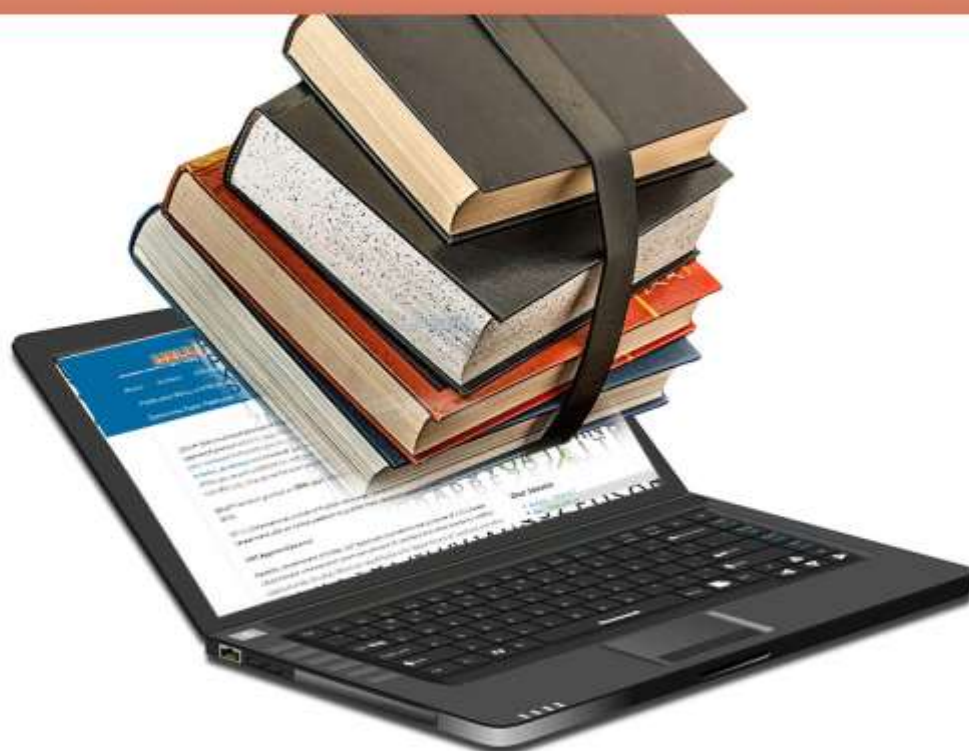


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Meeting Job Market Demands of English

Abstract

English language is an instrument of change in the rapidly changing world and at the same time it is itself changing constantly due to research and innovations. A gradual and continuous readjustment to the changing demands of a dynamic society should be characteristic of English education. A re-examination of the laws of learning is truly at the bottom of cause of concern for the organization of materials and methods of teaching English. Over the past four/five decades the pendulum tilts on either side from time to time, seldom producing the desirable results. The need for greater, wider and much varied communication is strongly felt now. The extension of educational and employment opportunities would require constant and continuous revision of aims and functions as much as redirection of methods of teaching a language.

Keywords: Innovation, Communication, Redirection,

Traditionally, education is regarded as transmission of knowledge from the learned to the ignorant. Here, teachers are considered as the 'haves' and the learners as the 'have - not's' and it is taken for granted that the learners are blank slates when they enter the class. This is all the more so in the Indian education system. The condition under which English is taught and learnt in India remains a source of dissatisfaction. The natural corollary is the poor standard of learning English in schools. The teaching of English in Indian schools has not escaped large scale criticism. While as a compulsory subject of study it stays in the school, it occupies a question of significance in Indian psyche as to whether young people taken through the study of English are found better prepared to manage the affairs of life. That pupils have to be more skilful in handling English as a tool for achievement in all varied phases of education goes without saying. Moreover, English is not the English classroom merely, it is for wider academic and professional use and for various situations in life. A firmer conviction is growing that the teachers of English must make their learners skilful in handling English as a tool for achievement in all the varied phases of education. Experts in language teaching are quite

convinced that the problem is not one of lack of expertise. It is admitted that on the pedagogical side, many problems that existed some two decades ago, still continue to exist. So much of time, thought and expertise have gone into these, but the situation is still not what it should be. It is considered that a working knowledge of English will be a valuable asset for all students and a reasonable proficiency in the language will be necessary for those who proceed to the university. The proficiency of English depends, in addition to the numbers of years during which it is learnt, on the motivation of the student, the state at which it is studied, the type of the teacher and the method of teaching adopted. The English teaching/learning strategies take cognizance of the process of curriculum transaction with regard to the development of skills through prescribed texts. The communicative view of language that is gaining relevance now, proposes that the learner should use the language for expression of ideas, meaning and feeling in addition to using the language for interaction and communication. The primary units of language are not merely its grammatical and structural features; but it should comprise categories of functional and communicative meaning. But the present guidelines for syllabi highlight mainly a linguistic and instrumental level, whereas, it should broaden its scope to encompass individual learner's learning needs and a general educational level. The teaching strategies that have to be included into the methodology for this aim go, however, with the communicative principles. The slogan of communicative language teaching is *Teach the Student How to Learn* as it is focused in the National Curriculum Draft.

