

## **CHAPTER- V**

### **FINDINGS AND SUGGESTIONS**

#### **5.1. Findings**

##### **5.1.1. The Methods Used for Teaching General English at the Undergraduate Level**

From the study it is learnt that 40% teachers think that English is difficult subject to teach and stating its reason 50% of the 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. Moreover, a large number of students are enrolled in each class. 40% teachers say that 101-150 students and 35% teachers say that 151-200 students are enrolled in the classes in which they teach. The classrooms are very poorly furnished, over-crowded and noisy. As there is no such teaching aid as microphone, projector (except a few colleges), the English teacher has to shout at the top of his/her voice, consequently sometimes when the English class goes on, the nearby classes get disturbed. At the same time, if the English teacher does not have a loud voice, he/she usually proves to be less effective in the General English class. When the teachers are verbally asked how they manage such a large class, a common answer is that usually, many students do not attend the class. In the study, 30%

teachers say that only 41-60% of the total enrolled students usually attend the General English class, 50% teachers say that only 61-80% students attend the class. The irony is that, the classroom arrangement is also made accordingly, that means the most of the General English classrooms will not be able accommodate all the students, if more than 80% students attend the class on a particular day, each of them will not be able to get a comfortable and convenient seat in the classroom. That means, instead of ensuring 100% attendance in the class, the college authority expects that only 60-70% students will attend a particular class.

When the teachers are asked- which language they use in the classroom, 65% teachers say that they use both Assamese and English in the classroom, 35% teachers say that they use only English in the classroom. On the other hand, when the students are asked which language is used by their teacher in the English classroom, 80% students say that their teacher uses both English and Assamese in their English class, while the rest 20% students say that their teacher uses only English in the classroom. Out of the total students who say that their teacher use both English and Assamese in their classroom, 9% students say that instead of using connected English sentences, their teacher uses only English words in their classroom. Justifying the use of both Assamese and English in the English classroom, 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 as the use of only English which the students find difficult to understand may make learning a monotonous business for the students; moreover, use of  $L_1$  may help in saving time, as translating into  $L_1$  is the easiest way to deliver the meaning of the content. But whatever may be the teachers' justification for using both English and Assamese, the reality is that if English is not used as a language for classroom interaction in the English class, the possible exposure for

learning English will be almost zero, since English is not used in the society for day-to-day communication. Though it is believed that exposure is very important for learning a L<sub>2</sub>, here the students learning of the language will be restricted only to the textbook/course-book. Moreover, as some students reveal that in the name of using both English and Assamese in the English class, some teachers use just English words, the students do not get any model to follow. Hence, this type of use of both English and Assamese in the English classroom may not be much helpful in learning the target language for communicative purpose. It is believed that communicative skill develops in the process of struggling to communicate. Therefore, use of L<sub>1</sub> 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. Since teaching and learning greatly depend on classroom interaction, mere discussion of textual matters can never be considered as quality teaching or learning. In ELT, learner-centred teaching is based on the assumption that students bring with them lots of ideas, opinions and experiences to classrooms. It is the duty of the English teacher to provide them with the necessary environment to express all these in English. Swami Vivekananda says, "Education is not the amount of information that is put into your brain and runs riot there, undigested all your life. We must have life-building, man-making, character making assimilation of ideas" (qtd. in Balasubramanian 3)

This particular finding shows that though both teachers and students believe that the main aim of teaching and learning English is to develop the communication ability of the students, the adopted way of teaching 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. Though the 88% students

say that their English teacher encourages them to speak English in the classroom, mere inspiration is not going to bring any significant change, as from the above analysis it is obvious that the students usually do not get any scope to use English for ordinary communicative purposes. 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. 2.5% students even say that they remain silent in the English classroom. On the other hand, as much as 78% students say that they do not use English outside the English classroom, and showing their reason behind not using English outside the English classroom, they say that speaking English is considered as showing too much; some other students feel that, if they make any mistake, their friends will laugh at them, some of them believe that speaking English is not as much essential as writing English, or they simply hesitate to open up their mouths. Now it is well realized that though the teacher inspires the students to speak English, this type of inspiration is ritualistic in nature, and can hardly make the students open-up their mouths.

