

## **Second Language Teaching: Pedagogy and Comprehension – An Opinionnaire-Based Study**

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### **Introduction**

There has been tremendous research on second language learning and teaching in the past few decades and yet little progress is visible for us (Littlemore, 2009). In other words, progress has been very selective in its areas. Hence the present paper is focused on the issues that are being encountered on the ground and is making an attempt to comprehend the unaddressed gap between second language teaching and learning. Needless to say the importance of learning and perfecting English language is mounting day by day posing us to evolve our pedagogical approaches for effective results. The wide spread of the English language has almost rendered the language a superior status and in some way, it has affected the attitude of the learners. If English can be treated as just another language with an attitude that is toward any other language, may be the leaning process has some positive results. However, it is easier said than done and given the need of the hour, this language has etched itself as a must know/have requirement.

The main purpose of this paper was to get familiar with the reality that we are facing today regarding teaching English as a second language. The purpose of the paper was to learn and understand the issues and problems of learners with respect to teaching them (Holme, 2004). Rather than relying on the archaic studies, this research has a study of its own with an opinionnaire which was distributed among second language teachers of under graduation. India is certainly making its mark on the global level on many fronts and education is among them too. But progress is an inclusive concept and it needs to be measured from all sectors and not restrict only to few. In other words, although there is a raise in literacy rate in India, the standards of education still need a boost. What better place to peek other than teaching level to evaluate the progress being made? Hence the research study was conducted purposefully among teachers of government under-

graduate colleges of rural, semi urban and urban college. By doing this, the real issues faced can be better understood and it makes way for devising solutions or taking measures.

Through this research paper, the researcher hopes to showcase the second language status through the perspective of experienced teachers. You may ask, why only the teachers? Well, the answer to that is not all that difficult, the choice of keeping teachers as the core of this study is to stress on the role of a teacher in teaching English language (Albert, M. 2007). From here onward, the teachers refer only to second language i.e., English language teachers and teaching refers to teaching in UG colleges in Karnataka, India. Teaching and learning go hand in hand and seem like organically connected. Evaluating the teaching brings forth many issues which can be taken into consideration and can be further included in making the process better as teaching and learning affect each other.

### **Second Language Teaching at Under Graduate Level**

It is important to know the footing of this study before learning its outputs. The current scenario is that English is part of the degree curriculum in India. Narrowing it to precisely Karnataka, English is included in the syllabi of Under-graduate students as a language for the first two years of the three-year degree courses. At present, students of graduate courses like B.A., B.Com and B.Sc. study English as a language for two years. This seemed good of an opportunity for probing into teaching and learning of English language in the syllabi.

It is often believed graduation is one step away from stepping into the real world of cut throat competition and the chaos of it all. How many students land up with a job has an undeniable relation with the standard of their communication and knowledge of the infamous English language? English fluency and communication skills top in the job description (JD) which companies provide. Hence a student's best opportunity to excel in his/her studies at the under graduate level needs our attention to assess and learn more.

Having said the importance of English language, the paper wishes to draw your attention toward the aspect of teaching. The researcher believes relationship between the teacher and the student is sanctimonious for a better understanding of the subject and even otherwise. Before focusing on the learners' status-quo in learning a second language, teaching comes into question

and that is exactly why the paper strongly believes in keeping the L2 teachers centripetal to the study (Mitchell, Rosamund et al., 2013). However, the process of teaching is composed of many intricate elements in it. There is no one particular text book way to go about when it comes to teaching; it is highly dependent on many factors which are volatile and hence making the process a tricky one.

## **The Study**

The opinionnaire based second language teaching study was conducted while keeping the curriculum of – 2016-17. The English texts prescribed during the mentioned time period is taken into consideration. An opinionnaire was devised consisting of 47 questions. Although the opinionnaire highlighted four important components, for the scope of this paper, the researcher wishes to focus on the two major aspects in it namely: language and pedagogy, and conceptual understanding.

### **Context**

The opinionnaire which focused on pedagogy and conceptualization was distributed to a total of 30 teachers with an average experience of eight years in the teaching field. These teachers were actively teaching (during the study) for all the three streams of graduation – B.A., B.Com. and B.Sc. included. The teachers make up for a diverse background and college experience. But the study was focused on government colleges across Karnataka. Teachers from twelve different colleges participated in the study and contributed collectively. As mentioned earlier, the research was aimed at learning the ground reality of such colleges where a large number of students are found. Keeping these as variables the opinionnaire was distributed through various means.

### **Participants**

The study was carefully designed to pick teachers with substantial number adding to their experience in the field of teaching, with an average of 8 years of experience. The opinionnaire was distributed to 30 teachers, out of which 20 were completed and received back. The teachers focused here are from various backgrounds region wise and make the study diverse similar to the diverse students in a classroom. From twelve different colleges, twenty teachers contributed to the study.

