

## **Problems of Teaching and Learning of the English Language at UG Level: An Experimental Study**

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### **Introduction**

The aims and objectives of teaching General English at undergraduate level in Jammu and Kashmir in general and in Jammu province in particular is to equip the young learners with the art of acquiring language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) and to prepare them as well-learned and proficient human resource qualified enough to find a berth for themselves in various streams of our national life. It is believed that the teaching of General English at undergraduate level will help learners in preparing themselves for being independent learners of literary texts and to interact with literature lovers with a fair degree of literary sensibility for understanding a variety of English texts. The purpose of teaching General English at undergraduate level may also to make the learners effective communicators with good vocabulary, pronunciation and teaching English as a skill rather than a knowledge subject, a means to several ends and to develop the linguistic competence that enables them to be aware of cultural, economic and social issues of their society. And, finally to enable the learners use correct English in daily life situations by teaching them grammar and structures and to develop the intellectual, personal and professional abilities of the learners.

A questionnaire method has been adopted for data collection and presentation in the present research paper. This method employs one of the most widely used survey data collection techniques. Because each respondent is asked to respond to the same set of questions and provides an efficient way of collecting responses. The purpose of the teachers' questionnaire is to explore immediate attitude towards the existing BA/BSc/BCom/BCA Part I, II, and III General English courses prescribed by the University of Jammu.

The present analysis of the teachers' questionnaire has shown a very different situation. In Jammu and Kashmir, especially in the affiliated colleges of the University of Jammu the teachers of English need a specific training programme. But, unfortunately, no efforts have been made for the teaching of language courses at postgraduate level in the University of Jammu. Masters in Linguistics is also not available in this University. There is an urgent need for English language teaching and learning programmes both at undergraduate and postgraduate levels. English language teachers should be equipped with specific courses to update knowledge and teaching ability so that they may be able to make teaching learning process more active and address the needs of the learners.

Students' questionnaire was designed to understand the needs of the students for learning the English language and to find out the perception of the undergraduate students towards their

General English courses. The aim of this questionnaire was to find out the opinions of the students with regard to course contents, teaching methodology adopted in the classroom, communicative activities or exercises, instructional materials, and relevance of the present syllabus to the aimed targets.

The analysis of the students' questionnaire has depicted that the majority of students dwell in rural areas of Jammu and Kashmir State. These students receive education in rural schools and as such become mere memorizing machines and remain deprived of learning and improving language skills. There is no doubt that the academic quality of teaching personnel in government schools is far superior to that of the private schools but the application of sincere and honest teaching approach in government schools by teaching faculty is undoubtedly questionable. The sound edifice of language building concept is an urge that comes among the teachers from within and picking up teaching techniques in the changing global scenario which is primarily missing in government schools particularly functioning in rural areas.

This research paper reports on the major problems of teaching and learning of General English courses at undergraduate level in the affiliated colleges of the University of Jammu (J&K). These problems are taken into account on the basis of the teachers' and students' responses to the questionnaires.

### **Problems of Teaching General English Courses at Undergraduate Level**

Analysis of the teachers' questionnaire presents the following problems:

- (i) The standard of the syllabus objectives has not been raised by the syllabus designers.
- (ii) The standard of the educational system with regard to certain improvements is not taken into account seriously.
- (iii) English is taught as a subject in the present educational system and not as a language.
- (iv) English teachers are not provided with sufficient training in the methodology of teaching the English language.
- (v) Academic and professional qualifications of English teachers, keeping in view the present needs, are not properly investigated.
- (vi) Majority of English teachers have literature background and not fully aware of the teaching of language through literature.
- (vii) The English teachers are not happy with the organization of the present General English syllabus prescribed for the undergraduate students.
- (viii) The English teachers believe that the aims and objectives of teaching General English at undergraduate level are not properly implemented.
- (ix) More than 50% teachers are of the view that they are just satisfied with the present syllabus and do not rate it as a comprehensive document which addresses the needs of the students.
- (x) Some teachers think that the existing courses of study in General English are useless as they are not enjoying the teaching of English.
- (xi) Most of the teachers believe that the methodology adopted for the teaching of language skills is not updated and they are still practising the traditional techniques and methods of teaching English as a second language.

- (xii) Most of the English teachers are not in favour of the inclusion of Indian Writings in the General English syllabus.
- (xiii) Language exercises are not properly graded in the prescribed textbooks.
- (xiv) The English teachers accept that the needs of the learners are not addressed.
- (xv) Teachers believe that they are not innovative enough to make teaching learning process more effective because of the existing system.
- (xvi) Time constraint and the fear of examination always lurk on the hearts of the teachers and leave no scope for innovative exercises to be taken in General English classes.
- (xvii) No focus has been given to the teaching and learning of basic language skills.
- (xviii) The use of modern teaching aids is to be made compulsory where English is taught.
- (xix) The teachers of English recommend the introduction of descriptive grammar in the General English course.
- (xx) The English teachers believe that maximum use of literary pieces should be avoided in a language class.
- (xxi) The English teachers recommend the change of the entire educational policy in Jammu and Kashmir.
- (xxii) The English teachers also accept the fact that they should adopt themselves with the changing world of today keeping in view the demands of the students. They also recommend that equal weightage should be given to reading, writing and communicative skills.

