

**THE INDIAN ENGLISH LITERATURE TEACHING AT UG LEVEL – AN ELT VIEW\***  
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A B S T R A C T

Literature teaching to facilitate language teaching goals and processes in Indian UG-level ESL classrooms need to have a different orientation. Specific objectives once having been clearly outlined, it remains for the enterprising teacher to perfectly plan the teaching progress strategies. The whole literature text needs to be broken up into useful divisions to conform to the needs of the plan of progress which teaching in the language achievements already targeted in some purpose-oriented way envisions. The achievement levels of the classroom having been determined in some notional way worked out on the basis of initial interactions and informal tests with different achiever-levels(such as LPLs or average or high achievers), the teacher is at advantage to use literature texts in their tailor-made divisions for time allotments and time-bound coverage of matter such that language items earmarked could be properly and verifiably taught to the benefit of the various achiever groups in the ESL classrooms. The correction plan to keep the learner in the assured learning progress continuum has to move accordingly where learning consolidation makes use of literary texts and highlights language properties to help achieve the ESL teaching-learning goals as per syllabus-plans already formulated well in advance.

**Introduction**

This paper tries to read the existing Indian English Literature teaching scenario at collegiate UG teaching levels in India and the ELT perspective is a basis against which a suggestion has been put forth so as to bring about a healthy balance between literature-heavy leanings and extreme language-only orientation in our colleges. Two things have been considered to be very relevant in our proposal - language of a certain desirable standard to be visibly in use in interactive teaching mode, and literary appreciation skills to be further developed in the students to lead them to expected levels of sophistication whereby students see cultural values and real life situations with scope to use the available knowledge to answer problems of life in various complex situations. The Argument is offered on how for complimentary and not countering purposes both literature and language teaching projects are to be seen to be stepping-stones for proper literary analysis and thereby for interpretation of the Indian English Literature. Reading, responding to texts and intentions, explaining ideas in proper logical chain and sequence, scanning passages for substantiating stands and stances, summing up and again building upon important basic ideas and issues etc. are things that show up how airy castles in fairy lands could only be built and seen to be concretely existing once language in its ease and persuasive force grapples with life's demanding crudities and the reasoning mind expresses itself to plumb the depths at which the meaning of things lies.

Doing Indian English Literature in the language teaching way could be interesting and effective with UG classes where students are mature to the degree where story sense in its sharing the ground with pragmatics of a life in the world of flux shows them that in language only narratives occur and the life's complexities explain themselves only in the structured patterns of language behaviours of societies and people across the globe. That Indian Literature including English works by Indian hands needs to share a cultural understanding primarily and pertinently predominantly Indian is something that goes well with doing works of English/Western masters with

much of Western/European Christian thought and we would do well to give our students what verily they have to get as intimate and not intimidating in the explanation of our UG texts. Breaking up selected parts into planned smaller parts which could be shown as lying inter-linked in the final and overall integrated frame of things while following as well as upholding the author's artistic and aesthetic vision and many messages in compact language packages is something that the UG ESL teacher may find useful to do while raising and teaching to raise questions for better comprehension of reading matter in hand and for explanatory skill-based reproduction of matter for oral and written test purposes

to meet examination and evaluation requirements throughout the country. In sum, we see a distinct need to integrate language and literature teaching skills to benefit the students the most by removing their handicap in both the spheres.

#### **The Indian ESL Teaching Scene Using Literature - Problems and Expectations:**

ELT in Indian situation is a matter that throws difficult challenges for the teacher of English who in his classroom has to work for language learning of his students mostly while doing a lot many literary texts. Literary texts from culturally different locations, namely, British, American or other regions, offer special challenges while equipping the students with language sense and literary appreciation skills. The learner background at all stages of education offers special challenges because of large class conditions and heterogeneous groups of learners. Literature teaching on the new communicative teaching format at post-higher secondary level of ESL learning is a complex challenge when moving from conventional teacher-centred classroom poses attitudinal and practical difficulties on part of teachers.

