

Effectiveness of the Methods and Materials Used for Teaching General English at Undergraduate Level: A Study Based on the Colleges of Sonitpur and Lakhimpur Districts of Assam

Abstract

After the World War-II, the teaching of English as second language (L₂) or foreign language (FL) has been regarded as an important activity and consequently it has emerged as an autonomous profession. Researches on English Language Teaching (ELT) profession started exploring new directions in methodology. Various methods have been introduced, but later replaced by methods based on newer theories. Earlier methods of ELT were based on the structural approach; while the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), which was developed during 1970s, was based on the communicative approach to language. This method believes that L₂ can be learnt best in the process of struggling to communicate. This change in L₂ teaching method has brought changes in assumptions about the nature of language, the nature of its teaching goals. Along with teaching and learning, learners' needs have started getting importance. The advent of CLT has paved the way for changing scenario of ELT where the goal of language learning has been shifted from "language comprehension" to "communicative competence". In India also, the goals of teaching English as L₂ have undergone various stages of development. But the Indian ELT researches reveal that here, even today, the teaching of English aims at developing the interpretative skills of learners by making them familiar with some well-known English literary texts. English is not taught as a language in India. Teaching English as content subject results in frustration and lack of interest on the part of the general undergraduate students. Educationalists and linguists agree to the point that since the needs, interests, and goals

of general undergraduates differ substantially from those of advanced students or students having major in English, methods and materials should correspond to the needs of those students. In order to achieve the desired goal of teaching and learning English at the undergraduate level, it is very essential to make a serious survey of the existing methods and materials of teaching English at the undergraduate level, so that required measures can be taken to make the teaching learning process more effective.

The objectives of the present study are-

1. To explore the different methods of teaching General English in the undergraduate colleges.
2. To make critical analysis of the materials used for teaching General English in the undergraduate colleges.
3. To see whether the materials are well supported by the adopted methods or vice-versa.
4. To have a critical look at the effectiveness of the methods and materials of teaching General English at the undergraduate colleges.
5. To find out whether the methods and materials used for teaching General English are able to achieve the desired goal or not.

The study has following delimitations-

1. The study is restricted only to Sonitpur and Lakhimpur districts of Assam.
2. Only twenty colleges are considered for the study.(ten from each district)
3. Only BA Semester I and II are considered for the study.

The report prepared on the basis of the findings of the study can be divided into five chapters-

Chapter 1: Introduction

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

Chapter 3: Methods of Teaching English as Second Language and Syllabus Design

Chapter 4: Research Methodology, Data Analysis and Interpretation

Chapter 5: Findings and Suggestions.

These chapters will be followed by a Bibliography and Appendices.

The first chapter entitled- **Introduction** includes background of the study, statement of the problem, rationale of the study, objectives of the study, delimitations of the study, and organization of the dissertation. The background of the study includes- advent of English in India, advent of English in Assam, present education system of Assam, place of English in UGC Model Curriculum, and the BA General English syllabi of Gauhati University and Dibrugarh University.

The second chapter entitled- **Review of Literature** is prepared on the basis of study of the existing literature on the relevant field. The reviews are presented under four broad headings, viz.,- **“Teaching of English as Second Language”**, **“Methods of Teaching English as Second Language”**, **“Materials of Teaching English as Second Language”**, **“Syllabus for Teaching English as Second Language”**.

Under the subtitle- **“Teaching of English as Second Language”**, the existing works of different ELT experts and scholars on the related field of study are discussed.

W. A. Bennett remarks that for developing the language skills in a learner, the teaching strategy must match the learning strategy as closely as possible. The teaching strategy must include a statement of activities in which the learner must engage if his learning is to be successful.

According to Shaun O’Dwyer, the teaching of ESL or EFL today focuses on a more democratic, student-centred approach, in which the teacher facilitates students with communicative educational activities. Such an approach gives emphasis on the

importance of learner autonomy and responsibility for the learning process, and attributes greater value to the learner's experience and knowledge in the classroom.

Philip Curran et al. mentions the four broad classroom cultures as- ultra-didactic (formal classroom), didactic (teacher-centred classroom), learner-centred (task-based learning), and ultra-informal (haphazard approach). H. D. Brown says that in almost every sphere of education, there has been a tendency to become “learner-centred”. He opines that time has come to prepare the methods and materials accordingly.

Anderson and Brewer describe two types of teachers- dominative and integrative. A dominative teacher refers to that teacher who thinks that he knows best issues, orders and decisions, expects obedience and conformity; dislikes discussions and criticism and tends to blame or threatens. An integrative teacher on the other hand, requests rather than orders, consults, encourages co-operation, delegates responsibility, welcomes pupils' ideas, creativity, and initiative.

