

Examining the problems in English Language Examination System

Dr. Anooja John, Assistant Professor, Department of English, Anand Institute of Higher Technology, India

Mrs. A. Sangeetha, Assistant Professor, Department of English, Anand Institute of Higher Technology, India

Mr. M. Kamesh, Assistant Professor, Department of English, Anand Institute of Higher Technology, India

Article Received: 11/10/2022,

Article Accepted: 19/11/2022,

Published Online: 21/11/2022,

DOI:10.47311/IJOES.2022.4.11.11

Abstract

After twelve years of learning English as a subject at school and three years of compulsory English at the college level, most of the average Under-Graduates find it difficult to speak a correct sentence in English, write their curriculum vitae, or even comprehend an English daily. This is not an exaggeration. Parents, teachers, examiners, and employers are concerned about the learners' poor achievement in English language as there is an increasing realization that Spoken English is a means of survival as well as empowerment in today's competitive world. A number of explanations can be given to account for this poor performance; the educational policy, uncongenial learning environment, dearth of proper reading materials, outmoded syllabi and faulty methods of teaching and evaluation. These issues are not too simple to be ignored. There should be a determined and devoted commitment from all quarters to reverse the prevalent methods, and thus create conditions that will promote a globally applicable English language, not as a distant goal, but as an urgent practical necessity.

Keywords: Education, Examination, Evaluation

Introduction

The present examination system is defective, in the sense that it does not facilitate the accomplishment of the objective of teaching a language, namely the acquiring of the communication skills. The principal focus of this observation is: the existing examination pattern places undue importance on the contents of the text that any pupil who has studied the text to a reasonable degree will pass the examination, without generating any intellectual activity, or exhibiting the skills of comprehension and communication. It has been noticed that the same unchanged system has been followed for many years

without much modification. The system seems to overlook the fact that the ability to merely memorise passages of prose, poetry, drama and novel is woefully inadequate to meet the communicative needs in the professional and social life of the students.

Blocks in the Way of Examination Reform

The major block in the implementation of schemes for examination reform has been created by educational authorities and teachers themselves. They, perhaps, fail to realize that examinations of the present type undermine basic educational objectives. Moreover, the Universities have failed in enforcing reforms in examination due to their lack of will in using authority, advice and legal privilege to bring about a change.

Most of the teachers lack the scientific knowledge of the problem, and have only a casual idea about the defects of the present examination system. Many of them are conservatives in their views, and are traditionalists, lost in old ideas. So, they are not reluctant to make new experiments, nor are they prepared to recognize the works of others in this field. If ever there are some teachers who genuinely feel the inadequacy, they lack the will power to come out openly in the field, for fear of criticism and conflict. There should emerge a voluntary effort from the part of the teachers themselves, than the changes being imposed from the top. It is true that examinees too are not much in favour of examination reforms. Examination reforms are met with opposition from the student community, and any move to improve the examination system is looked upon as a plan of the authorities to impose more strictness and discipline.

Justification of Examination Reform Today

The examination in the form it exists today has weakened the educational process by giving wrong orientation to teachers and the students. It has to be thoroughly examined whether, examinations in the form they exist today, are conducive to the attainment of basic educational objectives and goals. Basically, the examination should let the teachers know whether the examination goals set by them have been achieved by the pupils. An ideal examination programme has to provide adequate feedback to students and teachers to improve text books, methods of teaching and materials. It should also enable the parents, and prospective employers to know the level of achievement, and the skills and competence attained by the students.

There is a general tendency among the teachers to argue that language practice and oral activity are not feasible in the typical large English classes. Large classes should not dishearten the teachers because one of the essentials of good methodology is adaptability to actual conditions. 'Group Method' is a practical way of dealing with large classes. The teacher might face certain difficulties in the proper handling of this method because of the lack of the cooperation

or indifference from the students. The best way to 'motivate' them to co-operate in the 'group method' is to introduce the system of internal assessment, i.e., allotting a certain percentage of marks for the participation in the group. A total restructuring of examination system appears to be essential for this. The 'group techniques' can be, to a large extent, made effective if the teacher makes a genuine and sincere attempt to organize them systematically.

