



## Challenges of Teaching and Learning English at Undergraduate Level: A Case Study

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**ABSTRACT:** This paper is an attempt to investigate the challenges or problems regarding teaching and learning English as a compulsory subject at the undergraduate level of Panjab University Constituent College Dharamkot (PUCCD). The study discusses both the perspective of teachers and learners using case study model. Classroom observation, questionnaire, and textbook analysis are used as methodology. The triangulation of data results out the challenges of teaching and learning English language which is faced by both the students and teachers in this college and points out some basic solutions regarding that.

**KEYWORDS:** Challenges, English, Learning, Teaching, Undergraduate level.

### INTRODUCTION

Panjab University established in 1882. It has six constituent colleges located at different places. Panjab University Constituent College, Dharamkot has been established as one of the degree colleges, an initiative of University Grant Commission (UGC), Government of Punjab and Panjab University, Chandigarh to provide education at doorstep of residents of educationally backward district of the state. The college was inaugurated in 2016 and running B.A., B.Com. and PGDCA courses. The main objective of this college is to impart education to the students of rural areas as there are around 100 villages adjacent to this college [1].

Educational system meant for to train its pupils to be active in every sphere of society and for this active participation, there is a need to develop all four skills of English so that they can be able to communicate in broader platforms. English is not only regarded as second language to be learnt, but as an important qualification that all should obtain because without proficiency of English it is impossible to be an active participant of global life [2 & 3].

The importance of English is to express and convey our thoughts as English has become not just a library language but a language of opportunities. English is considered as the second largest native language in the world and in 70 countries it is treated as an official language. In more than 100 countries, English is the main foreign language taught in schools and colleges [4]. It completely controls the international business world, politics and cultures more than any other language in the world [5]. It is English language that provides a man good opportunities and develops him/her at interpersonal and societal level. But, teaching and learning English is a challenging task as it is taught and learned as second language in many developing countries. Because of the influence of mother tongue most of us facing difficulty in pronunciation, accent and understanding English [6 & 7].

PUCCD offers compulsory English to B.A. students and English and Business Communication Skills programme to B.Com. first year. As the name of the programme stated, 'compulsory English' is for 50 marks and 100 marks is for 'English and Business Communication Skills'. Compulsory English programme of all three years of B.A. course consists with literature extract, grammar and writing. In English and Business Communication programme of B.Com. 1<sup>st</sup> year, there are some literary pieces, writing skills and some concepts of business communication in the syllabus.

### OBJECTIVES

1. To locate and discuss the challenges/problems regarding teaching and learning compulsory English at PUCCD.
2. To provide practical solutions.

### METHODOLOGY

1. Observation Checklist
2. Questionnaire
3. Textbook analysis



## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This study discusses both the perspective of teachers and learners using case study model. Classroom observation, questionnaire, and textbook analysis are used as methodology. The triangulation of data results out the challenges of teaching and learning English language.

### I. Challenges Faced by the Teachers

The teachers of English of this college face various challenges in teaching English. The following are briefly discussed.

**Large Class:** In this college, in B.A. first year, there are approximately 260 students which are divided into two sections for compulsory English. In second year, there are around 135 students which are divided into two sections also. There are 84 students in B.A. third year. In B. Com. 38 students are there. Therefore it is difficult to address for a teacher to a class which comprising a large number of students and facilitate language production.

**Class Time Duration:** The time duration i.e. 45 minutes is allotted for a class that is not enough for teaching English and make the students learnt the language in a proper way.

**Syllabus and Methodology:** Syllabus of B.A. (1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> year) and B.Com. (1<sup>st</sup> year) mainly focuses on English literature. There is lesser importance on language learning. In the textbooks they only have some prose, poems, essays, short stories and plays which are part of literature and in language development section they only have few exercises on grammar and writing. There is no focus or any activity on listening and speaking skills. The syllabus does not fulfill the contemporary needs of the students. It is not career oriented which is the current need of the time.

As the students are all come from local or nearby villages, they want to understand the textbook in their mother tongue. The course designer and syllabus setters did not care the main aim of teaching English to these rural students. Moreover the syllabus is not updated for a long time.

**Student's Background:** Students who are coming to this college are commonly from local villages and rural areas and mostly they have background of schedule caste. Their educational background is very poor as well as they have very poor enthusiasm to read literature. They just want to pass the examination and get the degree of graduation.