The questionnaires were circulated virtually, and in person but were discussed upon the completion of it. This would facilitate better understanding of the issues in teaching.

### **Instruments**

Opinionnaire followed by discussion and observation classes were used as instruments during this field study. The opinionnaire was carried out through various medium, through visiting them and providing the hard copy of the opinionnaire, through reaching out to the teachers online and sending the questions through email, Through telephonic conversations and a few through interaction (Creswell, J. 2007). The aim was to obtain insights on the questions which are based on language pedagogy and conceptual understanding.

The opinionnaire was designed in a way to extract more responses in order to achieve a desired objectivity in them. The study was moderately successful (only 20 out of 30 came back) as the researcher received interesting and some seemingly honest responses. Needless to say that the study conducted allowed the researcher to get a firsthand experience of the second language teaching in colleges during the visits. The classroom observation also contributed to understand the atmosphere better and helped in comprehending key aspects in a classroom. The classroom, which acts as a social space for the students where integration between teacher and students provided great insights into the relationship between the two. The realities present in the second language learning classroom was testimonial to the results found from the study.

### **Results and Discussions**

Second language teaching in a country such as ours (India) needs herculean efforts to make it effective. Study like this warrant the realities that are prevalent in our classrooms. Considering the competency level of second language learners in India in general, and Karnataka in specific, this study has managed to throw light upon various intricate and dormant matters in our colleges.

The field study which complemented with an opinionnaire which was distributed across teachers (associate and assistant lectures) of UG level speaks on two major aspects. Since the intention of the proposed opinionnaire was to include and inculcate aspects like pedagogy, comprehension the questions were divided accordingly, i.e.,

- Language and Pedagogy
- Conceptual understanding

The present paper will highlight on the most important and vital results of the study with empirical data analysis. The above two categories will be discussed in this section.

### **Language and Pedagogy**

The opinionnaires were distributed to the teachers as mentioned above and as per the instructions, their identity was kept anonymous. This category of language and pedagogy consisting of 15 questions primarily focused on the classroom set up and the language of instruction used. But the underlying intention was to try to understand and examine the comprehension levels of students through teachers. The researcher believes that the teacher plays a prominent role in the development of a student academically and otherwise.

Throughout the study, one factor must always be remembered and reckoned with – the social background of the students. Studying students of government colleges in and around the city of Shimoga and few colleges in Bangalore (both in Karnataka), seemed essential and felt appropriate for the researcher, total of twelve colleges overall. Choosing such a sample was intentional in order to learn the real problems of the students in this region. Likewise, the teachers teaching in such geographical locations were also chosen for the same purpose.

Albeit the diversity among the teachers of different regional teaching experience, the results seemed to bear more similarities than stark contrasts. The study also threw light upon the current status quo of the learners' attitude and learners' issues. The purpose of the paper was to learn and understand the diverse issues and problems which hinder the process of teaching and learning.

### **Experience Overall**

The experience of visiting various colleges and acquainting with teachers teaching at UG level was quite an eye opener. The researcher visited colleges located in urban, rural and semi urban places. The study also enveloped elements such as observation classes, discussion with the students post class, detailed discussion with the teachers along with an opinionnaire. The

opinionnaire allowed the teachers to provide their own answers and did not restrict them. The questions were specifically designed to learn and analyze the situation at hand in the colleges. Hence the answers extended the researcher's understanding of the process of teaching.

## **Observations**

English as a second language marks up as the highlight of our current pedagogy (Albert, M. 2007). Having impressive abilities in communicating in English puts the language in spotlight attracting more research in it. The opinionnaire gave away some elementary answers and elaborated on a few important issues:

- When it came to the medium of instruction in the classroom, most of the teachers confessed that it had to be bilingual. The need to use the mother tongue was not an option but a necessity. However, student's response was also in two tongues. But certain factors like attitude toward the language hindered students to speak freely or even respond in the classroom. Given the inclusive syllabi of the students (2016-17) of all the three streams, the teachers found teaching communicative English as difficult. Grammar too was considered archaic and difficult to reach the students. However, some teachers opined no genre posed a difficulty.
- English learning as an issue is often discussed in the academia. Do the problems remain the same? May be yes, to a certain extent. During the study conducted it seemed so. The attitude toward the language itself was hostile among students. The attitude among students apparently posed as a major issue for the teachers to break the barriers and teach.
- Interactive method and teaching through literature has been noted to be effective modes of teaching by many teachers. But the undeniable fact is the use of mother tongue while teaching and its interference should be considered here. Teaching through L1 and teaching English through English is beloved to be effective modes in equal measures. However teachers also had a contrasting opinion about correcting the students' errors in a classroom.
- It was interesting to note the various aids used to teach the language in a classroom that has an upper hand in L1 understanding. From OHP to youtube videos, all the teaching

aids were seen to be actively engaged in teaching better English. The focus is also to acquaint the students of the various modes of learning as well as make the students aware of the cultures present in the text.

