

A Need for Teacher Development Training Programmes for the Teachers of English at Tertiary Education in Assam

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Abstract

This paper emphasises the necessity of ELT-oriented professional development training programmes for teachers. This would enable teachers to understand the learners' needs and teach English effectively so that learners can eventually become efficient users of the language. It is observed that the graduates from the North-Eastern part of India are unable to use the English language effectively in day-to-day communication. The prime reason for this inability is the way they are taught English, the content they study, the methodology used, and teachers' approach to the target language. Intensive analyses of Undergraduate learners' English language needs and of the General English syllabi of undergraduate courses of Gauhati University was done to find out the target needs of the learners. The data collected from teachers through a questionnaire showed the ignorance of the teachers about the learners' needs and of their own need for professional development.

Keywords: Professional Development; Needs analysis; Target Needs; Tertiary Education.

Background of the Study

The importance of English language in today's world is like the importance of oxygen for living. In a country like India, where English language is regarded as the official language, students of any discipline must acquire the language to survive in today's professional world. Being an ELT trained teacher and having taught in an Engineering college for last few years, I have felt that the students come with a lot of potentials; they have motivated mindsets to work on finding newer technical destinations. Students of Assam, in general, irrespective of whether they are studying in a technical or in a general college, whether they study English as a major course or are students of general English course, most of our students are found to be unable to use English language as effectively as expected. When it comes to perform in English language, be it for reading, writing, speaking or

listening, it is seen that the students become quite uncomfortable. They are not confident enough to speak or write in the language.

When I tried to investigate the reason behind this, it was seen that the students' inability to perform in the desired way is an outcome of the inadequate teaching of English that they have been receiving all these years. They are taught the content, not the language. By this I mean that the learners can only write answers to pass in the examinations, but when it comes to write effectively they cannot write properly. The investigation found out that the teachers are not at all aware of what exactly needs to be done to make the learners effective users of English language. They have been practicing the age-old traditional method of teaching to teach English. English is taught as a subject and not as a language that our learners must acquire.

This is because the teachers teaching in the colleges of Assam are not trained or they do not undergo any specific teacher training programmes to develop skills that will enable them to understand the learners' needs and teach accordingly. Though some of these teachers undergo or have undergone some kind of teacher training courses such as B.Ed. or M.Ed. etc. but, what kind of training they get from these courses about the methodology of teaching and to what extent these trainings help them in conducting classes is still under doubt, as the contents of these courses and their objectives are not stated clearly. Even at the time of recruitment, these teachers, besides the UGC norms, are not required to have any specific teacher training qualification in Assam.

The Need for a Changed Methodology

This kind of situations and observations laid the foundation of the proposed study. There is an urgent need for a reform in the existing teaching-learning process in the colleges of Assam. The development of soft-skills of the learners is also an important aspect. Our learner's inability to know what to say where and how to say something is another area which needs to be developed in them.

What Is the Changed Methodology? Or How Will It Come?

The change we are talking about here has to come from the ones who mould the learners. The one with whom our learners spend most of the time in the classrooms. The ones who are responsible to inculcate and meet the learner's needs. i.e.

THE TEACHERS.....

Importance of the Teacher

To quote **Hargreaves & Fullan (1992, p. ix)** **“The teacher is the ultimate key to educational change & school improvement”**.

It is what teachers think and do at the classroom level that eventually determines what learners learn in the classrooms. Thus, given the key role to the teacher in the classroom,

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professional growth of the teacher becomes a top priority. Teachers must not only develop their knowledge of the contents they teach, rather need to develop their knowledge on classroom pedagogy as well.

Who is a Professional?

According to the great ELT exponent **Penny Ur** “**a professional is the one who brings about change**”. Penny Ur in her article ‘**The English Teachers as professional**’ (1996) says that a professional is someone whose work involve performing a certain job / function with some degree of **Expertise**. Thus, the above stated lines take us to the assumption that, teachers, the one on whom depends the molding of the learners, must acquire professional growth in order to meet the teaching learning objectives.

The responsibilities of a language teacher in this respect are much higher in comparison to other subject teachers. Besides the content, language teachers need to know as well as develop the LSRW skills of the learners so that they become efficient user of the taught language as & when required.

