
Cultural Teaching In The Age Of Artificial Intelligence

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Abstract

This article delves into the challenges of literary reading in teaching and learning at the university level, particularly in the digital age and amidst the influence of artificial intelligence. The relationship between reading, performance, and skills in lessons and tutorials is explored through a survey gathered from first-year undergraduate and postgraduate students. The analysis of the results indicates that individuals with higher writing skills tend to have a more positive relationship with reading than their peers with lower writing skills. It is observed that those who read less or not at all not only struggle themselves but also create challenges for educators despite their considerable efforts. Further observations highlight the digital revolution's potential shortcomings and artificial intelligence's disruptive impact. These technological advancements are introducing new methods, causing disruptions and eroding traditional reading habits. The reflections on this observation lead to examining the consequences, focusing on the practice of reading, the act of reading and teaching, and the relationship with literary texts in the digital age and artificial intelligence. The aim is to propose alternative forms and practices considering utilizing new techniques and adopting innovative approaches.

Keywords: *Teaching-learning, Competence, Language, Culture, Literature, Artificial intelligence*

Introduction

We need to reflect on the act of teaching and reading regarding the issues at stake and the prospects for the future. This theme aligns with current concerns, as reading and teaching are two crucial activities in teaching and learning, albeit fraught with crises.

It goes without saying that beneath the trivial and banal appearance, reading holds a fabulous treasure: a sublime cavern of Ali Baba. It is the key to fully understanding, deciphering and living the world. Hence, the enthusiasm propels us to rethink this issue and place it at the centre of our reflections in the digital age.

Reading had been stated in the highest divine source, the Koran, wherein Allah addressed his prophet with the first Quranic verse: "*Lis! Iqraâ!*". Regarding the origins of reading, there is no need to reiterate the richest sayings on books and reading, all of which agree that reading is an essential psycho-sensory activity, but even more so, an act of commitment and attitudes.

However, teachers everywhere are sounding the alarm about the reading problem in teaching/learning, particularly at the university. What is the relationship with reading? What can the literary text achieve in the context of teaching and learning at the university today? What roles can be assigned to teachers supposed to be committed readers and responsible for pedagogical practices that positively influence learners' reading habits? What happens when

these same teachers cannot develop a taste for reading, knowing that some seem to have little affinity for it? These are just some of the issues that are increasingly part of our daily lives, and the aim will be to examine the conditions under which literary texts are accepted and the difficulties encountered when incorporating them into the teaching corpus and as objects of study.

Beyond any consideration of linguistic and cultural policies, an archaeology of knowledge can shed light on such issues and reassess the relationship between reading literary texts and the act of reading today.

Reading and teaching today: the state of play

Integrating artificial intelligence (AI) into our daily lives, customs, and practices sparks interest, rejection, fascination, and scepticism. Despite these mixed feelings, it is becoming inevitable in our day-to-day existence. This substantial phenomenon provokes significant controversy in teaching languages, cultures, and literature at the university level. Proponents of AI-assisted and remote teaching practices clash with those who champion the humanist traditions of conventional teaching.

The crucial question arises: Can transmitting knowledge and teaching/learning through new avenues in the digital age genuinely enhance our humanity? This inquiry occupies the thoughts of many these days. Such problematization prompts a profound reflection on the use of AI in teaching and learning, weighing the pros and cons. This evaluation leads to an optimistic vision and an alternative approach to teaching that embraces the potential of AI.

It is imperative to reconsider our relationship with reading, the common good, and treasure for all of humanity. Emphasizing the challenges of reading in the age of globalization and artificial intelligence, which is essentially a human creation but significantly advanced, calls for an alternative perspective on the act of reading and its relationship. The book and the digital realm represent two revolutions in the history of humankind.

The objective is to highlight various classroom situations to effectively involve literary texts within the university pedagogy and scholarship framework. This consists of examining issues related to students' practices, attitudes, and the quality of written language. Subsequently, the aim is to identify paradigms that can facilitate a renewed understanding of the act of reading within the teaching framework.

Moreover, enhancing digital literacy awareness for more proficient utilization is crucial. This encompasses e-readers, emerging reading applications (like Alibaba's machine-learning model), audiobooks employing synthetic voices, and other instances of artificial intelligence surpassing human capabilities. This domain is ever-evolving, with technology companies, such as the influential Google, furnishing precise answers by storing extensive information from various sources.

