

The Place of English and the Responsibilities of English Teacher

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My paper begins with a question about the need for (the continuance) English in Technical Education and its place in the Curriculum. I think it would be very appropriate if I quote from David Graddol's 'English Next India' to strengthen my argument that is directed towards the inevitable inclusion of English in the curriculum of Technical Education:

English plays a vital role in increasing opportunity around the world. It provides access to the information with which individuals can learn and develop and it provides access can learn and develop and it provides access to the networks which are vital in building and maintaining economic links. Perhaps more importantly, it provides a common language to share knowledge and ideas and to create the kind of relationships which go beyond a simple deal or contract...(3)

Should there be a place for English in Technical Education? Do institutions offering Technical Education need English as a subject to be offered to students and do they need a department for it?

Such questions may cross a scatter brain.

For any knowledge to be effectively exchanged or shared, communication has to take place between countries, across the globe, in the global language, namely, English. English has become the language of global communication, i.e., for the exchange or sharing of ideas and information in fields such as Commerce, Education, Medicine, Sports, Foreign relation etc. Any memorandum of understanding (M.U) between two different organizations or institutions has to be drafted only in English. Even within the country such as India, English bridges the communication gap and facilitates understanding and sharing of knowledge.

In higher Education, except for a few subjects such as Mathematics only English is used, that too at the UG level. For post graduate courses and research English becomes indispensable.

Today Technology is used in every field. Even in teaching Technology is used to facilitate effective learning. In all countries Seminars and Conferences are held not only by Educational Institutions but also by the Govt., to promote knowledge transfer and exchange of useful information that may make our life on this planet happier and more comfortable. For this purpose we need English badly.

English is not only a language for communication but for the import and export of Technical knowledge and development without which no country can progress. English has also become the language of the computer. Knowledge of Technological

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Developments taking place in France and Germany, for instance, is made available 'to people in other countries only through English Translations.

When English enjoys such a high prestige, it cannot be done away with by Technical Institutions saying that English as a subject in the curriculum is redundant.

Machines may not need a language but the men who operate machines need a language and it is doubtless English in the context of globalization.

Taiichi Ohno, the innovative man behind the just-in-time concept in the production of Toyota Cars told a US team that visited him, that all his inspiration was due to his reading Ford's book 'Today and Tomorrow' Written in English (*Shelton,33*)!

Today Japanese and Chinese are making Wonderful progress in Technology mainly due to knowledge transfer and exchange through English.

They have realized their mistake of having neglected English for a long time and today they think that a good knowledge of English is imperative for the progress of their nations.

Thus no institution of Technology can afford to do away with English because a technologist needs to acquire a thorough knowledge of English for communicating effectively in his workplace. In big organizations such as MNCs, only English is used for both oral and written Communication and in many an organization, a lot of money is spent on teaching Business English for the enhancement of Communication Skills of their employees.

Thus in every institute of Technology English is prescribed as a subject for examination, say, in the first year, though teachers of English have not come to be regarded as important people for technical institutions and are not treated on a par with teachers of Engineering Subjects. In countries like India, there is a great need for young teachers of Engineering Subjects to improve their English and their Communicative abilities because lack of proficiency in English results in confusion or miscommunication.

Their lectures are not impressive and effective when their English is poor. They do not get the respect that is due to them from others. They are not able to transfer their wonderful subject knowledge effectively to their students.

Students, except a few who are lucky to have excellent exposure to English at home, struggle to express themselves or to make short speeches on important occasions and flounder for words when they have to make presentations or write reports of their projects.

In this context the responsibilities of the English teacher become heavier than those of the teacher of Engineering Subjects. For instance an Engineering subject teacher normally manages with drawing diagrams, deriving equations using mathematics and speaking minimum number of words. The Engineering subject teachers may think that English is not necessarily for them. They may be right as long as they are in their class rooms. Even in the class rooms, they require good English to interact with students. They should be able to 'communicate' without confusing.

My personal experience has revealed that many final year students struggle to write their project reports; not only students but many professors who write their Ph.D.,

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dissertations, in horrible English. They make a lot of mistakes in the use of tense, concord voice etc. Sometimes they write incomplete sentences without main verb(s)!

The subject teachers as well as Students struggle to speak in English when they participate in Seminars and Conferences. Instead of communicating they confuse not only themselves but the audience. This is happening in many an institute of Technology.

Unlike in Arts & Science Colleges, the English Teachers working in Institutes of Technology have the greater responsibility to teach their Technical students the four skills LSRW, to train them in making effective presentation to write their reports in good English and even to acquire a good knowledge in Soft skills. Their responsibility is not merely to teach a certain no. of poems, prose pieces, short stories etc., that are prescribed to students of Arts and Science Colleges, but to teach technical English innovatively without depending much on the poorly written text books that are available in the market. They are very similar to the Grammar Work books containing exercises to be done. The teachers of English in limited time available to them in the B.Tech courses have to impart knowledge of basics in English help them enhance their communication skills and make them become employable.

Their additional responsibility is to teach B.Tech Students language Skills such as presenting a neat profile of the Chief Guest(s) at seminars and conferences (this, even

teachers of technical subjects, do not do well), giving a welcome address or proposing a vote of thanks.

Humanities and Science subjects such as Physics, Chemistry, Mathematics form the 'Innards' of Technical Education; they are vital organs that remain inside the body; because they are invisible normally, we should not think that they are not functioning. Once they stop functioning, the body loses life.

It is not enough if a student of Technical subject possesses deep knowledge of his subject. She/he must have the ability to express their ideas clearly and concisely.

Without this power of expression, exchange of knowledge as well as growth of knowledge becomes impossible

This is where English enters the picture and it is English that clothes all ideas and knowledge that are imparted by Technical Education. Thus one will be doing great harm to the progress of a nation by recommending the removal of English from the curriculum in Technical Education.

The global language and the language of easy expression, namely English has a tremendous impact on Technical Education even though it is not as much recognized as other Science subjects.

The following words of Professor Abhai Maurya, Vice-chancellor of EFL University, Hyderabad sum up the necessity for English to be continued in India:

The 'USP' being used by modern India for the growth of its new, IT - enabled economy has been knowledge of English. Modern India boasts a talented pool of young, proficient users of the English language, who can transform Indian Society and who can provide the necessary impetus to its growth...(4)

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