Other Expert’s Views

What does Professional Development actually mean?

Simon Borg in his article entitled “**Professional Development for English Teachers: Perspectives from higher education in Turkey**” (2015), is of the view that ‘English language teaching is characterized by a strong tradition of Continuing Professional Development’.

Borg says CPD often involves teachers attend workshops where they are introduced to newer ideas, information etc. these teachers are expected to take the new knowledge back to their classrooms and apply and adapt wherever required. In this approach to CPD, the teacher is seen as a consumer of knowledge. Various courses, workshops, seminars etc. to the development of pre-service & in-service English language teachers but often it is seen that the teachers regard these kind of workshops, trainings worthless as they are unable to establish practical & feasible relationship between these activities with the real classroom happenings. In spite of institutional co-operation, support of external experts, investment of a lot of time and money, the harsh reality is that CPD in this cases results as a wastage of time.

The conventional approach to CPD takes place only inside a training room but in this article Simon Borg advocates that teachers’ professional development is a continuing process and it may take place /start from our own classrooms.

A true professional development course will focus on the following points:

- **Relevance to the needs of teachers & learners.**
- **Teacher’s involvement in decisions about content & process.**

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- **Teacher collaboration.**
- **Support from authority.**
- **Valuing teacher's experience and knowledge.**

Similarly **Professor Gabriel Maggioli**, in his article '**Professional Development for Language Teachers**' (2003) defines professional development as **“an ongoing learning process in which teachers engage voluntarily to learn how best to adjust their teaching to the learning needs of their students”**. According to the author professional development is not a one-shot, one-size-fits-all event, rather an evolving process of self disclosure, reflection and growth. In this article Prof Gabriel advocates for a **'quality'** professional development and not just '*a professional development course*'. School reform & newer initiatives in present day teaching-learning process call for the need for professional development of teachers. According to this paper, current research shows a strong correlation between teacher's teaching and student's success.

For ESL teachers, professional development helps the teacher to assist their learners acquire the target language and also develop understanding of the cultures associated with the target language. These trainings specially focus on how teachers construct their professional identities during an ongoing interaction with students, reflecting on their own actions in the classroom & adapting themselves as and when required to meet the learner's expressed or implicit needs.

Implications

Thus, the above studies take us to the conclusion that,

- The importance and necessity of a **quality professional development** course for the English language teachers of the colleges of Assam cannot be denied nor overlooked.
- Studies have also made it clear that such kind of developmental courses do not always necessarily take place inside a training room. The basics of such development start from our own classrooms in front of our students.
- Teachers own experience, self-understanding, reflection, observation etc in such cases tend to be the tools for self-professional upliftment.

The Present Study

Needs Analysis

A **Needs Analysis** of the tertiary level **learners** as well as the **teachers** were done separately in order to find out what does our learners need and what does the teachers as professional require to know in order to meet learners' needs.

Some of the assumed English language needs of the tertiary level learners are as follows:

NEEDS ANALYSIS

Listening Skill

(Academic, personal, professional)

The tertiary level learners need the skill to be able to:

- Listen and understand whatever they hear.
- Listen attentively to a teacher's lecture.
- Listen to live commentaries.
- Listen to understand commands & instructions in English.
- Listen & answer oral questions.
- Listen & comprehend transcripts in English. Etc.

Speaking Skill

(Academic, personal, professional)

The tertiary level learners need the skill to be able to:

- Speak fluently in English in various situations.
- Speak appropriately according to the situation.
- Make effective use of the target language while conversing in seminars, discussions, conferences etc.
- Present their ideas and opinions logically.
- Be grammatically correct while speaking.
- Speak confidently while conversing with people with different accents. Etc.

Reading Skill

(Academic, personal, professional)

The tertiary level learners need the skill to be able to:

- Read and comprehend various kinds of texts in English language.
- Read simple instructions for performing an experiment, operating a machine, solving a task etc.
- Understand overall meaning of a given text.
- Locate specific information from a text.
- Read signboards, maps, atlases, etc to locate a place /information.
- Read and identify information from internet. etc.