According to Lewin et al., those pupils who are exposed to highly authoritarian atmosphere develop an aggressive and dominative behaviour with each other. On the other hand, pupils who are exposed to democratic atmosphere are spontaneous and friendlier in their relationships.

In the opinion of Krishnaswami and Krishnaswami - “English teaching in India is the world's largest democratic enterprise in the world. The pressure of population, pluralism, the colonial legacy, political compulsions, illiteracy, lack of infrastructure, vested interests and the problem of training teachers make English teaching in contemporary India a highly complex activity.” (14)

J. C. Agarwal remarks that the learner should be provided with the opportunity to encounter the text directly, so that they can develop their critical and creative abilities. . . . Once a teacher sees himself as a “manager of learning” rather than an

“imparters of information” he is likely to be less worried about his inability to cater to the linguistic needs of learners. (69)

The research works of K. K. Bhatia, Elnour Abdel Rahman Yeddi, S. N. Sridhar and Kamal K. Sridhar, M. V. Nadkarni, Pradhan and Mistry, Urbashi Barat, Flanders, Brown and MacDougall, T. V. S. Padmaja, etc. are also discussed under this subtitle.

Under the subtitle- “**Methods of Teaching English as Second Language**”, existing works on different methods of teaching English as L₂ are discussed. In this context Jack Richards and Theodore Rodgers point out, “Language teaching of the twentieth century was characterized by frequent change and innovation and by the development of sometimes competing ideologies. Much of the impetus for change in the approach to language teaching came about from changes in teaching methods.”(1)

Explaining the distinction between teaching and learning, W.T. Littlewood says that the former is carried out by teacher, while the latter by the learner; but in most of the existing literature on classroom methods and techniques, the focus is always on teaching; learning is considered as a reflection of teacher’s actions. Mathew Thomas mentions that for effective teaching, knowledge of the learner’s psychology and managing the stress in both teacher and student are very crucial.

Q. Z. Alam suggests that the teaching of a foreign language should not be a “chalk and talk” profession. Using proper methods for teaching in fact a clear challenge to the teacher, but if someone seriously wishes to improve the standards of language teaching, efforts must be made in right earnest to spread their use. T. C. Baruah mentions that the teaching methods should focus on communicative skills rather than on poetic excellence. The teaching of English must be embedded in local needs and indigenous context.

B. S. Jadhav says, “As a classroom consists of a heterogeneous group of learners the material may or may not be suitable for every learner. In such cases, the method should ensure effective use of the materials.” (64)

S. C. Sood finds- “If there is a need for rewriting our materials, keeping in mind the needs of the learners, it is also necessary that we employ an effective methodology for exploiting these materials in the classrooms so as to maximize the skills our learners need” (176).

Researchers and experts like M. R. Panchal, Agnihotri and Khanna, Mohd. Abdul Khalique, Y. V. Shrivastava, J. Umra Damayanti, P. Usha Rani also comment on this topic.

Under the subtitle- **“Materials of Teaching English as Second Language”** the findings of the research works done in both national as well as international levels in the related field of study are discussed. There are wide spread criticism on the role of published materials in language teaching programme. According to some experts, published materials are not adequate for presenting realistic language models. Such materials fail to address discourse competence as said by Kaplan and Knutson.

Tomlinson has criticized course-book for paying less importance on learner’s personal engagement with the materials- “Course-book materials are focusing more and more narrowly on the encoding and decoding of language rather than opening up rich opportunities for experience, engagement and effect” (441).

Krishnaswamy and Sriraman remark, “Ideally only skills and abilities should be specified without the prescription of any texts. Unfortunately, teachers, students, and examiners are now so used to the idea of prescribed texts that they would not know what to do in class or how to set an examination paper, if textbooks were to be removed.” (52)

Donoghue has conducted a survey among seventy six teachers for eliciting their views on pedagogical role of textbook. His study reveals that majority of his respondents find textbooks as “an essential source of information and support”.

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According to B. S. Jadhav, “The vast majority of the teachers have to use textbooks that are prescribed for them and only a handful of teachers, who are the elected members of the board of universities are fortunate enough to choose the textbooks they wish to use. Hence, the English teachers might feel that the prescribed textbook does not cater to their unique needs. While teaching, they might feel the need to alter, adapt and supplement the textbooks in order to meet the overgrowing demand on English communication.” (53-54)

Regarding materials used by student of undergraduate level Arup Sarma says, “Presently, teaching learning situation of English in Assam is primarily dominated by a flourishing market of the easily available bazar notes which is endangering the student community. Avoiding their prescribed texts a large number of students study the subject mainly by cramming answers to the likely questions that can be readily found in modal questions and answers on English prose, poetry, essays, grammar and composition only for hardly passing the examinations” (95). In his view the General English course of undergraduate level should be replaced by Functional English course for helping students to make them fit for global competition.

