



PROBLEMS OF *STUDYING ENGLISH* IN THE UG COLLEGES OF ASSAM, INDIA WITH SPECIAL REFERENCES TO THE COLLEGES OF DHUBRI DISTRICT

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Received: 19/01/2018

Edited: 29/01/2018

Accepted: 13/02/2018

Abstract: *Studying English in Indian context has been viewed by the author here, as a comradeship between the teacher and the learner. Every forward step of the teacher must be reciprocated by the learner in order to maximize the benefit. And, in order to be able to do this the learner must possess:*

- (a) *Basic linguistic aptitude;*
- (b) *Proficiency in mother tongue;*
- (c) *Basic idea about indigenous socio-cultural matters; &*
- (d) *A Historical sense of European cultural heritage.*

The author fixes a three-fold task in the present research activity:

- (1) *To provide a basic understanding regarding the study of English in the UG level colleges of Assam highlighting the strengths and weaknesses of the course-pattern.*
- (2) *To stimulate and justify the benefits of learning English in the present Global perspective and*
- (3) *To see how quantitative and qualitative changes can be brought in the teaching/ learning process of English with a slight adaptation to the present system by a mutual effort.*

Key words: *English, Problem of studying English.*

Introduction:

By the term 'Linguistic aptitude' the investigator wants to cover the various ingredients of English Language i.e. Grammar, Vocabulary, communicative skill etc. All these are inter-related as well as intra-related phenomena which contribute to a proper understanding and conveying of any idea correctly. 'Historical sense' refers to a basic conception of the socio-cultural aspects of Europe. 'Mother tongue' refers to the everyday-use language of the learner while 'Indigenous Culture' refers to the parameters of English in Indian cultural heritage.

While investigating these key issues a comparatively wider aspect of English teaching could not be left unexamined. This is because the issues emanating from English language pedagogy are complex in nature involving a larger educational agenda, comprising social, cultural, economic and political factors.

This brought the investigator to the wider areas of study as a viable paradigm that can be

explored for other options to conceptualize the English language pedagogy at the Under Graduate level.

Problems:

The main problems that are faced in the UG level have been identified as the following:

1. No idea about the dual status of English i.e. English Literature and English Language.
2. No prescribed methodologies in the teaching/ learning procedure.
3. Overcrowded, unhygienic and unscientific classroom causing inability to individual attention and successful interaction.
4. Heterogeneous learners having varied proficiency level, diverse socio- economic and cultural background imposing serious hurdles for the teaching-learning system in general.
5. Lack of awareness among the students about the enormous potentiality of English.
6. Lack of a scientific course pattern covering both the language and literature aspects of English;

Review of the problems & their suggested solutions:

1. Studying English means studying two subjects: (1) English Language and (2) English Literature. The case is like the two sides of a coin. Study of one confiscating the other is quite impossible. But, surprisingly this has been going on in India unlike most non-native English countries. In the UG level the students are taught only Literature. Language Teaching is totally avoided. And this conceptual error has been inviting hosts of problems making the subject leveled as **'Difficult'**.

Language is an instrument of communication, which makes it possible for two or more persons to establish and sustain a relationship, while literature is a means of communication through which peoples' culture is transmitted from generation to generation. So, if the purpose of learning a language is communication and literature is also communication, then the two are two sides of a coin, which are not separable (Adesuyi, 1991). A language therefore, is both a component of culture and a central network through which other components are expressed (Lado, 1964). The two subjects-English Language and Literature-in-English are reciprocal. The knowledge of literature prepares the foundation for language learning and vice versa. Apart from entertainment, literature enhances students' general use of language since communication takes place all the time in Literature. Literature helps learners develop their understanding of other cultures, make them aware of the differences in cultures as well as enable them tolerate and understand other peoples' cultures. This reciprocity makes Ogunnaike (2002) opine that the two subjects English literature and English language should be integrated since they are inter-related.

As soon as the student learns the basics of a language, he feels encouraged to study more literary texts having higher linguistic resources. This tendency ultimately helps the learner to acquire familiarity with 'different linguistic uses, forms, and conventions of the written mode: with irony, exposition, argument, narration, and so on.' (p.4)[5]

Yorke sees the matter through narrative literature like fiction, novel etc. where the learner finds something of universal human passions, their life-style, problems and experiences: "It [narrative literature] contains a wide variety of styles, ranging from everyday conversation to suggestive rhetorical devices." [Yorke]

Collie and Slater affirms that students' proficiency of language increase through the study of literatures on that language.[3] The functions of the written language becomes properly realized by the students while learning the literary texts. Carter and Walker also argue that as literature itself is the use of language so naturally analytic study of literature helps learning the language.

Thus, in order to have a successful study of English both language and literature should go simultaneously.

