

AN EVALUATIVE STUDY OF ENGLISH AT THE UNDERGRADUATE LEVEL IN SUJLA REGION

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Introduction:

Remarkable changes have taken place in the field of foreign language teaching and learning during recent years. Innumerable teaching aids are available to the rich and affluent nations. But in a poor state like Rajasthan where even the basic aids (e.g. the blackboard) are not always available, one cannot dream of expensive teaching aids. Since the textbook is the only and the most valuable tool available to the teacher of English in India, since those who design the syllabus, if at all they do so, do not have any classroom contact with the students whom the curriculum is supposed to be for, since the people to whom the job of textbook writing is assigned are not always the best ones, it seems that the whole teaching scenario is suffering from many fold problems on the level of teaching methods, teaching materials, and textbooks.

Even if the textbook provides all the necessary material and guidance-text, vocabulary, grammar and exercises-still, the responsibility of their actual use rests with the teacher. During the past decade or even more, many teacher-training programmes have been conducted in Rajasthan by the English Language Institute, Bikaner and Commissionerate of Education, Rajasthan but the desired results are very much doubted. It is all because that the college level teaching is being carried out either by academically unqualified teachers, or by teachers who had not been exposed to the modern methods of teaching. Another problem remains of the examinations that still dominate our teaching to a great extent.

Teaching English language and Literature to the undergraduate students in Rajasthan is comparatively a challenging task. Many factors go in making it difficult and challenging. First and Foremost is a fear-Psychosis. The students who come to join the Three-year degree course at college level are generally reluctant to study English. They have, by this time, developed a Phobia. They take English as a 'Ghost'. This apathy to English makes them

closed. They are not open to receive new things. Most of them don't want to opt English Literature as an optional subject. The horrible fact is that even those students who have secured first division and above are not prepared to opt English Literature and Language. When asked for reason their stereotyped answer is "Sir, English is difficult, I cannot keep pace with it. Somehow I passed it at Secondary Level." Prof. Mohan rightly says in this connection

"Some educationists still hold that the study of English literature is the logical development of literacy and that it serves a general educational function. As long as the medium of instruction at the secondary level was English, some semblance of literary studies could be maintained at the university level. But after 1930, when the medium at the secondary level in most part of the country gradually changed to the regional language, the shortcomings of this system became apparent. Entrants to universities, who did not have an adequate command over the English language, could hardly hope to receive any training in that area. Language learning was not something that the university provided for all its vaunted sophistication in literature, and most of those entrusted with the task of teaching English as a language at the lower level were found hopelessly ill-equipped for the task. Exposed only to lectures on literature during their study for the Master's degree in English, and having crammed some material readily available on prescribed authors, which enabled them to somehow pass the examinations without reading the texts, they knew precious little about either the language or its literature. Thus, the inadequacies at the top were soon reflected at the lower levels and standards declined rapidly. After Independence, when education could no longer be allowed to remain the privilege of a small section of the community and increasingly large numbers were sought to be educated without the provision of adequate resources and facilities for teaching or of proper planning of educational programmes, there was a further deterioration in the standards of English. This affected the study of other subjects also."(2000:56-7)

This needs to go back into the Psycho-analysis of the teaching environment, competence of the English teachers, study material available and its utility in inculcating the basic four skill of English Language, Time slot allotted to English Teaching and the