The research works of V. Saraswathi, Tickoo, Jane Crawford, R.S. Gupta, Stodolsky, Anjiliveli, Valsamma, Deshmukh, Damayanti J. Umra etc. are also discussed under this subtitle.

Under the subtitle- “**Syllabus for Teaching English as Second Language**”, the findings of various research works on related field of study are discussed.

In Widdowson’s view, “the syllabus is simply a framework within which activities can be carried out: a teaching device to facilitate learning. It only becomes a threat to pedagogy when it is regarded as absolute rules for determining what is to be learned rather than points of reference from which bearings can be taken.” (26)

David Nunan gives importance on the analysis of the learner’s needs in learning the target language. He remarks, “Information will need to be collected, not only on why learners want to learn the target languages, but also about such things as societal expectations and constraints and the resources available for implementing the syllabus.” (14)

John Munby has developed a model of language syllabus design which makes use of sophisticated application of needs analysis to language syllabus design. It contains nine elements, namely- participant, purposive domain, setting, interaction, instrumentality, dialect, target level, communicative event, and communicative key.

Smita Jha finds out that that lack of coordination between primary and secondary education on one hand and higher education on the other is one of the major problems of ELT in India. According to her “these three levels of education form separate categories, bodies or entities, and are independent of one another, leaving hardly any scope for a proper screening of our students to be done in view of their age, aptitude and motivation, factors, among others governing the process of language

learning or acquisition. All this is deplorable, and has on adverse or deleterious effect on language teaching including English language teaching in our country.” (17)

Usha Nagpal finds, “Most universities held on diligently to English literature not only in their honours courses but also in the general English courses. The question, whether in the compulsory English paper literature was to be taught qua literature or as a tool for language required unasked and unstated” (88-89).

Raja Ram Mehrotra remarks “the roads that lead to Shakespeare and Shaw do not lead to the learning of functional English” (105).

Arup Sarma has written “The syllabi even for the UG level are so designed that there is hardly any scope to develop linguistic competence in learners in an essential order. Due to the loopholes in syllabus designing our classroom teaching in English only enhances our students’ listening activity superficially as maximum time is spent in lecturing method. The unskilled students qualifying various levels with only the writing medium to the UG level create a more apathetic situation for English teaching.” (95)

Rajat Bhattacharya finds- “The syllabus in question perpetuates the old style of syllabus making whose object is mainly content teaching. It is substantially made up of British literary texts, that is to say prose, poetry and drama. . . . The rest of the syllabus comprises composition of conventional unseen-types like essay and letter.” (26-27). In his opinion, this type of syllabus will not be able to serve the interests of the students or the society.

Under this subtitle the research works of Candlin, Gordon, Breen, Tomlinson, Dr. Anil Sarwal, Rajeswari Sunder Rajan, Dr. Khirapada Dutta are also discussed.

Though various research works are found in the related field of study, till now no research has been done on the effectiveness of the methods and materials used for

teaching General English at undergraduate colleges under Gauhati University and Dibrugarh University of Assam.

The third chapter is- **Methods of Teaching English as Second Language and Syllabus Designing**. This chapter is again divided into five broad headings, viz.,- “Objectives of Teaching English in India”, “Methods of Teaching Second Language”, “Methods of Teaching Prose, Poetry, Grammar, Pronunciation, and Composition”, “Syllabus”, “The Role of Teaching Materials in Teaching English as Second Language”.

In this chapter some popular methods of teaching L₂ such as- the Grammar Translation Method, the Direct Method, The Audio-Lingual Method, the Bilingual Method, Situational Language Teaching Method, Community Language Learning (CLL), Suggestopedia or Desuggestopedia, CLT, the Natural Approach, the Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) method are described with their salient features. The researcher also takes into account the developments taken place in the language teaching profession during the post-method era. This chapter also includes different methods of teaching prose, poetry, grammar, pronunciation, and composition.

In this chapter, along with the methods of teaching English as L₂, the researcher puts forward a discussion on different types of language syllabi and also on role of different teaching materials in teaching English as L₂.

At the very beginning of the fourth chapter entitled- **Research Methodology, Data Analysis and Interpretation** the researcher gives a detail description of the research methodology adopted for the study. The research methodology includes a detail account of the population of the study, sample design, a brief profile of Sonitpur and Lakhimpur districts of Assam, tools used for the study, data collection procedure, and data analysis process.

