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# Connecting Cultures and Building Character: The Efficacy of the Panchatantra in English Language Teaching

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## Abstract

*Education plays a crucial role in any individual's life, apart from providing knowledge it also helps in building moral character. Ancient Gurukula system nurtured the students with quality education, wisdom, moral and life lessons. Due to modernization in education system, the essence of education is at vague. English Language Teaching focuses on developing pedagogical materials that not only promote linguistic competence but also foster character development and intercultural understanding. Panchatantra, initially called as Nitishastra, is considered one of the oldest collections of Indian fables, which is capable of enlightening an individual's mind through its moral stories. Originally compiled during 300 BC by Pandit Vishnu Sharma, an orthodox Brahmin, it edifies the values and as its Sanskrit title justifies, it is a book for wise conduct of life. This paper extensively concentrates on imparting Panchatantra tales into the ELT classroom, to enrich the experience of learning beyond language and linguistic proficiency, contributing to the holistic development and cultural insights of Indian culture.*

**Keywords:** Panchatantra Fables, Story-Telling, English Language Teaching, Moral Development, Pedagogical Tool.

## Introduction

English Language Teaching has evolved remarkably over the decades. Earlier, functional and structural approaches were of main focus, but in the contemporary ELT pedagogy, the importance is given to linguistic competence, critical thinking and intercultural awareness. It is the need of the hour, not only to communicate effectively in English, but also develop the ability to connect with people culturally, ethically and to inherit the quality of living a moralistic and holistic life. This shift ultimately results in the exploration and integration of teaching materials that can enhance linguistic skills and impart humanistic values. A significant challenge in ELT is finding authentic, engaging and culturally rich teaching

materials that can be implemented in ELT classrooms regardless of the proficiency levels of the learners. Panchatantra is one such a source, in this world where digital resources dominate. Vishnu Sharma's Panchatantra stands out as a powerful pedagogical resource. It is one of the highly translated literary works in the history. This paper posits the effectiveness of Panchatantra fables in ELT classrooms, when adapted and integrated thoughtfully.

### **Theoretical Frameworks**

The efficacy of Panchatantra in ELT can be understood through varied theoretical frames. Stephen Krashen in his Second Language Acquisition states that language is acquired through comprehensible input. His input hypothesis strongly emphasizes on acquiring language through contexts that are slightly beyond the level but understandable. Panchatantra with its engaging storylines and comprehensible contexts provide the learners opportunity to acquire language.

Output hypothesis by Merrill Swain emphasizes the importance of producing language. The fables in Panchatantra serves as an excellent material that pushes the learners' creative ability, summarizing, re-telling and thereby promoting language output and skills development.

Intercultural Communicative Competence model by Michael Byram suggests that attitude, behaviour, cultural connection are also important apart from building linguistic competence. These lifeskills can be improved using stories in Panchatantra. Egan and Mallan in their articles strongly putforths that story-telling boosts the language and life skills of the learners. Panchatantra produced in India reciprocates the Indian culture and cultural awareness.

### **The Panchatantra**

Originally written in Sanskrit titled as 'NitiShashtra', it was written for the unmotivated princes to culture their minds. It is divided into five tantras.

- Mitra-bheda: The Separation of Friends
- It cautions against the consequences of losing friends and the inportance of choosing friends wisely.
- Mitra-lābha or Mitra-samprāpti: The Gaining of Friends
- It speaks on the importance of gaining and maintaining a good companionship.
- Kākōlūkīyam: Of Crows and Owls
- It explores the themes of war and peace and also elaborates on how misundsrstandings and deceit can weaken the unity of people.
- Labdhapraāśam: Loss Of Gains
- It warns about the dangers and effects of losing something what one has gained.
- Aparīkitakāraka: Ill-Considered Action
- It focuses on the importance of careful and shrewd planning to avoid rash actions.