There is an urgent demand in the job market for a more articulate use of English, in professions that specifically look for skills of voice and personality. The job market today consists of a mixed bag of fast growing start-up as well as well-established companies. While earlier job seeker had little to choose from apart from Engineering, Medicine, or MBA, now he has a range of jobs to select from. A graduate with reasonably good English knowledge can become a Call Centre Associate, or a customer care executive in telecommunications or an event manager. In any or all of these areas, communication is the key word. Even the regular MBAs, and IT professionals require presentation and interpersonal skills to qualify for the job. With the advent of MNCs, views on language use are changing. There is a gradual but distinct move away from the heavy, literary, idiomatic and formal English to a more informal, direct, simple and user-friendly English. Educational courses, inevitably, have to attempt to strike a balance between academic objectives and employer expectations. Syllabus designers / materials producers will have to focus on achievable targets based on needs analyses conducted with an awareness of the nature of oral communication skills the employers desire in their prospective and existing workforce. Some may argue that adopting such a stance goes against

the spirit of 'education': but education without social relevance has no value, insofar, as educators are not employers. The making of employer-expectations in education, thus, becomes inevitable and renders education socially relevant. Extant need analyses, at best, help only to determine the 'what' of language teaching / learning and rarely the 'how' of it. The oral-communication-skills-instruction, the methods and techniques that are successful to develop speaking skill and the possibility of such methods being used in formal instructional settings provide the main impetus of this research. The paper highlights the discordance that obtains between two conceptualizations of oral communication skills: the virtual, traditional and system-based in the textbooks; the actual, contemporary and use-and feedback-based in the 'market'. The skills developed by or through these books have to be 'sold' in the 'market'. The less the discordance, the greater the possibility of their being sold. With this view, the paper defines the nature and scope of oral communication skills, extending the boundaries of traditional spoken skills of language. The tradition of teaching Spoken English, even when (though rarely) practised is largely one of 'imitation'; drills dominate other techniques in this tradition. The paper holds that such 'passive' practices may not suit the transitive nature of oral communication skills. It shows that focus on communication skills necessitates moving away from the mechanics (elements) of language to the functioning of language in terms of content of communication, i.e., 'meaning' and from the nuts and bolts (sounds, syllables and tone-inventories) of spoken skills to 'communication proper' which implies the manner of communication, i.e., 'effect of meaning'. Concomitant with these movements is the need to move the college lecturer away from 'lectures' and 'explanations' to becoming and being a model – user of oral communication skills and 'enabler of learners' reflective practices. The paper holds the position that real-time oral use of language to communicate meaning, to transact through language, is very similar to 'problem-solving'; it also holds the view that teachers need to be aware not only of communicative language teaching methodologies but also of accommodating in such methodologies the principles of 'constructive learning'. Towards this, the paper proposes that college lecturers need to be familiar with such 'reflective learning'; if these lecturers are trained to reflect on their use of oral communication skills and made sensitive to the neglected issues of the skills, then there is a possibility of their developing such skills among their learners and overcoming the limitations of textbooks.

Recently, a steady increase is seen in job opportunities and schemes for higher education abroad, and hence, the Indian students show remarkable interest in getting a score in the TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language). The goal of the TOEFL is to objectively measure the foreign students' English proficiency. Many American colleges and Universities,

as well as a large number of institutions and agencies, ask for official score reports. Lakhs of Indian students apply for the TOEFL score every year. The examination is divided into three parts which individually test different language skills. The test comprises three sections: listening comprehension, structure and written expression, and vocabulary and reading comprehension. It is essential that a thorough change has to be effected in the teaching and learning of English in the U.G classes, so that it will help them in the various competitive examinations and tests like the TOEFL.

The U.G stage forms an important educational bridge between the school stage and the higher stages of education. It is here that the student has to make the transition from the kind of learning to which he/she was exposed at school, to the quite different kind of learning that will be expected of him/her at the higher level.

The realities of the competitive world come crashing down up on youngsters immediately after attaining a Bachelor's degree or a Master's degree in the form of competitive examinations, interviews, group discussions, debates etc. Then, they awaken to the truth that mastery of the English language is the key factor that cements their confidence for commendable performance. The magic spell of English as an 'Open Sesame' to enter the Indian Civil Services, Management Studies in the leading business schools and national and multinational companies is indisputable. In theory, the hostile pronouncements against English may be continued to favour the regional languages, but as the cliché goes, *the proof of the pudding is in the eating*. There are thousands of graduates who are not credited with what they deserve just because of their instability in the English language. This study aims at putting across the compelling message of the need for restructuring the teaching of English in the Under-Graduate classes.

To conclude, English language teaching today faces an awesome challenge which is peculiarly Indian, and cries out for solutions which are developed within the country. There has been much hue and cry on this issue through the decades and many eminent educationists and professors have delved deep into the problem from different angles. Though the situation is still blurred, many pedagogical and sociological implications are beginning to crystallize. In order to evaluate the emerging situation and to identify the relevant issues accurately, indigenous scholarship and appropriate research tools will have to be employed. The theoretical and empirical knowledge and insights such researches will produce should surely help to solve some of the long – standing ELT problems, endemic in India.

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