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# AN ASSESSMENT OF THE PROBLEMS OF TEACHING ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE TO THE UNDERGRADUATE CLASSES

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**Abstract:** English language has always earned the status of official language. Besides it is in high demand especially in the higher education. One cannot open the gates of their high profile career without the key of English Language. However the scenario is extensively different in the education System. The importance of learning English language has been understood by everyone but practicing English speaking and writing is a serious concern of only few. This has led to the widening gap between the speakers of English and Non-speakers of English. The increasing number of the unemployment indicates that there is a wide gap between the classroom teaching Learning and the expectations of the corporate. The corporate demands the person with the ability to express effectively in English whereas the students are not being trained for the same in the classroom itself. Hence expectations of the Industry are not been fulfilled by the academia. Moreover the syllabus designed by the universities is not coping up with the present demands of the employment. This speaks for the wide gap between the industry and the academia. What are the factors that are responsible for this gap is the key concern of this paper. The challenges in teaching in general and English in particular are the pressing points of the discussion of this paper. It also highlights some of the experiments that are carried out in the classroom for developing the Language Learning skills. Finally the paper would suggest a few practices to be adopted for teaching English. Thus this paper is the result of the ponderings of the various issues and problems that are faced by the undergraduate teachers for teaching English.

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**Introduction:** The increasing number of the unemployment is an indication that there is a wide gap between the classroom teaching learning and the expectations of the corporate. The corporate demands the skilled human resource whereas the classes are unaware about the expectations of the industry. On the other hand the syllabus designed by the universities is not coping up with the present demands of the employment. This speaks for the wide gap between the industry and the academia. What are the factors that are responsible for this gap is the key concern of this paper. The challenges in teaching in general and in English in particular are the immediate points of the discussion. Finally the paper would suggest a few practices to be adopted for teaching English. Thus this paper is the result of the ponderings of the various issues and problems that are faced by the researcher for teaching English. It also highlights some of the experiments that are carried out in the classroom for developing LSRW skills.

**Review of Literature:** Higher education in India is still a luxury to some people. In spite of Government's initiatives in reaching education to every child, it has not achieved the remarkable results. English has a fundamental role to play in the Higher Education in India. The words of V K Gokak are very suggestive, " —It would be rash to cure ourselves off from the English language which keeps us in continuous content with the latest thought in Europe, in every field of life and culture". On a large scale, quite a large number of students in India are from vernacular medium. Learning English language for them is an exercise in grammar and syntax. Grammar Translation Method (GTM) is used for teaching English at various Levels. One cannot afford to remain away from learning English language as it will deprive us away from the new knowledge. In the professional courses it is taught as a compulsory subject. Instead of compulsory it should be taught as English for Specific Purpose (ESP). The text books are ready references for the examinations. The prescribed chapters from the text book within the stipulated time are the goals of the teachers. Academic exercises are secondary to simply finish the chapter without conforming to the understanding of the students. There is less scope for experiments in the classroom. The large number of students in a class is also one of the major challenges in teaching English. Furthermore, all the classrooms are meant for the students: but all the students are not meant for the classes. The present scenario of Higher education in India demands inspection and reform. It has multiple aspects to assess and examine which are discussed ahead. Lets us begin by discussing them.

**Developing an Interest:** Like Mathematics, the teaching of English has always remained a challenge. It deals with creation of interest among the learners. It is a fact that the things of interest only are learned by the

learner. In the traditional Method of English language the focus was on teaching grammar and tenses. Syntax was more important than the expression. Language is basically a medium of expression. It can be done by speaking or writing. However the study shows that the students are not actively involved in learning. They are merely taught. Thus the students of language should be first oriented towards the need of learning language and literature. Learning and understanding can go hand in hand. In fact one cannot learn without interest. Learning is an interesting activity. Any language learning involves four activities. Listening, Reading, Speaking and Writing.

**Developing LSRW Skills:** The biggest challenge for the English Teacher is to make the student speak in English. There is fear of public speaking among the students, committing a grammatical, Pronunciation, reading mistake all these are factors that deprive the student speaking in the class. Due to peer pressure the students often hesitate to speak. We can boost the confidence of the students by encouraging them to read in class. In the traditional framework of syllabus there is hardly any scope for speaking and reading in the class room. Looking at the number of students in the classroom, it is difficult to practice speaking and reading. Collective reading is one of the effective ways of teaching reading in class. Usually reading a poem loudly in a class is not practiced. In this regard poetry can be taught in class by practicing collective reading. It also familiarizes the students to know and practice the rhyme, intonation, stress, and pauses etc which are otherwise the concern of the Special English only. In other cases the students learn only the content of the lesson and not the supra-segmental elements of language. They can further be asked to read the newspaper, a short story or a sharing an experience will lead to the students speaking and reading in the conducive atmosphere. After reading the article, it is open for discussion. Reading in class will boost their confidence.

While teaching Writing one must be creative and resourceful. Writing is a thoughtful action. However the traditional Indian Education system has a very little scope for writing. On an average the students are made to write only at the time of examination. In this case the students are writing only after one Semester. Thus writing in the class is a neglected skill. This skill can be inculcated by maintaining a separate notebook which will be continuous progress of the students. The students are asked to write a word picture of about 50 words. Then describe something, write an article on the topic you like. Anyway such activities cannot be expected from the students at once. They need to be given some liberty and freedom to express. Once they are confident of their creative writing efforts, they would be more interested in another exciting exercise.