The survey was conducted in total twenty colleges of Sonitpur and Lakhimpur districts (ten colleges from each district) of Assam. The investigator purposively selected total forty teacher respondents, consisting of two English teachers from each college and total four hundred student respondents, consisting of twenty students from each college.

The researcher prepared two sets of questionnaire- one for the students and the other for the teachers, to collect the required data for the study. The student's questionnaire consists of total thirty multiple choice questions where the respondents are asked to answer by giving a tick mark against their chosen answer/answers. Similarly, the teacher's questionnaire consists of total thirty questions of both multiple choice and open ended type.

The BA General English syllabi of Gauhati University and Dibrugarh University designed for Semester-I and Semester-II are also analyzed to see the possibility of attaining the set goals, provision for using different teaching materials in teaching learning process, and the relevance of these two syllabi in present context.

For secondary source of data books, journals, articles written by different applied linguists and ELT experts, dissertations, and internet sources are consulted.

After collecting data, both the teachers' and the students' questionnaires are analyzed and the data found from those questionnaires are presented separately in tabular form. The numbers of responses are mentioned also in percentage for the ease of comparison.

The study is conducted by utilizing different kinds of "triangulation" such as "data triangulation", and "location triangulation" which are prerequisite for enhancing the validity and reliability of the data interpretation of the study.

In this chapter, the data found from the student's and the teacher's questionnaires are analyzed and interpreted separately.

The last chapter entitled- **Findings and Suggestions**, presents the findings of the study in detail. A brief discussion of the same is given below-

Findings

i) The Methods Used for Teaching General English at the UG Level:

From the study it is learnt that 40% teachers consider that English is a difficult subject to teach and stating its reason 50% teachers say that most of the students come with the preconceived notion that English is very difficult to learn, while 25% teachers blame the students for not paying proper attention in the English class, another 25% teachers believe that the difficulty is caused by lack of sufficient exposure to learn English outside the classroom. Commenting on the infrastructure of the English classroom, 68.5% students and 20% teachers think their classrooms are proper, otherwise 7.5% students and 35% teachers feel that their classrooms are bad and for 5% teachers, those are the worst. A large number of students are found to be enrolled in each class and most of the classrooms are also found to be very poorly furnished, overcrowded and noisy. As in most of the colleges, there is no such teaching aid as microphone, projector, the English teacher has to shout at the top of his/her voice. Consequently, sometimes the nearby classes get disturbed. If the English teacher does not possess a loud voice, he/she usually proves to be less effective in the General English class.

When the teachers are asked which language they use in the classroom 65% teachers say that they use both Assamese and English, 35% teachers say that they use only English in the classroom. On the other hand, when the students are asked which language their teacher uses in the English class, 80% students say that they use both

English and Assamese, while the rest 20% students say that their teacher uses only English in the class. Justifying the use of both Assamese and English in the English class, most of the teachers say that they do it on demand of the students. Some others think that use of L_1 can motivate the students to learn the target language, or use of L_1 can help in saving time. But whatever may be the teachers' justification for using both English and Assamese, the reality that one cannot deny is that if English is not used for classroom interaction, the possible exposure for learning English will be almost zero, since English is not used in the society for day-to-day communication. Moreover, in such a situation, the students do not get any model to follow. Hence, this type of use of both English and Assamese in the English classroom cannot be much helpful in learning the target language for communicative purpose. The use of mother tongue may help in saving time or it may reduce the teacher's task, but this type of oversimplification of teaching job will not be helpful in developing the language skills in the students.

The above mentioned findings show that though both teachers and students consider the development of the communicative competence in the students to be the main goal of teaching English as L_2 , the adopted methods at the most can help in understanding the items of the syllabus or to score good marks in the examinations, which may not reflect the language ability of the students. When the students are asked, which language they use in the classroom, 85.5% students say that they use both English and Assamese inside the classroom.

