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FROM CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK TO TESTING PRACTICES: A CRITICAL EVALUATION OF FOUNDATION COURSES IN ENGLISH AT UG LEVEL UNDER UGC'S CHOICE BASED CREDIT SYSTEM

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INTRODUCTION

It would not be an exaggeration to state that communication across boundaries without English language would not be possible. Considering English as a ‘living language’, it continues to spread its roots globally, in different varieties and through different dialects. English, as a language, continues to develop its form and structure. Thus, the language incorporated itself as the *Lingua Franca* with around four-hundred native speakers of English and an estimated two billion people who speak or understand English as a second or foreign language (non-native speakers).

Of course, after independence, there was a strong reaction against using English as a language in academics and as an official language. However, being a ‘link language’, it was soon recognized by the people of the country that they could not do away with the language as it was the only source for them to connect with the outside world. “What Sanskrit did an Indian during her long and silent centuries in the past, what Latin did in Europe though divided into many states and nationalities, English is doing now in India, but it is the language that unites all different regions of India into one and India with herself, with the rest of the world. It serves as the continuous vehicle that brings into its life the best from all parts of the civilized world”, (Rajagopalachari, 1962).

“Learning English in India, by Indian learners, really does not involve taking on a new culture”, Kachru (1976). The “Indianization” of English has to do a very little with British cultural and social traits. Thus, gradually, English was accepted in Education System in India as a ‘Library Language’ and with the introduction of ‘Three-Language-Formula’ (1968), English

became one of the official languages of the country. The need for English as a language has amplified, thus give rise to many educational institutions to facilitate English as a medium of instruction in their systems.

When Gujarat, as a separate state, came into existence in 1960, the idea to introduce English in education was rejected. Thinkers like Mahatma Gandhi, Morarji Desai and Manubhai Pancholi laid emphasis on teaching and learning in mother tongue rather than in English. Karthik Venkatesh in the article “Mahatma Gandhi and Language Games” states, “English, in his (Mahatma Gandhi) view, could function as the language of international communication but was a blot on the Indian character, to the extent that later in life he tersely stated in one of his writings that “it is we, the English-knowing Indians, that have enslaved India”.” This resulted into the late introduction of English education in Gujarat as compared to other states in India.

In the last several years, the office of the Commissioner of Higher Education, Government of Gujarat has initiated three different programmes to improve the expertise of English language among the students of Gujarat, namely DELL (Digital English Language Laboratory), SCOPE (The Society for Creation of Opportunity through Proficiency in English) and KMPF (Knowledge Management Programme for Faculty). DELL is an English Language Laboratory which helps to improve not only grammar and vocabulary but also lays emphasis on professional skills and soft skills. SCOPE, which was established in 2007, in Gujarat, to inculcate competencies in English language in order to enhance the employability of the learners.

KMPF is a program for teachers to develop the knowledge in computer and internet for research and teaching.

“To serve socially, if not physically, skill in more than one language is a necessity”, (Gardner, 1985). One cannot ignore the fact that learners of English in India come from heterogeneous backgrounds differentiated by language, education, medium of instruction and examination, socio-economic categories as well. The stratification of class, financial bearings, exposure to education are some of the determinants that contribute to the cause and need of learning English. To a certain extent these factors can also be the impediments in the journey of learning English despite being aware that English is the language of opportunity. The vicious cycle governed by these factors creates a divide- of haves and have nots which gets reflected in the heterogeneous classrooms. Thus, a plausibly perfect ‘blueprint’ of the curriculum addressing the practical and ground realities seems to be a distant thought. .

The over emphasis on teaching of grammar and writing skills while developing the syllabus of ‘English Language Skills’ leading to rote learning further creates a psychological block and aversion to speaking of English, believing that learning of grammar is synonymous to learning of English, and in this process the two primary skills listening and Speaking that contribute the most in acquiring any language get neglected. The undergraduate students of various faculties are not able to communicate in English very effectively. The curriculum used at the Undergraduate Level in Foundation Courses in English in the universities of India as well as the low performance of the students in English has been a major subject of concern. It is observed that

the curriculum is heavily loaded towards testing memory rather than equipping the learners with effective communication skills.

