

**Framing Syllabi For Developing English Language Proficiency
Bridging Gaps In English Teaching At The Tertiary Level**

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The English Language holds primacy in several levels of employment. This has drawn appeal towards the language as a valuable tool towards having an edge in ones skill set. Capitalizing on the image that English builds for ones employability and career advancement has become a trend set by employer and employee alike. It does indeed have its appeal in a global market, but its demand is due to the inability of educational institutions to provide verifiable and considerable output in students who are proficient in the English Language. Therefore the search for candidates with quality English skills is rather sparse in number. Attempts are of course made by academicians to change this reality but not to the level of a massive turnabout.

One of the major concerns in this condition is the situation of students who are identified as slow learners. “A slow learner is a child of below average intelligence, whose thinking skills have developed significantly more slowly than the norm for his/her age. This child will go through the same basic developmental stages as other children, but will do so at a significantly slower rate.” (Karen) These students are mostly found to have a very poor understanding of language competency. This can be due to poor quality in pedagogy. “The success or failure of any educational program depends on the quality of instruction” (Tiwari, 193). However, the

primary concern has always been the fact that most of school teaching focuses on the apparent need to aid the student community in boosting their grades to the highest possible extent since college admissions rely on the scores of their applicants. This trend seems to have set in the debilitating phenomenon of rote learning that has steadily and massively shifted the focus of the students from thinking and understanding to mechanically reproducing content that is provided to them by their teachers. This can prove most devastating to language acquisition because the students are eventually not geared to framing the sentences and paragraphs on their own but are made to reproduce material to the extent of being discouraged in doing otherwise. The resultant lack of language skill development leaves the student severely stunted in verbal communication.

The ideal solution would be to focus on school education, specifically at the primary level, where the affiliation to the language would be developed. However, the present issue is to cater to students who have completed schooling, perfect or otherwise, and have taken up collegiate education to boost their career options. As the flaws in the pedagogy of most schools catches up with the student, the student realizes quite late that the base of English Language learning was never properly established.

It is least to say that catering to slow learners at the tertiary level is a daunting, if not impossible task. The failure in strengthening English Language skills at the primary and secondary levels can, in a nutshell, be seen as an unfathomable omission of a teaching-learning process. Finally we come to the crucial question of how this situation can be resolved given that colleges are ideally intended to follow a University level English Language inculcation.

The evidentiary conclusion is that age-old syllabi should be revamped entirely. Attempts have been made previously in the form of bringing about a happy balance between language exercises and literary samples. Recent developments involved bolder policies like streaming that

segregated the student community on the basis of their English language competency levels. A preliminary test revealed the student's aptitude and their grade enabled the grouping. Of course, the system was not without its controversies concerning the segregation of students and the resultant hierarchy and complexes that seem to sink into the minds of the students based on their groups as well as the teachers who engaged them. Regardless, the endeavor is commendable for its ability to address the issue directly and attempt a resolution.

In all efforts, it is clear that a system is devised which eventually runs itself, thereby making employment transferable. However, we must come to terms with the system itself becoming a hindrance to reaching the goal. It is necessary at this point in time to consider the act of revising the syllabus. This element undergoes serious scrutiny in terms of its comprehensibility to all members of the student community. A noticeable phenomenon that occurs here is that the syllabus, in order to cater to slow learners, crops out all segments that would seem difficult for a slow learner to process. The purpose behind this is that any student, slow learner or excellent, would be able to relate to the syllabus and would be able to envelop the content for the sake of class exercises and examinations.

The flip side to this process is that the quality expected in a syllabus is toned down immensely. To be more specific, the benchmark that the syllabus needs to set in order to inspire aspirants is pruned to suit a slow learner. Eventually, it seems as if quality prostrates itself to the level of the slow learner instead of the student setting a higher goal. Although it is essential that a student is able to comprehend the syllabus, it is also true that any syllabus that is new to a student is intended to teach new things to the student at that level. This purpose seems to be hindered in the process of syllabus framing.

However, the solution wouldn't actually be the contrary. Elevating the benchmark too high could render the syllabus inaccessible. Therefore the true solution would be a bridging of the entities- a possible retention of quality and a simultaneous ability to reach out to the slow learner. As all teachers have observed, the student community varies in its ability to participate in a classroom activity. This could probably suggest a bridging by way of a certain level of flexibility that could be incorporated in syllabus framing.

The general idea is that a syllabus could be framed in a way that it is not too restrictive or exclusive in its form and content. It could possibly provide a skeletal framework within which several language activities could be incorporated by the teacher who would have a hands-on knowledge of the student group and would be able to mix and match the content on the basis of that knowledge. Although this seems to lack solidity, it would become more learner-oriented and the eventual goal of language skill development could be accomplished. H.H. Stern, in the book *General English Syllabus Design* provides the necessary perspective on this matter:

In the arrangement of the content, sequencing is inevitable. As a rough guide, he distinguishes structural aspects which can be systematized and other aspects which can spiral round this core...; but, in general, he recommends as the guiding principle practical teaching considerations and great flexibility in order not to inhibit the good teacher. (Stern, 9)

The flexibility could be utilized to include activities that would encourage the slow learner to participate actively and practice the four skills of language in a creative manner. Slow learners who need assistance to the extent of learning sentence construction could be involved in word-building games that would take away the thought that they are lagging behind in their skillset acquisition. Average and above average level students could be involved with threading

the sentences made in class into sequential paragraphs and subsequently into an organized passage. This is, of course, one example of how the syllabus could be orchestrated. The focus would always be on the level of involvement of the students in the activities, the quality and extent of the information that is imbibed during it, and nulling the atmosphere of segregation in the process.

To conclude, it can be inferred that the solution to developing English language skill set relies more in the absence of a structured system. Given the fact that teachers could very well opt out of institutions, it would be wise to consider options that would affirm the practicality of the process instead of deserting the flexibility. Since the process could provide evident results in the increase of English skills in student output from institutes of higher education, it gains viability in academic circles and in all organizational levels looking forward to positive results. Therefore, the innovation in syllabus framing can bring about a welcome change in the struggle towards excellence in English language proficiency and establish itself as one of the most successful attempts in language skill development.

Works Cited

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