feedback, at secondary level. Where and what goes wrong? Why the students have become so reluctant to opt English. They somehow want to avoid it. They want to run away from it. When motivated, some of them feel the importance of English as a language of opportunity but still they find themselves incapable of learning and mastering English Language. This shows how deep-rooted the fear is in the Psyche of the student. Some students, inspired either by their educated and aware parents, or by well placed relatives or by their friends or well wishers or senior students opt for English Literature. They try to improve things but the required Entry level competence in English Language is so poor that with that level of competence, they are given to study the Prose and Poetry of the great Masters of English Language. Such poetry recitations go over to their heads. They struggle to pass the Examination, somehow by cramming Passages without understanding the subtleties and nuances and meaning of the text. They go for help to Guidebooks, Bazaar notes and Translated material available in the market with lots of mistakes and incorrect and unauthentic explanations. They also run from pillar to post, to teachers and coaching centers where incompetent people are teaching spoken English courses. Their sole motif is to mint money. They simply, by highlighting the importance of English for various competitive exams and opportunities of better placement, exploit the needy students. This business of coaching centers and English medium schools is flourishing a great deal. They hardly have competent and qualified teachers, space for the movement of pupils, playing fields, Library facility. They exert a lot of mental pressure on the pupils to pass the examination with good grade. And for this, sometimes even unfair means are adopted.

The atmosphere is such, so called English medium schools are hardly conducive to the all round development of the impressionable minds. In government and government funded schools, the infrastructure is available but the manpower and the healthy environment for teaching and learning is rarely found. In these schools the pupils come from rural, uneducated and low-income families. They simply aspire to get promotion from one class to another without any considerable change brought by learning. The students cannot even speak fluently in Hindi. What to talk of English? There is also a dearth of committed teachers at different levels. Most of the colleges in Rajasthan leave aside the colleges situated in Jaipur, Jodhpur, Kota, Ajmer, Udaipur and Bikaner; have the feeding from rural, educationally and economically backward areas. Their educational background and awareness level is dismal. Their competence level in all four skills of English is so poor that they cannot write even five connected sentences in English. They cannot read and write

satisfactorily. Even the listening skill is very poor, since they hardly had any exposure to listening to good English. Least said is better about their spoken English skill. And at this, there is option available in General English and Hindi in Bikaner and Ajmer Universities. So the bulk of the students go for General Hindi. Even those who opt for General English, rarely come to the class as they simply have to pass the examination in this paper. The marks secured in this paper are not included in the aggregate percentage. This adds to the apathy and non-seriousness on part of the students for English. Actually the lack of proper environment, motivation, awareness and entry level incompetence are the root causes of the problems of Teaching English to undergraduate and postgraduate students in Rajasthan. It is not that the students of this state are lacking in basic talent or innate ability to acquire second or a foreign language. A few students who either had a chance of schooling in somewhat good schools or taught by some good teachers or have some good academic family background, have an edge over rest of the students. The problem at college level is that the teacher has no time and space for remedial teaching or teaching skills to students. He is bound by the syllabus and the time frame to cover and complete the syllabus in the stipulated time. He has to teach them poetry, drama, Essays, novels stories literary terms and some chapters from the chronological history of English Literature. Whatever the linguists say and prove about standard and non-standard language has no meaning for them. The basic thing is missing – the little bit competence in understanding English Language – Listening, Speaking, Reading and writing. Actually, a lot of remedial strategies are required to remedy these errors of learning. Since the teacher cannot hope to deal with all the individual errors at the levels of Phonology, Grammar, Syntax etc. Here are a few examples of the common errors made by the students of this area:

(a). Errors made with individual sounds:

- (a) Pronouncing “live” and “leave” identically. Pronouncing “desk” as “dex”. “Station” as “istation”. Errors are common in stress, rhythm, and intonation,
- (b) Errors in the use of Articles: Dropping an article where it should be used *and using it where it is not required: The gold is a precious metal. Using the wrong article: An young man.*

(b) Errors with verb forms:

- (i) Wrong inflection: wented, throwed etc.

(ii) Dropping auxiliaries; I reading a book. Unnecessary use of the auxiliary: My sister was went Jaipur.

(iii) Wrong use of the progressive form: I am having a scooter.

(c) Errors of agreement:

(i) Three boys is sitting.

(ii) The price of these books are high.

(iii) Her mother has broken his hand.

(d) Errors in the use of prepositions:

(i) Omitting proposition where it is necessary:

I went there by foot.