### Classroom Scenarios with Bilingualism

Respecting the heterogeneous aspect of the students in mind, the teachers engagement in the classrooms also posed several challenges. For instance, in the figure below (figure.1) we see the various responses from the teachers for the kind of problems faced by students in the classroom.

- As shown in the figure 1. most of the teachers point at not having a suitable environment for the students for a better communication of English language. However, this issue of a suitable environment echoes louder in the semi urban (Shimoga) and rural areas (near Shimoga) UG colleges. But with urban colleges too, teachers encountered various socio-cultural problems hindering the growth of learning. This distinction was made based on the discussion the researcher had post the opinionnaire.

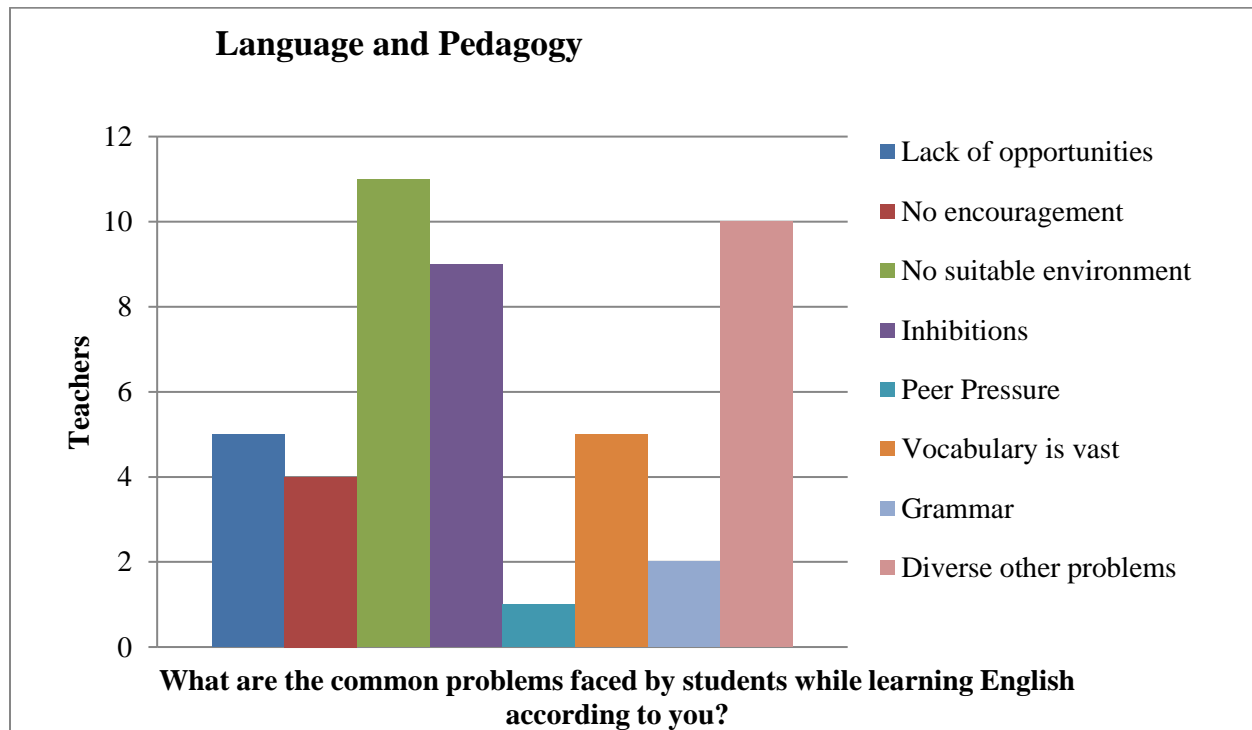


Figure 1

- While tackling the issues of second language teaching, we must take into account about the students. They are the key holders for such a study (Dean-Brown, and Rodgers, 2002). Teachers and students go hand in hand. In order to gain more insight into the whole scenario of second language learning, the researchers learnt that society plays a huge role in our education. The lack of exposure to a language like English and its various advantages need to be pressed harder among students.
- When we compare both figure 1. and figure 2. we learn that language learning intricately depends on the environment a student possesses. We can see the commonality of it clearly in both from teachers' perspective and students.