Again it is very essential for a teacher to take feed-back from the students, and if the students are found to make any mistake, the teacher should detect it at the earliest possible so that if necessary, he/she can take remedial measures. And for this, frequent evaluation of students' achievement is essential. But when the teachers are asked how do they know whether the students are following what they are teaching, though 60% teachers say that they learn it by asking questions, 7.5% teachers say that they learn it by looking at the faces of the students, 25% teachers think that if the students do not say that they have not understood what the teacher teaches or if the students remain silent, then it ensures that the students are following what the teacher teaches. But it is well understood that a student may remain silent in the classroom

because of various reasons, such as hesitation, fear, introvert nature etc. At the same time many students pretend it well to show that they are exactly following everything what their teachers are teaching, even while they are not paying any attention in the class or have not understood anything. Therefore, assessing the students' understanding either from their silence or from their facial expressions may be quite misleading. The reliable way to find out student's mistake is to take frequent assessment tests.

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. before starting the lesson, 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 then the English teacher usually sums up the lesson by discussing the textual questions given at the end of the lesson. In case of teaching of 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 both English and Assamese), but it will not be helpful in developing any language skill in the language learner. 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 here, the teachers are neglecting the main objectives of inclusion of prose and poetry in the 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). It is believed that the teaching prose pieces may help the students in expressing their ideas in the target language by selecting the appropriate words and functions and teaching of poetry aims to develop the reading skill of the learner. Again in case of teaching both prose and poetry, the teachers give good deal of emphasis on working out the exercises given at the end of the texts. This may be helpful in scoring good marks in examinations as well as in developing the language skills, if the exercises are properly designed to test the language skills of the learners. But analyzing the exercises found in the text books, 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 gives emphasis on providing students with an opportunity to have initiative and choice in communication, as language learning is purposeful and

teaching of language always aims at developing the students' ability to use the target language in real life situations. For making L<sub>2</sub> teaching effective, CLT advocates that textbooks should include some communicative activities such as role plays and other pair activities, task analysis for thematic development in a particular lesson apart from some comprehension questions related to that particular piece of writing. As Grant says, "An outcome of our understanding that language is a social practice has been an increased call for the use of 'authentic' materials, rather than the more contrived and artificial language often found in traditional textbooks." (qtd. in Crawford 85). "The archetypal communicative technique is an information gap exercise", says Cook (248) and hence, these task-based materials are designed in the forms of exercise handbooks, activity cards, a building plan and different pair communication practice materials.

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 on composition and gives their answers, while 6% students say that the composition portion of the syllabus is never taught.

In case of teaching grammar, 35% students say that they do not have grammar in their syllabus. 36.5% students reveal that their teacher at first gives the rules of grammar and then explain the rules by giving some examples; only 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. "Since the method of teaching rules first does not seem to work, we could start with communication first and then elicit the rules of Grammar

for them. Grammar tasks which are contextualized, life-oriented, meaning- focused, interactive and minimal in the use of labels may prove interesting and useful.” (Saraswathi 101). Again, Sarma and Mahapatra also suggest that in Indian context, the teaching of grammar should be related to the teaching of the textbook (63). But the data analysis reveals that 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 learnt. 14% students even say that in the name of teaching grammar, their teacher just tries to find out the important questions related to grammar and discusses those questions only. That means there is no systematic teaching of grammar. But, applied linguists like Krashen and Prabhu give importance on making grammar teaching context-oriented so that it can compensate for the lack of exposure to language. According to Larsen-Freeman, in teaching grammar teacher should consider the three aspects of grammar: form, meaning and use.

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 do not have the



required minimum infrastructural facilities for teaching English as L<sub>2</sub>. Though ELT in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century emphasizes on teaching pronunciation for attaining accuracy, the emphasis is shifted towards fluency with the acceptance of communicative language approach in ELT. But applied linguists of the 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. Tickoo points out a common cause of pronunciation problems faced by Indian people in speaking English- “. . . common source of pronunciation problems is especially true among products of India’s non-English medium schools. It is that because their main source of English is the prescribed textbook, their speech is often marked by a predominance of spelling- or book-based pronunciation.” (92)

When the teachers are asked whether they are aware of different methods of teaching English as L<sub>2</sub> and use those methods in their classroom teaching, only 40% teachers say that they are well aware of different methods of teaching English as L<sub>2</sub> and practise the suitable one in their teaching. 30% teachers say that they are aware of different methods of teaching English as L<sub>2</sub> 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. It shows that many teachers do not have any systematic knowledge of the different methods of teaching English as L<sub>2</sub>, and though some of them have the knowledge of the methods, they do not care to apply

them 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. Since teaching and learning of English as L<sub>2</sub> is recognized as context-oriented process, ELT has paved the way for adopting eclectic style of teaching. That is, the teacher is no longer bound to select only the best method for imparting knowledge of the English language. Now, it is expected that instead of adhering to a particular method, the teacher should create his/ her own method which can cater to the needs of his/her students. "Therefore, there is much more to teacher development than learning how to use different approaches and methods of teaching. Experience with different approaches and methods, however, can provide teachers with an initial practical knowledge base in teaching and can also be used to explore and develop teachers' own beliefs, principles, and practices." (Richards and Rodgers 252)