Tomorrow I will not come college.

(ii) Unnecessary use of a preposition:

Ram loved to Sita.

(e) Errors with phrasal verbs:

(i) Unnecessary use of a particle: He returned back my book.

(f) Errors with question forms:

(i) Non-inversion of the subject and auxiliary: why you are crying?

These are the types of errors the students generally make while reading, writing and speaking. Low Grammar knowledge; poor, very poor vocabulary; loose sentence construction and a lot of hesitation in speaking are some big problems of the students of SUJLA-region. Language being a big barrier, it is very difficult for them to comprehend a literary text-be it poetry or prose. Mother-tongue interference and over-generalization also come to play their roles to aggravate the problem. The basic problem is the lack of proper exposure to English language. They feel great problem even in understanding a simple text in English. That is why they cannot do any intensive and extensive study of any literary text. Critical study and critical Analysis of a text is a far cry for them. Certainly exceptions are there but they are rare. Secondly the poor knowledge of English history, history of English Literature, mythological and biblical references add a lot to their misery. Our students are exposed to an

exhaustive British literature most of which they cannot enjoy and appreciate due to the cultural and linguistic variation. Prof. Ramesh Mohan aptly observes in this regard

“Times have changed, but English syllabuses in Indian universities, by and large, have not, and we find ourselves in a situation where the study of English literature in our universities, unrelated to any particular social context or purpose, and having no specified objectives, has become, apart from some false prestige that is still attached to it, an aimless, undefined, perfunctory activity. We still require all our students, who offer English literature at the university level, to read the Elizabethans, the Augustan and the Victorian English writers, when many of them have neither knowledge enough of the language to appreciate their stylistic merits, nor an understanding of their social and cultural background, nor the maturity of mind and taste to appreciate their ideas. It is not surprising, therefore, that many of them resort to memorization, and what they call ‘selective study’, to somehow pass their examinations. They memorize the Romantics or Victorians; they reproduce, on demand, not only passages from these writers, but second-hand opinions, criticism and appreciation with all the authority of originality, and with varying degree of inaccuracy. They struggle through mythological and literary references and notes on English social history. They ‘annotate with reference to the context’ comment vaguely on the style, and attempt to make critical comparisons of giants in English literary history. This kind of study could hardly develop literary sensibility or stimulate critical thinking and writing. It has not helped in language learning either, because that has not been one of the conscious aims of such instruction. Literary criticism, literary history and literary appreciation have all thus become largely manifestations of a pseudo-literary study in our universities.”(2000:107)

Rationale of the Study:

The researcher has been teaching English at the college level in this region for almost six years. Over the years it has been noticed that at least 80 per cent of the fresh entrants to the college lack even the basic competence in English. The bare minimum that could be expected of them is the ability to make a right choice of concord, tenses, pronouns, etc. and the ability to write simple sentences and organize them in small, connected paragraphs. But unfortunately the students are nowhere near this bare minimum. Every year the incoming

batches show a lesser command of English. After six years of regular learning of English in schools, this is a sad state of affairs. It was this fact that motivated the researcher to make an evaluative study of teaching going on at the undergraduate level.

It was considered essential to make a thorough study of the available teaching materials, the textbooks, examination questions and the evaluation process. In order to verify this it is considered necessary to observe the actual teaching in progress, therefore the researcher visited a few selected colleges in order to verify the actual classroom teaching.

Examinations still dominate our teaching to a great extent. According to L.A. Hill examinations are essential as a means of getting the teachers to teach what we want the students to learn. Since the entire future of our students still depends on the examination results, the evaluations of the examination papers were considered. (1967: 81)

Geographical area of Investigation:

The area of study is SUJLA Region that includes Sujangarh, Jaswantgarh and Ladnun (Sujangarh and Ladnun are tehsils). The region has around 10 UG and PG colleges. The colleges of the region are affiliated to three universities of Rajasthan, Maharshi Dayanand Saraswati University, Ajmer, Maharaja Ganga Singh University, Bikaner and Jain Vishwa Bharati University, Ladnun. In terms of study area the study will cover the colleges of the region where the learning and teaching of English at the Undergraduate level is going on. In terms of subject matter the study will cover the teaching, learning, examination processes and their impact on the students.

