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ENGLISH STUDIES: TEACHING-LEARNING SCENARIO AT TERTIARY LEVEL

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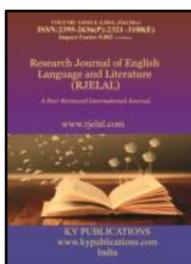
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ABSTRACT



Re-visiting/analyzing the curriculum of the English Studies offered at tertiary level brings in food for thought. The article is written primarily on analyzing the content offered for the students at tertiary level and the effect it bears on the research activity. Education is primarily divided into three stages: primary, secondary, tertiary. The division and the surpassing of each stage are believed to be the stepping stone for the next. A tertiary level learner is expected to be on the advanced stage of the learning. The learner is expected to be equipped with skills that aid him/her in the higher education/the employment market. The graduate who aims at employment in the academic arena usually enters the realm of post graduation and eventually enrolls for research work. The critical and analytical skills are highly sought for as one walks up the ladder. Language learning must enable the development of the mentioned skills. The role that language learning at tertiary level plays is the subject for discussion as it is lesser thought about.

Keywords: English studies, goals, higher education, tertiary level learning

Research output across the disciplines, despite the claim towards scientific objectivity and productivity, in the nation is a serious concern since most of them indicate at a content of poor standard. There is a surging need to analyze the factors yielding in deficit nature of research in the Universities of the nation. Apart from the fact of lack of seriousness towards the research or research holding the last position in prioritization for few, there's one serious problem which even the research-oriented scholars face. It's the task of writing the thesis or the paper. At times, there's a gush of ideas when one ponders over the research topic one has decided to work on and hence sits down to pen it down. The problem arises. There's hardly a paragraph or few lines on the paper and it stops. One is left in void with nothing to write and

the writing activity stops abruptly. There's another Herculean task for the researcher. A king share of thesis is believed to be the citations and quotations to justify or drive across the authenticity of the new findings. Researcher, then, turns to citations and references to substantiate the idea which have been written across. Here again, one tends to fail. The citation and referencing skills also becomes crucial for the researcher as the primary goal remain not to be held guilty for plagiarism and subsequently, being led to the rejection of thesis. The problems discussed in the earlier part, slows down the research activity. The problems as such are not stated to substantiate the sluggish attitude towards the research but to reason out the incompetence in the referencing and writing skills. This is where the

role of Higher Education turns to be a subject of critique.

One must surpass primary, secondary and tertiary education to subsequently enroll for the research work. In such case, the incompetence at the research work directly points at the inefficiency of the education one has surpassed to be at that particular point. Had the incompetency at research been the problem of a single individual or two, it could have been ignored as the problem of few individuals. But, the problem, being of the majority, it remains a subject of concern and hence directs at the flaws of Higher Education which the researchers have had. Contemporary Higher Education and Its Problems is a broad area in itself. The problems of Higher Education, when narrowed down to the problems of Higher Education at Tertiary level with specific reference to English as a discipline, are in itself a broad arena. Hence, the focus is primarily the problems of teaching and learning English at tertiary level. The purpose of teaching English has invited a lot of controversies in regard to its aim, objective and pedagogy.

Any researcher, irrespective of the discipline or field he/she is, must have mastered LSRW skills for which one ought to get trained at tertiary education gained in English language. English remains the popular medium of communication for any sort of research findings/outputs of any disciplines (exemption of indigenous languages). Locating the problem, education in India is primarily divided in three stages: primary, secondary and tertiary. The undergraduate courses at tertiary level of education offers language courses with a claim to ensemble the graduating student with the language skills to pursue higher studies and enable them for employment in Anglicised India. Unlike the claim, the courses seem to merely cater to the commercial world which only prioritizes the Speaking skill over the rest of three. What is the reason for the communication-oriented graduate courses in English? Need not ponder. Yes, the immediate answer is the global nature of English. English is the language of commerce and has accrued the status of global language with the majority of communication across the states, countries and continents being

carried out in English. Conceding to the importance for communication, the courses across prioritized facilitating command over communication in language and thereby ignoring the other skills to be nourished alongside.

This remains a drawback of the courses offered for it doesn't primarily cater to the goals of Higher Education. The goal of Higher Education is not facilitating communication alone, but also to develop analytical and critical skills which, in turn, are the primary requisites for research work.

The graduates and post graduates lack reading and writing skills as the courses offered at tertiary level do not train them for the same. One finds it hard to retrieve information from the piece of written text provided as they are not trained to think analytically and critically. Tertiary education in English must aim at developing linguistic competence alongside communicative competence. The learner must be equipped with analytical and critical thinking so as to take up research as the lion share of research work and its productive nature is completely reliant on these skills.