Improving Language Examinations

For the improvement of examinations teachers and paper setters have to devote considerable attention to the quality of the paper: its content, validity, reliability, layout and printing, scoring scheme, and the time allowed for the completion of the paper. The interpretation and other uses of test results are also important factors, and this of course relates to validity. The role of examinations in the total process of education, and its effect on the teaching learning situation is its another important aspect. These three aspects are interrelated. Education and examination should relate to important and meaningful experiences. Unless there is a high degree of meaningfulness, which is closely related to face validity, a question paper has little value as an education test. Therefore, examination should be planned in such a manner that it enhances the naturalness of the language learning process. When examinations tend to become meaningless exercises, they destroy the interest and motivation of the students, which are very important. In seeking to render language examinations more supportive of the learning process, Jacob Tharu, suggests two aspects of meaningfulness that can be enhanced. The first aspect is the interpretability of the results of examinations in terms of levels or standards of language competence. For example, with regard to the U. G. examinations, a student may get 40 marks, another 55, and yet another 70. The one who has got 40 has 'passed' but "what are the things he can do and cannot do?" "And in what linguistically relevant ways?" "Are the three students different from each other?" Here, comes the difference between criterion based tests and norm based tests.

These tests, which are generally contrasted with norm based tests, are concerned with establishing whether or not a person has reached a certain pre-defined standard of ability and competence. In a norm referenced test, although the test content implies standards of some sort, the emphasis is on distinguishing among individuals, usually by reporting percentile or deviation scores. In our system, when we declare that Miss A is the top scorer in a particular examination we are comparing her with her peers, but not saying anything of consequence about her actual attainments and abilities. Our examination system has the trappings of a criterion based measure but not its substance. When it is said beforehand that 40 percent and 60 per cent are crucial transition

points, it is conjectured that getting or not getting such a mark is related to some tangible differences in levels of ability. In practice no such interpretation can be made, because the marks scored are highly unreliable (Tharu 59).

If integrative skills and communicative competence are made the major objectives in the language examination, the memorization of formal statements and rules, together with isolated grammatical points, which now occupy most of the students' time will have less force. "It is important that a student doing well in an examination feels that he has, in fact, demonstrated some substantive and meaningful language behaviour, not merely that he has managed with luck to cope with an 'obstacle course', the relevance of which he does not find convincing" (Basil 65).

Establishment of Examination Reform Cell

The immediate need before the introduction of any change is the establishment of an examination reform cell in the university, with separate personnel for science, humanities and language examinations. The cell should comprise devoted persons of merit who are capable of statistically analyzing various items, scaling of marks, estimating reliability and validity of examinations. Their task should be to prepare the necessary background for the introduction of changes, plan the different phases of changes, solve the problems that may ensue, and after the change has been accepted as a routine, pass it on to the examination branch of the university. The cell may also orient teachers to new techniques of testing and organize seminars and courses to help the teachers. Since the examining bodies are finding it difficult to cope with the responsibilities of the conduct of examinations effectively in the present atmosphere, Hundal suggests the decentralization of examinations: Decentralization can be in the form of accredited schools or autonomous schools. It may still be better if a number of schools are made autonomous as a group but the right of guidance and quality control remains with the external examining agency (98).

Proper guidelines to the examiners constitute an important requisite for the elimination of inconsistency in extreme forms. The examiners are rarely given instructions or hints regarding the maximum marks to be awarded for an essay. A board meeting of the examiners can be convened at which a properly guided valuation scheme is given after proper discussion. For example, the board of examiners can come to a consensus that 12/15 could be given to a perfect essay, if it is excellent in language, content, form, presentation, coherence, expression of ideas and organization. But often examiners value and assess the essays according to their own norms, and standards. This brings in a plethora of anxiety, concern and uncertainty both to the students and their

parents who have started to lose faith in the reliability of examination results. Some grave measure has to be immediately taken to orient paper-setters towards the improved methods of question framing, and to orient the examiners as to what weight age has to be allotted to the different aspects of the answer.

Paragraph questions, the next component in the U.G. papers, also give freedom to the student to select, organize and express his ideas. There are certain advantages in the use of paragraph questions in lieu of traditional essay questions. One is that a larger number of paragraph questions can be used to test the students in the specified time. This will ensure a wider course coverage. Secondly, marking of such questions is less subjective, which gives scope for reliability. Paper-setters' workshops may help in framing good paragraph and short answer questions so that they measure higher mental abilities and skills rather than simple recall and recognition need.