2. Like other parts of India, in the Colleges of Dhubri District in Assam affiliated to Gauhati University also, teaching of English is performed in the traditional Lecture-method. And everybody knows that the success of Lecture-method depends on the personal efficiency of the teacher which is rarely expected to be a general rule. But, all the defects of Lecture-method are reflected in the teaching/learning sphere in general. Students have nothing but to play the role of dumb listeners. The basic objectives of the learners i.e. to learn the language, gather knowledge and derive pleasure of literature mostly remain unfulfilled. These issues were understood while examining the answers in the student Questionnaire distributed among the UG students. Most of the students felt that there was practically no scope on their part to participate in the teaching /learning system in the existing system. The course content and teaching methods only demand them to be mute listeners. Inquisitiveness is sometimes looked upon as an impertinent interruption to the process.

Thus, a review of the teaching methodology appears most essential in consideration to the changing perspective of the study of English in the colleges under GU, Assam. The author feels

that multiple methods instead of a traditional method may be helpful. Modern technologies should be used.

3. The number of students in the class room on the one hand and their varying proficiency level because of diverse socio-cultural and economic background on the other are acute impediments for the proper teaching-learning process.

This is certainly a very acute problem having no real solution in a country like India where Multiculturalism had been prevailing long before the European intelligentsia thought it worth studying in the Universities.

The author holds that the only remedy to this monstrous problem is to limit the number of students in a class where the teachers will get more opportunity to convey radical ideas through their personal contacts.

In the village based colleges the students suffer from a certain type of fear psychosis so far as English is concerned. The main reason is defective or incomplete background. Although several reformative steps have been taken to reform the teaching of English in the schools in recent years, yet there exist many feeder schools where English is taught by untrained and unskilled (sometimes Under Graduate) teachers. Besides being weak in Grammar and vocabulary, the students learn defective pronunciation in such schools. And these two factors ultimately develop formidable fear psychosis about the subject.

Even in this Post-modern and Globalized world very few students of the concerned locality are aware of the immense potentiality of English both in Higher education and job market. As such very few students take the matter seriously and invest extra efforts to learn the subject properly. The overall tendency is just to overcome the monstrous hurdle somehow. And this negative approach is enough to demoralize the teachers and make him reluctant to adopt any individual effort. Thus, both the teachers and the students perform the teaching-learning activity as a matter of routine compulsion.

The author feels that the only solution to overcome this problem rests on a strong and flawless school education like the Public School system of England.

In the (+2) stages, students have been given a compact course of linguistics (Grammar, compositions etc.) and literature which is so vast that it is quite impossible to teach/learn properly. Infrastructural problem plays the most vital role in this case. The course-contents, class-room conditions and time-schedule---all are mis-matched or matched unscientifically. Moreover, there are no teachers to teach English in the (+2) stages in the colleges. In addition to their normal duties, the teachers of the Degree section have to teach in the (+2) stage also. As a result there develops some real problems both on the part of the teachers and to the students. The lofty ideas of the scholarly syllabus makers mostly go in vain for their practical non-execution or improper and partial execution.

It appears to the author that the Individual infrastructure in this regard will make the situation beneficial.

4. Another problem is the absence of interaction. Instead of encouraging the students to take part actively, sometimes some inquisitive students are looked upon as a disturb creator in the teaching-learning process. And this is sufficient to make the whole class a mute audience for ever.

The author feels that there should be a compulsory time schedule for interaction in every class lecture. As there is no suggested methodology to substitute the Lecture method, so every class lecture should have a supplementary interaction session. Only through an interactive-session the weakness of the Lecture method can be overcome.

In the newly implemented Semester system of the T.D.C course of Gauhati University, English is a compulsory subject. The importance, whatsoever, is diminished to a great extent. Unlike earlier B.A Course where a student had to study Two papers of a total marks of (100+100=200), a Pass course student in all the streams [Arts, Science,

Commerce] under the present syllabus has to study English in Two papers of a total of 100 marks,(50+50=100). A student has to appear for 50 marks in the 1st semester and another 50 marks in the 2nd Semester. The texts are chosen keeping careful attention to the current Global literary and Cultural aspects of English. Passing is compulsory. Every student has to secure at least 30% marks in order to qualify for the B.A degree. The University has shown lineal attitude by providing a provision of 20 % marks from the internal assessment. The Question Pattern has also been changed radically to provide greater scope of passing. The system has been completely modified with a view to smooth the situation and to provide opportunities for better results.

But unfortunately it has done a serious blunder which had been noticed in some of the Indian states earlier. For the sake of Quantity, quality has been sacrificed. And even then, the change practically failed miserably to bring any real reformation in the Teaching-learning of English in the state. Neither the attitudes nor the performances of the students have indicated any sign to feel elated. To the contrary, the narrowing of scope of English in the course-pattern appears lamentable speculating its long term consequences.

And here again, once more, the cause is understood to be a general negative or lukewarm attitude towards English and lack of awareness about the importance of English in the present Global perspectives.