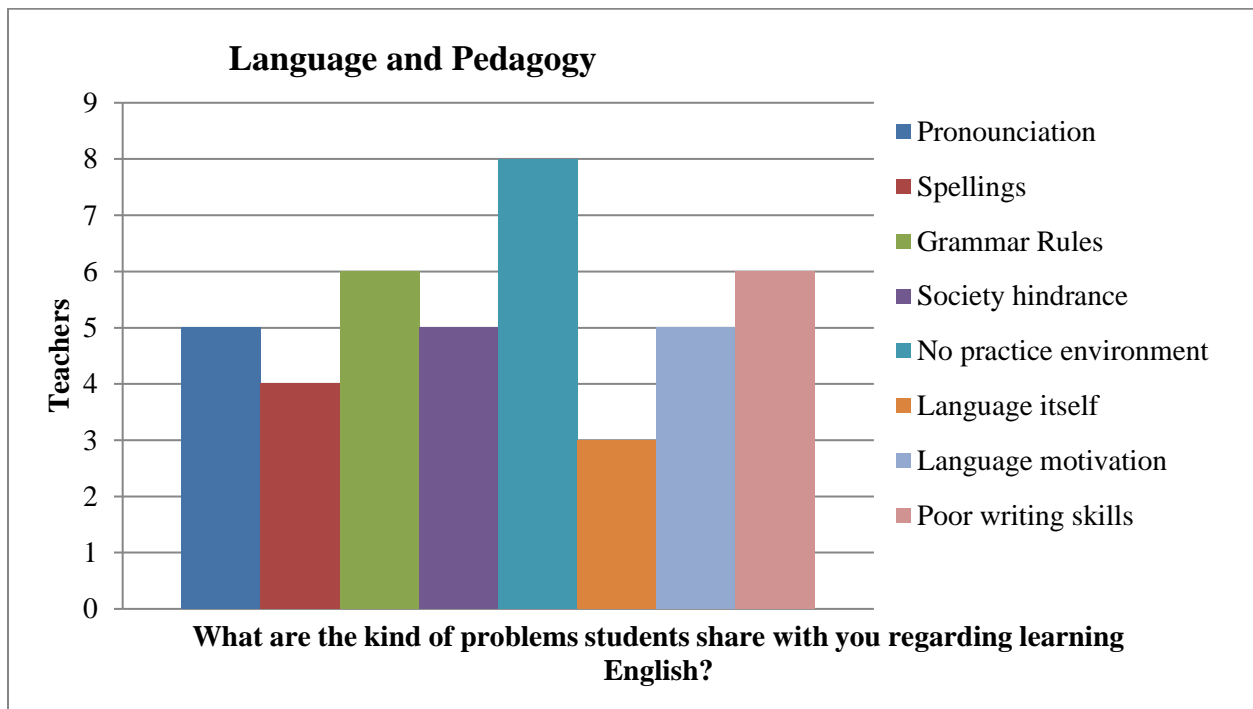


Figure 2

- While looking at the responses (figure 1) from the teachers regarding the classroom situation, the researcher was able to learn that there is an undeniable influence of mother tongue in the process of learning. Even the teachers acknowledged this above mentioned fact and also discussed with the researcher how they have to rely on a bilingual method of interaction while teaching.



- Although there was a fair distribution of answers for questions about instructional materials and the various other methods adopted by teachers to teach (appendix 1). However, the discussion with the students and the practical situation did not support the effectiveness of the adopted methods. Which begs the question, are our methods of teaching not effective enough?
- One of the major intentions of conducting the study was to learn about competence level among students through teachers. To learn from the teachers about the way English text books and teaching them helped in enhancing the understanding among students. This in turn shed light on the presence of literature so evidently in the text. Despite using bilingual method and also making use of various assisting instructional materials as well as devising own teaching methods, the metaphorical and cognitive levels among students are yet to reach an ideal level.
- There is always hindrance for students to learn concepts present in the text and that poses as one of the important issues that needs to be considered by the curriculum board. Although we can consider the teaching front and teaching competence as it has a direct correlation with L2 learning students, but the researcher still proposes that this needs to be discussed further given its importance.