Very short questions, based on the whole text, or particular passages chosen from the text have great potential in testing students' achievements. But the introduction of such questions without adequate preparation may lead to grotesque disjuncture. The short-answer questions very often tend to be stereotyped, and profess the lack of professional skill on the part of papersetters. The examinations conducted by boards or universities should really mean achievement tests intended to measure students' response to occasions, demanding use of some knowledge, skill or understanding. A vigorous and integrated plan, including robust packages have to be worked on, for enhancing the examination methods if this goal has to be achieved. The syllabus of English, as one gets it, is nothing more than a list of books and poems. There is no attempt to state clearly what the objectives of instructions are and how far the examinations have to take note of them. A clear definition of objectives gives directions to learning and training experiences, and it is also integral to the very meaning and validity of the examination.

There has not been much serious effort on the part of many of the teachers in the colleges to develop any kind of integrated ELT strategy. Normally, the college teacher does not follow any 'method', he follows what he thinks is 'natural', and convenient. The custom is that the teaching of English at the college level has been based on a study of the prescribed literary text, lectures on these texts, and dictating the summary and the answers to the expected questions. This is a very casual and effortless way, whereas a methodologist has to consider a reliable taxonomy of objectives i.e., what precisely needs to be done, an analysis of the means by which these objectives can be achieved, and a plan for achieving these objectives. In the present context, the teacher teaches, disregarding the receptive capability of the learner, and it is the subject matter that is the focus of attention of the teacher, rather than the learner. It has been more or less forgotten that language is a form of

activity and one learns a language through activity, and what really produces learning is the provision for opportunities for the learner to practise what he is learning.

Conclusion

One of the factors that hinders the development of comprehension and communication skills in the Under-Graduate classes is that the process of teaching is not compatible with the learner needs, i.e., the ability to use language independently and efficiently in real life situations. If this is to be facilitated, the teacher's job has to be taken more challengingly. In this respect, the two important qualifications that a teacher should master are; (i) faith in his profession (ii) practical common sense. These qualifications will never give way to newer theories, but will stand the test of time, and become stronger with experience. The teacher's sound attitude towards his students, and his work will take him a long way.

The qualities of discrimination and adaptability that a teacher needs can be summed up in the words of Wilga Rivers:

Once you have decided these things, you start working on what techniques will help us achieve the goals of the students through the kind of material and course design that we have in mind. Now, learner factors are extremely important in all of this; in any learning situation we are not just dealing with blocks of wood that are moving around. And this is where the real skill of teachers is, in being able to enthuse and involve students so that they will learn. It is the student himself - or herself - who is going to do the learning. All you can do as a teacher is to attend to the condition of learning and try to channel the inner motivation of the students (**Teaching Foreign Language Skills** 5). Employing effective strategies for language learning is essential to enhance opportunities for successful language acquisition. They also facilitate the language learning process and make it easier and more enjoyable. Therefore, there is a dire need to expose the second language learners to the strategies and their functions to guarantee successful language learning experiences. Through problem solving activities, group work, creative role – playing, simulations, and providing scope for experimental learning, the lecturer can increase the students' sensitivity to the way their conversation works. The teacher should be aware of group dynamics, and should be able to help the students in choosing the role that they play, and communicate to them the reason why this method is used in teaching. Thus in spite of the limitation in the situation, a committed and motivated teacher, if he/ she has the Patience and perseverance, can transform the U.G. English teaching programme from the lecture – dominated system to the learner – dominating system.

References

Basil, Mason. *For Teachers of English*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1964. Print

Hundal, T.S. *Examinations-Some Future Perspectives*. New Delhi: Sterling Publishers Pvt. Ltd, 1975.Print.

Tharu, Jacob. *Examination Reforms: Directions, Research and Implication*. New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1975.Print

West, Michael. *The Teaching of English: A Guide to the New Method Series*. London: Longmans, 1983.Print.

Rivers, Wilga M. *A Practical Guide to the Teaching of English as a Second or Foreign Language*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1978.Print.