The case of Major students in English is rather more miserable. At par the new syllabus, a Major student in English has to secure at least 40% marks in each of the 20 Papers of 100 Marks .Almost everything in English has been included in the syllabus including a paper of Optional Choice. The selection of the texts has been made very carefully and rationally. The present T.D.C syllabus in English (M) is nothing but the introductory or beginning part of the P. G. Course in English of the GU. The question pattern has also been changed radically keeping an eye towards the NET/SLET exams.

Conducted by the UGC for qualifying into Professorship. **The University has tried its best to give the B.A (Major) courses in the colleges the impetus of other professional Graduation courses like Engineering [BE], Medical [MBBS] etc.** But, here also it has been assumed that the students who come to study Major course in English are well conversant in the 'Linguistic' aspects (i.e. Grammar, vocabulary, communication etc.) of English. This is certainly too much an expectation from a student coming from rural background. True it is that a massive reformation in school education has been done in recent years; still most of the students (even those having 80% marks or above) are quite poorly trained with the linguistic features. As a result, the students of English [Major] feel overburdened from the very beginning and fail to achieve a good result ultimately. In many cases it has been noticed that a student of less proficiency/merit secures a better result that opts for some other subjects. Even the best possible effort and comparatively more labour and expenditure fail to generate a satisfactory result in English.

The author finds that the root of this menace is 'overlooking or neglecting of the Linguistic aspects of English' in almost all the stages of the teaching/learning process in the concerned locality. The students are taught either English literature or English language. They are never taught a balanced course containing both the aspects of English.

Thus, the author specially feels the necessity of the inclusion of a compulsory paper of 100 marks in 'Communicative English' to the Major course just like the newly implemented 'Methodology' and 'Computer Basics' papers in PhD courses of various Universities. In this regard, opinions of modern researchers on the subject like Joanne Collie, R.Ledo, J. Ogunnaike, T.Slater T. & J.Li, may be consulted.

Conclusion:

Problems of studying English in a rural setup are truly speaking 'a global problem with local addenda'. Of late English has become the global

language on the one hand and English literature has reached the status of world literature on the other. So, studying English implies undertaking a Herculean effort. The success opens the door of prosperity while failure proves catastrophic and disastrous. In present day India, English has reached the status of the Mythological 'Kalpabriksha'. (Gopalacharia).

"The increase in the use of English in India at present is "overwhelming". Presently, the estimated English language users in India are about 350 million. Although till today only 4 percent of Indians use English, yet India is the largest English-using population in the world. Over 350 million of users which are greater than the combined population of the two English speaking countries the USA and the UK" (Crystal; 2003)[1]. Literatures in English are nowadays recognized as part of the national literatures, and amazingly English language has become the unofficial but only acceptable (!) national Language of the Indian nation with a population of 1.21 crore. English language and its literature have, thus, penetrated very deep into the socio-cultural life of India.

In India, Education is elitist from the very beginning. It was never easily accessible to the commoners. As a result in both Pre-Colonial and Colonial period education served as a way to accomplish worldly prosperity and 'an avenue of upward mobility to those with resources' (khashru). And Education here refers to English education that was set up by Macaulay in 1853. The trend remained unchanged even after 65 years of Independence of the Country defying the emergence of various socio-ethnic and regional powers. The Higher Education system has undergone a 13-fold growth in number of Universities and a 26-fold increase in number of Colleges. In 2002-2003, there were 196 Universities 76 Deemed Universities and 13500 Colleges including 1600 Women Colleges besides thousands of Non-Gov. or Private Colleges. But, the number of

Universities have increased to 480 in 2010. The pressing demand, whatsoever, has made the Ministry of Human Resource Development, Govt. of India to establish another 800 Universities with immediate effect to cater the need of the increasing number of students. The number of Colleges and schools are also need to be increased in the same proportion. (Govt. of India portal)

Presently India produces an enviable amount, more than 3.1 million of fresh Graduates every year from various Institutions of Higher learning in India. India presently has approximately three hundred forty-seven institutes of higher learning and 16,885 colleges with a full registration of over 9.9 million. These institutions produce approximately 495,000 technical graduates, almost 2.3 million other graduates and over 300,000 post-graduates yearly.[2](The figure exceeds the individual total population of many countries!) In addition there are 1.5K research institutes and is the second largest pool of engineers and doctors in the world[3]. This is certainly a pointer to the potential strength of India in Human Resources.

But, under the bright record of quantity, a very dark and dismal picture of Quality lies hidden. The bright records of brilliance and outstanding performances of a handful of talented personalities who shine by their own brilliance both nationally and internationally are just a silver lining over a dark, worn-out and diseased system. The author feels that the massive unemployment/un-utilization of the aforesaid number of qualified Human Resource is **primarily due to their weakness in English.**

Finally, the author feels that it is high time to implement the suggested measures to stop further deterioration. The author further feels that the social changes and their probable directions are needed to be microscopic observation to find a proper way out to solve the problems.[3000]

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