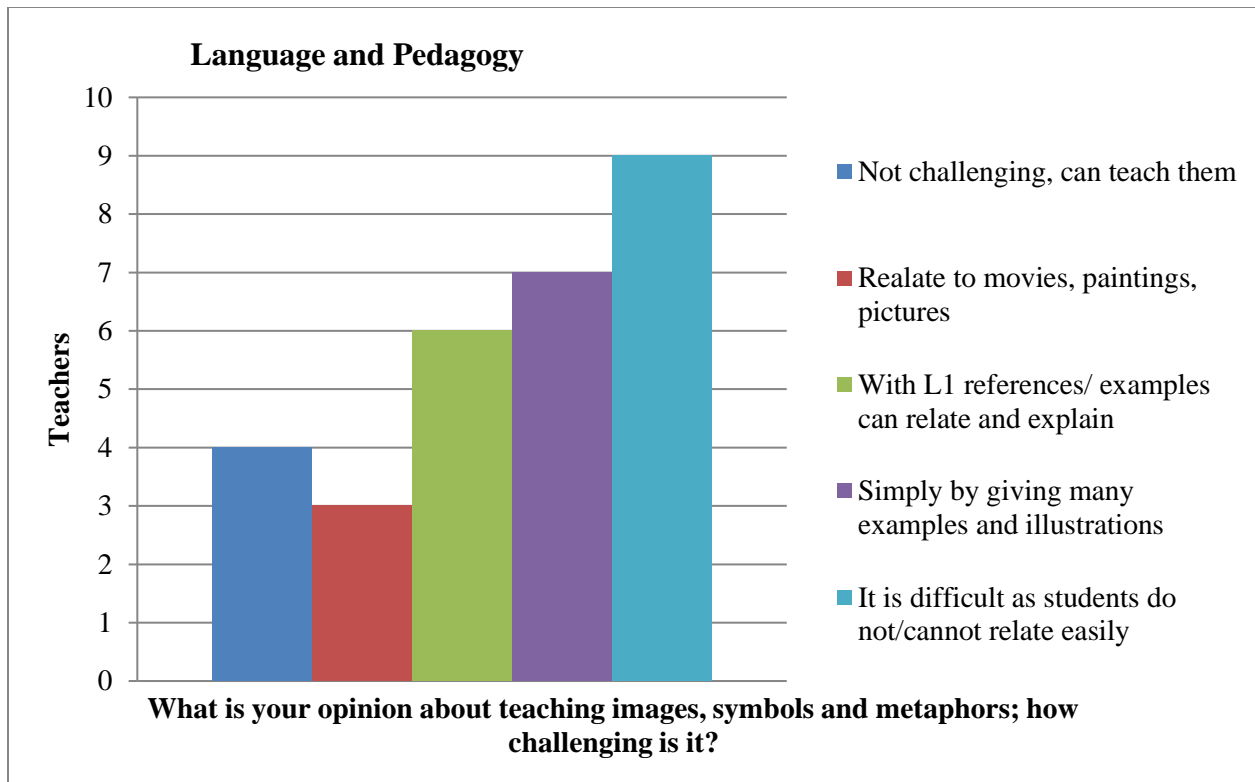


Figure 3

- Teaching the students of Under Graduates who come from heterogeneous backgrounds is a challenging task for any teacher. But it is also the matter of how soon and how well a teacher builds the rapport with students. Because in the opinionnaire, the independent variable is the responses for the questions about pedagogy and conceptual understanding.
- The graph in figure is exemplary of the gap that is present between the students understanding about English and the English language being taught. Despite best efforts, considering the factor that these questions were answered by teachers who had an average of 8 years of experience, they still struggle in bridging the gap between the second language and the student's second language speaking country. As many as 7 responses point at building a cultural reality about English language through many illustrations and that includes from the mother tongue as well. This also stresses that English taught with the assistance of a mother tongue might as well be effective enough for students.

### Conceptual Understanding

The study of second language teaching and learning is so widely talked about that it has never been out of limelight. It might be because of the new issues and problems emerging every day. But how do we go about if we have not addressed or resolved the old or existing issues completely? Keeping teaching the second language to students as a dependent variable, the researcher was attempting to learn the conceptual understanding among students along with learning the pedagogical issues (Gibbs Jr. 1994). The researcher believes that for a deeper understanding of any subject we must probe into its cognitive aspects as that is where the core of understanding lies.

The opinionnaire with questions which dramatized the conceptual understanding posed questions about figurative language teaching. The questions formulated in a simple manner (appendix 1) at the elementary level were essential to learn more about before going to more complicated ones. If we look at the texts books of English in general and UG (2016-17) text books in specific, we cannot deny the presence of large metaphors in them. In the sense that, there is always literature which needs to be learnt with all its complete essence. To do that, the opinionnaire helps to see the process that happens in a classroom. Keeping this in mind, the teachers were asked to discuss about their approach in teaching concepts like metaphors and the methods they adopted to do so (Lakoff and Johnson., 2003)