Government of Gujarat has been taking constructive steps addressing the changing dynamics of employability in the globalized market based economy and bridging the industry-academia divide when it comes to enhancement of language and communication skills among the youth of Gujarat. Gujarat continues to give prominent place to English in the curricula of the undergraduate courses as a ‘compulsory’ subject because it serves as a library language. The same was recommended by the Kothari Commission in 1968.

Not only in Gujarat but also in many states of India the undergraduate students of various faculties are not able to communicate in English very effectively. The curriculum used at the Undergraduate Level in Foundation Courses in English in the universities of Gujarat as well as the low performance of the students in Foundation Courses in English has been a major subject of concern. Most of the Foundation Courses in English aim at helping students to develop their “communication skills which is required to articulate thoughts and ideas clearly/effectively using oral and written communication skills and to present information and explanations in a well-structures and logical manner” (Learning Outcomes Based Curriculum Framework, 2018).

Since the implementation of Choice Based Credit System, which ultimately marked as the major change, initiated by the University Grants Commission (UGC) in the whole history of Higher Education in India, there is a need of a rock-hard research in this area.

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

It is needless to say that accurate developed communication skills are requisite for the job market today. With the spread of globalization and constant enhancement of international contacts in various fields such as commerce, education, science, etc. in India, a great deal of attention is being paid to redesign and restructure the curriculum framework that can prepare the learners for “accurate developed communication skills” (LOCF, 2018).

Although, it is felt that the Foundation or the Compulsory Courses in English for students at the undergraduate levels (B.A., B.Com. and B.Sc.) do not bring the required proficiency and competency in the students, in all areas of the language at the end of their graduation. It is observed that though students have the knowledge of their specialized fields at the completion of their graduation, they lack to perform well as they are not proficient enough in communication skills in English.

Sheba R. Dayal says, “It is found that many students across disciplines are not very good at communication and generally lack the proficiency they need to meet the growing demands of the present-day workplace competencies. Students at the completion of their graduation end up having excellent technical skills, however, lacking in effective communication.” (Dayal, 2005).

Jack C. Richards in “Curriculum Approaches in Language Teaching: Forward, Central and Backward Design” (2013) describes the dimensions of the curriculum. They are input, syllabus, process, methodology, output and learning outcomes. Designing a curriculum starts with ‘input’ as what contents learners are going to learn and “syllabus are made” (Richards

2013:7). ‘Methodology’ is stage where the syllabus is put in use for teaching and learning processes which lead to outcomes or we can say the ‘learning outcomes’.

Z.A. Jafre and Rany Sam in their research work on “Factors Causes Students Low English Language Learning” in *English in Education* (2013) discuss some factors that are may responsible for low performance of the students while learning English and communicating in English such as English teachers are “not well-trained” (Jafre, 2013)., teachers cannot perform well to attract the interest of students. Along with this, “...students lack English foundation background. Students lack confidence to use English because they are afraid of mistakes and shy feeling. The curriculum is inappropriate for helping students to improve their English proficiency. Last but not least, English language is difficult to learn due to students are not well-motivated, encouraged and gained learning strategy. Furthermore, students do not practice speaking English with English native speakers...” (Jafre, 2013). Thus, in this research study, the researcher will examine whether the above mentioned factors are true or not.