The prioritization of communication skills and the role of English Studies at tertiary level were discussed with a few acquaintances. The interesting question raised by the few facilitators of English during the discussion on the current nature of the courses in English provided was: Is it wrong if the courses offered assist the learner to gain fluency in English language which is a major criterion to be enabled for any job occupancy in either field? Of course, there is no denial of the communicative competence required to be employed and hence, a source of livelihood. The facilitators, though, were partially unhappy about the syllabus offered which according to them is more or less the same as that offered at primary schools, did not seem to be much disapproving of speaking skill prioritized over learning, reading and writing. Indeed, most of them were found to be ignorant or concerned of the goals of Higher Education and hence, hardly felt anything wrong with the existing system. In such case, a study on the status of English language teaching-learning at tertiary level with the goals of Higher Education at backdrop might serve as a bench-mark or a point to lead the system of Education to the righteous path.

If the need for teaching and learning English is to enable fluency in communication and sensitize the nuances of language, then the next question is: Is Kannada/Hindi/Malayalam/any other regional languages taught and learnt to gain fluency in communication or to enable the learner to facilitate communication in the respective languages? The answer simply is no. If those languages are not taught to merely improve the Speaking skills, then why is English being taught with the objective of enhancing communication skills? Why are the reading and writing skills neglected? Language learning presumably is an ensemble of reading, writing, listening and speaking skills that eventually bolster the analytical and critical ability. Language learning must enable to imbibe the knowledge contained in it.

The current status enjoyed by English is the same as the status of Sanskrit enjoyed in the ancient times. Sanskrit enjoyed the status of epithet of knowledge, culture and heritage and hence the mastery of the same was an accomplishment in its truest sense. Sanskrit is brought to discussion to bring in the comparison between itself and the current status of English. Unlike English, the scholars of Sanskrit mastered the knowledge that embodied the language. Despite being well-versed in Sanskrit, the medium of communication for the scholars was not necessarily Sanskrit which simply conveys the fact that the language learning was not about communication but about knowledge procurement for an individual. The superiority of the scholar of Sanskrit was not reliant on the standardized nature of medium of communication in Sanskrit. It was the knowledge that put the scholars on the superior status. Sanskrit teaching-learning is discussed to convey the fact that language teaching-learning must aim at knowledge acquisition i.e., developing analytical and critical thinking meanwhile enabling to retrieve information from the written piece of text.

Analyzing Macaulay's Minute on Indian Education and his motive behind introduction of English language as a medium of instruction, one understands that he did not want Indians to learn English language to facilitate communication with them but to inculcate cultural values and ethics of

English in the Indians. He wanted to anglicize India so as to enslave them through the inculcation of their values whose superiority he believed in, and hence wanted Indians to acknowledge the superiority of English through the acquisition of their language. Macaulay and his introduction of English language is being discussed to convey the fact that the introduction of English in India too was not to facilitate communication as is being treated by the Universities in India in the current times. Unlike the times of Macaulay which purported teaching of English with a defined objective, the teaching of English in the current times lack a clear-cut objective or rather appear to be meandering away from the goals of higher education.

While the incompetence in reading and writing is a major problem and has to be addressed, citations and referencing skills as mentioned earlier too is a serious problem to be addressed. Reading and writing, at least at a partial level, is being trained on by the prescribed texts at graduation. But, the referencing skill is the least touched upon. The researcher, when enters the realm of research work, finds oneself altogether in an alien domain with the frequent reference to the citations (footnote, endnote, bibliography, works cited, references etc.) of the earlier writers in the field as they back the research findings and its productivity. The copyright, plagiarism and citation styles (MLA, APA) of the content scares the researcher and chokes the little enthusiasm with which one would have enrolled for the research work. The researcher, till then, would have enjoyed the luxury of browsing the web, books, journals, articles etc. and retorting to CCP (Cut Copy Paste) for any sort of assignments done during the graduation. Unlike the assignments at graduation, the research paper demands original content or acknowledgment of the sources or statements that has backed the research finding/problem. While the acknowledgment of the sources is itself a new arena for the researcher, the acknowledgment of sources in a specific style poses as a more problematic task.

The research activity follows the tertiary education. The tertiary level education in English language on date is the same as the upper primary and high school education. Hence, the Universities

must relook into the curriculum of English language being offered for the graduate courses as they are to role play the ascending step towards research work. Not necessary that, every graduate immediately plunges into employment and hence has to be communication-oriented. Even if one plunges into a job, the linguistic competence developed in whole is not going to harm him/her. Disregard for enrichment of communication skill is not what is asked for. What is sought for is the due importance to the goals of Higher Education which has many other facets of learning as well. Domain of knowledge is an ever growing arena. Contribution to the domain of knowledge as a responsible educated is an equally important task for a learner of any discipline rather than view education as a mere tool to make one's living.

Tertiary education must cater to the aims and goals of Higher Education unlike the current system which is keen on meeting the demands of commercial world and hardly pays any importance to the research-oriented education. Research and its productivity in the domain of English studies are very much questioned for the fact that the recent contribution to the domain of knowledge is too little. The tertiary education in English needs a revival.

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