They also need to be taught comprehension skills first and then compositions. Compositions are often from the real life like situations. Some creative tasks can be assigned to them like drafting and designing the Travel Guide, Hotel Menu Card, or advertisement of online sale etc. What is at the root of this problem is that less autonomy is given to the student and the teacher to learn their own. Student's ideas should be adopted, welcomed, appreciated and if possible awarded also. This will encourage them to do the experiments in expression. It can happen only when there are some constructive changes or autonomy in the Curriculum Design.

**Curriculum Designing:** After every five years the Syllabi changes. In these five years the knowledge of all the streams changes rapidly. With the help of technology students update themselves; the teacher's in the class with the old information stock hardly give the students any constructive knowledge to them. E.g Business Letters are drafted with the help of the letters printed in the Text Book, whereas the students know that such letters can be drafted in the form of official Email than the letter. This suggests that there is nothing challenging for them to learn in the class. As a result the classes are not sought after. The students attend the class not for the knowledge but to avoid the disciplinary actions on them by the college administration. In such scenario, he is not a learner but merely an auditor.

**Old Tale in New Words:** Rapidly changing world and its expectations demands the change and reform in the teaching learning method. The students of all streams demand the new methods of teaching. Though the content is same but the method should be new. E.g To teach a chapter on *The Rising Tide of Urban Chaos* which is all informative, the students can be asked to present the same data in the form of the graphs and charts than in the paragraphs. This activity is liked by the students because they are individually involved in finding the answer than simply following the peers. All in all the new methods, new ways of learning, student's friendly education will make the Language and Literature Learning an interesting experience. This is not possible in case of mathematics. The students have to solve the problem. The student solves the problem, and he understands method. i.e he learns by doing it. In language class it is expected to happen. The students were

not asked to think and express. Recitation in the language class is also a neglected practice in the class. Since this generation believes more in the technology, it is advisable to use the presentations as a method of teaching. This will make them look at the screen with full concentration because the audio visual aids attract the vision of the students. They can also be asked to read the content of PPT. In this way they can be engaged in the learning process. It will also help in the class control.

**Employability:** English language plays a key role in earning jobs for the students. Making them employable is the prime function all educational organizations. But the fact is learning a language is often considered as secondary due to the core subjects of the Main Course. English is understood with interest by only few classes. This leads for negligence towards developing linguistic competence. Consequently the student could not pace up the language skills that are expected in earning a job.

**Declining Standard of English:** Today though the number of speakers of English is increasing considerably: it is also affecting its standard. They are moulding and changing the language as per their need and usage. This is an alarming bell for the native speakers of English because it is losing its authority and authenticity. On this situation Dr Sengupta from North Bengal University states.

It is a paradox that as education in India is advancing, the standard of English at all stages is sharply declining. English is no longer related to a particular social context, and that explains why it no longer holds undisputed supremacy in our educational curriculum. Working knowledge of English has become the main objective of our educationists. They want our students to know a few basic structures and a few hundred essential words, reducing 'literature' to the irreducible minimum. What our educationists; often fail to understand is that literature is useful even in language learning. The most important function of literature, however, is genuinely educational. It forms certain attitudes and inculcates certain positive values. (Sengupta)

If they do not read Literature, they will not be nurtured ethically. It is the function of the languages to read and understand because "literature begins in delight but it ends in wisdom" Robert Frost.

**Effective Use of Technology:** Mobiles are another challenge in the class. The students are so crazy for the use of Mobiles. Very often they are found playing with the mobile in the class. This craziness can be converted into the positive way. For example they can be asked to refer to the dictionary in the classroom. Usually reading in the class becomes difficult if the student do not bring the text book. They can further be allowed to click the photos of the text that they want read in the class. This will be the lawful permission to the students to use it in class. Mobiles can be used creatively in the class. Nowadays even the technology has proved to a helping hand for such learners. Moreover one can play the audio of the poems of the poet.

**Examination and Evaluation:** Any knowledge which goes without its assessment and evaluation from the learner's point remains only the information. The objective of examination is to examine and evaluate the learner's understanding of the concept. The students should often be trained for the evaluation processes also. Ultimately it is the examination and evaluation that determines the students' academic and Professional advancement. Hence continuous evaluation should be observed. But due to the time and number of the class students, one cannot give justice to the examination and evaluation process. It can be examined by assigning a project work, writing a report of the field visit or by writing an answer of the lesson taught in class under the conditions of examination. The testing of the languages should be on basis of all skills .i.e Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing. The exercises given below are the text oriented and not the learner centered. This makes the guide books easily available. As a result the students find an escape from studying or even for that matter coming to the class for learning. However the language question paper does not show the conformity to all these four skills in a single question paper. Hence adequate evaluation is not done. The students can be encouraged to speak and write on their own. This exercise will give him/her a chance to articulate his/her original thoughts and not from the books.

**Conclusion:** Language Teaching has its own importance due to the growing need of business and corporate. Moreover language is also a demand of the scientific and technological advancements. Looking at the above discussed problems and impediments in the way of the teaching English, it seems that though the journey has begun but a long journey has to travel. A sense of insecurity looms large. There are certainly few restrictions on

the Academicians. However we as teachers of English should not leave any stone unturned in discharging our duties. One has to be resourceful and enthusiastic in our profession and mission. We can, however, devise ways and means to do whatever is possible within our limited resources. The future of English depends largely upon the teachers of English themselves, although they are not allowed to shape the educational policies. Towards Conclusion Dr Sengupata's words are very evocative. As teachers, we are to be conscious of our growing responsibility and attract an ever-growing number of students. This apparently impossible task can be achieved only if we take up teaching as a mission. We are to search our hearts and undertake teaching with zeal and devotion. Before finding fault with our students we should find fault with ourselves. What Chaucer said about corrupt priests is a timely warning to us all - "If gold rusts, what shall iron do?"

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