CHAPTER – II

Functional English: The Need of the Time

I. Curriculum and Prescribed English Syllabi for Professional courses

II. Authentic Teaching Materials

III. Practical Approach

IV. Exploring Literary Text for ELT
The Rajeev Gandhi Technical University offers English (Communication skills) for the first year engineering (B.E/B.Tech.) students in one semester. The focus is on basics of technical communication; speaking, reading and writing. The prescribed syllabus divided in five units deals with linguistics techniques, English phonetic symbols, modern usages of language; process, channels and barriers of communication, strategies to overcome these barriers, oral presentation and audition communication; verbal and non-verbal communication. Writing tasks comprise reports, letters, notice, memorandum, reminder, complaint, documentation, calling/sending quotations and preparation of manuals. Slogan writing, comment, advertising, speech writing, precise writing, noting and drafting is also included to promote creative writing skills of the learners. Technical writing tasks comprise survey reports, laboratory report, project, report of trouble so forth. Language laboratory sessions incorporate – phonetic symbols, pronunciation, listening and speaking skills, oral presentation skills and conversation (telephonic, face to face and formal-informal situation).

Bachelor of Business Administration (BBA) first year students study English under the head ‘Business Communication’. The main objective of the course is to help students acquire the basics of interpersonal communication and public speaking so as to develop their communication skills. The course contents basically cover one of the language skills that is writing. Effective listening and speaking skills have been given little attention whereas reading skills are almost neglected. Written communication deals with the need, principles and
structure of effective written communication, Business letters, CV preparation, Job application, testimonials, reference letters, reports, technical reports, proposals, memoranda, agenda and minutes. Unit 2 incorporates the strategies to develop effective listening skills. Public speaking is the only topic that covers speaking skills.

The students pursuing the BCA (Bachelor of Computer Application) degree study English for one semester from the prescribed book ‘English Language and Indian Culture’. The course is designed in such a way that it emphasizes on writing tasks in general. It includes formal and informal letters, paragraph writing, short answers etc. Teaching of grammar items comprises of simple, compound and complex sentences; coordinate/subordinate clauses; tenses; modals; narration; active and passive voice; verb structures; determiners; and prepositions etc. These language items can be introduced to express the communication functions such as seeking and imparting information; expressing intellectual and emotional attitudes; and for persuasion and dissuasion. Reading comprehension and vocabulary, as usual are also a part of the course.

The students pursuing MCA and MBA (Master of Computer Application and Master of Business Administration) study communication skills in first semester. Spoken and written skills are the main course contents. Types of communication, principles, barriers, essentials of communication; media communication, speaking skills and writing skills are the topics covered. Students are expected to prepare and deliver oral presentations, lectures, speeches, interviews, debate, telephonic conversations, negotiations and group discussions. Unit on
written skills include preparing of bio-data, seminar, paper, bibliography and official correspondence; mechanics of writing, paragraphing, precise, report writing; creative writing; and common errors in language.

Teaching materials are the medium of conveying information which can be harnessed for education. A teacher and a learner, in a formal educational setting would feel handicap in the absence of teaching materials. Teaching materials are a medium to impart knowledge.

To quote Marshall McLuhan:

The medium is the message. The medium is not only what it contains as message, but as an agent itself, by the very fact of its existence, of change. Once the medium has made its presence felt as a 'message', then it is important to know the content which is appropriate for that medium to carry.¹

Today a major problem confronted by most of the Indian teachers is a class where language proficiency of the students ranges from one end of the scale to another. The challenge then is to produce and refer or recommend a textbook which contains innovative activities unfamiliar for learners and also engages their interest. The question that now arises is which teaching materials can best suit the requirements of learners and

what should be the criteria to select the most suitable study materials?

Generally while selecting teaching materials teachers are guided by many factors such as quality, availability status and price so forth. Teaching materials easily assessable are either paper based and printed or electronic. Generally teachers prefer paper based teaching materials i.e. course books, text books, authentic magazines and newspapers and real-life documents (patents, correspondence, specifications etc.) (Table 15: Types of Teaching Materials).