Objectives of the Study:

1. To know what is happening in the name of teaching English in the selected colleges.
2. To find out about the qualifications of the teachers.
3. To observe the classroom teaching and record what goes on there.
4. To know about background as well as motivation of students.
5. To know about the expectations and satisfaction of teachers.
6. To examine the syllabi and the textbooks prescribed in terms of their academic and social utility.
7. To find out the physical conditions of the classrooms and the colleges.

8. To draw conclusions and suggest changes.
9. To develop programmes for Indian learners, those of rural areas and teachers of English to build their English language proficiency and cultural understanding and provide them with the skills required for efficiency in English language teaching.
10. To study the problems faced by the weaker sections of society in the region acquiring English language skills and to devise solutions for the same.

Research Gaps:

As far as, the researcher knows no significant and substantial work has been done on this topic, so far.

Hypothesis:

Teaching of English language in the region of the study has failed to make an impact on students as regards to their knowledge, understanding and language competence.

Delimitation of the Study:

The scope of the study is limited to the teaching of compulsory or General English in the selected colleges of the region. It investigates the total teaching/learning experience taking into consideration three very important parameters i.e. materials, methods and examination. It was deemed neither feasible nor necessary to take the whole of Rajasthan for the evaluative study; therefore the study is limited only to the SUJLA region that includes Sujangarh, Jaswantgarh and Ladnun (Sujangarh and Ladnun are tehsils). The region has around 10 UG and PG colleges. The colleges of the region are affiliated to the three universities of Rajasthan, Maharshi Dayanand Saraswati University, Ajmer, Maharaja Ganga Singh University, Bikaner and Jain Vishwa Bharati University, Ladnun. The researcher has taken all the colleges of the region for his study which are ten in number. The study may be considered representative of the whole region because almost a common syllabus of the said universities is followed in the region. Even the competence of the teachers can be considered representative because they have had their training in different districts of Rajasthan and have worked in various districts because of inter-district transfers. The student population may also be considered representative because the region has all kinds of student communities-rural, tribal, backward, scheduled tribe and scheduled caste.

Methods and Techniques adopted for the Study:

Major Research Questions:

- i. Do the teachers have the basic academic qualifications necessary to teach English?
- ii. Are the teachers aware of the objectives of teaching English at the college level?
- iii. Do the textbooks reflect the objectives professed in the syllabi?
- iv. Do the teachers use the books for the purpose they are meant for?
- v. Do the nature and content of the examinations support the goals of teaching?
- vi. Have the ELT Programmes of the State made any impact on the teaching of English at the undergraduate level?
- vii. Have the teachers been trained effectively to use the new techniques?
- viii. Is there any difference in the performance of ELT trained teachers and untrained ones?
- ix. Are the teachers aware of the considerations important for the writing of textbooks?
- x. Are the teachers able to evaluate the existing textbooks?
- xi. Do the teachers have the ability to evaluate the existing examination system and suggest reforms?
- xii. Is there any difference in the quality of teaching going on in Govt. and Private Colleges of the region?
- xiii. How do the students view the teaching to which they are exposed?
- xiv. How the students respond to the textbooks prescribed for them?
- xv. What kind of students are coming forward for taking up English?
- xvi. Why do students feel motivated to learn English?

Research Design:

This is an evaluative study of the teaching of English in its entirety at the Undergraduate Level in SUJLA Region. The scope of the study is limited to the teaching of compulsory or General English in the selected colleges of the region. It investigates the total teaching/learning experience taking into consideration three very important parameters i.e. materials, methods and examination. It is proposed to determine on the basis of this study how the materials reflect the professed aims of the syllabus, how the teachers work through

these materials in the actual teaching situation, and the extent to which the nature and content of the examinations support the goals of teaching. As a result of the study it would be possible to assess the degree to which course design, individual teaching performance and the examinations conform to certain principles, policies and procedures.