B.N. Patanik evaluates the Indian scene saying: "... One can see that the two extremely important aims of language planning in our country to-day are (a) the enrichment of Hindi so that it can prove adequate to fulfil the task of functioning as the sole official language of the country, and (b) the rapid development of the regional languages so that these can be used in as many domains as possible. Consequently... except for a very small section of the people, Indians would tend to use English only in a very few situations in day-to-day life. This must be reflected in the programme of English language teaching in this country..." (Patanik: 1991) He holds: The teacher of English in India is in a state of indecision on the issue of the variety of English which should acquire the status of the educational model. ... The decision to advise the learner against the use of colloquial forms can be justified on the ground that since English in India is to be used in mostly formal and semi-formal situations, the General English courses intended to teach language to all learners must be designed in such a way as to teach formal and semi-formal styles. "(ibid.)

Gambhir (1991) in this connection observes: "...The most important thing for second language learners is to be able to acquire or assimilate rules as to what different structures may mean in different social situations in a given language...", and again: "...The format of the classroom and teaching materials has to be as far as possible close to natural socio-linguistic situations that a person is likely to encounter in the target society. The classroom should be less of formal academic centre where the teacher is explaining how a language works and students are taking notes; or, a teacher is making students drill key structures of a language. A language classroom should emphasize activities which take place in real life communication rather than pattern rehearsal..."

In continuation of the above, it is worthwhile to note that in the wake of the communicative teaching strategies, the teacher of English has to take note of how production skills have assumed the highest significance now. Gumperz (1982) and Green (1989) have laid emphasis on pronunciation, grammar and discourse patterns' and Tam (1997) has stressed the importance of 'repetition' in oral productions. Wilkins (1997) has underlined the role of 'grammar' and 'vocabulary' without which meaningful communication is impossible. Talagaki (1997) has suggested to make use of the promises held forth by 'brain-storming, skits and

interviews' for communicative purposes. Rivers and Temperley (1978) have seen the usefulness of writing and speaking integration for reinforcement and mutual enrichment suggesting thereby also the importance of the listening and reading skills in the communication-oriented success. Sheppard (1992) and Leiki (1992) recognize the value of 'content feedback' in writing alongside 'a limited amount of grammar, punctuation and spelling feedback' for effective writing. Ellis (1994) holds that 'motivation' is an important factor in student development programmes and in projects meant to ensure learning. Green (1993) emphasizes on the need for appropriate teacher work in terms of planning for sustaining motivation at the pre-teaching, while-teaching and post-teaching phases.

Green (1993) also draws attention to the fact that the teacher must recognise that in "large teacher-centred classes, students have little opportunity to deliver enough output to be judged fairly or receive constructive feedback to enhance feelings of security and success." Indian classrooms being especially 'large teacher centred' ones the need is to help/support the emotional state of the learners that is so vital to the language learning situations. Mishra and Mahapatra (2001) observe: "...the teacher's task consist pre-eminently in strengthening the individual students' resolution to progress on the basis of their successful learning experiences which the teacher necessarily critically most sensibly makes use of to stress the fact that confidence-level of the participating students is boosted and contribution-level later on in terms of involvement and dedicated hard work is remarkably upgraded on every subsequent teacher-student evaluation-based interaction. Here again, the teacher creates and fosters a non-threatening learning-ensuring atmosphere using his understanding of the students' background - cultural, socio-economic and the like - which play important role in determining learning success and the rate and pace of its consolidation." Baskurmen (1994) requires 'a more natural type of interaction in the class-room' with a greater role for the students 'in controlling the content and the flow of exchange'. Keeping in view the above observations, it is quite reasonable to expect that a clear idea as to what should be the nature of the teacher responsibility to make the Indian English second language teaching classroom desirably productive. The mission-mode approach, the inspired mindset to do good to the learners and to the society as a whole, is necessary if the ESL teaching project has to be made into a success.

