



**AN ALTERNATIVE GENERAL ENGLISH SYLLABUS FOR
UG STUDENTS - THE NEED OF THE HOUR**

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ABSTRACT

'An Alternative General English Syllabus for Under Graduate Students' is a paper based on the findings of a minor research project work. The paper attempts to explain the factors contributing to the rising importance of English language in the aftermath of Globalization. It also tries to assess the English Language Teaching Scenario in India (more particularly Bengaluru) as expressed in the new developments taking place (like closure of regional language schools, mushrooming of English Centres etc.). It discusses the challenges in the ELT situation and necessary changes to be brought about to make English Language Teaching more meaningful and fruitful in the present era.

English language education in the post independent India has been garnering a lot of interest in terms of both, the policy and the pedagogy. English is seen as the language of progressive attitude, provider of a better opportunity for life and a key to prosperous future. The importance of English language in the multi-lingual and pluri-cultural Indian context is marked by the raising curve. The role and status of English in the international/global scenario have only made it the most sought after language.

English Language Learning situation in India has been as diverse as its culture. Though there is an ever increasing demand for learning it as a language, it has also been a contentious issue for social, cultural and political reasons. The never ending debate over the language policy has only been a reflection of the importance that it is acquiring over the years. Certain indicators of the rising demand for English education can be seen in

- a. Demand for English medium schools resulting in the closure of state run Kannada medium schools. (in Karnataka)
- b. Better job opportunities for youth with even a smattering knowledge of English.
- c. Opening of English Centres in every locality of every major city in India, claiming to teach English language in 3 months to 3 years duration.
- d. Private players like Tata Sky offering 'English learning made Easy modules' on television.



- e. ICT revolution and Globalization which have together contributed to the importance of English language education.

As a teacher of English what really was mind boggling to me was the paradoxical development of the closure of post graduate courses in English in certain colleges and also the struggle of some colleges to retain the required strength to run Optional English courses while the number of English Centres kept increasing. It was this enigmatic problem that led me to take up a minor research project to investigate the same. At the same time, the developments of the 21st century, like Globalization, Changes in the Higher Education system to keep abreast with international standards, emergence of the educated and aspiring middle class etc. have had their impact on English Language Education, while the demands on the language do not seem to have been comprehended by the policy makers or pedagogical authorities.

The project work included field investigations of about 10 colleges and 4 English Centres across the city of Bangalore. It was an illuminating experience encompassing the drastic changes which had come over the Higher Education sector. As it was necessary to have variety, one of chosen institutions was a Deemed University, some were government colleges, and some autonomous and some private-aided colleges. The teachers of English from across the city responded enthusiastically and expressed their views and opinions hoping to make English education in India a fruitful one.

Certain Observations and Findings are Discussed Below.

English dominates language policies of all South Asian nation-states. As Braj. B. Kachru (1986) says its power goes beyond linguistics and into its history, attitude, politics and economics. This project seemed a dip-stick survey that revealed the enormity of the demand for English language teaching, in terms of objectives, approach, method, syllabus design, techniques, evaluation methods and standards.

The revelations of the survey were as follows.

1. The university prescribed syllabus though is said to be need-based, it appears to be inadequate.
2. The importance given to basic skills of the language, listening, speaking, reading and writing is varied and different in different institutions.
3. The evaluation system also varies from college to college.
4. In terms of syllabus, there is obvious shift from literature to language teaching and from classical literature to contemporary global literature.



5. The integrated approach to language learning has given way to specialized and specific approach.
6. The needs of the students are as divergent as Indian culture is.
7. Eclecticism rules the world of English Language Teaching.
8. The shift from the joy and pleasure of studying literature to learning language as a set of skills or to develop liberal humanist thinking coupled with social responsibility is resisted.
9. The teaching community is yet to take cognizance of the changed scenario and work towards making English teaching a meaningful venture.
10. Teacher Plausibility- willingness to adapt to the changed ideology, teaching objectives and ever changing demands of the student community need to be addressed.
11. Optional English Course Syllabus treats it as a pure study of literature starting from classical to contemporary literature which the students are disoriented to.
12. Optional English courses fail to tap the creative potential in the students.
13. Creative thinking and Creative writing need to be encouraged among the student community.
14. The course contents need to be designed in keeping with the demand and need of the student community.
15. Clarity in the stated objectives for General and Optional English courses would definitely help in bringing about the required change.

These findings suggested the need for an alternative syllabus to General English in undergraduate courses. They also emphasize on the mismatch between the demand and supply of knowledge in ELT in the globalized scenario. (Higher Education has undergone a sea change.) It is treated as a commercial business with transaction of knowledge and skills, investing time and efforts to reap profits in terms of money.

As Albert Einstein says 'Knowledge is dead- Education serves the living'. The need of the hour is to take stock of the changed situation and make necessary changes in the curriculum to make it relevant to the present scenario and fulfill the needs of the student community. Let us take a look at the kind of changes to be brought in the field of English Language Teaching to deliver goods.

1. First and foremost, treat English as a living language and focus on the skill development rather than treating it a subject.
2. General English syllabus needs to be more realistic and prepare the students to confidently handle various real life situations using language.



3. Clear and well-stated objectives, appropriate course materials, practical and workable methodology could ensure the quality in language teaching.
4. The system seems to fall short of the need and expectations of the student community forcing them to make their own arrangements to fulfill their needs. Therefore attract the students back to classrooms by making the course relevant to them.
5. Optional English needs to revamp itself to meet the creative needs of the student community.
6. Journalistic writings and media, entertainment, theatre, study of other languages, indigenous and international texts of culture and anthropology can be incorporated into Optional English syllabus.
7. It is the need of the hour and also the responsibility of the teachers and the University to empower students with English Language and provide them with the key to their global careers and prospective future.

Of course, the ELT situation in India has been a great challenge and puts the English teacher in an unenviable situation. Newer challenges, like which model of English needs to be taught? How to make any method work in large classrooms? Language fanaticism giving a different twist to the whole issue of ELT, have emerged in the recent years. But resourceful teachers have always been creative enough in finding ways and means of living up to the challenges and making language learning an enjoyable activity.

Last, but not the least of all changes to be brought about in English language learning situation is the change of mindset in the student community. To develop a healthy perspective to look at the multiple languages that India as a country houses is of utmost importance.

Any language for example, English, Kannada, Tamil, Gujarathi cannot replace one another and each one of them have a role to play in our lives. As Raja Rao, one of three major English novelists of the post independent India, in the preface to his novel 'Kantapura' said, English is the language of our intellectual make-up while Kannada (or any other language as our mother tongue) is the language of our emotional make-up. Competence in more languages will only make a person a better player in the larger scenario. Therefore, language learning needs to be seen as a process of empowerment.



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