Regarding the methods of teaching English, 41% students say that their teacher starts teaching a prose piece by telling its summary in English, 27% say that their teacher encourages them to read the lesson and find out its meaning, 10.5% students say that their teacher tells them some relevant stories, incidents etc., 9.5% students say

that the teacher starts the lesson by telling the summary in Assamese. 6.5% students say that their teacher gives them the meaning of the difficult words in Assamese, while 5.5% students reveal that their teacher just opens the textbook and starts teaching. After starting the lesson, 52.5% students say that the teacher teaches them by telling them every paragraph briefly in both English and Assamese, 26.5% students say that their teacher gives an overall idea of the lesson, and finally, the English teacher usually sums up the lesson by discussing the textual questions given at the end of the lesson. In case of teaching a poem, 56% students say that their teacher starts the poem by giving an account of poet's life and works, 28.5% students say that their teacher starts by reciting the poem and by focusing on the theme of the poem, while 15.5% students say that the teacher asks them to find out the difficult words and their meanings. Thereafter, 33.5% students reveal that their teacher explains each stanza separately in both English and Assamese, 22% students reveal that the teacher explains the poem by bringing out the main thoughts and ideas of the poem with the help of questions. 18.5% students say that the teacher teaches by explaining each sentence in both English and Assamese. Finally, most of the teachers conclude the poem by discussing some textual questions given at the end of the poem. Now it is seen that the popularly adopted methods of teaching prose and poetry at the college level may be useful in drawing the students' attention towards the prescribed text, or it may be helpful in understanding the prescribed text easily (as at every step, the teacher gives the summary either in English or in both English and Assamese), but it will not be helpful in developing any language skill in the learners. By adopting this kind of method, the teacher tries to help the student in comprehending the prescribed text easily within a minimum possible time. But in teaching prose and poetry, the teachers are neglecting the main objectives of including prose and poetry in ELT syllabi. "The focus of a prose lesson is more on

teaching language but the aim of a poetry lesson is what is usually called ‘appreciation’ or, to be more precise, enjoyment; the teaching of poetry must be a lively, stimulating and challenging *participatory activity*.” (Krishnaswamy and Krishnaswamy 168). Again, analyzing the exercises presented at the end of a particular lesson it is seen that most of the exercises are designed only to test the language comprehension of a student, nothing more than that. But CLT – the widely favoured method for teaching English as L₂ gives emphasis on developing the students’ ability to use the target language in real life situations. For making L₂ learning effective, CLT advocates that textbooks should include some communicative activities.

In case of teaching composition, half of the students say that the teacher usually teaches them how to compose something and then asks to do lots of practices, 19% students say that their teacher selects important questions and gives their answers, while 6% students say that the composition portion of the syllabus is never taught. In case of teaching grammar, 36.5% students reveal that their teacher at first gives the rules of grammar and then explain the rules by giving some examples; 10% students say that their teacher teaches grammar first by giving some examples then by deriving the rules from those examples. Though the linguists propose that grammar should be taught in context and in inductive way, most of the teachers teach the grammatical items in deductive way. Moreover, the grammatical items are taught in isolation. Consequently, the students find the grammar class monotonous and find it difficult to apply the grammatical rules that they have learned.

When the English teachers are asked whether English should be taught with proper pronunciation, stress and intonation, 50% of them say that all these things should be taught in the English class because students must learn how to speak English with proper pronunciation, stress, intonation, while 27.5% teachers believe that all

these things cannot be taught in the traditional classroom, where the infrastructural facilities are minimal, 15% teachers say that they do not get enough time to teach all these things in their English class. In case of students, more than half (51.5%) students say that though their teacher advises them to speak English with proper pronunciation, stress and intonation, but in classroom teaching, it is never practised. It shows that in the adopted method of teaching English, proper emphasis is not given on the speaking skill. Moreover, the most of the colleges lack the required minimum infrastructural facilities for teaching English as L₂. The ELT in post-method era gives importance on teaching pronunciation of English in order to attain accuracy as well as fluency. The applied linguists of post-method era come up with the view that there should be a balance between both accuracy and fluency because incorrect utterance may fail to communicate the intended meaning.

Only 40% teachers say that they are well aware of different methods of teaching English as second language and practise the suitable one in their teaching. 30% teachers say that they are aware of different methods of teaching English as L₂ but cannot rely on those methods; therefore they teach in the traditional way, 10% teachers say that as they are not familiar with the different methods of teaching English, they prefer to teach in the method in which they were once taught. While 15% teachers say that instead of following a particular method of teaching English, they prefer to teach by applying their own method. Again, only 25% teachers say that they learned those methods in their teacher training programme; the rest of them learned the method either in their own initiative or as a part of their syllabus of earlier course of studies. It shows that many teachers do not have any systematic knowledge of the different methods of teaching English as L₂, and though some of them have the knowledge of the methods, they do not apply those methods in their actual classroom teaching. Contrary to

Johnson's view which states that many language teachers are determined not to recreate the same kind of formal language learning experiences they underwent when they were students, most of the teachers are found to follow the same method in which they were once taught by their teachers. The reason behind applying this particular method may be- it simplifies their task and at the same time, may help the students to score good marks in the examinations. But this unsystematic way of teaching English cannot help the students in achieving the desired goal.