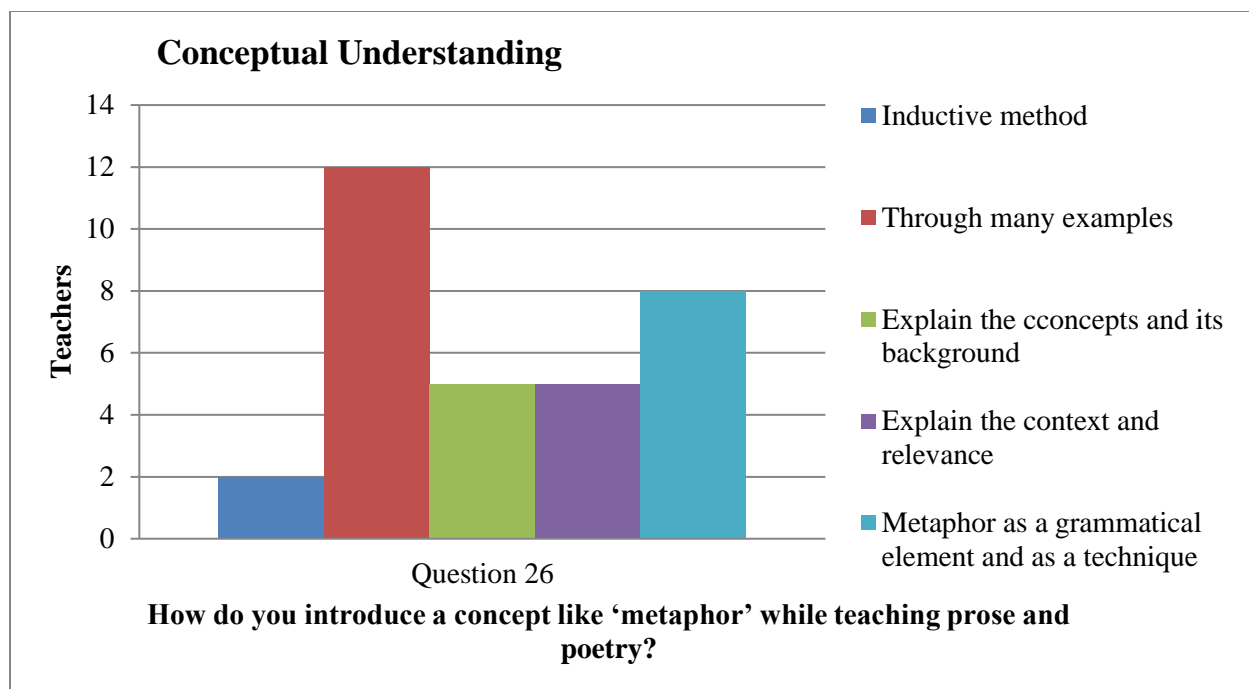


Figure 4

For instance, in the figure 4. we learn that that most responses point to using many examples for introducing concepts like metaphors in the text present. But we should also consider that metaphors are not just used in poetry and just as a figurative language, they are found in texts too. As Lakoff and Johnson say, we conceptualize our understanding metaphorically and language is the best way we do it. Our thoughts and brain mappings that occur in our brain are metaphorical in nature (Lakoff and Johnson., 2003)

From figure 4. we can also learn that such complex concepts like metaphors can only be taught with an equivalent in mother tongue for relevance purposes. In other words, many illustrations and examples are made use by the teachers to bring a level of familiarity in our mind to learn something new in English which is a second language (Keysar, and Glucksberg., 1992). It tells us a lot of things about students, as their mode of understanding a second language is in relation to the first one, the teachers have to go the traditional way of finding examples in native tongue to make it easy for them.