The advertisement materials, textbooks in students' specialism, conference papers so forth are incorporated in the list of home tailored materials and have secondary importance. The electronic teaching materials or technology based materials, photocopied materials, audio-video tapes and computer-based materials; internet and self-study materials are also referred by considerable number of teachers. (Table 15: Types of Teaching Materials).

It is the ethical and professional responsibility of the teachers to evaluate the authenticity and relevancy of these teaching materials before recommending them to their students. The paper based materials are generally evaluated with reference to their usefulness from teacher’s perceptive, relevance to the students’ specific needs, course objectives and attractiveness (that is user friendliness, appealing and understandable format).

During the survey it was found that teachers seem to be at a loss when evaluating the relevance of the teaching materials to the students’ requirements and course objectives. When asked about pragmatic issues
such as course objectives, course content and materials design, the English teachers of the professional institutes in Indore city, confessed that they are more ready to evaluate the locally produced course books than British and American ones. The reason for this preference was that locally produced books are well available and easily accessible rather than later ones which are theoretically useful and desirable but are not available on a daily basis in most colleges and classrooms.

A dominance of English for General Purpose (EGP) course books against English for Specific Purpose (ESP) was also observed during the study. Our background knowledge of Indian ELT situation, supplemented with classroom observation findings and teachers' responses to the queries lead to the conclusion that locally published teaching materials are mainly used for teaching purposes, whereas the use of communication-centered ESP course books is confined.

The existing situation, in the professional colleges of Indore on one hand reflects the natural professional expectation of a typical Indian EFL teacher to rely on a well-designed course book in his/her teaching practice; and on the other hand, this may also be a sign of teacher’s dependence restricting his flexibility in meeting the ever changing needs of the learners, which is crucial in the teaching of English for Specific Purpose.

While interacting with the students of professional colleges it was also found that the choice of teaching and learning materials generally remains in the hands of the teachers. However, learners prefer printed and technology-based materials. Specifically course books were at the top
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priority by a considerable group of learners. But a minority group of learners was of the view that as they get hold of these books in photocopies, they hardly consider them interesting and attractive.

When students were inquired about the utility and effectiveness of the electronic teaching materials, they demonstrated extremely favorable reactions towards their usefulness. English teachers too consider the use of audio and video tapes, multimedia and on line teaching useful but the only constrain here is that these are time consuming. (Table 15: Types of Teaching Materials).

It was also found that little attention is paid to supplying students with self-study materials. There are hardly any self-access study facilities available to learners. On the other hand, a minority group of teachers were found that emphasized on using self-designed (teacher-produced) teaching materials. Despite of the array of English language teaching materials available commercially, they produced their own material for teaching purpose. They spent considerable time in finding, selecting, evaluating, adapting and making teaching materials.

The teacher-produced teaching materials can be better than commercially available because those are particularly produced for world-wide EFL market. They are necessarily generic and do not aim at specific group of learners or any particular cultural or educational context. As Altan also expresses:

Our modern course books are full of speech acts and functions based on situations which most foreign language students will encounter....‘Globally’ designed course books have continued
to be stubbornly Anglo-centric. Appealing to the world markets as they do, they cannot by definition draw on vocal varieties of English and have not gone very far in recognizing English as an international language, either.\(^2\)

Modern language teaching technology emphasizes on identifying the personal academic needs of the learners and teaching accordingly. Teacher-prepared materials provide the opportunity to select texts and activities at exactly the right level for particular learners, to ensure appropriate challenge and levels of success. Teachers are free to choose from the range of possibilities, including topics, situations, notions, functions, skills so forth, or a combination of these principles, as starting points to develop a variety of materials that focus on the developing needs of their particular group of learners.

Another advantage of self-tailored materials is that they add personal touch to teaching which generally students appreciate. And tapping into the students’ interest increases motivation and engagement in learning.

