

The Need for Teaching Writing Skill at the Tertiary Level: A Case study

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Abstract:- Even after 72 years of independence, English continues as a major second language in India. Therefore, there is a need to teach English, and to teach it to suit the needs of the second language learners. The goals of teaching English have shifted, the methods of teaching English also need to be changed today. It is essential to discuss the type of teaching that is desired at the tertiary level. The teaching of English at the university presents an entirely new set of problem. Much time has to be devoted in building the foundations that are necessary for the minimum essential use of this language at the Undergraduate level.

Keywords:- Writing, Tertiary, Second Language, Teaching, Learner.

During the last two decades the promotion of regional languages, in preference to English has been a matter of deliberate policy. However, English continues as a major second language all over India. Hence, there is a need to teach English, and to teach it to suit the needs of the second language learner.

I. ELT SITUATION IN INDIA

Language teaching in India can be traced back to ancient times. With the introduction of English education, Grammar-Translation method was employed to teach English and this method was in practice for a very long time. Then Direct Method was used to teach language.

According to Direct method the learners are exposed to a large chunk of language, in the form of literary texts and lectures delivered by the teachers. This exposure, it was believed, helped the learner to acquire the language. This method was employed to teach English, when the goals of teaching English were different from those of today. It was essential to teach the learner listening and spoken skills, because the British rulers required personnel who could work in their offices and understand them. Today, the goals of teaching English have shifted. It is necessary to teach learners reading and writing skills.

Since the goals of teaching English have shifted, the methods of teaching English also need to be changed. Today, the larger emphasis in language teaching rests on Communicative Teaching. Experiments have been conducted in this direction in India and abroad. In order to have a grasp of the teaching situation as it exists in the college today, it is necessary to have a brief knowledge about the students' background –

- a) When do they start learning English?
- b) How do they learn it?
- a) With the adoption of three language formula in principle, all the states have implemented this in practice. Therefore, before entering the college classes, students will have learnt English for ten years. This period seems fairly long, though the results it yields are not satisfactory.
- b) In schools, students are taught English with the help of simplified texts, which are structurally graded. But the teachers who teach English in the primary schools are not suitably trained to handle these materials. Hence, the learning of English remains either inadequate or scanty.

In colleges, the universities which frame syllabi for undergraduate courses do not take cognizance of these inadequacies. They expect the students to be fairly well equipped, and offer courses which are beyond the grasp of the students. Thus, English language teaching fails to establish a continuum. There is a need to remediate the inadequacies of the students at the tertiary level rather than give courses for elaboration or expansion of knowledge.

II. WHAT IS DESIRED –BY WAY OF LANGUAGE TEACHING

It is essential to discuss the type of teaching that is desired at the tertiary level. At the tertiary level, the teaching should primarily be of a remedial type. It is expected that the learners have learnt enough language, but in the course of their learning, they might have either learnt it wrongly or poorly. At the tertiary level it becomes the responsibility of the teacher to correct and strengthen the language already learnt at the secondary level. The teaching of English at the university presents an entirely new set of problem. Much time has to be devoted to repairing the damage done or in building the

foundations that are necessary for the minimum essential use of this language at the Undergraduate level.

The remedial teaching administered should enable the learner to use English which forms a major link language even within the country for internal communication. This leads us to conclude that we need to teach the English language, and that, at the tertiary level it should be primarily a remedial type of teaching that needs to be done. It has also been agreed upon, that we need to teach English to suit the needs of a second language learner.

The main objectives of teaching English course at the degree level are-

1) To enable the students to use English effectively so that he can pursue his studies in humanities, commerce and science.

2) To equip the students with communication skills he is likely to need in the occupation or vocation he will be able to fill.

As part of the writing component of the syllabus:

a) Sub skills relevant to role of English in higher studies; note taking; note making; extracting facts and statements relevant to a given point of view; reporting events and experiments; recording observations, findings and conclusions.

b) Sub skills relevant to employment: drafting letters –official and semi-official; framing instructions; rules and memos; abridging given piece of texts; drafting invitations and their responses, complaints and replies; enquires and answers.

c) These can be in general term called communicative skills. They can also be called functional categories since these skills are largely role based. They aim at preparing the learner to face the world and life at large, immediately after his formal education is completed. Such aims help to build an intrinsic motivation into the course.

Reforms have been made to establish a relation between the syllabus and the scheme of examination. Attempts have been made to streamline students according to the choice of their courses. Thus, students of first year BA and BCOM are offered special courses in English .BCOM students have a course in Business Communication and BA students have a course in Communication Skills. In their second year class, instead of Drama and Poetry texts, BA students have a course in Mass Communication.

The primary function of any language is to communicate. The language communicates through four skills i.e. listening, speaking, reading and writing. These skills can also be called passive and active skills. Listening and reading are passive skills and speaking and writing are active skills.

