

Challenges of Teaching English at Undergraduate Level: An Analysis

Raghu P S

Assistant Professor of English, GFGC, Bettadapura, Periyapatna Taluk

Abstract- My paper is a sincere attempt to discuss the challenges of teaching English at the undergraduate level in the colleges. The paper discusses the challenges both from the perspective of the teachers and the students. Besides discussing the challenges, the paper provides practical solutions which can be implemented by the teachers to ameliorate the teaching-learning process within the given setting and resources.

Key words: ELT, compulsory English, undergraduate level

INTRODUCTION

Language is one of the unique creations of man. Since man is rational animal he is gifted with the power of speech. Man can have mastery over language through the skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. Learning and teaching of language is a part of curriculum. Language learning i.e. mother tongue takes place in a natural setting. But learning a foreign language is very difficult and it should be learnt in atmosphere where everything is set artificially.

As we all know that India is a multi-lingual society where we need to have a common language i.e. the lingua-franca. People of different states, religion, culture, language etc, have to communicate with a common language. It is essential for all of us to share everything with others. Because we are living in the era of globalization. English has become the need of the hour in the multi-lingual society like India. It's acquisition, learning and teaching is not so easy as it is compared to mother tongue. English is learnt and taught as a second language in schools and colleges where regional language is the first language.

Learning and teaching of English revolves around the teacher and the taught. Here the role of both the teacher and the taught is significant. Both of them should show some sort of interest in teaching and learning respectively. Readiness to teach and to learn in the class lessen the burden of the teacher and students. Learning, understanding and acquisition of

English is very easy for the urban students whose medium of instruction is English. But it is not so in the case of rural students. That's why teaching of English in undergraduate level is quite challenging. Nelson Mandela says:

“If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head,

If you talk to him in his language, that goes to his heart,”

There are number of reasons why teaching of English is a challenging task at undergraduate level. They are:

1) Structure of classroom:

Classrooms are considered the biggest challenge for the English language teachers. It is difficult for the teacher to pay personal attention. It becomes very difficult for the students, especially the low-proficient one to study in such large classrooms. Due to lack of personal attention and motivation, the student with low-proficiency loses interest in the course, as a result of which they stop attending the compulsory English classes.

2) The students of different-background

The students from English medium backgrounds are naturally very confident in the class because of their high proficiency level in the language. When it comes to any task, they voluntarily take part with great enthusiasm and ease. But the students from other medium lack such kind of proficiency, enthusiasm and ease in learning English.

3) Teaching methodology

The English teachers are in a better position because they can teach English by using different methods like direct method, bilingual method, communicative method etc. Most preferably the lecture method is being used in the classes of undergraduate level to cater to the needs of all the students.

4) Lack of motivation or rewards for the Students: Students lack confidence and feel nervousness and hesitation while speaking English language. The English teachers should motivate and appreciate the students, who try to speak English in the classroom. Other students may also feel motivated by this action and they also may try to speak in English language.

5) Framing of Syllabus

The syllabus should be according to the needs and desires of the students. The needs of the students in rural area are entirely different from the students of the urban areas. The students of rural areas find it quite difficult to understand because of the difficult vocabulary and grammar used in the English text books.

6) Facilities:

The teacher and the students of English suffer due to lack of facilities like building, audio-visual aids, language labs and ICT in colleges. Even in the government colleges the situation is worse.

7) Hesitation to follow bilingual method:

In a multi-lingual class room the English teachers hesitates to follow bilingual method for he thinks that his colleagues would feel bad. To avoid this he uses direct method.

8) Dependency on teacher:

The students of English language mainly depend on the teacher. They expect lot from the English teacher. So pressure is on the teacher. It is quite apt at this context to quote a statement on the abilities of the teacher given by Sir Henry Vandyke. i.e.,
“An average teacher explains,
A poor teacher complains
A good teacher teaches and
An excellent teacher inspires”

CONCLUSION

A language becomes a medium of our thought process only when it is learnt in the natural way. However, English cannot be learnt in the natural way because it comes to us as a second language. We are first exposed to our first language, its sound systems, its structures, its grammar and its codes of culture. We

use English not the way the Englishmen use, but in our own way. To quote Salman Rushdie (1994):

“we can't simply use the language in the way the British did; that it needs remaking for our own purposes... To conquer English may be to complete the process of making ourselves free,”

Learning two languages will help promote use of intercultural dialogue and social equity. Language learning has the potential to promote attitudes which encourage curiosity about other cultures. Language learning enables the learners to understand the connections between language and culture and thereby to combat social exclusion. It opens up generational gaps in societies, effecting a repositioning of minority languages. Language curriculum should mould a culturally responsive pedagogy where teachers/learners are sensitive to the cultural background of students and help them make connections between the local, national, racial, cultural and global identities.

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