

CHAPTER-I

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1.1 INTRODUCTION

English in the schools and colleges of Mizoram should be seen as a means to the pursuit of academic and vocational goals of students at all levels, particularly at the advanced level. The achievement of these goals can be placed in proper perspective only when the students-need themselves are clear. The goals are set by keeping in mind the purposes to which the language will be put, whether it is for pursuing a course of study, or for business in a town or city, or for communicating with tourists in one's area of living and so on. Thus, it is the auxiliary role that English is called upon to play, particularly in the sphere of academic studies, that is a prime motivating factor. Where such a role is matched with specially designed materials relevant to the needs of the students, the results can be fairly impressive. But where the language courses at the tertiary level merely repeat the context and techniques of those at the secondary level, the results will be as ineffective as they were before. Moreover, students become disillusioned and doubtful of their capacity to learn English. This is the situation prevalent today among the students in this State who have been struggling to learn the English language for a good many years. No provision is made either in the nature of learning materials or in the teaching methods used, to practise the skills needed and to develop the learning ability of the students. Little attempt is made to relate the teaching materials either to the communicative needs of the learner or to their subject specializations. Even at the advanced level of education, we see

thousands of Mizo students learning English merely with a view to passing their examination. A difference in approach is therefore needed in which English ceases to be only an examination subject and becomes a means to pursue academic and vocational goals.

1.2 BACKGROUND TO THE PRESENT STUDY

Despite the uncertainty that has marked the future of English in India, ever since we achieved independence, English continues to be taught as a second language to millions of children throughout the country. In the majority of schools, the English language is introduced at the higher primary or lower middle level (Std. V or VI) in Mizoram it commences in Std. III. Indeed, it is a massive exercise but unfortunately, the results are not very encouraging. In fact, the steady fall of performance in English is a cause for great concern to all those who are genuinely interested in promoting ELT in India.

In Mizoram, it is found that when students enter the PU level their general proficiency in English is incredibly low, despite the fact that they have been taught English for eight years and have studied all other subjects through English medium throughout high school [VIII - X]. One of the major reasons for this is that English is taught as a subject and not a skill. It is also found that some students know the rules of grammar but find it very difficult, rather impossible to use those rules to express themselves in English.

This practice of imparting formal knowledge of the English language continues even at the PU level. The obvious

result of such an approach to ELT is that thousands of students, even after undergoing eight years of formal English teaching, find it extremely difficult while attempting to communicate in English. The whole background may be described in five dimensions which are as follows:

- [i] Teaching and the teacher
- [ii] The role of the teacher
- [iii] The role of the student
- [iv] Material or syllabus
- [v] Examination

Each of them are thoroughly discussed in this thesis.

1.3. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

This study began in an English as a second language [ESL] classroom-out of a not surprising awareness that a typical school learner and a college entrant in Mizoram, after a few years of having studied English, cannot still use the language with any amount of ease, which is a general complaint. Such a deficiency has been variously described as a lack of 'communicative ability,' 'accuracy but not fluency,' lack of 'an appropriate use of language,' lack of 'academic competence' in English and so on.

In Mizoram, like other colleges of India, teaching English is teacher textbook oriented, where the students play a passive role. The teacher reads a lesson, explains, dictates notes and prepares students for the examination. Teaching English has thus become synonymous with the reading of the text only.

Learning of English is evaluated through comprehension questions while the primary objective of developing the language skills, has become a secondary affair. The emphasis in the English classroom is to complete the lessons of the prescribed textbooks.

If the textbook has been properly designed, faithful adherence to it may not be a bad thing. Unfortunately, many of the textbooks in use are not properly designed. Some of them are produced by people who may not be fully acquainted with the principles of language teaching.

A language textbook should therefore be judged by its effectiveness as an aid to language learning, other considerations can only be secondary. Generally, it is found that producers of language textbooks are guided only by considerations of 'content' and overlook the basic purpose, which is to help the students learn the language.

The first requirement for us therefore, is to be able to judge how effectively the textbook is as a language learning device. Hence, in this study an attempt has been made to spot the deficiencies and strengths that are contained in the textbooks prescribed for PU students.