Examination system is an indispensable part of any education system. Usually examinations are designed in such a way that it can assess particular skill/skills of the students. The examination pattern is usually determined by the objective of teaching and learning, and whatever may be teaching-learning goal, the students' performance will be ultimately measured by their score in the examinations, therefore the immediate goal of the students is to get good marks in examinations. In case of teaching and learning of English as L₂, as the goal is to develop the communicative competence in the learner; the examination should be designed in such a way that it can really assess the language skills of the learners. But in the present study, as much as 60% teachers believe that the existing examination system is of no use because it cannot assess the language skill development in the learners. In case of students, 16.5% students believe that the present examination system cannot measure the students' ability, 4.5% students believe that the system cannot measure the communicative competence in the learner, and 12% students think that the examination system is based on common question pattern. Giving their suggestions for improvement of the examination system, the teachers say that in the end-semester as well as in the sessional examinations, questions should be set to measure the overall language skill development in the learners. "The examination system should try to test the skills of language, not the knowledge of it"-

one teacher says. The teachers also suggest that common question pattern can be avoided by more careful and clever question setting.

ii) The Materials Used for Teaching General English at the UG Level and Whether the Materials are Well Supported by the Adopted Method or Vice-Versa:

Regarding the need of various teaching materials, though 10% teachers believe that they need only black-board and textbook to teach English in the classroom, the rest of the teachers believe that apart from textbook, blackboard and authentic material, various audio-visual aids, projectors etc. are also required for teaching English in the classroom. But when the students are asked whether their teacher uses diagram, pictures, maps, radio, television or other teaching aids in their classroom, 58% students say that their teacher sometimes use them, 19% students say that they hardly use it, while 21% students say that they never use it. Similarly 72.5% students disclose that their teacher never make use of any teaching learning activity such as role-play, language task or language game to teach English, 21% students say that the teacher hardly use them in their classroom teaching. This particular finding reveals that there is a huge gap between what the L₂ teachers believe and what they practise in their classroom teaching. Though most of the teachers believe that for effective teaching of English as L₂, apart from the black-board and the textbook the teacher has to use different teaching materials, teaching aids, and may have to take help of language tasks, in their classroom teaching, they hardly practise it.

A close study of the Gauhati University General English syllabus reveals that the major portion of the syllabus is based on literary topics which expose students to complex themes that are not relevant and meaningful in their contexts. Majority of the undergraduate students are unable to speak, read, write, and understand English properly in spite of being taught it from the very beginning of their school education.

Now, it is well realized that the need of the hour is the development of communicative competence in our learners. But the Gauhati University syllabus has completely ignored this aspect of language learning. It does not adopt any language-based approach for improving students' proficiency in English. Moreover, the syllabus does not give sufficient guidance in how to use the contents of the syllabus.

On the other hand, BA General English syllabus of Dibrugarh University basically aims at developing the writing skill of the learner for enhancing the comprehension ability. This syllabus gives more importance on written composition. Though the General English Paper-II syllabus contains literary topics, it has given the teachers required freedom to prepare "supportive materials on the basis of the literary texts for developing the communication skill of the learner." Though the Dibrugarh University syllabus prescribes two textbooks for the course, these text books are not found to be adequate for teaching English as L₂. The text book entitled- *Written Word* prescribed for Semester-I has not included all the items of the syllabus. Another textbook entitled- *Twentieth Century Prose* gives importance on the thematic concern of the prose pieces. It does not provide the students with language tasks which are essential for developing language skills in the learners.

The contents of the syllabi of both Gauhati University and Dibrugarh University are not found to be helpful in developing the communicative competence of the students. At the same time, these syllabi fail to fulfil the basic objectives of the UGC Model curriculum which states that any programme or degree bearing the word "English" in its title should ensure a certain competence in using the language. In this 21st century, when English has acquired the status of the global language, these types of syllabi which give more importance to literature do not have much relevance in real life situations. Today, most of the learners of English in India show apathy towards literary

studies as their aim of learning is associated with the development of communication skills in English, both spoken and written.

Commenting on the materials used for teaching General English at the degree level, 70% teachers express dissatisfaction as they feel that the General English syllabus does not correspond with the aims of the teaching and also with the needs of the learners. 80% teachers feel that the prescribed syllabus lack sufficient scope for using materials of genuine interest to learners and at the same time, the contents of the syllabus are very monotonous in nature, as the syllabus does not allow to practise the different methods of teaching and learning of English. 75% of the teachers also feel that the prescribed materials i.e., the text book used for teaching English lack enough variety and range of topic and to some extent, culturally alien. 85% teachers of both universities also comment that the General English syllabus prescribed for the degree students does not have any flexibility, which is an essential quality of a good syllabus. In this post-method era when language teaching tends to be flexible and learner-centred, there is an overall demand for using a “tailor-made” syllabus instead of a “ready-made” syllabus. At the same time, the syllabi of these two universities are themselves not designed on the basis of any particular approach to language teaching. That means the existing syllabi of Gauhati University and Dibrugarh University are neither process friendly, not product friendly.

