

Decolonizing Literary Comprehension through GenAI: Harnessing Generative AI for Visual and Contextual Insights into Literary Texts

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The global ELT industry often emphasizes literary texts rooted in British culture, which can pose significant comprehension challenges for students in post-colonial contexts such as Sri Lanka. Although the prescribed literary texts in the Sri Lankan A/L syllabus include selections from world literature, most of these works originate from British and American contexts. These literary texts rooted in British and American culture, pose significant comprehension challenges for students in local classrooms. The cultural nuances embedded in poems, short stories, novels and dramas often remain alien to the students, creating a disconnect that hampers engagement and understanding of the prescribed texts fully, resulting in low performances in responding to them. Close observations of classroom teaching, along with questionnaires and interviews conducted with learners and teachers, revealed that local students showed little interest, as the culturally bounded elements alienated them. This research study, therefore, sought to fill this cultural divide by integrating literature with AI technologies particularly the ChatGPT image generation capability to enhance contextual understanding and promote a decolonized approach to teaching literature. Conducted with ten literature teachers from the Kurunegala district, the research involved training them to incorporate AI-generated illustrations into their lessons. The study catered to 55 students who offered Literature as a subject for A/L. These AI-produced visuals served as cultural mediators, helping students bridge the gap between unfamiliar literary settings and their own lived experiences. Classroom observations, teacher reflections, and student feedback revealed that AI-generated imagery facilitated contextualization by visually representing abstract and foreign concepts, making literary themes and settings more accessible. Furthermore, it enabled students to reimagine texts beyond their colonial frameworks, fostering deeper engagement and critical discussion. The findings highlight AI's potential as a pedagogical tool that not only enhances literary comprehension but also promotes interaction, learner autonomy, critical thinking and creativity. Classroom observation, feedback forms, questionnaires and interviews were the main data collection tools, and the data was analysed using thematic analysis.

These insights affirm that AI-assisted visualizations can serve as a decolonizing strategy, empowering Sri Lankan students to engage with English literature beyond its traditional Eurocentric framing.

Keywords: Literary comprehension, AI image generation in teaching, Decolonizing approach