

A CASE OF THE MISSING OBJECTIVES
A STUDY OF THE GENERAL PROFICIENCY AND COMMUNICATIVE ENGLISH SYLLABUS
AND TEXTBOOKS OF MANGALORE UNIVERSITY UNDERGRADUATE COURSES

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Undergraduate students are aware of the importance of the English Language in their academic and professional life. They know that communicative competence in the English Language is of prime importance to secure a white-collared job. The modern student starts studying English from the first standard itself even when the medium of instruction is not English. However, even after 12 years of studying the English Language, students who join undergraduate courses are not able to read, write, or speak in English. In many cases even after another two years of English at the undergraduate level there is hardly any change in their communicative competence with regard to the English Language

In 1917, Principal Barrow of Calcutta Presidency College said the following to the Sadler Commission of Calcutta University:

When students come to college, they cannot follow lectures and they cannot read even quite simple English with ease. The curriculum is quite pretentious- Wordsworth, Milton, Arnold, etc. This may not seem ambitious; but the fact is that students at the end of eight years are still without any command of modern English. Their vocabulary is extremely thin. They know hardly anything of the idiom or rhythm of the language. In this condition they are set to study 'Literature' which depends for the success of its appeal on choice of words, on phrases and on rhythm; which is full, moreover of allusions to the Bible, to European mythology and legend and to English life and customs and history with which these boys are almost totally unfamiliar... To suppose that the reading of literature in this manner has any value whatever is absurd. (Nagarajan, 12)

The situation, however, hasn't altered much in the present times. On the other hand, such clueless students with a master's degree in English now teach English to the modern students who are equally bewildered by what is taught. The realisation of what is lost in the 14 years of learning English only dawns on them when they attempt to seek white collared jobs. This observation brings to focus the need to scrutinize what is ailing English language teaching and learning in India? In spite of the numerous theories and corresponding new methods of teaching, most English classrooms are still witness to the teacher-oriented and passive-student scenario.

According to N Krishnaswamy (2003), English teaching in India is the world's largest democratic enterprise in the world. The pressure of population, pluralism, political compulsions, variety in all areas of life, the colonial legacy, illiteracy, lack of infrastructure, vested interests and the problem of training teachers make English teaching in contemporary India a highly complex activity. According to Awadesh Sharma(1985), historically speaking, the teaching of English has been wrongly construed as literature teaching and was scarcely ever intended to provide language instruction, particularly at the college level. Although literature teaching is one of the ways of language teaching, it is doubtful whether the teaching of literature in Indian schools and colleges ever had the imparting of language skills as a conscious aim. This trend according to Awadesh Sharma has been detrimental to the teaching of English in India.

Languages should generally be taught and assessed in terms of the 'four skills': listening, speaking, reading, and writing so that students are able to learn the language in an integrated manner. Researches carried out in the field of English Language teaching state that the objectives of teaching should be clearly defined in the syllabus so as to facilitate the achievement of outcomes that the teaching- learning aims at. However, the ground reality is that the objectives have been found missing in every syllabus that has been framed over the years for undergraduate courses in Mangalore University. The absence of the objectives would naturally lead the teacher to look elsewhere for what is to be achieved through the act of teaching and the natural alternative available is the question paper. The problem aggravates if the question paper, to a large extent, tests memory rather than skills. Since memory is tested, memory is catered to-leading to the teaching of English as a subject rather than as facilitating the acquisition of skills. This paper attempts to survey the

syllabus, the prescribed texts and the question papers of Mangalore University courses and examines reasons for the rote-ridden teaching-learning that is carried on to a large extent in colleges of the University.

An objective is something you plan to achieve. Objectives are specific, outcome-based, measurable and describe the learner's behaviour after instruction. Knowledge of teaching-learning objectives is the most important principle that underlies language teaching. The methods of teaching for different teachers may differ depending on the type of learners, the size of the class, the skills of the teacher, the kind and level of knowledge or skill to be imparted and such other factors. However, a teacher cannot take decisions on what methods to employ unless s/he has a clear idea of the objectives to be achieved. Nevertheless, the truth is that defining clear objectives of teaching-learning is the most neglected aspect of the syllabus as well as the textbook. The syllabus at the undergraduate level only lists what is to be taught but not the objectives to be achieved. In addition, the teacher of English at the undergraduate level, in most cases, has no teaching degree as it is not a prerequisite for securing a teaching job at the undergraduate level. The only model that many teachers have to rely on is their teacher who could be a product of the same system. Therefore, by the end of the semester, the syllabus is completed, but the objectives of teaching may not be attained.