Advising for the improvement of the Gauhati University syllabus, the teachers say that the syllabus should be task-based and some more emphasis should be given on grammar and composition. On the other hand, the teachers feel that the General English syllabus of Dibrugarh University is monotonous in nature and it cannot motivate the students to learn English. Suggesting for the improvement, the teachers say that the syllabus must cover more ideas along with the language. The teachers also feel that the

syllabi of these two universities should be prepared on the basis of the feed-back report of the teachers teaching at the undergraduate level. Apart from the teachers, the students also find many short-comings in the syllabus. For 29.63% students, the course has little practical value, for 22.22% the course is too vast, for 19.63% the syllabus cannot help in learning how to speak English, for 11.48% proper emphasis is not given on grammar, for 7.78% it cannot prepare them for higher studies, and for some others the course material is not interesting at all.

iii) Effectiveness of the Methods and Materials of Teaching General English at the UG Level:

Only 22% students say that they use only English in their English classroom and as much as 78% students say that they do not use English outside the English classroom. Stating their reason behind it, 51.28% students say that “speaking English is considered as showing too much”, 17.95% students fear that if they make any mistake, their friends will laugh at them, 10.25% students say that they hesitate to speak in English, 16.67% students feel that speaking English is not as much essential as writing English, while 3.85% students fear that if they make any mistake, the teacher will scold them. After analyzing the students’ questionnaire it is found that whenever the students make any mistake, 48% teachers react negatively. They either warn the students, or scold or even punish them. But this type of response from the teachers’ side suffocates the classroom atmosphere for the students, as the students feel a continuous stress inside the classroom. The ELT experts agree to the point that for effective learning, the students must feel free to make mistake. Unnecessary stress impedes the entire teaching learning process, and under such situations, it is normal that students will not be enthusiastic to respond to what the teacher says. This type of situation ultimately affects the classroom communication in a negative way. By analyzing the students’

questionnaire it is also learnt that there are a few language teachers who, whenever enter the English classroom to take class, students feel captive or even horrified. Though most of the students find the English class either equally interesting or more interesting than the other classes, there are some students who consider English class to be very boring one and they understand nothing or only a little bit of what their teacher teaches. The teacher respondents reveal that many students do not attend their English class regularly and stating reason behind it 30% teachers say that the students think that they can pass examination without attending the classes, another 30% say that the students are never serious with their study, 20% teachers blame the system for not being able to compel the students to attend classes regularly, while 20% teachers think that the students do not come to the class regularly because, they may not find it class interesting.

44% teachers feel that it is speaking skill, 28% teacher feel that it is writing skill, 16% teachers feel that it is reading skill, while 12% teachers feel that it is listening skill in which the students are not properly developed. Again, the teacher identifies the grammar and the composition as the most useful component in the syllabus. When the teachers are asked to give reason behind this uneven development of the language skills, they mainly make the English syllabus and the examination system responsible for it.

Now, from the above findings we can say that the methods and materials used for teaching General English at undergraduate level is not much effective, because though majority of the students find the English class interesting, they are not being able to use the language inside as well as outside the classroom. Some students find the English class very boring and they do not understand anything of what their teacher teaches, and many students feel that they can score good marks even without attending

the classes. That means neither the applied method can inspire the students to come to the English class, nor the methods and materials can help the students to develop their communicative competence in the language.

iv) Goals and Achievements:

Stating the goal of teaching English, half of the teachers say that the main goal is to enable the students to communicate in English in different real life situations, for 25% of teachers it is to enable the students to write English for different purposes, while 10% teachers think that the basic goal is to enable to students to read and comprehend the language. On the other hand, most of the students want to learn English mainly because- it is essential for higher education, it is essential for day-to-day life and it is the language of the world. Only 8.4% students reveal that they want to learn English because it helps in getting a job easily, and only 2.96% students say that they want English because it is the language of internet and computer. From this analysis, it is understood that now students want to learn English as an indispensable part of their day-to-day life, rather than as a language of opportunities or as a symbol of social status. As it has been mentioned earlier, for 25% teachers, enabling the students to write English for different purposes is more important than anything else, on the other hand as much as 65% students think that ability to write English for various purposes is more important even than the ability of verbal communication or the scoring good marks in examinations. That means, for many students written communication is even more important than the verbal communication, and one reason behind this is- in the present social context of Assam, communicating in English basically means communicating in written form, rather than communicating verbally.