Skills are factors of language, which can be mastered for an effective communication in the specified language. In order to learn a language thoroughly, and achieve a native like competence, it is essential to master all the four language

skills. Since we are learning English as a second language, the essential skills we need are reading and writing.

Writing as a skill can be defined in various ways. It can start with the mechanics of writing which need to be taught at the primary stages. In Maurice Imhoof words, “writing is more rigorously structured than speech. All language productions-speech or writing must of course follow the rules of language; if they do not, the productions are ungrammatical and likely to be unintelligible or misunderstood-writing does not have all communicational; conventions available in speech, for example gestural and facial expressions ,repetition, questions and answers for clarification-writing is just not putting down on paper what one speaks.”(Imhoof, 1977)

Since speaking and writing are productive skills, they can be best learnt by practice. In Peter Elbow’s words, “writing can be best learnt by writing”. (Elbow1973) This statement implies that writing classes should provide the learner with ample opportunities for writing. The teacher should explain the tasks and allow the learners to work on similar tasks either in groups or individually. These tasks which produce letters, paragraphs, reports or essays, help the learner to improve his writing.

III. HOW CAN THE DESIRED OBJECTIVE BE ACHIEVED?

We attempt to make a thorough examination of the system and find out why the desired objective can be achieved. We proposed to analyze the existing system for its components. They are:

1. The syllabus
2. The teacher and his methods
3. The learner
4. The text book
5. The examination

These can be called major components, because they deal directly with the learning process. There are also other components, which influence learning, but not directly .These can be called minor components, and deal with administration and environment.

They are:

- a) The Establishment
 - i) The University
 - ii) The College
 - iii) The Classroom
- b) The Social Environment
 - i) The Family Background
 - ii) The classmates
 - iii) teacher-taught relations

- c) The Physical Environment
 i) The location of the college
 ii) The nature of college building
 iii) Location of the house

The Teacher: the teacher forms second of the major components. But because of the involvement of human factor in teacher, it is difficult to generalize and state the characteristics essential to make an ideal teacher. It would be very difficult to find any two teachers with identical qualities. While discussing the teacher we may discuss the methods practiced by the teacher. It was also observed that most teachers teach English through lecture method. In order to promote language skills, the teacher has to give practice to the learners in the skill required. In order to give this practice, a teacher has to be resourceful enough to frame suitable exercises. This can be learnt by either formal training or employing one's own ingenuity. The teacher must be for this purpose adaptable to the situation –and manipulate his lessons according to the needs of the students.

The Textbook-materials being used in the present day should be according to the needs of the students. In the absence of such materials, the teacher should be resourceful enough to use the existing material in a useful manner.

The Examination- the main drawback of the existing examination system lies in its being highly subjective. The reforms in examination should aim at making it objective. Besides; the examination should specify its objectives and should be able to assess the learners for their proper understanding of the subjects and level of learning. Attempts to teach writing can be achieved to a large extent by adopting these reforms.

IV. TYPE OF WRITING REQUIRED BY THE STUDENTS AT THE UNDERGRADUATE LEVEL

The right type of language skills can be promoted among the students particularly the skill of writing. The students must have the:

- Ability to write simple pieces of English of general usefulness
- Ability to write English for the purposes of study.
- These specified end behaviors can be taken as the objectives for teaching English at the college level.

Since the learning is unable to do this, it becomes necessary for the college teacher to teach letter writing, note making, report writing, paragraph writing and essay writing, as part of English class exercises in composition.

Writing as we mean here, is the ability of a person to express clearly through writing. Writing should communicate. It has the same functions as speech, though it differs from

speech in some aspects. In speech we can use incomplete sentences; we can pause and receive immediate responses. In writing these things are not possible. Writing is basically a thinking process. So in order to teach our students how to write properly, we have to teach them how to think.

The student should know “how to select and organize experiences according to a certain purpose ...a purposeful selection and organization of experience requires active thought .when writing ,students must keep in mind their purpose ,think about facts they will need to select which are relevant to that purpose ,and think about how to organize those facts in a coherent fashion. The process of learning to write is largely a process of learning to think more clearly.” (Arapoff, 1965).

This view is supported by later psychologist like Bruner. Cognitive skills already possessed, can help a person to think inductively. This shows that by exposing the students to familiar data, which they need to manipulate and reproduce in a different manner, students can be made to write and also think. In order to help the learners perform these tasks, they can be offered some guidance in the form of suggesting structures, or illustrating how to commence the rewriting of the passage. It is possible to produce similar materials to suit the Indian learners, which can develop the writing skills. In the recent years, course books for teaching writing to Indian students have also been produced by the Indian writers.

V. CONCLUSION

Since the goals of teaching English have shifted, the methods of teaching English also need to be changed. The right type of language skills can be promoted among the students particularly the skill of writing. Writing is basically a thinking process. So in order to teach our students how to write properly, we have to teach them how to think. This shows that by exposing the students to familiar data, which they need to manipulate and reproduce in a different manner, students can be made to write and also think.

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