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 learning is to get good marks in examinations. In case of teaching and learning of English as L<sub>2</sub>, since the goal is to develop the communicative

competence in the learner; hence, the examination should be designed in such a way that it can really assess the language skills of the students. 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 students. In case of students, though 40.5% students think that as student, it is not their duty to comment on examination system, 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 bringing some improvement in the examination system, the teachers say that in the end-semester as well as sessional examinations, instead of assessing a particular skill, 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. Again, different marks are allotted to the General English course designed for BA Semester-I and Semester-II of Gauhati University and Dibrugarh University. In case of Dibrugarh University there are two question papers of 100 marks in each, i.e., 200 marks in total. But in case Gauhati University, the General English course carries only 100 marks in two papers, 50 mark in each. One teacher from a college affiliated to Gauhati University suggests- "At least two papers of 100 marks in each paper should be given at Degree level, as it was the practice in the old non-semester regulation under GU Exam." Regarding examination reform, The National Policy on Education, 1986 states:

8.23 Assessment of performance is an integral part of any process of learning and teaching. As part of sound educational strategy, examinations should be employed to bring about qualitative improvements in education.

8.24 The objective will be to re-cast the examination system so as to ensure a method of assessment that is a valid and reliable measure of student development and a powerful instrument for improving teaching and learning. In functional terms, it would mean:

- i) The elimination of excessive element of chance and subjectivity;
- ii) The de-emphasis of memorization;
- iii) Continuous and comprehensive evaluation that incorporates both scholaristic and non-scholaristic aspects of education, spread over the total span of instructional time;
- iv) Effective use of the evaluation process by teachers, students and parents;
- v) Improvement in the conduct of examination;
- vi) The introduction of concomitant changes in instructional materials and methodology;
- vii) Introduction of the semester system from the secondary stage in a phrase manner; and
- viii) The use of grades in place of marks.

(Rao 30)

#### **5.1.2. The Materials Used for Teaching General English at the Undergraduate 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 L<sub>2</sub> teachers believe and what they practise in their classroom teaching. Though most of the teachers believe that for effective teaching of English as L<sub>2</sub>, 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.

The analysis of the data shows that apart from the textbooks/course-books, the teachers do not use any other teaching materials for teaching General English in these colleges. Earlier, in language teaching programmes, though materials referred only to the textbooks, now-a-days language teaching materials refers to authentic/authentic-like materials as well as other specially designed instructional resources, apart from the textbooks. Recommending for using quality textbooks and different teaching-learning materials in different educational programmes, the Kothari Commission of 1964-66 suggests- “Teachers’ guides and other instructional materials should supplement textbooks” (Mohanty 58). With the introduction of the communicative approach to language teaching in the late 1960s and 1970s, language learning is visualized as a cooperative process which develops from the interaction among

student, teacher, text and tasks. “From the perspective of communicative language teaching, learner’s needs and wants inform the teaching-learning process, and the emphasis is on using the language in stimulating communicative activities” (Finney 76). Consequently, various language syllabi were developed under the umbrella term communicative syllabus where “everything that is done with a communicative intent” (Larsen-Freeman 129). The materials used in this method to develop the communicative competence of the learner are termed as “text-based, task-based, and realia” by Richards and Rodgers. As it is mentioned earlier, in Clark’s opinion for the development of “real life” competencies among learners, they should be exposed to such kind of language which takes place outside the course setting and contains a pragmatic value. Richards and Renandya maintain, “A large percentage of the world’s language learners study English in order to develop proficiency in speaking” (201). Applied linguists give importance on using authentic/authentic-like materials in teaching English as they believe that these materials can help the students in using the language in authentic social contexts, even inside the classroom. At present, in ELT, there is a move towards flexible, need-based and learner-centred teaching. As a result teachers are free to use language teaching materials according to the learners’ need. Teachers are given freedom to use some supplementary materials which are necessary for drills, role-plays, solving problems, interviews, discussions, information gap activities etc., provided, the materials used by the teacher should ensure the contextualization of the language they present. As already mentioned, on speaking about the relevance of such language teaching materials which are mixture of both created and authentic materials, Clarke says, “Such books (begin to) take on the area, if not the activity, of authenticity, containing considerable amounts of photographically reproduced ‘realia’, in the form of newspaper articles, maps,