**Lost in Translation:** In India, English is being studying or learning through translation. The learners of English feel easy to understand English in their mother tongue. Likewise, the students of this college whose mother tongue is Punjabi they want to understand the lesson of the textbook either in Punjabi or in Hindi. Therefore, the teacher is bound to translate the text either in Hindi or Punjabi to make the students understand. If the teacher continues to deliver lecture in English it will go all in vain and thus the whole English language effected by translation.

### II. Challenges Faced by the Students

As the teachers are facing some difficulties in teaching students in the classroom, the students are having some too:

**Studying in a Large Class:** Studying in a very large group of students in a classroom is hurdle to the students. Some of the students who have enthusiasm to learn English language or have interest in studying it, they cannot able to concentrate or focus on the lesson because of the chaos of the large number of students in one classroom.

**Class Time Duration:** The time duration for a class is 45 minutes and it is not enough for the students to understand the lesson or text.

**Syllabus Related Issues:** The students are studying here general English as it is compulsion for all. The content of the textbooks seems difficult to them as the prose and poems are extracts from literature and vocabulary of the textbook is quite difficult for them.

### III. Textbook Analysis

The textbooks of compulsory English of B.A. (1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> year) and B.Com. (1<sup>st</sup> year) are prescribed by Panjab University, Chandigarh. The analysis of the text materials is done to provide insights about the quality of the course program, its planning and organisation. It is also for identifying the relevance in different teaching contents of the textbook. The key findings of textbook analysis are:

- i. The prescribed textbook focuses only on reading skills of English language, there is very few exercises on grammar and writing.
- ii. It does not deal with listening and speaking skills.
- iii. In reading section, few questions are given which follow both the strategy of reading skills i.e. skimming and scanning.



- iv. There are very few items of writing skills and grammar.
- v. Vocabulary is quite difficult of the lessons as far as these students are concerned.
- vi. The syllabus and textbook which recommended for B.Com. (1<sup>st</sup> year) only focuses on literature which consists of some essays and plays.
- vii. In Business Communication part they have some concepts on business communication and it focuses on some writing skills also. The tasks on speaking skill included interview, group discussion but there is no prescribed particular tasks on listening skills. They do not have exercises on grammar and vocabulary also.

## Solutions

This paper suggests some solutions to these above mentioned challenges. The implementation of these solutions is likely to have a positive bearing on the improvement of the curriculum of English language at this college.

### 1. Redesigning the Syllabus

The syllabus designer or expert committee of Panjab University for undergraduate level must take some steps to redesign the syllabus based on the appropriate need of these rural learners. This would cover an inclusive outlook for English language development based on specific learning outcomes.

### 2. Functional Skills

The learners must be involved in some activities on functional skills which should be prescribed/given in the syllabus of English which may help the learners to meet the daily needs of English language and the employment requirement, specially the learners of B. Com. must learn all the four skills of English language.

### 3. Resources and Materials

The digital revolution can encourage and develop the English language of the learners. Audio-visual aids, Information and Communication Technology (ICT), newspaper and books in the library which may help to get the desired goal.

### 4. Classroom Activities

As the textbooks are all literature centric, the teacher can ask them to solve the exercises given at the end of the chapters after finishing the lesson. A typical exercise consists of questions in the area of vocabulary, grammar and comprehension. It will lead to the development of critical thinking of the learners.

## CONCLUSION

The teachers and students of English in this college work under difficult constraints and challenges. They deal with different sets of challenges regarding English language. The results indicated that large class, students' background, limited class-time duration, textbooks, syllabus and methodology all played a part in the complexity of teaching and learning English. And, to give solutions to these challenges brings a set of questions: "can we dream of the effective implication of communicative syllabus in such overcrowded classes? How can we expect the teacher to conduct group discussion, and carry out role playing by dividing such large classes in a limited 45 minutes? And what about the evaluation method?" [8]

With all these questions it becomes necessary that the English course demands an urgent rethinking. This literature centric course is obsolete and doesn't cater to the needs of these rural and low self-esteeming students at all. The syllabus should be redesigned to incorporate the functional elements in it to suit the present day requirements of vocational, technical and professional manpower. As presently, the Compulsory English course has a constitutional position in the pedagogy, the syllabus designers and expertise should look into the contemporary needs and requirements of learning English language and treat it as much more than to get the passing marks [9].

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