W.A.Bennett, in *Aspects of Language and Language Teaching* states that Language teaching is essentially handing over of skills and not simply the passing on of information. Mastery of a language is said to be achieved when the skills of the language that is listening, speaking, reading and writing are mastered. The primary objective of language teaching can be said to have been achieved when a learner is able to understand the language when it is spoken, is able to speak intelligibly in the language, can read the language with comprehension and can finally write it correctly. The primary objective of teaching, according to W.A. Bennett is to develop in the learner, to the best of his ability, the four language skills.

Navitha Arora, in *English Language Teaching: Approaches and Methodologies* talks of two types of objectives- learner objectives and instructional objectives. She divides the aims of teaching English into two broad categories: Reception and Expression. Reception refers to the student's ability to respond to activities such as listening and silent reading.

Expression refers to the ability of the students to express themselves in the language they are learning. So, expression comprises of skills such as speaking, reading and writing.

The Taxonomy of educational objectives or *Bloom's Taxonomy Model* is in three parts: 1) Cognitive Domain which includes knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation 2) Affective domain which includes receiving, responding, valuing, organising and characterizing 3) Psychomotor Domain which includes imitation, manipulation, precision, articulation and naturalization

In 1975 an attempt was made to define the objectives of teaching English at the undergraduate level. The *Draft Intermediate Syllabus (1975)* states the following objectives with reference to the skills

A) Reading- This complex skill is divided into sub-skills such as 1) reading with appropriate speed, learning to adjust speed to matter and purpose of reading 2) Reading with global comprehension, that is identifying the relationships of facts, arguments and generalizations 3) Reading with local comprehension, making inferences, catching suggestions and implications 4) Evaluating reading, identifying bias, weakness in an argument, distinguishing facts from opinions. These sub skills lead to framing of exercises which include a) objective reading- reading for facts, arguments, logical relationships, generalizations b) Subjective reading- interpreting the attitude, tone of the author c) Reading for information- using reference manuals, interpreting instructions, etc.

B) Writing- Sub skills- 1) Essay, critical notes, annotations, etc. 2) Reporting- events, recording observations, note making, note taking, etc. 3) Drafting letters, memos, editing and abridging given pieces of text, drafting invitations, responses, complaints, inquiries, etc.

C) Speaking- 1) Elements of pronunciation- word-stress, sentence-stress, use of dictionary for information on stress and pronunciation of words 2) reading aloud, participation in discussion, questions and appropriate responses as in an interview, social conventions like greeting, appreciation, wish, response.

This document covers all skills except listening skill. The committee hoped that the universities would keep these sets of objectives before them while preparing the syllabus for undergraduate classes. However, neither the syllabus nor the teaching of English or even the examinations has attempted to realise most of these objectives

The *UGC Model Curriculum 2001* focuses to a great extent on the writing skill. The Preamble to the Model Curriculum sets down the following objectives: 1). Development of comprehension skill 2) Development of composition skill or writing skill 3) Development of literary skill and 4) Imparting education in human values and perceptions. In reality, this curriculum lays greater stress on the writing skill and completely ignores the speaking skill

In 1985, Frances D Colaco carried out commendable work in ELT area titled *Proposed Revised Syllabus in English for Under-graduate Classes of B.A/ B.Sc./ B.Com of Mangalore University* where she points out the lack of well-defined objectives as one of the problems expressed by teachers that hinders acquiring proficiency in English Language among students. She also points at traditional method of teaching, examinations which demand memorization rather than develop reading and writing abilities as the other reasons. She proposed that the teaching of English should adopt methods which are more conducive to proficiency development and that the syllabus and examination be so defined to support these methods. Based on her work the English teachers Forum proposed 12 specific objectives to develop speaking, reading, writing and listening skills. However, the syllabus even today does not state or reflect any objectives of teaching.

The Mangalore University Undergraduate Syllabus was last revised in 2014, to be implemented from the academic year 2014-15. The title of the paper is General Proficiency and Communicative English. The semester wise syllabus only lists the name of the textbook, the essays and poems to be taught for each semester, the grammar to be taught and the question paper model for each semester. An examination of the question papers for I semester B.A, B.Com, B.Sc. shows that out of 100 marks, 80 marks are allotted to University written Exam and 20 marks for internal Assessment. Out of the 20 marks for internal Assessment, 10 marks are allotted for internal exams and 10 marks for assignment (the only area where a teacher can include some innovative creative practice for developing LSRW skills). Out of the 80 marks for University exams, 40 marks are allotted for text-based essays and text-based short answers which are largely learnt by rote, 10 marks allotted for annotations, 10 for vocabulary and 20 marks for grammar. The second semester question paper model shows again 40 marks are allotted for text-based essays and text-based short answers which are largely learnt by rote, 10 marks allotted for