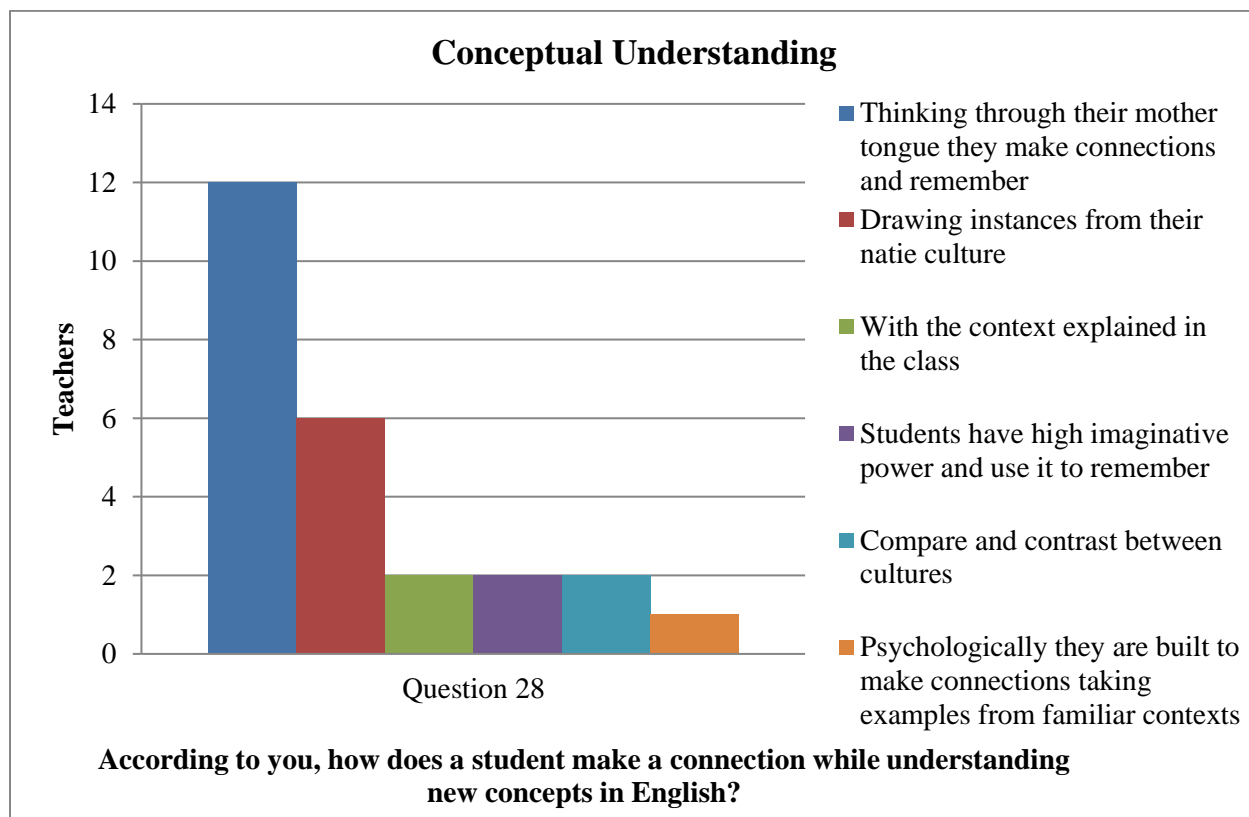


Figure 5

Although English is so widely spoken in the world and ours being one of the top countries where people speak most English, researches like this are needed to be carried out. Progress is when every aspect of a topic is aligned in development. These colleges where students are still learning to be teacher independent and competent in English, probing into their cognition seems fit an idea.

Teaching new concepts which are linguistically difficult and also conceptually challenging in the beginning is quite a task (Keysar, and Glucksberg., 1992). However, when asked about the same, teachers had a popular opinion that students would think through their mother tongue and make connection (figure 5). As many as 12 responses tell us how we use our mother tongue competency level to learn about something complex. It might also be possible as Chomsky says,

our LAD is profound and has been used by our mother tongue (so effectively) and hence it may lead us to a better understanding of an L2.

Theoretically, it seems to be difficult for the teachers to only use cultural references in English while teaching English. As per the discussion about the same topic was taking place, the researcher clearly marked the difference while teaching English through English and teaching English through mother tongue (Vicente, Begoña,1991). So it seems safe that our psyche is best utilized and is useful when we learn something new through something (here, a language) that we are comfortable in.

