself. Life skills which can be broadly categorized into cognitive, affective, and interpersonal skills are hardly mentioned or targeted as outcomes of the philosophy, literature, history, and other art courses while they are undoubtedly commensurate with the purpose of education or life. Ironically, professional and technical colleges that vouch for inculcating such universal skills in the learners underestimate and neglect the humanities (which teach these transversal skills naturally) the most. Instead of limiting themselves to the social scientific theories and via rising above all narrow identities, the humanities can ensure developing human skills such as critical thinking, emotional intelligence, leadership, and collaboration universally in the humanities as well as the non-humanities students.

This essay presents a case for the life-skill approach to internationalizing the humanities in higher education in the context of literature teaching concerning two of the courses I introduced at my university as a tenured faculty member of the Department of Humanities, Social Sciences, and Management. The first one, titled “Life-Skill Approach to Interpreting Contemporary World Fiction” (refer to Appendix 1 for the syllabus), is designed for the Ph.D. English coursework, while the second one, titled “Poetry for Personality” (refer to Appendix 2 for the syllabus), has to be offered as an elective to all PG/UG engineering and basic sciences students of the premier technological university. Appreciating literary texts of different genres, geographies, languages, and identities vis-à-vis their plot, themes, characterization, narrative dynamics, and figures of speech, the courses aim at giving new roles and direction to the humanities schools in general and the literature departments in particular internationally by adopting the universal touchstone of life skills as the course objective and outcome.

While adopting the life-skill approach as an educational tool to analyze contemporary world novels and short stories, the Ph.D. English course evaluates how the authors have been able to weave their critical and creative thinking, empathy, and design of human relationships into the selected texts. The reader’s response is to be ascertained in the context of her ability to groom her analytical, emotional, and social skills during and after reading the scholarly book by relating to the author and her life experiences and the textual events, characters, and language.

Bringing in the essential characteristics of a researcher, such as an aptitude to tell one thing from another, paying attention to detail, observing things from a distance with no personal and political bias, and accommodating all perspectives as to the theme, achieving the purpose of studying literature critically will be aimed at through the slow/close reading method. While the scholar deconstructs the textual language non-judgementally, even when she wants to consider the literary/spiritual compassion for the marginal, the mooring of the life skills will render her apolitical and universal rising above her conditioned self/identity, being aware in the moment, and realizing her best potential.

In the new post-pandemic world order where the AI-based large language models like GPT-4 are all set to force the university teaching to shift its focus from "what to" why and "how, the application of the life-skill method to literary interpretation makes it possible for the literary critic to concentrate on the logic and the process underlying a text.

The second course planned for the postgraduate and undergraduate science and technology students of the engineering university helps not only to address the problem of the decline in the number of humanities and English studies courses as majors and electives across the world but also to realize the goal of interdisciplinarity, multidisciplinary, and internationality in the professional higher education as envisaged in the new education policy (2020) of India. The suggestiveness and ambiguity of poetry can bring clarity not only about how to think and feel individually but also about how to act concerning society and culture.

The selected poems concerning personality skill themes like decision-making, problem-solving, emotional resilience, flexibility and adaptability, and leadership and collaboration inspire the reader to reorient herself to achieving her larger goals of inward and outward life, such as self-abnegation and non-hierarchical worldly relations.

According to the spirit of the life-skill approach to literary studies, both courses use various outcome-based and experimental pedagogical methods. While the Ph.D. specialization elective blurs the line between life skills as the research tools and life skills as the themes, the university-wide PG/UG elective tries to realize its objectives via different active teaching and learning techniques like flipped classroom, think-pair-share, mind mapping, and small-group discussions. Despite accepting and respecting all localized identities, for example, language, nation, region, ethnicity, gender, race, religion, caste, and ideology, the purpose of the humanities in general and literary studies in particular at the university level does not get lost when the universal human skills are targeted as the central pedagogical outcome without letting any rigid belief system be the core tool for studying philosophy, literature, and history courses in the classroom. Thus, the shift in the approach to teaching and researching arts and humanities in the international higher education system can change not only the face of the discipline across the world but also the entire higher education cosmos as transferrable skills have indeed become the most vital for the material as well as the spiritual human life in an AI-driven post-COVID world.

**NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY SRINAGAR**  
An Autonomous Institute of National Importance  
Established by the Act of Parliament

**Course Title: Life-Skill Approach to Interpreting  
Contemporary World Fiction**

**Course Description:**

The course is designed to define, approach, and further develop different life skills, i.e., cognitive, affective, and interpersonal skills, as literary scholarship techniques. The paper includes diverse literary fiction (novels and stories) published in the last two and a half decades worldwide, either initially or translated into English. The researchers are expected to analyze the selected fictional texts by applying the life-skill approach to interpretations of literature.

**Course Objectives (COBs):**

- COB 1:** The course intends to help the research students to acquaint themselves with various types of life skills and their relationship with literary texts.
- COB 2:** Examine different thinking, emotional, and social skills as research tools/methods.
- COB 3:** Develop essentials of life-skill approach to analyzing literature.
- COB 4:** Interpret literary texts from different genres and geographies applying a life-skill approach.

### **Course Outcomes (COs):**

Upon the completion of this course, the research students will be able to:

- CO 1:** Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of theory and practice of life skills.
- CO 2:** Define and appraise various life skills as literary-analysis methods and techniques.
- CO 3:** Interpret the selected literary texts applying various cognitive, affective, and interpersonal skills as research tools.
- CO 4:** Apply the life-skill approach effectively to interpret any literary text in general and contemporary world fiction in particular.

