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Prospective Teachers of English in India: A Perspective

Ravindra B. Tasildar, M.A.

Introduction

India has always felt a grave shortage of teachers of English at every level of education. It seems that enough attention is not paid to this long-term requirement of the nation. With the failure to implement the recommendations of various commissions and committees, the increase in the enrolment of students, rapid growth of English medium schools and introduction of English from class I, the paucity of teachers has continued to haunt even in the present century.

This has led the National Knowledge Commission (2006) to recommend to induct graduates with high proficiency in English and good communication skills without formal teacher-training qualifications as teachers in schools.

Despite a number of new job opportunities available today, majority of the students admitted to B.A. (Special English, or variously called Honours, Major, Principal English, etc.) and M.A. (English) courses aspire to enter the teaching profession. The term *Special English* has been used in this paper as used in the Report of Curriculum Development Centre (1989).

This paper is an attempt to link the requirement of the nation with the aspirations of these students.

Educational Reforms in Indian Universities

Owing to the liberalization of the Indian economy and globalization, the last few years have witnessed the opening up of thousands of new job opportunities for the graduates proficient

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in English, mainly in the services sector; in hospitality industry, print and visual media, IT, BPO, spoken English institutes, malls, etc. This has resulted in the unprecedented changes in the English courses offered in Indian universities. Indian universities have started courses in communication skills to convert their students into saleable products.

A cursory look at the initiatives taken by the various academic bodies in the country in the last decade of the twentieth century and in the first decade of the twenty-first century is helpful to locate the focus of the educational reforms.

Initiatives by the Academic Bodies

With the aim to equip the students with higher-level language skills necessary for certain profession or professional courses, University Grants Commission (UGC)-sponsored courses in Functional English are run at the undergraduate (UG) level in some of the colleges in the country. The papers in Functional English include components like conversational English, remedial grammar, advanced writing skills, introduction to broadcast media and entrepreneurship development. Recently, UGC has also started to encourage colleges to introduce Career Oriented Courses in different subjects. Many colleges have started courses in spoken English and communication skills in English.

Owing to globalization and IT boom in the country, the Birla-Ambani report on 'A Policy Framework for Reforms in Education (2000)' and the NASSCOM-McKinsey Report (2005), and almost all Indian universities have proposed to introduce new courses or updating the existing syllabi of the English courses. For instance, University of Pune has started add-on courses like Soft Skill Development Programme (SSDP) and Global Talent Track (GTT) to enhance the employability potential of its graduates in relation to IT-enabled industry.

SSDP provides training to the students studying in the final year of the degree classes in spoken English, total personality development and ways and means to appear for an interview. GTT, an IT course, aims to acquaint the students with the latest skills and knowledge services required for knowledge services industry. GTT also includes basic communication skills (written and oral) and basic interpersonal skills. Besides, the university has replaced a paper on English literature by a paper entitled *Enriching Oral and Written Communication* in the syllabus of TYBA English General (w.e.f. June 2010).

Viswanatha (2005) views such changes as the mindless enslavement to market forces.

Reports on the Teaching of English in India

Taking into account the requirement of teachers of English in the country, some of the committees and commissions on the teaching of English in India suggested certain measures to fulfil this quantitative as well as qualitative requirement.

The Study Group on English in India (1967) had suggested making arrangements to increase the number of admissions to the B.A. subsidiary and principal courses in English and the M.A. course in English in colleges and university departments of English so that adequate number of teachers of English required for teaching at high school and higher secondary

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levels could be trained. The Group also recommended introducing a paper on 'Problems involved in the teaching of English as a second language or world language' for higher secondary teachers of English for their M.A. degree.

The Study Group on Teaching of English (1971) noted that our teacher training colleges have failed to keep pace with the mounting needs for teacher education and training. Therefore, the Study Group suggested starting courses like 'Course in English for Students who wish to be Teachers of English or Study English Literature' and 'A Course in English for Non-graduate Teachers'. In addition to this, the Study Group emphasized introducing the study of Linguistics and Phonetics with special reference to English and methods of second language teaching in the B.A. (Hons.) and M.A. Syllabuses. The Curriculum Development Centre in English (1989) has also suggested to the universities to introduce an optional course in 'A Course in Linguistics and Language Teaching' in the third year of the B.A. Special English degree program.

However, non-implementation of such recommendations has widened the huge gap between the demand and supply of teachers of English in the country.

The Requirement of Teachers of English in India

According to the National Knowledge Commission (2006) about 600,000 teachers proficient in English are required in the country. To meet this requirement, the commission recommends that graduates with high proficiency and good communication skills in English should be inducted without formal teacher-training qualifications. Besides, the introduction of English from class I in many states has resulted in the demand for teachers of English even at the primary level. According to Annamalai (2008) as 89% of primary schools are located in rural areas, English is a ticket to a teaching job in primary schools in villages. He estimates that there is need of about 24,000,00 teachers of English in the primary schools in the country. In addition to this, other factors like the rise in the enrolment of students in schools and the mushrooming of unaided English medium schools have increased the requirement for teachers of English in India.

The demand for teachers of English is not only limited to schools and colleges. More than two decades ago, Durant (1986) has noted the success of the commercial language teaching sector in India. Today English classes are found in almost every city and town in the country. The teachers of English are also required in the private coaching classes for entrance and competitive examinations. Furthermore, private tutors are also in great demand.

Nevertheless, the academic bodies, which have shown enthusiasm to start courses to fulfill the job markets' demands of the IT-enabled industry, seem to be blind to this large scale requirement of teachers of English in the country. There is a need to go for sustainable reforms prioritising requirements of the nation rather than merely focussing on providing cheap labour to the MNCs.

The Inclination of the Students Majoring in English

Despite a number of new job opportunities available today, majority of the students admitted to B.A. (Special English) and M.A. (English) courses aspire to enter the teaching profession. Mekala (2005) has noticed that 62% of the students majoring in English in the colleges affiliated to University of Madras wanted to be teachers. Some graduates with specialization in English who cannot go for B.Ed. (purely for non-academic reasons), prefer to give tuitions, become private tutors, join as teachers in coaching classes or start their own spoken English classes. It is necessary to take cognizance of this situation and to reflect on it.

Training the Prospective Teachers of English

The prospective teacher of English is instructed at the honours and post-graduate courses in English (Study Group, 1967: 35). But, according to Pattanayak (1981) and Seshadri (1997), the students who graduate from Indian universities are not equipped to teach English. Nevertheless, only a very few Indian universities aim at teaching prospective teachers of English through the B.A. (Special English) and M.A. (English) courses. For instance, Gujarat University offers an optional paper in 'Spoken English & ELT' to the regular students of B.A. whereas the existing syllabi of M.A. (English) of Delhi University and Panjab University do not have even an optional paper in ELT. Yet, the National Knowledge Commission (2006) favours graduates proficient in English, but without B. Ed., to be teachers in schools.

To Sum Up

In the light of above observations, it is essential to incorporate the component of 'English Language Teaching' in B.A. (Special English) and M.A. (English) courses offered in Indian universities. It could be incorporated either as a separate (core or elective) paper or partly in the paper on the study of English language. The UGC sponsored Functional English Courses include components like English for Journalists and English for Broadcasters. As the demand for teachers of English in India is definitely more than the demand for English journalists and broadcasters, the colleges offering UGC's Functional English Courses and Career-oriented Courses should include a component like 'Training for English Language Teaching'. Such initiatives would help to produce graduates with competence to teach English effectively.

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