Howard suggests ten guidelines for designing effective English teaching materials. Firstly English language teaching materials should be contextualized to: the curriculum they are intended to address; to the experiences, realities and first languages of the learners; and to topics and themes that provide meaningful, purposeful uses for the target language. Secondly, materials should stimulate interaction and be generative in terms

of language. Next English language teaching materials should encourage learners to develop learning skills and strategies.

English language teaching materials should allow for a focus on form as well as function. They should offer opportunities for integrated language use. English language teaching materials should be authentic. They should link to each other to develop a progression of skills, understandings and language items. They should be attractive. English language teaching materials should have appropriate instructions and finally they should be flexible.3

Teaching methods and techniques applied by English teachers of technical university are very much affected by the type of materials they use; therefore the accessibility of the resource materials to the teachers is of utmost importance.

While interacting with the English teachers of colleges under survey it was discovered that in their everyday practice, they employ a variety of foreign EGP course books, based on modern communicative principles. But as they teach English for Specific Purpose (engineering, management, trade, business etc.), the teachers try to develop their personal teaching pack. The main sources for development of such a resource pack are usually authentic materials in the field of students' specialism. But having found an appropriate text, teachers often have neither the expertise nor the

time to develop communicative tasks and exercises. Ultimately this practice does not lead to the desired learning outcomes and makes both learners and teachers frustrated.

Through these findings, they can identify areas that need more attention. This would help revise the existing English textbooks meant for engineering, technology or management students. Similar efforts elsewhere have resulted in developing new textbooks. For example:

The CIEFL Hyderabad (now EFL), had prepared a package of materials under the general title ‘enrich your English’ to be used in 150 hours. This package aims at developing a take-off proficiency in reading and writing skills. The focus of this package was on the reading skills, though speaking and listening skills are also given due importance.4

The question whether the English language skills of our future professionals must be improved, is needless. In fact the main concern is how to go about in promoting these skills. The time demands English teachers to lay stress on ‘quality-oriented education’ and maintain harmonious relationship with the learners so that they can exploit their interest in English language learning.

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Practical approach to English language teaching is about what to do in class and when, why, and how English teachers can do it. It is a question about planning, structuring and integrating various activities for the purpose of enhancing the learners' learning. Gambhir 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.\(^5\)

A healthy teaching classroom environment promotes learning ability of the students. In the same regard Gambhir adds:

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.\(^6\)

Reflective teaching provides a strong foundation to result-oriented teaching. English teachers often confront the situation when they are well prepared with the lecture, but at the end of the class are dissatisfied—either with the learners' response or with their own presentation. Reflective teaching helps teachers at this stage.

Reflective teaching means looking at what a teacher does in the classroom, thinking about why he does it, and if it works—a process of self-observation and self-evaluation. By collecting information about what goes on in our classroom, and by analyzing and evaluating this information, they identify and explore their own practices and underlying beliefs. This may then lead to changes and improvements in the teaching.

Reflective teaching is therefore a means of professional development which begins in the classroom. It therefore implies a more systematic process of collecting, recording and analyzing teachers' thoughts and observations, and those of their students, and then going onto making required changes.

If a lesson went well, one can think about why it was successful. On the other hand, if the learners failed to understand a language point introduced to them, one need to think about what went wrong and why it may have been unclear. If students misbehaved in the classroom - what, when and why were they doing? The process of reflection begins with the teacher’s response to a particular problem that has arisen in a particular class of students or due to the way one deals with the incidents of misbehaviour.

Maintaining a diary wherein one writes notes about what happened in the class or describes his own reactions and feelings observed on the part of the learners can act as a catalyst in the reflection process. A colleague invited to the class to collect information about the lesson delivered, will relate back to the area one has identified to reflect upon.

A useful information for reflection can also be provided by video and audio recordings of the lessons. A teacher may do things in class, he is not aware of, or there may be things happening in the class that as a teacher one does not normally see or observe. Audio and video recordings help him to identify these things.