TERMINOLOGY USED IN THE RESEARCH TITLE

This sub-section particularly centers on the brief account of key words that are mentioned in the Ph.D. thesis title. They are ‘Curriculum Framework’, ‘Testing Practices’, ‘Foundation courses in English’ and ‘Choice Based Credit System’. Curriculum is “a programme of study at educational institutions, usually consisting of a group of related subjects,” (McArthur, 1992: 275). It is a set of courses offered in a particular field of study that enable learners to acquire specific skills and knowledge. ‘Curriculum Framework’ is a systematic plan which summarizes the contents to be learned by the students. It clarifies what a learner should know. Syllabus is a part of curriculum, it is “a description of the contents of a course of instruction and the order in which they are to be taught,” (Jack C. Richards, John Platt and Heidi Platt, 1991: 90). It is perceived to be a set of course offered to the learners to acquire specific knowledge. It plays an important role in developing students’ language skills emphasizing the phrase, “Well planned is half done”. Curriculum design offers a ‘blueprint’ to teachers as well as students offering objectives, implementation plan and the possible outcomes by the end of a specific course.

It has been also observed that developing the curriculum in English is a priority in education in Gujarat. The significance of curriculum framework and syllabus designing is ascertained in catering to the needs of the learners and identifying the possible learning outcomes, then planning of instructions and learning process. However, “syllabi are too often simply handed to faculty members to teach, with little room for any creativity or innovation in presentation, content, assignments, or assessment.” (NEP, 2019: 256). Thus,

the syllabus often does not match the curriculum or are not based on LOCF. The objectives are not clearly specified. If specified, then the question arises here is, whether they are designed as per the guidelines of UGC model curriculum. Thus, the research analyses teachers' perceptions of curriculum framework in Foundation Courses English at the undergraduate level in the universities of Gujarat and how the curriculum is implemented in classroom. After syllabus, the next focus of the researcher will be on 'teaching and testing practices'. As stated earlier what A. Rahman says regarding teaching methods, the researcher will focus on how do the university teachers implement the syllabi given to them, in classroom. With the implementation of CBCS in Higher Education Institutions, there is a shift in focus from teacher-centric to student-centric education, yet students lack proficiency in communication skills. Learning Outcomes-Based Approach requires a shift from passive learning to active learning (from teacher-centric to learner-centric). "Teaching methods, guided by such framework may include: lectures supported by group tutorial work, field-based learning, the use of prescribed textbooks and e-learning resources and other self-study materials, etc."(LOCF, 2018: 07)

"Communication skills - both verbal and written - have become increasingly important in the modern world. People spend much of their daily lives communicating messages, requests, questions, opinions, feedback, anecdotes, and more - both in person and in written or digital form. Numerous surveys of employers around the world reveal that verbal communication skills are ranked first among potential job candidate's "must-have" skills and qualities. The ability to speak, listen, question, discuss, and write with clarity

and conciseness – and with confidence, eloquence, friendliness, and open-mindedness - is considered a truly essential skill for all managers and leaders.” (National Education Policy, 2019: 90)

‘Foundation Courses in English’ / ‘Foundation English’ / ‘Compulsory English’ / ‘Communicative English’ / ‘Communication Skills in English’ / ‘English Language Skills’ / ‘English for Specific Purposes’ are specially meant for the development of the four skills among the students viz., Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing (LSRW). Listening and Speaking Skills can be acquired directly through the environment or the surroundings where the people communicate in English. Reading and Writing is learned through formal education. However, the language is usually taught in formal educational set up, resulting to lack in confidence in students to perform well.

Choice Based Credit System (CBCS) in Higher Education aims at overall development of the students providing them to choose the courses of their own choice from the given or prescribed subjects. The courses in a programme are divided into three kinds: Core course i.e. the main subject and a compulsory requirement of a programme; Elective course is a complementary course which is intended to enrich the study of core subjects, allowing students to specialize in one or more branches of the subject area; and last, Foundation Courses which are of two kinds: Elective Foundation which focuses on Value Education and Compulsory Foundation i.e. English (on which the researcher focuses on in this research study).