diagrams, memo pads, application forms, advertisements, instructional leaflets and all the rest. Some books indeed, almost entirely consist of authentic material, including illustrations, extracted from newspapers or magazines.”(79). Almost all applied linguists agree that for effective teaching of English, materials should match learning objective, ensure learner’s participation, develop learner’s confidence, develop learner’s linguistic skills, facilitate student-teacher interaction by promoting interpersonal skills, meet learner’s need, have appealing content with meaningful communicative activities, have relevance on learner’s life , have flexibility and ensure contextualization of the target language. They believe that only such type of materials will be able to achieve the desired goal of ELT i.e., the development of communicative competence of the learner.

But the analysis of the syllabi of Gauhati University and Dibrugarh University has shown that the Paper-I of the Gauhati University General English which is meant for BA Semester- I students contains prose section which includes six prose pieces on different themes and topics written by Mahatma Gandhi, George Orwell, Punyakanta Wijenaik, Manoj Das, Michael Ondaatje and Rohinton Mistry. The grammar section includes common errors and make sentences using common phrases and idioms. Paper-II is meant for BA Semester-II students, which includes seven poems composed by poets like William Blake, Wordsworth, Langston Hughes, Jayanta Mahapatra, Wole Soyinka, Margaret Atwood and Seamus Heaney. The grammar section of this paper includes voice change, tag questions, use of determiners and narration. Surprisingly, no text book is prescribed in the syllabus. Hence, students buy different books of different authors/editors, and many of those books are of doubtful quality.

Again, the General English Paper-I syllabus of Dibrugarh University (prescribed for BA Semester-I students) aims at developing the written skill of the

learner. The content of the syllabus includes comprehension, précis, various kinds of letter writing, preparing CV, note-making/writing short notes, note taking and note making, brief outlining of points, numbering/sequencing of ideas, paragraph writing, report writing, transcribing information from charts, graphs, visuals etc. The instructional objective of the General English Paper-II meant for students of Semester-II, is to develop the students' ability to appreciate different types of creative writings and also to inculcate desirable social values. The contents of this paper include short stories of different authors like O'Henry, R. K. Narayan and Vikram Seth and three prose lessons written by Verrier Elwin, George Orwell, and Stephen Hawking.

With the acceptance of communicative approach to language teaching, the teaching of English as L<sub>2</sub> aims at developing the communicative skill of the learner. But the contents of these two syllabi are not found to be helpful in developing the communicative competence of the students. A close study of these syllabi reveals that the major portion of the syllabi is based on literary topics which expose students to complex themes that are not relevant and meaningful in their own contexts. Moreover, the syllabi do not give sufficient guidance in how to use the contents of the syllabus. Moreover, 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 21<sup>st</sup> century, when English has acquired the status of the global language, these types of syllabi which give more importance on 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 UG 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% teacher respondents feel that the prescribed syllabus lacks sufficient scope for using materials of genuine interest to learners and at the same time the content of the syllabus are very monotonous in nature, as the syllabus does not allow 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 at the same time, they are also, to some extent, culturally alien. 85% teachers of both universities also comment that the General English syllabus prescribed for the students of UG level 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. That means a good syllabus shows flexibility in selecting the content of the syllabus by paying attention to the students’ need as well as to different frameworks of language syllabi designed for teaching English as L<sub>2</sub>. At the same time, the syllabi of these two universities are themselves not designed on the basis of any particular approach to language teaching. “No specific approach is prescribed”, “There is no definite standard on which study materials are based”- the teachers remark. That means the existing syllabi of Gauhati University and Dibrugarh University are neither process friendly, not product friendly. The teachers accuse the Gauhati University General English syllabus for not being well-balanced. To them the syllabus gives unnecessary weightage on prose and poetry, and adequate stress is not given on composition. Suggesting for the improvement of the 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 want the Dibrugarh University syllabus to be more practical and motivating in nature, moreover the syllabus should give emphasis on developing the speaking skill of the students. The teachers also feel that the syllabi of these two universities should be prepared on the basis of the feed-back report of the college teachers teaching at the UG 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.