Student feedback is a crucial component of the reflection process. Their opinions and perceptions can add a different and valuable perspective to the teaching. The information recorded through reflective teaching on classroom activities, teacher’s behaviour and approach to language teaching, student’s behaviour so forth, gives idea for changes to implement.
Apart from reflective teaching process, there are other resources such as websites, magazines, academic articles, libraries or bookshops that suggest useful teaching ideas. The ultimate objective of teaching English via practical approach is of enhancing students' learning.

...and learning a foreign language is a matter of language acquisition; students will incrementally acquire, practice and refine their language skills in accordance with their individual needs. Developing language skills is a matter of how to activate the students optimally in their work with adequate material, exercises and assignments in the classroom.

In the context of practical approach, an English teacher has to be aware that an English course that is vocationally and contextually relevant for the students will inevitably cover the same formal aspects of English as found in a 'General English' course. Working with relevant and authentic (related to particular subject area) texts can be highly motivating for students.

The teaching of grammar for grammar's sake is mere a misconception. It has no effect on developing learners' oral or written skills. "The study of traditional school grammar has no effect on effect on

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raising the quality of student writing. It will do them a gross disservice”. Olav Talberg also suggests that:

The English teacher should encourage students to use ‘interactive grammar exercises’ available on the Internet individually to improve their formal language skills. If teachers want to support their language instruction on grammar, a ‘comparative or contrastive grammar’ method may be used to highlight and create awareness of differences between national language and English.

The English teaching staff without well equipped language skills; speaking English with dialect accent, having incorrect pronunciation and intonation, is deficient to change English knowledge into English skills. Earl W. Stevick pointed out that:

We may continue to affirm that the learning is in some ways ‘central’ to what we do. But we should at the same time remember that there are other functions for which our society, and our students themselves, demanded that the teachers stand steadfast at the center of language education.

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The teacher’s role and function cannot be replaced.

English teachers can encourage their students to interact in English only if they themselves use English to communicate in the class. This is also a principle for communicative teaching approach. But English teachers also need to acknowledge that they need to adapt to situational realities.

Teachers often report that some students remember a lot and learn when teaching in English is accompanied with the use of first language and some students find it difficult to grasp in English. They do not have a background in English and the context that encourages them to think that English is very important. Therefore, the approach and the amount of English used in a class depend on the class itself. As Weir states:

Clearly the use of particular methods may be constrained by contextual features over which teachers have no control, the wash back effect of examination formats taking precedence over curriculum mandates being common.\(^{11}\)

English teachers can be innovative in their teaching approach. However:

The persistence of the older traditional, teacher-fronted, grammar-translation approaches should not always be thought of simply in deficit terms, i.e. as resulting from a lack of understanding or willingness of teachers to implement a communicative approach. Most teachers teach as they do

because they believe that the methods adopted are effective for the purpose.\textsuperscript{12}

In spite of constraints, English teachers must demonstrate creativity in their teaching, they can select classroom teaching, pair work, team work, discussions, presentations so forth (Table 34: Types of class work). The only notion to be kept in mind before selecting any of these methods is that these are be based on an understanding of the needs of the students in their particular subject area.

An effective and successful teacher goes far beyond the boundaries of the technical aspects of teaching - the teaching methods used in the classroom. Teaching methods are important but they are merely one aspect of teacher's effective practical approach. Moreover, it is important to follow a principled approach based on learner's specific requirements.

ELT profession therefore, needs to acknowledge a richer and more varied picture of classroom life than one sanctioned by official curricula; one in which there is an acceptance that traditional forms of instruction persist for a reason, and that to uncover the reason there is a need to investigate the socio-cultural and educational contexts of use of the methods.

Literature teaching to facilitate language teaching objectives and to enhance communication competence in UG/PG level ESL classrooms (especially in Professional colleges of Indore) need to have a different orientation. Once the specific ELT objectives are been clearly outlined, it becomes the ethical responsibility of the enterprising teacher to perfectly plan the teaching progress strategies. The literary text now needs to be fragmented into smaller useful divisions to cater to the needs of this plan. A literary text in this context is any written, printed, oral, audio or video resource referred by the language teacher.