## CONTENTS

### UNIT 1: Introduction

Life Skills: What, Why, and How

Life Skills and Literature

Cognitive, Affective, and Interpersonal Skills  
as Literary Research Methods/Tools

Analyzing Literary Fiction via Life-Skill Approach

### UNIT 2: Cognitive Skills (Critical Thinking, Creative Thinking, Decision Making, Problem Solving) and Literary Research

*The Multiple Effects of Rainshadow* by Thea Astley

*Hateship, Friendship, Courtship, Loveship,  
Marriage: Stories* by Alice Munro

### Unit 3: Affective Skills (Emotional Intelligence, Self-Awareness, Empathy, Resilience) and Literary Research

*The Translator* by Leila Aboulela

*The Bamboo Stalk* by Saud Alsanousi

### Unit 4: Interpersonal Skills (Individual versus Society, Language, Collaboration, Leadership) and Literary Research

*A Case of Indian Marvels: Dazzling Stories from the  
Country's Finest New Writers*, edited by David Davidar

## PRESCRIBED READINGS

1. J. Krishnamurti, *The First and Last Freedom*, Harper and Brothers, 1954.
2. Thea Astley, *The Multiple Effects of Rainshadow*, Viking, 1996.
3. Alice Munro, *Hateship, Friendship, Courtship, Loveship, Marriage: Stories*, McClelland and Stewart, 2001.
4. Leila Aboulela, *The Translator*, Grove, 1999.
5. Saud Alsanousi, *The Bamboo Stalk*, translated from Arabic to English by Jonathan Wright, Bloomsbury, 2015.
6. David Davidar (editor), *A Case of Indian Marvels: Dazzling Stories from the Country's Finest New Writers*, Aleph, 2022.
7. Omar Anbar and M. Al-Qudah, "The Relationship between Critical Thinking and Literary Criticism," *Dirasat: Human and Social Sciences*, 44(1): 191-200, January 2017.
8. Luis Galvan, "The Uses of Empathy in Literary Theory and Hermeneutics: A Systems- Theoretical Approach," *Concentric*, 42(2):27-43, September 2016.



## **NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY SRINAGAR**

An Autonomous Institute of National Importance

Established by the Act of Parliament

### **Course Title: Poetry for Personality**

#### **Course Description:**

The course is designed to cater to the need to teach soft/personal skills to undergraduate and postgraduate students across the departments via reading and analyzing poetry. By focusing on 21st-century life skill development, the course serves the vision and mission of the HSS&M Department and the goals of the NEP 2020. The campus-wide system adopts active and flexible learning approaches in the classroom to achieve the desired outcomes. Teaching the selected poems via applying concept mapping, think-pair-share, and other innovative strategies, the course expects the learners to improve their cognitive, affective, and interpersonal skills and thus improve their career prospects.

#### **Course Objectives (COBs):**

**The course intends to help students to**

**COB 1:** Acquaint themselves with basics of personality skills.

**COB 2:** Understand nature, scope, and types of thinking, emotional, and social skills.

**COB 3:** Read the prescribed poems to discuss various life skills in relation to literature.

**COB 4:** Develop their personality through bettering their soft skills with the help of poetry.

**Course Outcomes (COs):**

Upon the completion of this course, the students will be able to:

- CO 1:** Exhibit knowledge and understanding of various soft skills.
- CO 2:** Relate poetry reading to different cognitive, affective, and interpersonal skills.
- CO 3:** Analyze the prescribed short poems to discover the direct relationship between literature, life skills, and personality development.
- CO 4:** Apply essential knowledge of the different ways of thinking, feeling, and behaving to dealing with day-to-day issues.

## CONTENTS

### UNIT 1: Introduction

Soft Skills, Personality Development, and Poetry

Thinking Skills

Emotional Skills

Interpersonal/Social Skills

### UNIT 2: Analytical and Critical Thinking

‘The Road Not Taken’ by Robert Frost  
(<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/>)

‘The Times They Are A-Changin’ by Bob Dylan  
(<https://www.bobdylan.com/>)

‘Come Over Murri’ by Lionel Fogarty  
(<https://www.best-poems.net/>)

### Unit 3: Emotional Intelligence and Empathy

‘On Love’ by Kahlil Gibran  
(<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/>)

‘Kindness’ by Naomi Shihab Nye  
(<https://poets.org/>)

‘Ah, Come Sit beside Me’ by J. Krishnamurti  
([https://www.speakingtree.in/  
blog/turn-inwards](https://www.speakingtree.in/blog/turn-inwards))

## Unit 4: Interpersonal Communication and Teamwork

‘If’ by Rudyard Kipling (<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/>)

‘Words’ by Kamala Das (<https://www.poemhunter.com/>)

‘Still I Rise’ by Maya Angelou  
(<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/>)

### PRESCRIBED READINGS

1. <https://professional.dce.harvard.edu/blog/10-emerging-skills-for-professionals/>
2. <https://www.thebusinesswomanmedia.com/how-poetry-can-improve-soft-skills-list/>
3. Bryan Greetham, *Thinking Skills for Professionals*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.
4. <https://thepeakperformancecenter.com/educational-learning/thinking/critical-thinking/analytical-thinking-critical-thinking/>
5. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/emotional-intelligence>
6. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/empathy>
7. <https://www.mcgill.ca/skillsets/framework/teamwork-interpersonal>
8. Tim Z. Hernandez, “Father of Clarity,” [www.theatlantic.com](http://www.theatlantic.com), 2022.