Writing Skill

(Academic, personal, professional)

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The tertiary level learners need the skill to be able to:

- Write answers to questions during examinations.
- Write applications, formal letters, make notes prepare memos etc.
- Compose their own piece of writings expressing their own ideas and views.
- Fill up forms (both online and manually).
- Write articles, seminar papers, journals etc.
- Write CVs & Resumes.
- Write short messages or notes.
- Express their ideas and views in writing through simple and clear language, etc.

English Language Needs of the Tertiary Level Teachers

The teachers of English needs to:

1. Listen to their learners' responses.
2. Explain texts using simple language.
3. Deliver lectures fluently in English.
4. Simplify the texts according to the learners' level of understanding.
5. Respond to learners' queries/ doubts.
6. Read and comprehend texts in English language.
7. Write teachers journals or logbooks.
8. Write lesson plans.

Teacher's Professional Development Needs

After figuring out the learners and the teachers English language needs, it is important to find out the teacher's specific Professional development needs required to meet the learner's needs. Some of those Needs are as follows:

The tertiary level teachers need to

- Master newer techniques and methodologies for taking classes.
- Plan lessons in a way that addresses learners' needs.
- Adapt techniques that will increase learners' motivation.
- Develop methodologies that will discourage learners from rote learning.
- Inculcate techniques that will avoid spoon feeding the learners and make their classes learner-centred so that the learners enjoy learning by being involved.
- Attend refresher courses, FDPs, seminars etc to know about the current innovations & newer methodologies practiced in language teaching.
- Develop the skill of self-reflection, peer reviewing etc to help themselves and each other develop their teaching abilities.
- Develop interest in getting involved in research & publication of papers to upgrade their versatility as language teachers.
- Upgrade their knowledge in ICT to adopt technological tools for language teaching.

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- Be aware of their own English language Needs, lacks and wants.
- Read related journals, articles and texts to make teaching sessions interactive and interesting.
- Take language teaching as a means to create good communicators, etc.

Material Analysis

Observations on the G.U General English Syllabus and Question Paper Pattern

The main objective of the proposed study is to highlight on the shortcomings of the present teaching-learning processes prevailing in the colleges of Assam. At this point it is also important to look at the contents of the syllabus and the evaluation process that the learners undergo as these two aspects play a major role in a language teaching curriculum. The contents and the question papers play a crucial role in shaping the learners.

Now let us look at the contents of the General English syllabus and a sample question paper of the Degree Course offered by Gauhati University one by one.

B.A. General English

Semesters I & II

Marks 50+50=100, Credits 4+4=8

Objective

The aim of this course is to provide the students an opportunity to read and respond to representations of the issues in contemporary life and culture in the English Language. The selection of texts is aimed to present themes and topics that are stimulating, insightful and informative. Each paper will have a grammar section of marks. Students having English as Major subjects will have to answer questions on a text indicated in the syllabus, instead of the grammar section. Internal assessment in these two papers may be in the form of an objective-type test.

Paper I

Total Marks: 50(40+10) (10 Marks For Internal Assessment)

Prose: 30 Marks

There will be two compulsory questions of 10 marks each ($10 \times 2 = 20$) from a choice of five. Students will also have to write two short notes of 5 each ($5 \times 2 = 10$) from choice of four. All questions will be text-based, and students will be expected to be familiar with the content of the pieces prescribed.

Texts

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M.K. GANDHI: The Swadeshi Movement
GEORGE ORWELL: Shooting an Elephant
PUNYAKANTE WIJENAIKE: The River
MANOJ DAS: The Misty Hour
MICHAEL ONGAATJE: Angulimala
ROHINTON MISTRY: Running Water

The following essay is meant for students having Major in ENGLISH, on which they will be examined, in lieu of the Grammar section. There will be a compulsory question of 10marks (10×1=10)
Nissim Ezekiel: Naipaul's India & Mine

Grammar (10 Marks)

Make sentences using common phrases and idioms. (1×5=5).

Common errors: to be answered as directed. (1×5=5)

A Sample Question Paper of TDC 1st Semester General English (2017)

Full Marks: 40

(The figures in the margin indicate full marks for each question.)