It is a great privilege for teachers and learners to quickly access information and locate a book. However, despite occasional technical difficulties in network accessibility, distance teaching, learning, and online scientific and cultural events (which have seen significant advancements in recent years), the practice of reading and the relationship with books is constantly under threat, particularly in university Humanities departments.

The joy of exploring the life and work of writers from past centuries and researching corresponding periods has all but disappeared. A simple click on a search engine can complete the task, allowing information to be printed and submitted to the class. Although PDF versions of literary works or studies are increasingly accessible, they, in reality, hinder the production of meaningful book reports. Additionally, the rise of scientific dishonesty is evident among plagiarists at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels in technical

commentaries, essays, dissertations, and theses. The use of ChatGPT further complicates the evaluation process.

These findings can be attributed to laziness, a lack of curiosity, and a distaste for reading, implying that individuals do not engage in reading activities, have never had an affinity for books, and rarely cultivate the habit of reading. Here are a few examples illustrating the need for more motivation to read.

In the first year of the Master's course in literature, where classes and assignments focus on French-language Maghreb literature, students present contemporary French authors with a total confusion of eras, origins, and various considerations. They even go so far as to mistake the names and works of the classics of Algerian literature, such as "Mouloud DIB" and "Mohamed FERAOUN."

The problem of comprehension is inevitable, and the risk of completely missing the point is genuine. A brief commentary or response shows this response, not to mention an assignment, on a fable by Jean de La Fontaine, "*Les femmes et le secret*" [i.e., Women and Secrecy]. In this fable, we expect to find a moral denouncing various faults, such as the propagation of a secret and the inability to keep it, even when it is implausible. The story's moralizing is accentuated through situational comedy and the literary register of irony: discretion, even with those closest, is portrayed with a light touch of misogyny. The big disappointment comes when we read the text produced; after just five lines, the conclusion briefly explains "*the fraud of the woman who cheats on her husband and the dangers of sexuality.*"

Significant delays were during the sessions devoted to analyzing poems, with challenges in reading and reciting aloud, including respecting intonation, pronunciation phrases, difficult letters, and alliances. It was a difficult time.

The lack of vocabulary and the failure to use dictionaries and encyclopedias are glaring. Upon reading the draft of a Master's dissertation on a novel by Hamid Grine, "*Clandestine*," one expression seems intriguing: "*Les années hémoglobines*" to mean "*the years of blood*," about the 1990s and the context of terrorism in Algeria. This pompous exaggeration in tone and this metaphor of pure invention resemble that of a journalist who published an article presenting this novel in the national daily newspaper "Reporters" on December 3, 2017. This suggests that not only do we struggle to read, but we also struggle to understand what to read.

When you read and genuinely enjoy reading, it becomes apparent when faced with a learner whose profile as a reader is immediately prominent. Here is just one example from a directed work on an extract from "*The Little Prince*" by Saint-Exupéry, where the theme of friendship (an allegory, even a parable) is celebrated through a vast lexical field chosen to meditate on the meaning of friendship: creating links, taming, being responsible for one's flower. The fox teaches us that friendship is a cult, a rite that cannot be performed overnight and must become a responsibility. The Little Prince then understands that he is responsible for his flower, the only one of its kind in the world, despite its grand airs, because he has tamed it sufficiently. The symbolic value of the philosophical tale lies in the profound meaning of the initiation to life.

The most significant moment in reading this passage was the one that led to another reflection and raised questions about the other or otherness through a sentence uttered by the fox: "*Language is a source of misunderstanding.*" After this, the Little Prince understood everything and repeated, "*You can only see clearly with your heart; what is essential is invisible to the eye.*" This scene conveys much about our relationship with others through an

allusive reference to the myth of the Tower of Babel, a highly historical and symbolic tale (a place of the confusion of languages).

Here, we witness the blossoming of a second-degree reading that revisits all mysticism and esotericism through a dual philosophical and anthropological lens. This last example takes us from an exploratory, cursive reading to an active, polysemic, and analytical reading.