### **Problems of Learning General English Courses at Undergraduate Level**

Analysis of the students' questionnaire presents the following problems of learning General English courses at undergraduate level.

- (i) Majority of students who have been given the questionnaire for responses belong to the rural areas where the teaching of English as a foreign or second language does not receive much attention.
- (ii) Most of the students are not proficient in English at all.
- (iii) The students of rural colleges do not have sufficient exposure to English.
- (iv) Activities relating to the functional aspect of the language are not conducted in the rural areas in which the students have to communicate in English.
- (v) Students have not realized the importance of English in their day to day life.
- (vi) Students simply learn English to pass the examination and are not bothered to have a command over it.
- (vii) Most of the students have shown their interest in grammar as they know the basic weakness in learning English.
- (viii) Students believe that the existing syllabus of General English at undergraduate level did not prove supportive in enhancing their creativity.
- (ix) Students' language skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing do not receive an equal attention in the present syllabus.
- (x) Need based language items relating to communicative skills are not included in the present syllabus.
- (xi) English classes do not help students to use English in spoken and written forms.

- (xii) Students completely failed to express themselves in English because they do not have enough time to practice it in the presence of teachers and also not have opportunities to use it in daily life situations.
- (xiii) Students say that a conducive environment for communication is not available.
- (xiv) No practice in speaking skills is provided in the colleges.
- (xv) Students feel comfortable with their mother tongue and usually avoid interacting in English.
- (xvi) Majority of the students are disagreed and dissatisfied with the techniques and methods adopted by English teachers in the affiliated colleges of the University of Jammu. English has been taught as teacher centered with traditional methods.
- (xvii) Students have problems in vocabulary, meaning, accent, and pronunciation. These are the major obstacles which are encountered with the listening skills of the students.

### **Suggestions**

Most of the degree colleges affiliated to the University of Jammu are located in rural and far off areas where the basic requirements for English language teaching are not easily available. The purpose of teaching English is to make students proficient in language and to use it in day to day ordinary situations. But the present system does not seem to show any improvement in enhancing the proficiency of students. Following reforms are to be taken into account for a better system of teaching and learning of General English courses at undergraduate level in the affiliated degree colleges of the University of Jammu (J&K).

### **Reforms in the General English Syllabus**

Consequent upon the realization that the teaching of English should be of some practical value to the students, and desirable changes are to be introduced in the General English Syllabus at the undergraduate level in the affiliated degree colleges of the University of Jammu. Majority of teachers and students recommend a complete change in the existing General English syllabus as the existing General English syllabus does not state the objectives in terms of language skills. The teachers of English also stated that the existing General Syllabus does not allow them to be innovative in the classroom. Therefore, there is an urgent need for a purposeful syllabus which would give a concrete shape to the instructional objectives which aim at bringing about desirable changes in the learners through the learning process. The syllabus should state the aim and objectives of the subject clearly. A careful study of needs of the learners set of scientifically stated instructional objectives, textbooks, which will capture the implications of the objectives, and a model of examination which will help the teachers as well as students to assess the level of attainment in relation to the set objects are some of the important points which syllabus designers may keep in mind while designing General English Syllabus for the undergraduate students in the affiliated degree colleges of the University of Jammu. Hence, the syllabus may be made interesting, activity and student-oriented which allows for interaction and provides opportunities for skill practice relevant to real life needs. Such a syllabus would facilitate scoring and at the same time informative, laying emphasis on skill testing rather than content memory.

### **Reforms in the Instructional Materials**

The existing textbooks do not allow much scope for imparting language skills. Contemporary ideas and thoughts are not properly graded and designed to promote language skills.

Both teachers and students are not happy in the organization of the contents of the textbooks as they do not provide sufficient amount of communication output. Students and teachers need graded textbooks in terms of structures and vocabulary of functional English as the existing lessons in the textbooks are not properly selected and graded.

### **Reforms in the Instructional Objectives**

There is an urgent need to reform the instructional objectives as the existing syllabus of General English at the undergraduate level does not clearly specify the aims of teaching General English. Both the teachers and the students have stated that the existing system does not fulfill the aims of teaching English as a second or foreign language.

In order to ensure effective and purposeful language learning, teaching and testing, the instructional objectives may be stated in terms of tasks to be performed through the second language.

### **Reforms in the Teaching Methodology and Techniques**

The conventional lecture method is to be replaced by a pedagogy in which students are actively engaged in the learning processes, teachers motivating them to communicate in the classroom and providing feedback rather supplying information. Teachers and students have shown their dissatisfaction over the methodology and techniques presently applied in language teaching. Thus, lecture method may be used only in explicating content areas when the students find it too difficult to overcome them through communicative devices such as problem solving.

### **Reforms in the Evaluation System**

A great deal of care and attention may be paid to the evaluation system. The University of Jammu has adopted an unaltered pattern of examination for a long time which is characterized by a set pattern. The existing system of evaluation has two major components: Internal Assessment tests and the final (Term end) examination. The internal assessment tests may be conducted seriously as they give periodical feedback and also enable both the teachers and the students to identify the weaknesses in teaching and learning and correct them accordingly.

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