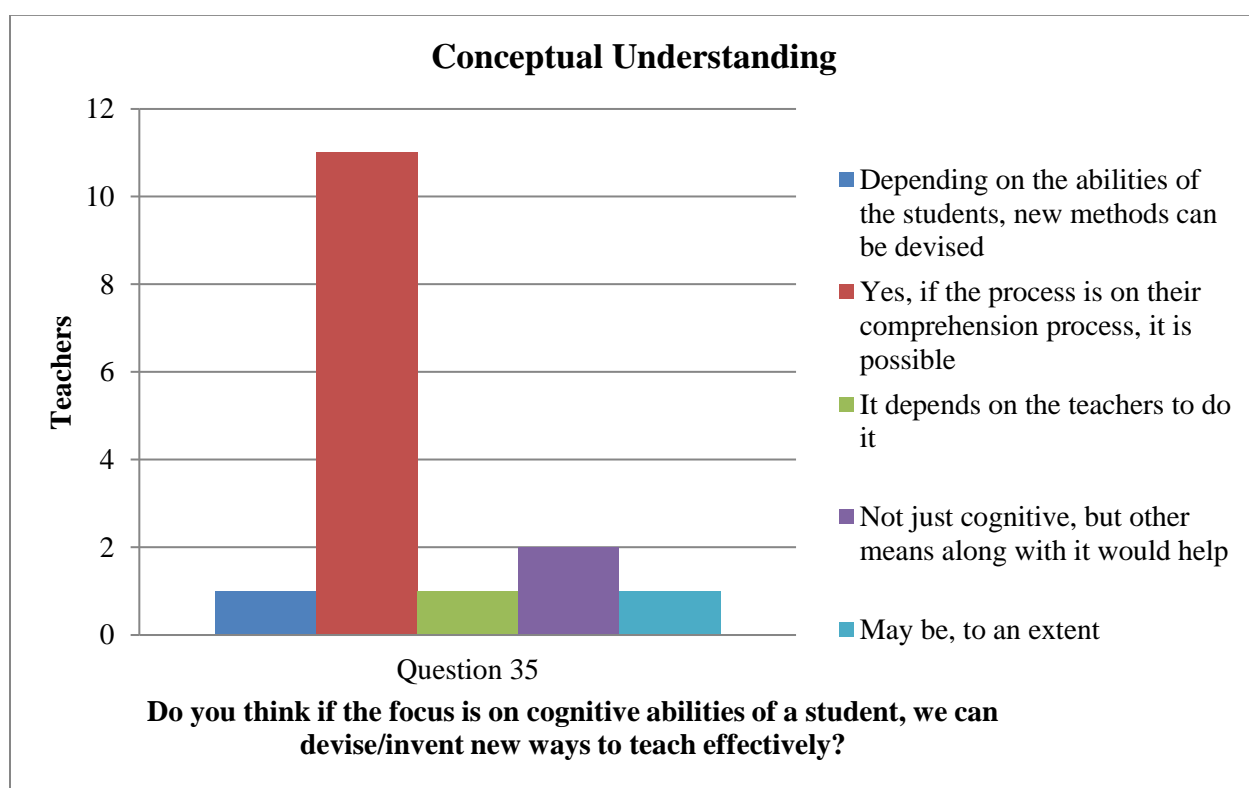


Figure 6

There is still a dearth of new perspectives in teaching, especially in the areas/locales considered in the study. There is a strong reason to believe that this might be the situation in similar geographical locations and government first grade colleges across Karnataka state. So, when this is the case, even teachers feel that a new way to adapt to teach the students must consider the students profile.

Figure 6. the cognitive approach to teaching and learning of a second language can be applied in under graduate study. As many as 11 responses pointed that a new approach to the teaching problem can be a cognitive one to bring in some novelty in the results. Our approach toward language teaching and learning needs a fresh perspective and by keeping cognitive abilities in mind, it is possible to formulate a fresh curriculum (Shen, Yeshayahu, 2002) . It is worth taking this perspective as it is student-centric and is focused on how the students comprehend and respond to the language cognitively. By learning about the psyche of the students and how their brain mapping and attitude about a language, a new curriculum approach seems less bizarre of a change.

## Conclusions

Although this study involves only 20 subjects and the results do not amplify in great number, we can surely consider them to be effective to a certain level. They do stand as a mirror to the current situation and they cannot be ignored. Even if we cannot entirely generalize given the sample area and other conditions, these UG teachers throw interesting and meaningful insights. The results show that there is a considerable gap between the teachers and the students of second language. Among the results, it is noticeable how language memory may it be semiotic or semantic, needs a cognitive approach to deal with. The teacher's opinions are commendable and studying them not only helps in learning about the pedagogy but also sheds light on the wide scope for improvement.

In theory a learner is the key element in English language learning/teaching but after the study, the teacher is more dependent on the learner than we actually believe to be. Changes for improving the level of competency in semantic levels in English can be brought about based on the learner's attitudes and responses.

It was clear that the pedagogy in the locations of the study conducted begged for a new dimension of research into the teaching of English. The responses of English teachers favored this notion too. A study into the semiotic approach through cognitive process can act as a breath of fresh air in the curriculum if considered. The classroom which acts as a social space for English language provides a narrow role for the students for participation in reality. It is not only because

the teacher occupies a central position in the classroom, the attitude of the majority of the students does not allow them to come forward and take active participation.

The respondents/teachers do crave for better and effective results from their students but the alignment of interest is not by the students. Having many such issues, our pedagogy is suffering at Government College and it needs immediate attention. Under Graduate level of study is a very pivotal ladder in any students' life and language not merely seen as a language but a tool to think and to express better needs to be focused on? To express the acquired knowledge in order to survive in this world, we need a desired language and mode to communicate. Our teachers are trying their best self but there is a fundamental need to change some archaic perspectives about teaching as well.

All in all, language teaching and learning go hand in hand and the study only points at some fundamental changes to see substantial results in the end. The study like the above one attempts to uncover the issues and opens doors for further studies to be taken to help the pedagogy largely. Teachers too need studies like this to mould their ways and also devise new methods can be introduced out of them. The benefits of this would be certainly noticeable.

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## Appendix: 1 Opinionnaire (some guiding questions)

### Language and Pedagogy

1. What are the common problems faced by the students while learning English according to you?
2. What are the kind of problems students share with you, regarding learning English?
3. In your experience, what has been an effective mode of teaching English?
4. How do you make the students understand the metaphors present in the text? In both prose and poetry.
5. Do you prefer teaching English (target language) using English and not through mother tongue/native language?

### Conceptual Understanding

6. How do you introduce a concept like metaphors (a figurative language) while teaching poetry and prose?
  7. According to you, how does a student make a connection while understanding new concepts in English?
  8. How do you make your students understand concepts like – *Melting Pot*, *Time is Money*, *The World is my oyster*, *Cash Flow*? (similar examples present in the text you teach)
  9. Would you say teaching metaphors present in the text with reference to mother tongue is effective?
  10. Do you think, if the focus is on cognitive abilities of a student, we can device or invent new ways to teach?
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