annotations, 10 for vocabulary, 10 marks for grammar and 10 marks for creative writing- paragraph writing (5 marks), interpreting graphs (5 marks). The third semester paper has 60 marks for text-based essays and short answers, 5 marks for punctuations, 3 marks for arranging in bibliographical order, 2 marks for interpreting notices, 5 marks each for Drafting Advertisements and Dialogue writing. The fourth semester question paper model shows 50 marks for text-based essays and short answers, 10 marks for annotations, 10 marks for general essay writing, 5 marks each for Report Writing and Job application with C.V. The BBA/ BCA/ BSc(Hospitality Sciences/ B.Sc. (Fashion Design)/ B.Sc. (Garment Design)/ B.Sc. (Leather Design)/ B.Sc. Interior Design and Decoration/ B.A (Security and Detective Sciences)/ B.Sc. (Counselling) question paper in the I Semester has 35 marks for text-based essay and paragraph questions, 15 marks for annotations and 25 marks for grammar and 5 marks for a choice between paragraph writing or Job application with C.V. In the second semester 30 marks are allotted for text-based paragraph and essay questions, 10 marks for annotations, 10 marks for vocabulary, 20 marks for grammar and 10 marks for creative writing-5 marks for a choice between paragraph writing and dialogue writing and 5 marks for drafting advertisements.

In the absence of objectives of teaching and learning, a teacher of English derives from the model question paper that the stress should be on rote-learning so with the students passing in the University Exams as the chief concern they dictate notes which the students learn by rote and pass exams. Since the weightage is more for rote-based questions, many students even secure first class and distinctions with absolutely no ability to even create a single grammatically correct sentence on his/her own. Even when teachers don't give notes, there are guides available which most students use to study for the University Exam.

In the absence of the teaching objectives in the syllabus and a question paper model that shows an incline towards rote-learning, a teacher of English would go to the textbook to check if there are any objectives mentioned there. An analysis of the textbooks for undergraduate courses for Mangalore University implemented from the academic year 2014-15 shows that only the I B.A textbook published by Trinity Press, New Delhi give a Publisher's note which states that the aim of the book is

- to nurture sensitivity towards works of Literature

- to develop the powers of critical thinking through a grounding in literary criticism and appreciation and
- to create an awareness of the interdisciplinary possibilities of English Studies.

It further says that the book features: Long answer questions, short answer questions, annotation questions, comprehension and grammar exercises so as to enable students to clear out excellently in their graduation course and further fit themselves for post-graduation studies in literature that require advanced literary skills as also to acquaint them with a broader and more sensitive understanding of human and societal relations and inherent issues and problems. The aims don't mention LSRW skills at all but seem more literature oriented.

BBM (now called BBA)/ BCA/ BSc(Hospitality Sciences/ B.Sc. (Fashion Design)/ B.Sc. (Garment Design)/ B.Sc. (Leather Design)/ B.Sc. Interior Design and Decoration/ B.A (Security and Detective Sciences)/ B.Sc. (Counselling) - all these courses have a common textbook. Ideally, each one of these should have had an ESP text which would greatly help them develop communicative competence required for the professions they would get into. However, under Mangalore University, learners of all of these courses study the text titled 'Current English for Language Skills' by M L Tickoo and A E Subramanian. B.Sc.(Animation and Visual effects) too has the same textbook however the marks allotted vary with 70 marks for University Exam and 30 marks for internal Assessment. The courses mentioned in this paragraph have the paper General Proficiency and Communicative English only in the first two semesters compared to the other courses where the paper is a part of their first four semesters. Therefore, while the other courses study 5 prose pieces and 5 poems in the first two semesters, these learners study 7 prose pieces and 5 poems in each semester in addition to 10 items of grammar compared to the 5 items for each Semester (I/II Semester) for the other courses. The preface written by the authors M L Tickoo and A E Subramanian says that the new emphasis in language pedagogy is on learner activity. Independent reading by the student is what the teacher should aim at. They also say that it is now felt that the most profitable type of classroom interaction is not so much the teacher imparting instruction but the learner performing various tasks under guidance. This is the reason for providing in the lessons, the glossary and comprehension questions, the large number of language exercises, independent word-study in the form of dictionary work and the composition assignments.