The crucial point to emphasize for successful reading sessions during tutorials is the need to highlight a few relevant aspects:

- The notion of textual variation;
- The importance of the thematic and comparative approach (linking texts from different cultural areas, blending them without regard to their origins);
- Listening for intertextual echoes in literary texts;
- Adopting teaching methods and approaches is part of a didactic approach with a robust intercultural bias.

Reading must first and foremost challenge the teacher's professional conscience. On the complex question of how to define oneself as a literature teacher and one's relationship to reading, various conceptions exist regarding the nature of teaching literature. Some see it as a sacred act, others as an art, and finally, as a profession. Naturally, these diverse perspectives significantly influence how a literature teacher perceives themselves.

For almost everyone, teaching literary texts is more than just a job; it is a passion for literature. Undoubtedly, passion plays a pivotal role in the teaching process, where the role surpasses the mere transmission of the spoken word. It involves books and the transmission of ideas, encouraging reflective reading. Antoine Compagnon emphasizes this: "*I have always thought that the teacher should disappoint, make people want something more than what he or she gives.*" He adds, "*The teacher must dissatisfy, leave their listeners with questions rather than answers. They have to leave their listeners perplexed, with questions they did not have before, and with the feeling that they are more intelligent than before.*"¹

Beyond its symbolic significance, the famous opening and closing words of Voltaire's tale "*Candide ou l'optimisme*," "*Il faut cultiver notre jardin*" [i.e., We must cultivate our garden], put into practice by the characters, have another connotation: working the mind, which, in this case, is reading or the act of reading.

From the popular proverb "*reading is food for the brain*" to neuroscience, which considers reading an excellent form of exercise for the brain, the term "*literary reading*" encompasses various approaches depending on where it is used and the context. It also refers to a set of practices whose issues involve teachers and learners. Beyond a traditional conception of reading, a vision of the subject-reader, in this case, the student, is essential, as envisioned by Michel Tournier:

¹ Antoine Compagnon is a writer and literary critic. He has been a professor at the Collège de France since 2006, where he occupies the chair of Modern and Contemporary French Literature, focusing on its history, criticism, and theory."

“Yes, the natural, irrepressible vocation of books is centrifugal. It is made to be published, distributed, launched, bought, and read. The writer’s famous Ivory Tower is, in fact, a launching tower. We always come back to the reader as the writer’s indispensable collaborator. A book does not have one author but an indefinite number of authors. In addition to the person who wrote it, there are all those who have read it, are reading it, or will read it. A book that is written but not read does not fully exist. It has only half an existence. It is a virtuality, a bloodless, empty, unhappy being, exhausted in its cry for help to exist. Writers know this, and when they publish a book, they unleash a swarm of paper birds into the anonymous crowd of men and women, dry, bloodthirsty vampires who scatter at random in search of readers. When a book lands on a reader, it swells with warmth and dreams. It blossoms, it flourishes, and it finally becomes what it is: an imaginary, teeming world where the writer’s intentions and the reader’s fantasies mingle indistinctly, as they do on a child’s face, the features of its father and mother.” - Michel Tournier, “Le Vol du Vampire,” Paris: Mercure de France, 1981.

In “*En lisant en écrivant*”² (a collection of fragments and notes published in 1980), Julien Gracq reflects on the writer who writes and reads while writing.

What neuroscience reveals

The neurosciences raise numerous questions and provide answers about the practice of reading: How does reading alter our brain? What occurs in our cerebral system during reading? Does the brain’s anatomy change as we learn to read? Is there a specific cerebral architecture for reading? What constitutes the neural code of written words? Can we lose particular skills through the process of learning to read? How do cognitive sciences relate to learning at school? What would our world be like without the words to perceive it? Neuroscience has addressed these questions, offering insights into the mysteries of our brains during the reading process.

While our genes have not explicitly evolved for learning to read, studies indicate that writing has adapted to accommodate the constraints of our brains. Current research supports this perspective, including that of neuroscience researcher Stanislas Dehaene.³ in “*Les neurones de la lecture*.” Since Sigmund Freud, the connection between reading and brain circuitry has been acknowledged.