The Indian UG ESL classroom with a literature-based, and literature-biased, syllabus at both compulsory and Honours/major teaching courses is a complex forum where formality of the systemic discipline makes learning of English as a language principally meant for use in real life situations difficult. To understand this difficulty experienced by the learner(s), it is necessary to ask (a) if English language –as language warranted to be taught - is difficult, (b) if literature given in English language – for course contents at given stages - is difficult, or (c) if teaching of literature in English in Indian UG classes makes understanding of things - literary/aesthetic-artistic - difficult. Each of the three questions is important and seeks to be answered if we intend to bring to our English literature teaching classes some very definite and verifiable learning outcome. The ESL teacher training courses need to find out if the answer to each of the above questions individually or together does not contain the key to do away with the difficulty of the classroom English literature teaching at UG level. The ESL teacher doing literature has to ask if learning suffers due to students' improper and unwelcoming attitude to English as a teaching subject, if literature offered in Indian languages and that in English pose difference in experience and response - with resistance to English language affecting appreciation of literature offered in English, and if therein the method of presenting literature using English language makes things difficult. In all the cases, the perceptive teacher realises what is urgently warranted to be done in the situation with the compulsion for him being to make students learn English as a language which they could very effectively use in all practical situations of life and to make them appreciate literature on offer as really related to practical situations that life faces.

The general poor response of students in literature classes in English is indicative of the fact that a good deal needs to be done to make classes interesting, involving and interactive. When literatures is offered, the teacher has to make the book (textual stuff prescribed) practically as many times conveniently broken up into inter-linkable parts as possible. These parts are to be further appropriately planned to be reproduced on a revision teaching format to ensure that comprehension questions are asked, vocabulary exercises for synonyms, antonyms and then right words in right situations and expressions, idiomatic expression etc. are given, composition exercises based on the selected paragraphs or the ideas with which the classes have been conversant are assigned and work produced by students where they show evidence of what they have learnt, what sequence of events on a logical chain they have been able to give to the events, and what organisational pattern in terms of cohesion and coherence they have been able to use is corrected to put matters in proper perspective – remedial lessons as may be found useful could be conducted to enable less successful students to come up when proper encouragement in continuous doses is provided to them both individually and, when groups work, in suitable uniformly progressing compatible groups.

The Indian ESL classrooms with adequate concentration on language development through literature ideally stand to gain if the texts from the Indian English literature selected be offered at the UG level with emerging Indians realities in mind and to hold the attention and interest of the youth to properly make them responsible participants in the task of national re-construction. The role and responsibility of the English teaching syllabus has to be arranging for the students their regular bread after the college education and making them respond to the challenges the country and the world are poised to face due to unforeseen changes that keep on fast invading the arena of our life and experiences. What Indian English literature classes offered on the language teaching focus would then have to do may include some of the following:

1. Literature in the Indian sense of '*sahitya*' has to be offered to show to the students that society-and-individual linkage on a responsible basis of sympathy and concern is of a vital significance if a world based on the ideal of *vasudhaiva kutumbakam* (one world-one family) and on the cherished eternal values of nonviolence, love, co-operation and mutual respect is to be realised in future;
2. Literature is to be offered under properly planned divisions of the syllabus into units and sub-units to ensure conscious learning of language structures, and an insight into how the same could be used for producing connected compositions in oral and written discourses;
3. Testing, evaluation and remedial teaching have to be done to have a proper assessment of learners' understanding of the Indian situation, the global situation, the emerging order of realities, and the problem-solving demands on the language learning for handling the questions of human rights and equality.

Towards building up a language-development-oriented literature teaching in Indian ESL teaching situation consistent careful efforts need to be made where the classroom teaching should equip the young college-going students in India with a growing sense of patriotism that would be open to embrace and appreciate whatever best could be there in the international experience. Syllabus, examination, evaluation – every aspect of ELT accordingly would have to be appropriately re-cast to face the challenges of globalisation while in every way making the best use of the opportunities created by globalisation drives.

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