The preface also adds that the type of teaching envisaged is the class reading the passage by themselves and the teacher testing their comprehension with the help of the given questions. They also state that comprehension questions given in the text (one-word answer questions, multiple choice questions) properly employed can be a tool of explanation as well as a tool of testing. However, in reality it is neither. As the questions in the University Exams expect long (essay) answers and paragraph answers, the teacher feels compelled to explain the lessons in detail for if the teacher doesn't do so students would consider the lesson as not done. However, if the exams tested reading comprehension with unseen passages instead of long and paragraph questions, the teacher is justified in making the reading of passages student-oriented. Moreover, the grammar items in this book are not a part of the syllabus. Therefore, this book too which could have been a valuable asset in teaching English Language skills fails miserably to create any impact on the learner's skill development.

In order to bring in the views of other teachers with regard to objectives, I prepared a short questionnaire of 11 questions and administered it to 25 teachers teaching General English in Undergraduate colleges under Mangalore University, taking care to see that I include senior teachers, newly appointed teachers, teachers working in rural colleges and urban colleges. The questions and the answers are presented in tabular form below.

RESPONSES

Questions	RESPONSES	
1) Number of years of teaching experience at the undergraduate level(General English)	30 & MORE	5
	20-30	5
	10-20	5
	5-10	5
	LESS THAN 5	5
2) Do you have a) B.Ed Degree b) PGCTE/PGDTE/similar qualifications(Specify)	B.Ed Degree	3
	PGCTE	4
	PGDTE	Nil
	Similar Qualifications	Nil

3) Did you study English Language teaching as a subject at the Post Graduate Level? Yes/No	Yes-	7		
	No	18		
4) If Yes, do you think the knowledge you gained there assists your teaching? Yes/No/ any other comment	Yes-	3		
	No-	4		
5) The guiding force for your teaching is a) Syllabus b) Textbook c) Question Paper If your answer is none of the above indicate d) and specify what guides your teaching	Syllabus -	6		
	Textbook-	5		
	Question Paper-	6		
	All the above three	5		
	Any other	2- a) My love for the English Language b) My teaching experience and the B.Ed Course		
6 The most important goal you hope to attain with reference to your students is a) They pass in the exams(with flying colours) b) They learn to listen, speak, read and write in English c) They become employable (rate the options as 1,2,3- with 1 being your most important goal)	A	B,C-17		
	8- students passing the exams is most important	b)They learn to listen, speak, read and write in English c) They become employable. These two are equally important		
7) What method do you use to achieve your goal?	a) Lecture Method	16		
	b) Communicative methods	9		
8) Do you believe that the present syllabus, textbook and question paper specify the objectives of teaching English? Yes/No/ Any other Comment(specify) a) If yes, what are the objectives of teaching/learning English as specified by the present syllabus, textbook and question paper? b) If No, how do you then arrive at the objectives of teaching?	Yes	2	No	23
	a)Developing human values	1	a)From Experience	12
	c) Developing writing skills	1	From the question paper pattern	11

9) Are objectives important for teaching English? Yes/No/ any other comment(specify)	Yes-25	
10) If you could change some things in the syllabus/ textbook/question paper, what would you add or delete?	a) Add workbook	5
	b) More vocabulary quizzes	3
	c) Exercises for developing LSRW skills,complete change in examination pattern(stress on skill testing)	16
	d) Phonetics – to improve pronunciation	2
	e) No Comments	1
11) Even after studying English Language for 12-14 years most of our students are not able to speak or write grammatically correct English, what in your opinion is the reason for this?	a) Insipid and unplanned syllabus b) Large classrooms c) Inexperienced teachers d) Poor salaries to teachers e) Faulty examination system f) Lack of exposure to English outside the English class g) Lack of motivation among teachers h) Minimal opportunities for interactive learning as focus is on exams and completing the text within the time frame i) Absence of workbook and ineffective textbook j) Lack of fluency among teachers k) Students not being encouraged to speak in English l) Communication even in the English Classroom largely in Kannada	

The answers of the 11 questions confirms that teachers believe that objectives of teaching English are important and that the objectives are missing in the textbook, the syllabus and the question paper. Their answers to the eleventh question points not only to the ineffective and faulty syllabus, examination system and textbook but also to inefficiency of teachers. The need now is to frame a syllabus, question paper model and textbooks which collectively aim at improving LSRW skills and either a practical paper on ELT with practice teaching at the Undergraduate /Post graduate Level or a Degree/ Diploma or Certificate Course in Education as a prerequisite for Undergraduate teachers. There are however conscientious teachers who in spite of all these problems try to include activities aimed at facilitating the development of LSRW skills into their teaching of General

English but these attempts can generally be carried out for short durations of time as the teacher will have to get back to the main task of completing the syllabus and preparing the students to write the University exams. A systemic change is the need of the hour. In the meantime, adding the objectives in at least the syllabus will help teachers focus better on what they are expected to do in the classroom.

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