The tales in the Panchatantra are exceedingly interesting, it includes clever animals outsmarting the strong ones, remarkable storylines and the surprising twists attracts the learners. Anthropomorphism is also followed by Vishnu Sharma to explore intense human behaviours and motivations through animal characters in a less direct and engaging way. The stories mainly focus on the morals framework of life, Niti. It speaks about the socio-cultural connection and ethical lifestyle. As it is born from the culturally rich nation, India, it never compensates in delivering the richness to its readers. The references in the fables are from the flora, fauna, social structure and philosophical concepts that are followed by the ancient Indians.

## Panchatantra in ELT

The integration of Panchatantra can yield notable benefits across language and linguistic skills, character development and cultural understanding. The fables introduce vocabulary related to animals, nature, emotions in a memorable way. Through the stories, one can learn the past tenses and the arrangement of words, promoting to grammar development. Complex ideas in simple language, aids the learners reading ability. The stories when narrated by the teacher or when played in animated version promotes listening skill among the learners. It also creates opportunities to discuss and debate on the topics promoting speaking skills. Creative writing is boosted using the themes in the fable, moral of the story and character analysis.

The Panchatantra serves as an window to the past, where people lived with morals, wisdom and believed in karma. The authenticity of Indian culture is widespread when Panchatantra is implemented in the classrooms. It also paves way for cross-cultural comparison. Learners can compare the fables and folktales of their mother nation with that of Panchatantra and bring out significant and productive topics for discussion. It develops empathy among the individuals.

Vishnu Sharma's main task was to educate the princes mentally and emotionally. In such a note, Panchatantra serves as a strong piece of art in identifying the moral lessons and delivering it promptly to the audience irrespective of age, gender and nationality. It also helps the learners to analyse a particular situation and provide solutions based on the situation. It is understood better, when the fables are connected with the real-life experiences of people. It also develops foresight, the main theme is to think before action. The mistakes committed by the characters helps the learners to plan and consider thoughtfully. It also offers insights on friendships, alliances and social relationships.

## Practical Implementations

Fables are to be chosen wisely in order to receive proper results. Varied activities can be undertaken apart from reading comprehension.

### Role-Play using the Dialogues between the Characters

- Visualizing the structure of the plot.
- Debate on the characters' actions and decisions.
- Writing short note on the characters, writing from the character's point of view and deriving a conclusion or end twist beyond the original conclusion.
- Comparing different tales with similar themes and comparing illustrations from varied editions and cultures.
- Facilitates discussions on specific topics enhancing speaking skills and social connection.

### Scope of the Study

- This study helps in promoting cultural, ethical, moral values apart from linguistic competence.
- It opens opportunity for the foreign learners to dive into the rich culture of India.
- It aids the Gen Z learners and the forthcoming learners to impart knowledge about the Indian aesthetics.
- Grammar and other language skills can be improved when Panchatantra tales are used appropriately.
- Teaching-learning becomes easier and entertaining.

### **Limitations of the Study**

- This study deals with the base for Panchatantra pedagogy.
- The main focus of Panchatantra fables in ELT classrooms is to enhance the language skills and linguistic competence.
- The wise choice of story plays a vital role.
- The text has to be handled with sensitivity and cultural awareness, since there are chances for cultural misinterpretations.
- The archaic language used in the text, though it is translated, it requires detailed explanation.

### **Scope for Future Study**

- The future researchers may research on the deeper aspects of teaching Panchatantra in ELT classrooms.
- A detailed study on Panchatantra pedagogy can be done.
- The effectiveness of animated version of the story can also be researched.

### **Conclusion**

Panchatantra fables serve as a remarkably potent resource in the search for holistic and engaging ELT approaches. Its unique collection of ancient fables offers far more than just linguistic input. English language and linguistic skills can be fostered by leveraging these fables in ELT classrooms. It shapes the learners' wisdom, ethics and cultural insight. Panchatantra solidifies its place as a culturally rich and character-building language education. It triggers the learners with universal human experiences through a cultural lens, exploring and comparing the contents. The simple language and anthropomorphic-centric plot conveys complex ideas in simple tone. It helps in enhancing fluency and accuracy in English language. Ultimately, the wisdom embedded within these ancient fables continues to offer profound lessons, not just for life, but for learning language in a meaningful context.

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