



Need to Reform General English Syllabus at UG Level in the Affiliate Colleges of the University of Jammu: An Experimental Study

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ABSTRACT

Syllabus is a document which directs teachers and guides the students. It gives a specification of the aims and objectives of the instructional programmes, the content, language skills and functions to be covered, the classroom procedures and processes, the theory underlying these procedures, and mode of assessment. The data for the present paper collected through students' and teachers' questionnaires which are designed to understand the needs of the students and expectations of teachers for teaching and learning of the English language and also to find out the perceptions of the undergraduate students and English teachers towards the General English syllabus prescribed by the University of Jammu. Majority of the students and English teachers are in favour of a complete change in the existing General English syllabus as it does not fulfill the aims and objectives of teaching English as a second or foreign language. Students have shown their dissatisfaction in improving the language skills. Therefore, there is an urgent need to look into the existing General English syllabus and make a shift from the traditional and outdated pattern of teaching of English into a newer and updated one. This paper addresses the need to reform General English syllabus at undergraduate level in the University of Jammu with special reference to the importance of English language teaching. A brief forecast of problems and issues in the teaching of the English language at undergraduate level and recommendations will conclude this paper.

Keywords : Syllabus designing, language skills, problems of language teaching, remedies.

Introduction

English remains at the heart of our society. It is widely used in media, in Higher Education and government and therefore remains a common means of communication between speakers of mutually unintelligible languages. English in India and particularly in Jammu and Kashmir has, indeed, come far from its original uses in the colonial times when it was mostly used as the language of the government. Nowadays, English has spread into many new domains, also the more personal ones, such as the family and friendship. Today, in fact, it is hard, almost impossible to think of English as it is used in our country only simply as another foreign language. It has made an invaluable contribution towards the unification of the country.

Functions of Syllabus

A syllabus may be defined as an outline of topics to be covered in an educational or training programme. It is also an outline of goals and objectives of a course. Goals and objectives identify the expected outcomes and scope of the course as determined by the instructor or course designer. It usually contains specific information about the course, an outline of what will be covered in the course, schedule of examinations, assignments, classroom rules and the grading policy of the course. It also ensures consistency between schools/colleges/universities and that all teachers know what must be taught and what is not required. A syllabus can serve the following functions in an educational programme:

- It helps in achieving the required aims and needs of the learners and the activities which will take place in the classroom;
- It ensures a fair and impartial understanding between the teacher and the learner;
- It provides a roadmap of course organization;
- It sets clear expectations of material to be learned;
- It helps in selection and grading of content;
- It helps in specification of what units will be taught.

Therefore, a syllabus is a teaching device used to facilitate

learning. It can be used to express certain assumptions about language, psychological process of learning, pedagogic and social processes to be adopted in a classroom.

A Skill-Based and Task-Based Syllabus

The term skill in language teaching is used as a specific way of using language that combines structural and functional ability but exists independently of specific settings or situations. In this type of syllabus, the content of language teaching involves a collection of particular skills that may play a role in using language. It is generally used for four models of language: listening, speaking, reading and writing. Skill-based syllabi merge linguistic competencies (pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, and discourse) together into generalized types of behaviour, such as listening to spoken language for the main idea, listening to foreign radio for news, speaking skills for giving instructions, personal information, asking for emergency help over the telephone, delivering effective lectures, skimming and scanning, writing well-formed paragraphs, writing specific sentences, memos, research reports, work reports, etc. It is also called competency-based instruction.

The chief rationale behind skill-based instruction is to learn the specific language skill. The ability to use language in specific ways is partially dependent on general language ability, but partly based on experience and the need for specific skills. Efficiency and relevance of instruction are major strengths of skill-based syllabus.

"Skill-based instruction is not associated with any specific theory of learning. The general theory of learning is that the learning of complex behaviours such as language is best facilitated by breaking them down into small skills, teaching them and hoping that the learner will be able to put them together when actually using them (Cunningsworth, 1986: 52).

"We have so many tasks to do in everyday life, at work, at play, etc. As for as the English language is concerned, it requires learners to use language, with emphasis on meaning, to attain an object. The definition of a language learning task

requires specifications for four components: the goals, the input, the activities derived from input, and finally the roles implied for teacher and learners" (Nunan, 1997: 47).

A Task-based syllabus implies activities that the learners have to do for non-instructional purposes outside the classroom as opportunities for language learning. It supports using tasks and activities to encourage learners to utilize the language communicatively so as to achieve a purpose. It indicates that speaking a language is a skill best perfected through interaction and practice. The most important point is that tasks must be relevant to the real world language needs of the learner.

Tasks are distinct from other activities to the degree that they have a non-instruction purpose and measurable outcome. Tasks are a way of bringing the real world into the classroom. In other words, task-based syllabus requires the student to apply cognitive processes of evaluation, selection, combination, modification, or supplementation to a combination of new and old information. The student will have a chance to come across particular structures in different contexts. Since there will be constant and natural recycling of certain structures in each unit by means of tasks, listening tasks and language study sections. Students will be provided an opportunity to overcome their difficulties and develop their inter-language.

Conclusion:

Keeping in view the present needs of the students at undergraduate level in the affiliate colleges of the University of Jammu and the expectations of the teachers the syllabus designers should frame a multi-skill course which will aim at developing students' proficiency in language and communication skills. Syllabus designers must integrate aspects of all the types of syllabuses to synthesize the required components. It is rare for one type of syllabus or content to be used exclusively in actual teaching settings. Syllabi or content types are usually combined in more or less integrated ways, with one type as the organizing basis around which the others are arranged and related.

It is clear that no single type of content is appropriate for all teaching settings, and the needs and conditions of each setting are so idiosyncratic that specific recommendations for combination are not possible. The only possibility for some positive conclusion is to evaluate available resources in expertise, in materials, and in training of teachers so that we

may address the needs of the learners. Further points to consider when critically reviewing a syllabus are the objectives of the course as well the needs of the learners. Ultimately, and perhaps ideally, a hybrid syllabus will result purely due to pragmatic reasons.

"It is wise to take an eclectic approach, taking what is useful for each theory and trusting also in the evidence of your own experience as a teacher" (Hutchinson and Waters, 1983: 51).

But the existing syllabus in General English course adopts the approach of teaching English language through literature. This is a mere appreciation of literary texts. The textbook which has been designed according to the current General English syllabus do not motivate students in organizing activities pertaining to learning of the language skills. Literature is a source of joy for everybody and the motivation for reading and studying it is almost inbuilt but there is an urgent need to explore the possibilities in designing a syllabus and textbooks which have infinite number of exercises for day to day use of English language and in this way the joy of reading English literature can be fruitfully utilized for the learning of communicative skills needed in real life situations.

There is an urgent need to minimize the use of literature in a language course. Units dealing with language skills as well as grammar, vocabulary, etc. are to be carefully graded and implemented. The minimum use of literature may allow teachers of English to use maximum time in applying techniques like question-answer sessions, group discussions, role playing, oral presentations, etc. The teacher should have enough time to adopt activities and exercises in the classroom to suit the needs and competence level of the students. A General English course should be flexible enough to allow experimentation on the part of individual teachers to make students active participants in the teaching learning process. This is possible only if the syllabus designers frame a syllabus document according to the needs of the learners because the ultimate aim of teaching English as a foreign or second language is to equip the students with language skills so that they become better and more confident learners of the language.

The aims and objectives of the existing General English course are to be modified keeping in mind the practical nature of the course and future challenges. The syllabus should be learner centered, learning focused and activity oriented.

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