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## TEACHING OF ENGLISH AT UNDERGRADUATE LEVEL IN PUNJAB: QUALITY CONCERN AND REMEDIAL MOVES

<sup>1</sup>Puneet Narang, <sup>2</sup>Dr.Renu Sharma

<sup>1</sup>Research Scholar, <sup>2</sup>Associate Professor

<sup>1</sup>Department of English

<sup>1</sup>Desh Bhagat University, Mandi Gobindgarh, Punjab, India

**Abstract:** The significance of English at higher education has increased due to its meaningful presence in professional world. It has been introduced as a compulsory subject in almost all professional and non-professional courses at undergraduate level. The present study has aimed at investigating the quality of teaching learning process being carried out in English classrooms in the colleges of Punjab. Qualitative data has been gathered through interview method from colleges by interviewing 50 English teachers across Punjab. The teachers have reported several issues being faced by both teachers and students pertaining to English language teaching and learning. In this context, the teachers have also come out with diverse suggestions to ensure optimum learning outcomes.

**Keywords – Higher education, English language, English teachers, learning outcomes.**

### I. INTRODUCTION

The onset of era of globalisation has witnessed parallel rise of English as a global language. The continuously growing significance of English language at national and international levels has resonated in various spheres of life including education. Besides school education, college education has also been swayed by its influence. English language is being perceived as the language of opportunities which provides access to global employment market. Therefore at undergraduate level, in almost all professional and non-professional courses, English has been introduced as a compulsory course. At this level of education, the learning group grows more heterogeneous, as students come from diverse socio-economic background as well as schools. As a result, their previous level of English competence varies. In such a situation, they may face difficulties with respect to their present course in English.

In this scenario, it is pertinent to survey the research literature to ascertain the quality of teaching, learning process, being reported, with respect to English classrooms, at higher education level and also to explore stresses and strains, if any, experienced by either teachers or students or both.

### II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Several studies have been conducted in various countries where English has been taught either as second language (ESL) or English as a foreign language (EFL) at higher education level. Many challenges have also been reported. Salma (2022) has reported that both teachers and students face difficulties in English classes. The various factors such as large class size, students' background, limited class-time duration, textbook, syllabus and choice of methodology cause hindrance in the process of teaching and learning English. She recommends redesigning of syllabus to incorporate the functional aspect of language to fulfill the requirements of professional students. Mathad (2019) has focused on the problems being faced by

English teachers in institutions of higher education in rural India. Heterogeneous groups of students, excessive use of vernacular language, high teacher student ratio, less opportunities of English language usage, lack of individual attention are the central issues which have been reported by him. According to him, these issues need immediate solution for the benefit of the learners. Burhanuddin et al. (2023) have reported that the students undergoing EFL (English as a foreign language) course have a very high level of motivation as they have strong beliefs that learning of English is very crucial for them. Further pinpointing the psychological issues, he has reported that while speaking, majority of the sixth semester EFL students experience lack of self-confidence, anxiety, fear and shyness. They feel uneasy and agitated while making and answering questions in English. Jaya et al. (2022) have discovered speaking problems among university students of an English education program in South Sumatera. The factor causing these speaking problems include lack of general knowledge, lack of speaking practice, fear of committing mistakes, inability regarding word usage, inadequate grammar practice, low motivation, low participation, reading laziness, shyness, nervousness and fear of criticism.

Examining the English language related challenges of first-year students in Hong Kong, Evans & Morrison (2011) have reported that the students problem relate to grasping technical vocabulary and lectures and also developing suitable academic style. They have suggested that motivation, hard work, effective learning strategies such as peer learning can enable them to combat these issues. Afzal (2019) has spelled out, in his investigation of English majors at a university of Saudi Arabia that English proficiency of second learners depends largely upon their vocabulary command. But, the students face several problems in learning vocabulary such as understanding the meaning and pronunciation of new words, their spellings and usage.