University Grant Commission (UGC) under Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD), Government of India has already submitted the final draft under “Quality Improvement Programme, 2018” aim at the

development of “Learning Outcomes based Curriculum Framework (LOCF)” at UG and PG Levels. “The Quality Mandate of UGC has given thrust on Curriculum Reforms on Learning Outcomes based approach with an aim to equip the students with knowledge, skill, values and attitude.” (LOCF, 2018). The learning outcomes are designed to help students understand the objectives of the course provided to them. It is a framework based on the expected learning outcomes (such as disciplinary knowledge, communication skills, critical thinking, problem solving, analytical reasoning, research related skills, etc.) that are expected to be attained by the students at the completion of their graduation. “The fundamental premise of LOCF is to specify what graduates completing a particular program of study are expected to know, understand and to be able to do at the end of their programme of study. This approach of learning makes the student an active learner; the teacher a good facilitator and together they lay the foundation for lifelong learning” (QIP, 2018). Along with this, from time to time improvement in the Higher Education System in India, the UGC has formulated various regulations and guidelines to bring the desired uniformity in grading system.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- I To understand the skills requirements and the expectations of the corporate world from the graduate students with respect to English Language Skills.
- II To examine the present curriculum framework recommended by UGC.
- III To examine whether the syllabi Foundation Courses in English at UG Level of the state universities of Gujarat are designed as per the guidelines of UGC?
- IV To look at the Knowledge Delivery Methods recommended by UGC to achieve focused process based learning and holistic development among the UG Level students.
- V To look into the use of significant assessment tools recommended by the UGC for evaluating the students.
- VI To examine whether the structure of the question papers of state universities of Gujarat are reliable.

RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

- I Students lack the proficiency they require to meet the expectations of the present-day workplace competencies.
- II English teachers are unaware about the present curriculum framework designed by the UGC?
- III The syllabus Foundation Courses in English is not designed as per the guidelines of UGC model curriculum and the “Learning-Outcomes Based Curriculum Framework”.
- IV Knowledge Delivery Methods used by the teachers of the universities help to increase the knowledge of the students in a specialized field, but do not develop accurate communication skills.
- V The structure of question paper is heavily loaded on testing the memory and does not give space for communication skills.
- VI The use of the same format of the question papers and the structure of the question papers has led to set a particular restricted pattern that can be guessed easily by the students, putting a big question mark on their reliability.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- I What are the factors that affect language proficiency? What are the graduates attributes that students should attain by the end of the course?
- II Are the teachers of English aware about the term ‘Learning Outcomes’?
- III Are the syllabi of Foundation Courses in English in the universities of Gujarat designed as per the guidelines of UGC?
- IV Which Knowledge Delivery Methods are used by the teachers? How accurate these methods are to attain the learning outcomes of the course?
- V Does the format of question paper test the proficiency of students’ communication skills?
- VI Is the ‘same format’ of question papers over the past years reliable and test students’ knowledge?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research methodology traces the steps taken by the researcher while carrying out the research. The research study includes a checklist-cum-questionnaire and face-to-face interviews for collecting relevant data. The manner of data collection is Quasi – Experimental and the analysis of the collected data is qualitative, quantitative and interpretative. Samples are taken from the teachers of the state universities of Gujarat who teach in the undergraduate courses in Arts, Commerce, and Science. The variables include: (a) the urban and rural segments and (b) low and high performance of institutions (based on NAAC Accreditation and Govt. of Gujarat's AAA).

Following is the list of state universities in Gujarat which provide undergraduate courses in Arts, Commerce and Science:

01. Bhakta Kavi Narsinh Mehta University, Bilkha Road, Junagadh.
02. Gujarat University, Ahmedabad.
03. Hemchandracharya North Gujarat University, Patan.
04. Krantiguru Shyamji Krishna Verma Kachchh University, Bhuj-Kachchh.
05. Krishnakumarsinhji Bhavnagar University, Bhavnagar.
06. Sardar Patel University, Vallabh Vidyanagar, Anand.
07. Saurashtra University, Rajkot.
08. Shree Govind Guru University, Godhra
09. The Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda, Vadodara.
10. Veer Narmad South Gujarat University, Surat.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Limitations are those conditions beyond the control of the researcher that may place restrictions on the conclusions of the study and their application to other situations. The current study has the following limitations:

The primary limitation of the study is that it focuses on the curriculum in Foundation English in the state of Gujarat only; hence it does not include and does not shed a light on the curriculum in Foundation English in the other states of India. Though, the researcher firmly believes that testing practices in other states of India is almost similar.