The English teachers efficient in using literary texts in their tailor-made divisions can cope with the learners’ requirements to bring about a healthy balance between the literature and language oriented teachings.

The teachers committed during the survey that they generally refer literary texts from culturally different locations namely British, American or other regions. Such texts offer special challenges to the Indian learners group. As these learners move from conventional teacher-centered classrooms (as practiced in school classrooms) to the new communicative teaching environment (as practiced in professional colleges), they face practical difficulties. At school level, English teachers do exploit different genres of literature (drama, poems, essays, novels, short stories etc.) to teach English language. They are bound to refer the literary texts prescribed in the syllabus. Whereas college level literary texts generally are the newspaper/magazine articles, business correspondence, audio/video
texts, film clips, podcasts so forth used by English teachers to enhance the interaction skills of the learners.

These literary texts are a rich source of linguistic input. They enable the learners to practice four language skills (LSRW) and in addition exemplify grammatical structures and present new vocabulary as well. Thus these literary texts can fulfill the main objective of teaching English, and that is to promote communication competence of the learners.

Communicative competence is not just acquiring mastery of structure and form rather it incorporates the ability to interpret discourse in any social and cultural context. Kinneavy’s communication triangle has best represented the variety and types of discourse. This classification of discourse types includes:

\[...expressive, \text{ which focuses on personal expression (letters, diaries, etc.)}; \text{ transactional, which focuses on both the reader and the message (advertising, business letters, editorials, instructions, etc.); and poetic, which focuses on form and language, drama, poetry, novels, short stories, etc.}^{13}\]

Generally, the English teachers in their efforts to teach communicative competence make use of texts which focus on the transactional and expressive forms of writings with the exclusion or restriction of poetic forms of language that is literature however, literary texts remain an unavoidable tool in the hands of a language teacher. It

\[^{13}\text{J. L. Kinneavy, } A \text{ Theory of Discourse: The Aims of Discourse (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1971) 56.}\]
solely depends on the teacher as what to teach and how to teach and exploit a literary text for language teaching.

The literary texts used particularly in ELT classrooms of professional courses today are no more restricted to canonical texts from certain countries like America, UK so forth but include the works of writers from a diverse range of countries and cultures using different discourses of English. These works are unique in the way English language has been extended, modified and elaborated.

In ELT classrooms generally teachers have 'language-based approach' to literary texts. The objective is to exemplify specific linguistic features for example literal and figurative language, direct and indirect speech, active and passive voice so forth this approach enables the teacher to use close procedure, prediction exercises, jumbled sentences, summary writing, creative writing, role play and other such strategies in language teaching.

Carter and McRae describe this model as taking a 'reductive' approach to literature.

These activities are disconnected from the literary goals of the specific text in that they can be applied to any text. The learner is hardly connected with the text, and literature is used in a rather purposeless and mechanistic way in order to provide for a series of language activities orchestrated by the teacher.14

Teaching of correct English is also a burning issue. As Olav Talberg has experienced:

Many English language teachers argue that correct English can best be taught and learned in a ‘General English’ context, also with respect to the teaching of English for engineering students. My experience is different.¹⁵

Anyhow, when the literature is offered, the teacher has to go beyond the actual text prescribed and make it practically convenient for the learners to comprehend. Olav Talberg in his study further adds:

The fact that the purpose, the lay out, the discourse and the vocabulary of texts that deal with technically oriented subject matters are different from literary or newspaper texts, for example, these features justify the need for didactic approaches that are different from those applied to texts on general, social or literary topics. The term ‘Technical English’ is commonly used to refer to texts that deal with ‘technical subjects’ and to denote texts in which the discourse is different from that used in literary texts or texts on various social subjects. The term ‘vocationally-oriented English’ can also be used to denote English language instruction that aims

at developing language skills that are relevant for a particular profession or group of professions. \textsuperscript{16}