Procedure: The following procedure has been followed in the study:

- i. A linguistic and content analysis of textbooks. (Evaluative schedules were prepared for the evaluation of these books.)
- ii. An analysis of examination papers of all the three universities which fall under the scope of the study. (The analysis of the question papers of the last three or four years was made.)
- iii. Field work which includes collection of information through field visit, and questionnaires which were administered to both teachers and students. The field work also included observation of lessons in the classes, and informal interviews of the teachers and the students.
- iv. Purposive Quota sampling method was adopted for collecting the information through the questionnaires.

Tools:

Questionnaires were administered to both students and the teachers in order to collect the relevant information. The Questionnaires were expected to provide the maximum information as they had all the components like teaching, textbook, examination etc. Informal interviews were also conducted of the experts of the English language teaching who either were teaching here or had rendered their services some time or the other for the students of this region. The tolls were standardized before applying and ELT experts' and Supervisor's opinions were taken for the same.

Selected Colleges for the Study:

- I. Taparia Sanskrit College, Jaswanthgarh (affiliated to MGS University, Bikaner).
- II. G.H.S. Govt. College, Sujangarh. (affiliated to MGS University, Bikaner).
- III. S.D.S Girls College, Sujangarh. (affiliated to MGS University, Bikaner).
- IV. Permasheri Devi College, Bidasar. (affiliated to MGS University, Bikaner).
- V. Jasvir Mamorial College, Sandava.(affiliated to MGS University, Bikaner).
- VI. Abhilasha College, Sandava.(affiliated to MGS University, Bikaner).

- VII. Chandrashekhar Mahavidyalya, Sujangarh.(affiliated to MGS University, Bikaner).
- VIII. Acharya Kalu Kanya Mahavidyalya Ladnun.(Jain Vishva Bharati University, Ladnun).
- IX. Directorate of Distance Education, Students of Distance Learning Programme. (Jain Vishva Bharati University, Ladnun).
- X. Madhav College, Pavolab, Jaswanthgarh (affiliated to MDS University, Ajmer).

Processing of Data and Interpretation:

The collected information was edited, classified and tabulated keeping in mind the objectives and research questions. The tabulated information was logically as well as statistically interpreted. The research report is presented in narrative style.

Conclusion:

The scenario of teaching English in Rajasthan in general and in SUJLA-region in particular is not very healthy and it is more or less because of the demotivating learning situations, uninteresting teaching methodologies and outdated syllabi. There is definitely a demand of wholesale changes in the realm of English teaching. Prof. Gokak aptly says in this regard, "the teaching of English is in a chaotic state today". In most cases the officially stated objectives of teaching English are defeated as both types are handled almost similarly and the 'method' adopted in either case is word-for-word translation of the English texts into Hindi. To make matters worse, even the translation given is far from perfect or even accurate.

Teaching about English is mistaken for teaching English. Rules of grammar are mechanically repeated before the class and the most useful visual aid-the blackboard-is rarely made proper use of either for giving grammatical illustrations or for teaching compositional skills.

The points made above add up to a most despairing catalogue and constitute a sad reflection on the teaching of English at the Under-graduate level in Rajasthan. The inevitable conclusion to draw is that whatever learning takes place does so in spite of and not because of the college. For a poor country like India bad teaching on such a massive scale is an enormous waste of action against the best interests of the educational system in particular and the nation in general.

The solution-even though to suggest one is beyond the scope of the present study-is not to let the various recommendations of experts' committees and commissions gather dust in government archives, but to make a concerted and sincere attempt to implement them as effectively as possible. It would truly be an act of patriotism.

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