Many researches have suggested various teaching methodologies to overcome obstacles coming in the way of gaining English competence. Khan (2011) perceives that teaching of English as a Foreign Language has always been a challenging task leading to low achievement level on the part of students. Occasional use of translation method, adoption of communicative approach and suitable use of bilingual approach can prove helpful for teachers and learners. Identifying failure of lecture based teaching in engaging students in an English class, Hurst & Nixon (2013) have suggested that peer interaction on routine basis can bear results for efficient conduct of teaching learning process at undergraduate level. They have reported that the students recognise the importance of social interaction for enhancing their language command. Kottairaj et al. (2020) have found that, for combating students' learning problems in English language, they should be involved in curricular and co-curricular activities such as discussions, debates, lectures and conferences. They have further suggested that the students will learn with utmost interest if modern techniques like computers, projectors and other multimedia are utilised. Fekadu (2019) has recommended strategy of collaborative discussion between students and teachers for developing English proficiency. According to him, English language clubs can also extend support in this regard.

Rao (2018) has discoursed that English language has attained the role of creating opportunities but its teaching learning process is not up to the mark. Further explaining she adds that the education commissions and think tanks have stressed the need for developing requisite skill set among students to make them competent for employment market. According to her problems such as lack of clear-cut policy, less exposure to English language, lack of appropriate learning material, lack of qualified teachers, poor pedagogical choices, lack of motivation, high teacher student ratio and faulty evaluation system pose challenges to effective English language teaching. Farook & Mohamad (2020) have found that most of the students of a college in Sri Lanka have lack of interest in the subject of general English and consequently show poor results. Several factors such as assigning more importance to main subjects, lack of English background, use of traditional teaching methodologies and crowded classrooms result into loss of interest among students. They have further suggested the setting up of a separate language unit with modern classrooms facilities in this regard.

To sum up, it has come to the observation that teaching of English as second language as well as foreign language, which is a global phenomenon, does involve presence of diverse challenges for both teachers and learners. These challenges emerge due to variety of factors which are socio-economic, linguistic, demographic, physiological and also systemic in nature. And, above all, their immediate redressal is quite indispensable.

### III. PRESENT STUDY

In the light of above findings, the perspectives of college English teachers in Punjab have been examined to evaluate the nature of teaching learning process being carried out in English classrooms.

#### **IV.OBJECTIVES OF STUDY**

1. To locate issues being faced by both teachers and students in English classrooms.
2. To propose remedial steps for the enhancement of existing process of teaching and learning.

#### **V. METHODOLOGY OF STUDY**

In order to ascertain that, to what extent, the introduction of English as a compulsory course has resulted into development of English language proficiency among students, interviews were conducted with 50 English teachers taking up different UG courses including B.A., BCA, BBA, B. COM, B.Sc. (Agriculture) and LLB in various govt. and private colleges of Punjab. These teachers teach various courses such as Communication Skills, General English, Business Communication Skills, Elective English and English Language and Literature. An interview schedule was prepared for carrying out interaction with these teachers. The responses received have been content analysed.

#### **VI. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The complete analysis and discussions of responses have been presented below.

##### **6.1 Quality of English Teaching in Higher Education Institutions**

As English has been introduced in different disciplines at higher educational level, it is important to explore the quality of teaching learning process being carried out in various colleges. In this regards, only a small number of responding teachers have stated that the quality of teaching is excellent. In their view, as the faculty is highly qualified and dedicated, it makes all possible efforts 'to make things easier' for their students. Sincere efforts are put to develop mastery over the subject. Pedagogically micro teaching is employed and teaching technology has also been used suitably. Additionally, the students are engaged in listening practice through English news channels. However, majority of teachers have reported that the quality of teaching learning in their respective colleges is 'just good enough' as the students lack basic knowledge of English.

Besides, some of the teachers have viewed that quality of teaching of English is less than satisfactory as the present curriculum does not expect it to be taught as a skill subject rather it is approached as content subject.

Overall analysis indicates that a satisfactory level of teaching of English has yet to be achieved. Only a small number of teachers have reported the quality of teaching to be excellent. As English is a foreign language, its learning will remain unattainable without ensuring quality in its teaching learning process.

##### **6.2 Level of Performance of Students in English**

In order to assess the performance of students in the English classroom, the teachers have been asked whether they are satisfied with the performance of their students. Majority of teachers have stated their students' performance to be just satisfactory. These teachers are either teaching English as communication skill with a limited syllabus or Elective English. However, a considerable number of teachers have reported the performance of their students in English language as low. In view of these teachers, most of the students lack affinity with English language and therefore are less motivated to develop command over it. They lack confidence in basic usage of language. The reason is that strong foundation of basic grammatical command of English had not been laid at school level, especially in state run government schools as well as in low fee English medium schools. Instead of teaching it as skill subject, English is taught as a content subject. Most of students opt for memorization of content and reproducing the same in examination without any involvement of their linguistic creativity. Therefore, the students are not enough proficient in the usage of English in spoken and written form.