Neuropsychology, neuroimaging, and neuroethics present verifiable theses about the power of reading and writing, as demonstrated by neuropsychiatrist Boris Cyrulnik: “*We speak to weave a link, we write to give shape to an uncertain world, to emerge from the fog by illuminating a corner of our mental world. While a spoken word is a real interaction, a written word modifies the imaginary,*” as written in “*La nuit, j’écrirai des soleils*” : 9.

Ongoing neuroscience studies emphasize the importance of reading in mitigating signs of Alzheimer’s and potentially slowing the progressive loss of memory and certain intellectual functions.

The literary text as a genuine instrument of knowledge

The traditional theoretical or historical question, “What is the practice of reading?” is now met with a more crucial inquiry: “What can literary reading achieve? What value does our society and surrounding culture ascribe to the act of reading? What utility does it hold? What role and purpose does it serve? What is the relevance of literature today?” In response to these questions, Antoine Compagnon asserts, “*Only reading can save us*”:

²Julien Gracq, *Reading while writing*, Paris, José Corti, 1980

³Ecole Normale Supérieure PSL conference “How does literature change our brain?”

Literature helps us live better, to live well. Those who engage with literature possess assets, irrespective of their professional pursuits. Proust said, "*You become a better lawyer, engineer, or excel in any profession if you are also a reader. It grants a kind of mastery over events, over what unfolds in life. It lets you experience things vicariously, giving you more control over your life.*"⁴

The enduring relationship between the human sciences and literature, which has existed for a substantial period, is evident. Literature contributes to knowledge by serving as a model for historians, sociologists, and even ethnologists. The novel serves as a genuine instrument of expertise, echoing through historical figures like Herodotus, Ibn Khaldun, Freud, travelogues, exotic literature, and science fiction novels.

However, in the contemporary era of heightened globalization, the global village, and artificial intelligence, the question arises: Does this belief still hold? Unfortunately, the age-old practices of maintaining a tactile connection with manuscripts are vanishing by the day, replaced by a digital paradigm: zero paper, only rays of light that assail the eyes.

Having extensively utilized videoconferencing during the epidemic, Antoine Compagnon acknowledges, "*I conducted my Columbia seminars this autumn from my office at the Collège de France, and I found the students excellent and very professional. It forced me to change my teaching methods, so it rejuvenated me. Not everyone has this experience, and I would still like to get back to live communication! Contact is important. It is great to do many things remotely in the digital world... Nevertheless, that does not replace live performance, and teaching is a performance!*" He further posits that literature provides a certain distance from life events, stating, "*The confinement has just reminded us of that! The bookstore has done rather well this year. What happened during the lockdown is proof that reading is essential.*"

If reading is essential, it must be universal, worldwide, and transhistorical in different ways. This concept is advocated by William Marx, the Chair of Comparative Literature at the Collège de France, offering another perspective on teaching literature. The teaching of comparative literature, which emerged in Europe and America as early as the 19th century, involves reading texts of all origins and statuses, conducting essential literary analyses within the context and in service of immobile travel and disorientation, and exercising admiration. This approach is expanding to open the door of the world library, fostering unlimited readers capable of reading beyond literature, shedding a certain historicity through a process of defamiliarization.

The very notion of literature becomes problematic, encompassing historically dated and geographically localized presuppositions and uses. Hence, the title of the chair is in the plural, proposing the study not of *literature* but of *literatures*. The focus is on acknowledging their diversity linguistically, culturally, and anthropologically. Comparative Literature research centres on the evolution of aesthetics and the status of literature from Antiquity to the present day, placing their variation according to the culture at the core of studies.

In his 2019-2020 course titled "*Construire, déconstruire la bibliothèque*" at the Collège de France, William Marx, a specialist in French, Anglo-American, Italian, and Germanic literary traditions (agrégé de lettres classiques), introduces the idea of reading in the world library.

⁴Léa Salamé, a journalist from BOOMRAANG on France Inter, interviewed with Antoine Compagnon, professor of French literature at the Collège de France since 2006 and holder of the chair of modern and contemporary French literature. The interview aired at 7:50 a.m. You can listen to the interview [here](#)."

The course addresses the question, “*Sommes-nous ce que nous lisons?*” [i.e., Are we what we read?], emphasizing the comparative nature of all reading. According to Marx, every work is read through this comparative lens, and literature, by prompting us to explore other worlds, helps us transcend our imaginary realk j à-dge de France.

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