### **5.1.3. Effectiveness of the Methods and Materials of Teaching General English at the UG Level**

Though 85% students reveal that they find the English class interesting, 3% students say that they do not understand anything what their teacher teaches, 12% students say that they understand only little bit of it, while 59% students say that they understand most of it. Only 26% students say that they understand everything what their teacher teaches. Again, only 10% 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, 45% students say that “speaking English is considered as showing too much”, 21% students fear that if they make any mistake, their classmates will laugh at them, 20.5% students say that they

hesitate to speak in English, 10.5% students feel that speaking English is not as much essential as writing English, while 3% 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 natural that students will not be enthusiastic to respond to what the teacher says. This type of situation will therefore ultimately affect the classroom interaction in a negative way. The analysis of the students' questionnaire also reveals 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 class, 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 it is because the students may not find their class interesting.

Again 44% teachers feel that their students are not properly developed in speaking skill, 28% teacher feel that it is writing skill in which the students are not

properly developed, 16% teachers feel that their students are not developed in 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 far from satisfactory, 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 that English class is 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.

#### **5.1.4. Goals and Achievements**

Stating the goal of teaching English, 50% 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 social status symbol. 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, communicating in English basically means communicating in written form, rather than communicating verbally.

Examining the syllabi of both Gauhati University and Dibrugarh University of Assam, it is seen that the syllabi of these two universities set different goals for their BA General English students. The Gauhati University syllabus states its aim as 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. Moreover, the Gauhati University BA General English syllabus has not prescribed any definite course-book for students. Students have to search for the prescribed text pieces in the various books available in the market and these textbooks usually give some exercises at the end of the lesson which includes some questions based on the content of the prescribed topic. The main aim of these exercises is to test the comprehension skills of the learner. The syllabus does not give importance on enhancing the communication ability of the learner as it states that students should be familiar with the content of the prescribed pieces since they are expected to answer text-based questions. However, Dibrugarh University BA General English syllabus

has prescribed two textbooks for the course. But these text books are not adequate for teaching English as a L<sub>2</sub>. The text book entitled *Written Word* prescribed for Semester I authored by Vandana Singh has not included all the items of the syllabus. Another textbook entitled *Twentieth Century Prose* has given importance on the thematic concern of the prose pieces. It does not provide the students with language and tasks that are effective for developing speaking skill of the learner. BA General English syllabus of Dibrugarh University aims at developing the listening and writing skills of the learner for enhancing the comprehension ability of the learner. 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.”(45)

The study reveals that both the BA General English syllabi of Gauhati University and Dibrugarh University are inadequate to meet the needs of the learner. The content of the syllabus meant for BA General English course is found to be inadequate for the students of higher education. Major portion of the syllabi is based on literary topics which expose students to complex themes that are not relevant and meaningful in their own lives. 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. It is felt that the need of the hour is development of communicative competence of the learner. But these syllabi have completely neglected this aspect of language learning. It does not adopt any language based approach for improving student’s proficiency in English. But proficiency in English is

one of the main requirements of higher education. The growth of the IT sector in India opens up employment opportunities for the youths of India. For this, students require to develop their communication skill in English, both speaking and writing. But the syllabi of Gauhati University and Dibrugarh University seem to neglect this reality to a great extent. After the emergence of “needs-based philosophy” in language teaching, learner’s need becomes a major concern for planners, curriculum framers, materials producers and language teachers. But, it seems that the syllabus designers of these two universities have prepared the syllabi without considering the needs of the learners seriously. According to Finney, the most widely followed syllabus model in ELT is the “Mixed-focus model” of syllabus which includes “linguistic component based on language functions and themes based on learner’s interest” (76). In this 21<sup>st</sup> century when English has acquired the role of the global language, these types of syllabi as prescribed by Gauhati University and Dibrugarh University, which give more importance on literature, are considered to be less useful for the learners. 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. Therefore, the BA General English syllabi of Gauhati and Dibrugarh Universities need to undergo some major reformations.

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. But according to the recommendation of the Kothari Commission in 1964-66- “For a successful completion of the first degree a student should possess an adequate command over English, be able to express himself in it

with reasonable ease and felicity, understand lectures in it and avail himself of its literature” ( qtd.in Rao 293).