Q.1. How did Orwell justify the shooting of the elephant? What does Orwell realize about the nature of imperialism from it? 10

Or

Bring out briefly the Buddha's encounter with Angulimala. 10

Q.2. Give a character sketch of Auntie Roopwati from your reading of the story, 'The Misty Hour'. 10

Or

Give an account of the arrival of the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan refugees in Dharmasala and the changes thereof.

Q.3. Answer any two of the following questions. 5×2=10

- Explain Gandhiji's idea of Swadeshi economy.
- Give a brief description of the dangerous jungle in The River.
- Give a brief description of the dangerous jungle in The River.
- What were the reactions of the people when they recognized the changed Angulimala entering the town for alms?
- Discuss why visiting Dharmasala had been a childhood dream of Rohinton Mistry.

Q.4. Frame sentences to illustrate the meaning of the following phrases (any five). 1×5=5

In favour of, On the contrary, Bring to book, Hold good, To book, Bag & baggage, In cold blood.

Q.5. Rewrite the following sentences correctly. (any five). 1×5=5

- a) He said that he will come in a week
- b) Have you a pen to write
- c) He was prevented to do the work
- d) I prefer tea than coffee.
- e) I wish I was dead.

Implications

The observations on the syllabus and the question paper take us to the following conclusions:

- a) The section of the syllabus entitled “**Objective**” is vague.
- b) The part of syllabus where it is mentioned that the grammar part needs not to be attempted by students who have **English as Major** is creating ambiguity. The objective behind this is not stated.
- c) The section entitled ‘**Grammar**’ is not appropriate as it has some content on vocabulary as well.
- d) The contents of the B.A. 1st semester are **all literary texts**, there is no inclusion of **functional English** which happens to be a major cause for de-motivation of the learners.
- e) The questions of the sample question paper are all **subjective**.
- f) They test the learners’ knowledge of the **content only**, how much language acquisition takes place in such kind of testing is totally overlooked.
- g) The syllabus content and the evaluating system do not address learners’ **day to day English Language requirements**.

The Following Move ...

- A visit to some representative colleges were made to find out practical facts.
- Two separate questionnaires for the teachers and the students respectively were prepared for this.
- Some of the questions asked to the teachers and students and some representative responses are as follows

Questionnaire for Teachers

1. Are you aware of your learners’ needs? / Why do they need to study English?
2. How do you assess your learners?
3. Are they learning the language effectively?
4. Do you think that the contents of the present syllabus meet the students’ needs?

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5. Which skills according to you are important for your learners to acquire at this stage?
6. What do you want your learners to do with the content they learn while learning English language?
7. Are your learners able to speak in English effectively in real life situations? / does your language teaching go beyond the classrooms?
8. What type of teaching aids do you use to facilitate your learners to learn the language?
9. How much texts do your learners read?
10. What are the different types of texts they read? (Besides textbooks?)
11. What type of texts do they write? How often are they required to write in English?
12. What according to you is the importance of the LSRW skills in any language learning process? Is it possible to learn a language without achieving these skills?
13. Do you agree that as a language teacher you should attend various refresher courses or participate in professional development programme?
14. How often do you attend these?
15. Does your institution facilitate such participation?
16. What are your some of the constraints as a language teacher?
17. Why are the students not able to make effective use of English language when it comes to use it for communication beyond classroom?

Some Responses

1. Are you aware of your learners' needs? / Why do they need to study English?

Responses:

- They need to study English as it is the official language and also it is an universal language.
- Competency in English is required to survive in the world today.
- They need to study English because it is the most important and essential language nowadays, etc.
- English being the global language helps to fit in the cosmopolitan environment.
- English language is a medium to transmit all form of knowledge.
- Enables learners to widen scope in the job market.
- Boosts learners' self-confidence.
- English language is needed for all round development nowadays.

2. Are they learning the language effectively?

Responses

- Most teachers replied 'no'
- Yes, some do try a lot, the interested ones do finally learn the language effectively.

3. Do you think that the contents of the present syllabus meet the students' needs?

Responses:

- No, it doesn't cater to learners' needs.
- Degree Arts syllabus is not appropriate.
Degree Science syllabus is good
English Major Syllabus is appropriate.
H.S. course (NCERT) is good but sometimes doesn't meet the learners' level.
- There should be more focus on functional English which will help in improving their oral & written proficiency.
- The present syllabus is good but the CBCS syllabus which will be effective from next semester (Aug'19) is more relevant & up to date.