The present research work will cover most of the state universities of Gujarat which offers undergraduate courses in Arts, Commerce and Science. Hence, it will not be able to cover the central university, state-private and deemed universities of Gujarat. Also, it will not be able to cover all the universities of Gujarat.

The scope of the study is limited to interviewing and the use of questionnaires as a main source of data collection instrument however there is fear that some teachers may not tend to fill in questionnaires cooperatively. Thus, the researcher will go through each questionnaire minutely and if needed, may be decide not to consider some of them.

SCHEME OF CHAPTERIZATION

The following tentative chapters will be the part of my research work:

- 1 – Introduction
- 2 – UGC Initiatives on the Semester System
- 3 – Review of Related Literature
- 4 – Research Methodology
- 5 – Analysis and Evaluation
- 6 – Conclusion

Chapter-1 ‘Introduction’ begins with the evolution of English as a Language and the development of English in Higher Education in India. The chapter focuses on the brief history of English as a global language, emergence of the English language in India and its education system. This chapter also elaborates the current scenario of English as a language in the state of Gujarat. The chapter, then introduces the formulation of the research idea, a statement of problem, a brief explanation on the terminology used in the title. Along with the brief description of the idea, it also includes research objectives, hypothesis and questions, research design, limitations of the study and a list of the selected State Universities of Gujarat for the research.

Chapter-2 ‘UGC Initiatives on the Semester System’ unearths the development of the ‘Semester System’ from the beginning till the ‘Learning Outcomes based Curriculum Framework’ in the Higher Education in India. The present chapter mainly focuses on the elaboration of adopting the Choice Based Credit System and Learning Outcomes based Curriculum Framework. It further explains the theoretical support for the research undertaken.

In continuation with the previous chapter, ‘Review of Related Literature’, Chapter-3 will present a literature review relating to the focus of the study, introducing and discussing key concepts that help to inform the study. It also aims to provide a framework for understanding curriculum reforms in the context of the undergraduate courses in the universities of Gujarat along with the background information of CBCS under UGC and Learning-Outcomes Based Curriculum Framework. Around six theses, eighteen research papers and articles and fourteen UGC official documents are taken up for the review and for to understand the research gaps.

Chapters-4 is a detailed account of the ‘Research Methodology’ of the proposed study, its design, a detailed explanation of the research context, along with a description of the research methods and data collection. The research study includes a checklist-cum-questionnaire and face-to-face interviews for collecting relevant data. The manner of data collection is Quasi – Experimental and the analysis of the collected data is qualitative, quantitative and interpretative. Around 300 samples are taken from the teachers of the state universities of Gujarat who teach in the undergraduate courses in Arts, Commerce, and Science. The research administrated the Checklist-cum-Questionnaire (34 items) to a randomly selected group of teachers who teach at UG Level across the state universities of Gujarat.

Chapter-5, further elaborates the ‘Analysis and Evaluation’ report of the findings of the study from interviews and checklist-cum-questionnaires. The present chapter focuses on the analysis of the hypotheses. It further opens up the detailed evaluation from the checklist-cum-questionnaire via graphs, charts and tables with the logical and theoretical explanations of the

qualitative questions from the checklist-cum-questionnaire on the base of adopting semester system into the curriculum and how the recommended syllabi for the Foundation Courses in English by the UGC is implemented at UG Levels of the state universities of Gujarat.

Chapter-6 will draw ‘Conclusions’ based on the data analysis and evaluation. The conclusions are drawn from the findings related to the hypotheses presented earlier. This chapter will also provide a summary of the main findings and offers implications, recommendations and suggestions for further research scope.

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