1.4. SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS OF THE PRESENT STUDY

No studies have so far been conducted in this State to find out the actual causes of this failure and the level of difficulties the learner faces in learning English at the PU level. What matters most is the attitude towards learning English

and not the 'error' which re-presents only a segment of the total language learning activity. English must be thoroughly evaluated to bring out a solution which must be pedagogically sound and psychologically acceptable.

The purpose of the study, therefore, is to find answers to the following:-

[i] To identify the deficiencies and inadequacies of the strategies adopted both by the teachers and the students of the present syllabus of English at the PU level.

[ii] To examine whether the contents of textbooks are suited to the proficiency level of PU students in the rural colleges of Mizoram.

[iii] To ascertain whether the language and vocabulary used in the textbook are appropriate for PU students.

[iv] To find out whether the students can integrate text as a discourse.

[v] To study whether the prescribed texts help in increasing the proficiency level of the learner of English at the PU level.

[vi] To make recommendations for improving both the syllabus/material and the content-matter.

1.5. HYPOTHESIS AND ASSUMPTION

The present teaching-learning situation in Mizoram does not take care of the various problems of the learners. It is

the improper selection of teaching materials and the unsuitable nature of the content of the material for language learning, which is solely responsible for the low proficiency level of the Mizo learner.

Most of the people who have learned or want to learn English as a second language need to use it in connection with Science, Technology, Commerce and so on. But the type of English they have learned or will learn is said to be inadequate for their respective needs. Such a complaint is based on two facts:-

[i] The syllabus or material we use in English at the school as well as at the college level is not useful as it is based on the teaching of English literature, which fosters among the learners, the values, symbols and language specific to literature and

[ii] Whatever English is taught or learnt at school or college level is not learnt well enough to be of any practical use in one's day to day life.

It is believed that the knowledge of English acquired in literature classes can be transferred to any new subject or field of activity. Of the many counter arguments we shall refer to only two:

[a] Students who learn English in a routine class fail to 'transfer' it for specialized purposes and

[b] the pro-literature attitude of the teacher of

English coupled with the literary type of materials used in the classes, prevent our learners from appreciating and therefore from putting to use a type of language that is analytical, impersonal or even cold.

Hence, it is said that the materials used for it are unsatisfactory because we ignore the 'use' it is expected to be put to.

Primary survey indicates that both teachers and students find the contents of the prescribed books for PU students too difficult not only in terms of the language but also in their themes. There are a large number of new/unfamiliar words in each sentence which creates problems for the teachers as their use is not understood by the learners. The result is that learning becomes difficult and ineffective. It is also reported that as the language and themes of these texts are unfamiliar to the vast majority of the students, there is very little motivation for reading lessons as the text represents life not known to them [e.g. appendix iii]

1.6. EXPECTED OUTCOME OF THE STUDY

The expected outcome of the study is as follows:-

[i] The average PU student of Mizoram is not prepared for the type of selections made for his/her course,

[ii] The teaching of English at school does not produce the essential skills and the necessary competence which are required for the use of English in college.

[iii] The planners of present day PU courses in English in NEHU have failed either to understand the need to concentrate on essentials or, where they see the need, to provide for it. In both cases this is partly due to a lack of awareness of what constitutes the essentials. Hence the prescribed texts do not serve the purpose for which they are prescribed.

[iv] Difficult words, phrases and expressions, syntax and the length of sentences of the prose pieces that appear in the prescribed text are unsuitable as material for the purpose of English language teaching/learning. Appearance of such prose pieces in the text therefore betray the confidence of the teacher too.

[v] Students are unable to interpret text as a discourse.

[vi] Strategies adopted both by the teachers and the students in the classroom are unsound.

1.7. TOOLS OR INSTRUMENTS USED

The aim of the present study is to analyse the English material [we call it material because a syllabus should have instructional objectives which the present syllabus lacks] of NEHU prescribed for the PU students. Hence, an investigation of the needs/purposes of learners has been carried out. We have also enquired into 'what' and 'how much' the existing syllabus and examinations demand of them in terms of communication skills.