Now from this study it is well realized that these two universities of Assam, viz., Gauhati University and Dibrugarh University have failed to come into agreement in regards to the teaching-learning goal of General English, as these two universities set heterogeneous 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. As mentioned earlier syllabus designers’ of the BA General English Syllabus of Gauhati University aim at building vocabulary, making students familiar with current “ideas and issues” and to develop the ability of the students to use the English language “effectively” through some significant literary texts written in English. But whatever may be the goal, both of these universities seem to fail to achieve it as most of the students are not capable of using the language for their day-to-day communicative purpose. Commenting on the use of literary texts for teaching the target language by some language teaching programmes Richards and Rodgers say that they are still following the principle of Grammar Translation method which was rejected in the late nineteenth century for neglecting the most important skill of the language i.e., the speaking skill. It is disheartening to see that, in this 21<sup>st</sup> century when the applied linguists and syllabus designers are giving importance on using “eclectic” method and “integrated” syllabus respectively for making English language teaching effective as well as relevant for learner’s day-to-day life, 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 UG level in the colleges of Gauhati University and Dibrugarh University



are not much effective. 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 to make ESL teaching more effective and need-based. But the findings of this study reveal that most of the teachers are not concerned about the recent developments in the methods and materials used for teaching English as L<sub>2</sub>.

## **5.2. Suggestions**

On the basis of the above findings of the study the following suggestions can be put forward-

1. English should be taught as a language, rather than as a content subject. The main goal of teaching English is to enable the learners to communicate in that language, rather than learning the content of the text. The focus should be on the skill development, rather than the comprehension of the meaning of the text.
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. He/she should be proficient in spoken English and should take

special care to follow correct pronunciation, stress, and intonation of English, so that the students can listen and follow.

3. The teacher should be aware of the different methods of teaching English as L<sub>2</sub>, 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. The students should be encouraged to read English newspapers, journals or books of their own interest and should advise them to see and listen to some selected radio or television programs which may be helpful in learning the language. The college library should have sufficient number of English books which are interesting as well as suitable for different levels of students.
6. In the General English syllabus, language should get priority over literature. Those who are interested in literature may opt for English major.
7. The General English syllabus should include only that much literature which can make language learning an enjoyable activity. For that, the prescribed literary texts should be chosen carefully. The prescribed texts should not be culturally alienated and monotonous in nature.
8. Syllabus should match the teaching goals and learners' need. For that feedback from both teacher and learners are essential.
9. Grammar should be taught both deductively and inductively. Emphasis should be given on composition.
10. Teaching of pronunciation must aim at attaining an intelligibility beyond the regional level, for that segmental and supra-segmental properties should be taught and practised carefully.

11. Before preparing the syllabus, it is very essential to make a serious analysis of the learners' need.
12. The materials used for teaching English as L<sub>2</sub> should be flexible in nature. There should be sufficient scope for language practice. A communicative syllabus which allows more language tasks is preferable for the learners rather than a structural or literary syllabus.
13. The teaching materials should be designed in such a way that they can accommodate modern methods of teaching English as L<sub>2</sub> or vice-versa.
14. Instead of emphasising only on textual English, the teaching materials as well as the examination system should focus on functional English.
15. 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.
16. The examinations must avoid the stock questions/common questions patterns. Instead, they should compel the students to use their own English.
17. As the exposure for teaching and learning English is very minimal, the government should generate funds to develop the infrastructure of the English classrooms. Language laboratory should be established.
18. 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.
19. The teaching and learning of English can be made more enjoyable and effective by applying various teaching aids. Training should be provided to the L<sub>2</sub> teachers about how to use different teaching aids as supplementary materials in classroom teaching. At the same time, the teachers can use their own innovation in using different low-cost or cost-free teaching aids. The

teacher can introduce different language games, role plays etc. to create communication gap among the students, which will enable them to communicate in English.

20. 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. The in-job trainings may have shorter duration than the pre-job training, but even then all recent developments in the field of L<sub>2</sub> teaching should be informed to the English teachers from time to time.

### **5.3. Scopes for Future Research**

The study was delimited to the methods and materials used for teaching English at the undergraduate level. The colleges of only two districts, viz., Sonitpur district (under Gauhati University) and Lakhimpur district (under Dibrugarh University) are considered for the study. However, further research can be carried out in the following fields-

1. The similar type of study can be undertaken in the colleges affiliated to all the three affiliating universities, viz., Dibrugarh, Gauhati and Assam Universities of Assam.
2. A comparative study can be done among the methods and materials adopted for teaching English in the undergraduate colleges under all the three universities of Assam.
3. A study can be conducted on need-analysis of the undergraduate level students.
4. The syllabi of the BA General English course prescribed by the universities of Assam can be studied in detail.

5. The classroom infrastructure and other problems related to English teaching-learning situation in the undergraduate colleges of Assam can be studied in detail.
6. Study can be undertaken on the existing evaluation system of the universities of Assam.

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