4. Are your learners able to speak in English effectively in real life situations? / does your language teaching go beyond the classroom?

Responses

- Yes, most of my students speak effectively in English.
- No they can't.
- Though care is taken to take language teaching beyond the classroom, majority of the students cannot speak effectively in English. Various factors are responsible for this.

5. How much texts do your learners read?

Responses

- Majority of them do not read much
- Very less
- They avoid reading as they cannot comprehend the texts.
- They do not feel motivated to read.

6. What type of texts do they write? How often are they required to write in English?

Responses:

- Regularly but not effectively.
- They write in the examinations, they write grammar, compositions, textual questions answers, etc.
- They write in the examinations. English as a general subject exists only in the first two semesters of the six-semester course. Very few students write good English even students having other subjects as Major also do not write good and effective English.

7. How often do you attend various refresher courses or participate in professional development programme?

Responses:

- As and when required.
- UGC has made attendance in particular number of courses mandatory. But professional development trainings are not mandatory.
- I personally attend conferences/seminars dealing with language out of interest as I pursued my Ph.D. study in the field of language acquisition.

Questionnaire for Learners

1. What are your reasons for learning English language?
2. Do you have any specific 'need' to learn the language?
3. What are the various contexts (situations) you think where you need to communicate in English both now as well as in future?
4. How often do you speak in English?
5. Are the contents of the General English syllabus helpful in learning the language?
6. Do you feel motivated to attend English classes?
7. Do you feel any problem while speaking/communicating in English?
8. What type of texts do you need to write in English? How often do you write?
9. Other than textbooks, what type of texts do you read in English?
10. Does your teacher make use of tasks/activities while teaching English?
11. What is the importance of English language in the present day in terms of the professional world?

Some Responses

1. What are your reasons for learning English language?

Responses

- I like English.
- Like & love for English language.
- I want to improve my speaking & writing skills.
- To learn English.
- No specific reasons, etc.

2. Do you have any specific 'need' to learn the language?

Responses

- I want to learn English because it is an attractive language.
- For future official communication.
- To get a job.
- To be able to communicate with foreigners, to speak correctly, etc.

3. How often do you speak in English?

Responses

- English Major students: in classrooms with teachers.
Other Major subject students: very less
General English students: no speaking in English at all.

4. Are the contents of the General English syllabus helpful in learning the language?

Responses

- English Major syllabus is okay, but students find the general English syllabus having no connection to their day-to-day life, tend to be not interesting. They feel demotivated to attend these classes. Mostly they attend English classes just for getting attendance.

5. Do you feel any problem while speaking/communicating in English?

Responses

- The learners (most) have certain common issues in this regard, as insufficient vocabulary, grammatical error, inability to put appropriate words to frame meaningful sentences, nervousness, attitude of peers, etc. Are the Various threats. Phobia like they might be wrong, teacher might get angry, etc. are the problems they face.

Conclusion

The conversation with the students and the teachers helped me a great extent to Understand what is actually happening in the colleges and how much are our learners learning.

All the above-mentioned studies, observations and situations brought me to the following conclusions:

- The learners have potential for learning
- The teaching-learning process in the colleges of Assam needs a change.
- Teachers' active role is the most essential need to develop learners in the desired way.
- Teachers need to understand that, by professional development we do not mean always getting special trainings inside a training room. It may start from our own classrooms too.
- To teach a language, the language has to be taken as a skill that needs to be developed in our students and should not be considered as a subject like History, Mathematics etc.

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- The ultimate need for the teachers is to train them through a QUALITY Professional Development course and not just any training programme.
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Colophon

This research paper is an authentic work done solely by me. All the data collected, analysis done, and conclusions drawn were discussed and finalised under the guidance of my supervisor **Anita Tamuli**, retired Professor, department of **English Language Teaching**, Gauhati University, Assam. I, hereby, convey my gratitude to Prof. Tamuli for all kinds of help and supervision she has provided in carrying out the research work.

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