The designing and teaching of effective language courses involve an investigation into the uses to which the language will be put. Every English teaching programme at the PU level should be concerned with teaching English to students whose primary interest lies in some branch of specialization. But

" informal approaches to learners or their instructors in whatever professional field of study or vocational field they belong to will invariably lead to vague, confused and even erroneous results."

[Mackay and Mountford 1978]

Hence, in the present study, we decided to be as precise as possible in identifying the nature of the needs of the learners, finding out whether communication skill in particular is useful to our target group, whether the 'materials' and examination demand their use and also whether they are being developed through classroom teaching.

The following are the tools used for this research :-

- i) An analysis of the existing syllabus;
- ii) An analysis of the question paper;
- iii) Questionnaires for teachers and students;
- iv) A schedule for classroom observation;
- v) Informal discussions with teachers and students.

These instruments can be divided into two types. Instrument (i) and (ii) above, already exist. Their analysis is

taken up to see what demands they make on students in the form of skills. Instruments (iii), (iv) and (v) have been designed by us. They are meant to identify the needs of students, to find out whether skills are important for their needs and to see if they are being developed by the present material in use at the PU level of NEHU.

1.8. APPLICATION OF THE PRESENT STUDY :-

The present study is felt to be of immense importance. Poor standard of student's performance in English and infantile knowledge about the language in use are found to be the outcome of the present syllabus at the PU level. It is, therefore, useful to probe into the matter and find out whether this claim is justified or not. The existing situation at the undergraduate level may not be direct outcome of the present syllabus at the PU level or it may be just one of the factors and not the only factor to be blamed. Hence a thorough survey is necessary which will help future syllabus makers in a better way.

Application of the present *study* is felt to be more important at the present juncture because, from this year 1996, NEHU has handed over PU to the Mizoram Board of School Education which has adopted NEHU syllabus in toto [without any change]. Hence, the result will be the same when ' history repeats itself.'

To improve the standard of English at the undergraduate level [as all the Colleges of Mizoram are English medium], it

is therefore a must to investigate the present materials in English at this transitional stage.

1.9. REVIEW OF PREVIOUS STUDIES

A brief review of a few research studies conducted at the CIEFL Hyderabad has been found related to the present research and is given below :

No. (1) A critical study of the Fundamental Curricular issues relevant to the teaching of English in India leading to an Alternative Integrative ELT Curriculum.

(A Ph.D thesis submitted by B.N.Koul, in 1981).

The researcher opined that in India, teaching English is in a state of crisis today. The assumption is that the ELT problem remains unresolved mainly because the questions fundamental to curriculum referred to here in general, remained unidentified, and those which have not been understood properly. With this assumption in view, it has been hypothesized that the crisis in ELT/ learning remains unresolved because the solutions presented so far have not taken cognizance of the curricular considerations relevant specifically to the Indian situation.

One of the findings in this study is that the problems of ELT as they obtain in India are more 'social' than 'educational' in nature. And one of the solutions is that of accepting what the researcher calls 'An alternative Integrated ELT curriculum.' And he says if it is not implemented, there may not be any other way of improving the existing ELT situation in

the country. The study, it is claimed is the first ever search into the socio-cultural constraints that ELT in India suffers from, the explication of these constraints in terms of the 'unconscious culturally induced bias', and the identification of these constraints and the level-wise analysis of the relationship that obtains among the curriculum components, the identification of the weakness of this relationship and the consequences of such a relationship.

The researcher finds the following findings of Dr. B.N. Koul relevant to his study.

1. ELT problems as they obtain in the country today must defy all reforms that are based on linguistic, pedagogic or both. Only those reforms which take cognizance of the curricular considerations pertaining to ELT, relevant specially to the Indian situation must, when implemented, resolve the crisis in ELT in India.

2. A change in the socio-linguistic scene of a nation is consequent upon the socio-political changes which the nation in question undergoes.

3. It is high time that teacher training programmes in general and those of training English teachers in particular are made provision for re-ordering a trainee's personality.