Examining the syllabi of both Gauhati University and Dibrugarh University it is seen that these two universities set different goals for their BA General English

students. The Gauhati University syllabus states its aim as preparing students to understand and use language effectively, building vocabulary and providing the students with an opportunity to read and respond to representations of issues in contemporary life and culture in the English language, while Dibrugarh University syllabus aims at imparting some basic skills in written communication to the students.

The study reveals that both the BA General English syllabi of Gauhati University and Dibrugarh University are inadequate to meet the needs of the learners. The content of the syllabus meant for BA General English course is found to be inadequate for the students of higher education. These two syllabi cannot provide the learners with the exposure to use English in real life situations. ELT in Indian context reveals that majority of the undergraduate students are unable to speak, read, write and understand English fluently in spite of being taught the language from the very beginning of schooling till the graduation. In the study, when the students are asked whether they can use English for day-to-day life, 3.5% students say that they cannot use English for day-to-day communication. As much as 61% students reveal that they can speak only two/three sentences in English.

Now from this study it is well realized that the two universities of Assam have failed to come into agreement in regards to the teaching-learning goal of General English, as these two universities set two different types of goals for the similar group of students. Though Dibrugarh University syllabus aims at imparting some basic skills in written communication, Gauhati University sets a quite ambitious goal for its undergraduate students. But whatever may be the goals, both of these universities seem to fail to achieve them, as most of the students are not capable of using the language for day-to-day communicative purpose.

It is disheartening to see that even in this 21st century when the applied linguists and syllabus designers are giving importance on using “eclectic” method and “integrated” syllabus for making ELT effective and relevant for the learner’s, syllabi of both these universities still reflect some characteristics of Grammar Translation principles. Therefore, it can be said that both the methods and materials used for teaching English at undergraduate colleges of Dibrugarh University and Gauhati University are far from satisfactory. A need-based syllabus and learner-centred teaching method may be a solution to the existing problem. However, nothing can replace the humanitarian role played by a teacher. For this, as said by Dutta “Along with reformation of the examination system and the English syllabus, it is necessary that the teachers become sufficiently resourceful and innovative to face the challenges of teaching English even with limited resources.” (232). Moreover, for making teaching of English context-oriented and learner-centred, it is required that teacher must be conversant with different trends which have brought a revolutionary change in methods and materials of teaching English, so that he/she can practise “principled eclecticism” (Larsen- Freeman 183) in order to develop his/her own method on the basis of the existing methods. But the findings of this study reveal that most of the teachers are not much aware of the recent developments taking place in the field of ELT.

Suggestions

On the basis of the above findings of the study the investigator put forward some suggestions, a few of which are briefly mentioned below-

1. English should be taught as a language, rather than as a content subject.
2. As there is no sufficient exposure to learn English outside the classroom, the teacher should try to give sufficient exposure to the students inside the

classroom and for this he/she must be able to act as a role model for the students.

3. The teacher should be aware of the different methods of teaching English as L₂, so that he/she can develop his/her own method on basis of the knowledge of the existing ones.
4. At the college level, the target language should be the language of the classroom.
5. In the General English syllabus, language should get priority over literature. Those who are interested in literature may opt for English major. The General English syllabus should include only that much literature which can make language learning an enjoyable activity.
6. Syllabus should match the teaching goals and learners' need. For that feed-back from both teachers and learners are essential.
7. Grammar should be taught both deductively and inductively. Emphasis should be given on composition.
8. Before preparing the syllabus, it is very essential to make a serious analysis of the learners' need.
9. The materials used for teaching English as L₂ should be flexible in nature. There should be sufficient scope for language practice.
10. The teaching materials should be designed in such a way that they can accommodate modern methods of teaching English as L₂ or vice-versa.
11. Instead of emphasising only on textual English, the teaching materials as well as the examination system should focus on functional English.
12. The exercises given at the end of a particular lesson should be designed in such a way that they can test the language skills of the students.

13. The examinations must avoid the stock questions/common questions patterns.
14. The students should be encouraged to speak English in the English class, with friends and if possible, with parents and other people who can communicate in that language.
15. The teaching and learning of English can be made more enjoyable and effective by applying various teaching aids. Training should be provided to the L₂ teachers about how to use different teaching aids as supplementary materials in classroom teaching.
16. Pre-job training, specially designed for the language teachers should be made compulsory for all English teachers. Thereafter, they should be trained up at a regular interval of time.

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