##### **6.3 Problems Faced by Students in English Classroom**

It is vital to ascertain the kind of issues being faced by students in English classroom. When inquired, all the teachers have reported one or the other issue being faced by students, one set of teachers has told that students face issues such as lack of basic grammatical command over English, lack of fluency and fear of committing mistakes in the use of English language. Another set of teachers have pinpointed that the learners 'experience lack of confidence' while speaking English. They feel that this language is 'a hard nut to crack.' They have a 'phobia of this language.' They are unable to understand the 'nuances of this beautiful language.'

Further elaborating the issues, the respondents have said that the students can't understand spoken English properly because the most of the students have background of vernacular medium schools. Certain students, who have rural background, lack fluency and very few of them have the 'desire to improve'

Furthermore, a number of teachers have opined that mother tongue interferes in the learning of English. As English is not our native language, therefore the students feel hesitant when it comes to speaking. Besides, weak base of grammatical competence of students is also a problem which hampers their understanding.

#### **6.4 Problems Faced by Teachers in English Language Teaching**

Besides taking note of students' issues, teachers' perspective regarding their problems in English classrooms are also worthy of attention.

A considerable number of teachers have stated that the students do not understand the language properly because they lack in basic language command. The teachers are supposed to teach English with the help of Hindi or preferably Punjabi. Their dilemma is that 'they are forced to do whatever the students require.' Otherwise they are considered 'bad teachers.' English language teaching has 'more influence of mother tongue'. They also find it difficult to teach pronunciation.

Another set of teachers have observation that the students consider English to be the foreign language and therefore they lack motivation to acquire proficiency in it. They have further added that they have to motivate each and every student to put up hard work and do language practice.

Some teachers have argued that, for promoting fluency in English, content needs to be delivered in English, but some students fail to grasp it. As a result, the teachers have to resort to the translation method which adversely affects fluency of students. Besides, the students have poor understanding of tenses, inadequate vocabulary and poor command over basic sentence structures of English language.

In nutshell, it can be concluded that process of teaching of English is not a smooth affair and many factors intervene in the achievement of learning goals.

#### **6.5 Suggestions for Making Teaching and Learning of English Effective and Productive at Higher Education Level**

The English teachers are the prime agents in the whole educative process. The suggestions have been sought from them for making teaching and learning effective and productive at higher education level. A considerable number of teachers have said that there is no need to work towards adding more practical aspects with the help of language labs. Making available spoken English software can be another solution. Another set of teachers have suggested that the things should 'start taking the right shape' from primary level. A better grasp of students on basic grammar should be ensured at school level.

Further, diverse suggestions have come up from rest of the teachers. They have said that interactive sessions for students must be conducted on daily basis. 'Only good teachers of English at school level will be able to produce good students who do not feel threatened by this language.' Some have suggested that the social media can be utilised in positive way to teach English through lectures, movies etc. Some are of the view that there should be arrangement of extra classes of English learning. A number of respondents have said that phonetics should be introduced so that the students can learn correct pronunciation. Another important suggestion is that the books by Indian English writers should be introduced because students are more familiar with the environment and legends of their own country. Finally it has been suggested by a group teachers that guest lectures should also be arranged for the students.

### **VII. CONCLUSION**

English has been introduced in varied professional and non-professional disciplines for developing students' English proficiency which is linked directly to fulfillment of their career aspirations. On exploration of quality aspect of teaching learning process in English classroom, it has come to surface that it is below the mark. In spite of utilization of modern pedagogical tools by teachers, performance of students is merely satisfactory. They are not adequately proficient in the use of English in both spoken and written form. The central reason is lack of basic grammatical command over English. Even affective factors such as students' lack of cultural affinity with English, poor motivational level, poor self-esteem and fear of committing mistakes in the usage of English are also responsible for their unsatisfactory performance. The rural background of students also poses obstruction in their learning process. For bring out improvements, there is need to make curriculum practice oriented. A sound learning of English grammar at school level can also contribute in making its learning more fruitful at college level. Finally, Indian writings in English can be given space in curriculum for making whole process of English language learning a familiar one for the students.

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