4. It has been found that the Indian ELT syllabus designers visualize a syllabus meant for a certain level of instruction as an isolated 'ends' and 'means' unit. Such a unit

stands in a disjointed relationship with other units fixed for other levels of instruction, consequently, instruction imparted at the various levels of learning ceases to be relevant to one another. This fact alone must do immense harm to ELT at all levels.

Isolated reforms in teaching materials, teaching methodology or techniques or syllabus, will not in our situation, prove to be anything more than a hotch-potch patchwork of purposeless repairs. What is needed is what may be called an overall unified curriculum for ELT, a curriculum in which the components stand in conjoint relationship at each and every level and across the various levels of instruction.

The researcher also lists certain tasks that are to be undertaken in order to bring the proposal to the level of instruction. The tasks that are of interest to the present study are :

1. The preparation of a "manual of the teaching / learning units." This manual is conceived to be consisting of a pack of several units, each of which must present a few logically related 'notions' a few situations 'those 'notions' can fit into and their correspondent 'linguistic exponents'.

2. The identification of means and ways of using 'translation' as an effective pedagogic and testing device.

3. The preparation of various 'skills' and 'register-based' courses that might be used at various levels of instruction.

4. The preparation of detailed syllabuses that accomodate the contributions made by the activities and results thereof suggested above.

5. The preparation of teaching and supplementary materials for use at various stages of instruction.

6. Training teachers for the various levels of instruction.

7. The 'goals' of ELT at the high school level, a clear outline of which has been presented before by the researcher in his thesis, have been identified and established empirically. As far as the high school level is concerned the goal should be to produce a multilingual / bilingual person who can make effective use of English in the situation he has possibly been called upon to communicate in. The contents of the course are to be the applied linguistic material in terms of 'words' and 'situations' arranged in 'situations' with a view to making the learners learn to 'communicate' effectively as an efficient bi/multilingual.

8. 'Evaluation' should not be necessarily an end of the year activity. Achievement in L₂ learning must be checked and tested at shorter intervals of time and for this purpose standarized language tests should be made available.

One can find a lot of affinities between the present study and Dr. Koul's dissertation. Both of them deal with the designing of a syllabus / curriculum although Dr. Koul has looked at the issue in a broader perspective and has succeeded in

finding out some deep rooted problems that were not known hitherto. If Dr Koul has succeeded in looking at the problem at the macro-level, the present study intends to address itself to some specific problems faced by a specific set of learners within a specific area but the approach remains the same.

No [2]. The use of Communicative Tasks to Supplement Traditional/Structural text books in Teacher's English at the High School Level in Gujarat.

[M.Litt. dissertation submitted by M.C.JACOB IN 1985]

The ELT practitioners are aware of the fact that in most class rooms the learner is not exposed to any 'real' language necessary for day to day communication. One of the concerns of people involved in ELT is how real language behaviour can be replicated in the classroom. Jacob has made an attempt to identify some of the inadequacies of structural materials in this regard, and to show how these materials could be supplemented by curriculum tasks/games.

The aim of the study under discussion was to demonstrate the effectiveness of communicative tasks and games in supplementing the prescribed materials of Standard IX of the Gujarat State. There are some useful conclusions which could be drawn from the study. One can conduct his class using tasks and games in an 'informal' setting without losing anything of the seriousness of purpose. They will, in fact, help ease tension and nervousness, which encourages communication thereby creating an interactive atmosphere conducive to communication. There should

however be a change in the traditional role of the teacher. He is no longer a 'dictator' but a co-participant or a 'co-communicator'. He is one among the pupils who would help them to communicate. He should cultivate the sensitiveness as to when to interfere and when not to. He should help to ensure maximum learner participation. The learner should be taught some language function which have immediate practical application. The learner should be given the opportunity to do tasks, play games and take part in 'role playing.' By assigning different roles reality can be brought into the classroom.

As far as the textbook writer/material production is concerned, he has an important role to play in the changed situation. He needs to include task/games/some language functions at the end of each lesson so that it will have some utilization value and at the same time it will generate a lot of interest to the pupils to learn.

Jacob's study has an immediate bearing on the present research which attempts to suggest how changes should be brought about in English teaching at the high school level. Jacob throws some light on the theoretical aspects of the current ELT situation in India, Structural versus Communicative approach to language teaching, making ELT more communicative etc. which are really necessary before going into the specific problems of ELT in Mizoram.

NO. [3] Developing a need-based curriculum for students pursuing. General English at the Degree Level.

[M.Litt. Thesis submitted in 1986 by Simon Mathews Dabhi]

An attempt has been made by Dabhi to examine the validity of the assumption that achievement in English proficiency gained through four years of organized instruction can be achieved with one year's conventional formal instruction, without any remediation. Arising from a theoretical and practical concern, it is an attempt to examine the problem of stream B students of the first year degree course in Gujarat University.

The study points out the urgent need for research in the direction of need based curriculum. The teachers teaching the English language are in acute need of some basic language are in acute need of some basic training in ELT. Some possible steps that could be taken in that direction are suggested.

It is necessary to organize teacher training programmes in terms/forms of workshops and orientation may be arranged for college teachers with the help of the experts in ELT. Such programmes may be made compulsory for in service college teachers. More effective materials for teaching and testing English language should be produced under the guidance of competent authorities and institutions in the field of ELT.

The study thus emphasized the need to adopt a more modern and dynamic concept of Education where instructional objectives, learning experiences and evaluation constantly interact with the learner at the Centre. It has emphasized the

need for a learner-Centred conception of education that calls for diagnostic testing and need-based instruction which follows from instrumental objectives stated in learner-oriented terms.

The main interest of the present researcher in studying Dabhi's work is how the concept of 'needs' and 'testing' have been exploited and how they have been used to make the curriculum an inte-grated whole. It was also worth studying because of its elaborate discussion of the theoretical background in the area of ELT under the headings of: the nature of second language learning and instruction, different approaches, communicative strategies, concepts of language testing, the communicative trend, the role of evaluation in education, which the present researcher finds relevant to his own research.

NO. [4] English at the under-graduate level in Mangalore University: towards an alternative Syllabus.

[M.Litt. thesis submitted by Francis G Calaco in 1985]

Calaco's study is an attempt at bringing changes in ELT at the under-graduate level in Mangalore University. The study was undertaken at a most opportune time: it reports the effort to bring about a change, in response to a felt need which emerged at the time of setting up the new University in 1986.

The researcher has incorporated some of the most important principles in her 'alternative syllabus'. These are 'functional ' needs of learners, personality development as an entry to learning language, priority to listening, public speech and conversation, reading for pleasure, the need for varied

writing tasks, optimal exploitation of student potential, need for better self-perception, need for more encouragement and friendly attitude for teachers and authorities. These are some of the points, if taken care of, will lead to better teaching and learning, from which both the teachers & the students will benefit.

There are certain elements which hold one's attention to Calaco's study: one is the element of 'change' which the researcher has envisaged, and she has succeeded in bringing it about in the form of an 'Alternative syllabus.'

1.10. ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY

The study presented in this thesis is divided into six chapters.

Chapter 1 of the thesis discusses the background to the study. It states the problem, scope of the study, methods and techniques adopted for the study, hypothesis and assumptions, constraints, expected outcomes and application of the present studies. It also makes a review of the previous related studies.

Chapter II, a brief historical account of English as a second language is given. It is seen that a content, structure and philosophy of higher education came to us as a legacy of the colonial rule. This chapter makes an attempt to show the place of English in our day-to-day life. Finally, this chapter gives a brief estimate of the ELT situation in Mizoram.

Chapter III deals with the syllabus design in ELT and

the theories and approaches involved in syllabus Design. It attempts to find out.

[i] the place of syllabus in language teaching and

[ii] the type of syllabus available in language teaching learning scenario.

In Chapter IV, we have analysed the existing syllabus and question paper. A brief description of these instruments are also given so that their strengths and weaknesses can be properly assessed.

Chapter V gives the details of the fieldwork undertaken, such as the selection of the sample of teachers and students, preparation of the questionnaires and data processing. The presentation and interpretation of the data collected through the field study have been included in this chapter.

In Chapter VI, the findings of the study and observations based on them are presented along with some suggestions on the basis that a model syllabus may be constructed.

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