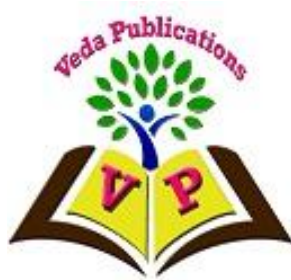# ENGLISH LANGUAGE SKILL DEVELOPMENT MODULES AND EVALUATION PROCESS TO AID KNOWLEDGE ENHANCEMENT IN COLLEGE STUDENTS

Shobhana N[1*], Rachitha Cabral [2]

[1&2](Assistant Professor, School of Social work, Roshini Nilaya, Mangalore.)

ABSTRACT

The paper intends to study the need to evolve a contextual and integrated teaching learning and evaluation process that takes into account every student and their English Language skill competency. Being part of an Institution that enjoys position as an Autonomous College provides avenues to evolve a curriculum and testing method to promote a contextual and inclusive education process.

The faculty in English at the School of Social Work, Roshni Nilaya, Mangalore, had the opportunity to study and test the English Language Skill component of the students enrolled for the undergraduate programme in Social Work at the entry level. It was noticed from the evaluation module that the composition of the students who had joined the course was a mixture of those in need of improvement in their language competency (English) and others with advanced language competency.

We began to explore the reasons for the polarity in their language competencies and further investigation pointed to the fact that those from vernacular medium background/education had difficulty in relating to the texts with regard to its content and the language used, it was to an extent alien to them. The paper intends to bring out the rationale of the curriculum evolved to make the texts student-friendly and inclusive. The objective is to integrate and bring the two polarities together in the English Language skill development process.

An inclusive classroom is one with students from diverse backgrounds, and more importantly diverse learning needs. The curriculum and pedagogy have to be flexible and differential so as to cater to the needs of the class. The other aspect that is crucial to sustaining the quality and enabling appropriate changes to be made is the assessment process. Assessment is traditionally seen as a means to gauge the learning level of the student/individual and place him or her in accordance with standards.

Inclusive education is a system that is not given much attention to. It is considered a time consuming and resource intensive programme. Teachers often find children with disabilities be it in terms of Physical, Mental or at the skill level, a big challenge in their classroom and one which they are not ready to deal with. It involves too much work to have a diverse set of children in one class. However, it is important to understand that it is not the student that is disabled in an educational institution but the "curricula" (Universal Design for Learning- UDL guidelines). The curriculum designed seldom is flexible and able to adapt to varied needs and tweaks. The student, with the right support and scaffolding, can achieve great heights in different areas. The UNESCO report of 1994 in the Salamanca Statement states that Inclusive education is the most effective means of tackling issues of "discrimination", creating "welcoming communities" and in building a society where everyone is included and accepted- one of equity and humanity.

The Department of English, School of Social Work, Roshni Niaya, Mangalore, in its second syllabus revision felt the need to take stock of what we as educators have been doing thus far and what we can do in the present as teachers of English Language in an institution which enjoys autonomous status. We were empowered with the freedom to evolve our own curricula and assessment pattern and we wanted to do justice to it. We set out on a threefold action plan in our designing of curricula for teaching English as a second language. The first step was to conduct a minor survey of students in the pre-university level as they would be the ones who would join an undergraduate programme next. We intended to assess their skill level with regard to English Language and the significance it held for them. The study would dwell on the way they perceived themselves, their future life, career options, and what place English Language skill had for them now and in the future.

We found interesting responses. They responded positively when asked about their self-worth, self-image; however when they were asked in particular about the place and relevance of English as a language in their future (career) they expressed self doubt and the need to better themselves. The conclusion we drew from this study was that their skills and competencies received through their vernacular medium (Kannada or Malayalam) did provide them with the necessary sense of self worth and self-image. The need for competency in the English Language was in the distant future and as such not a threat or of much concern presently. When prodded for a response they felt it needed attention and the consequence of the lack of English language skill was a matter of concern to them. The reason according to them was that speaking English would make them feel good about themselves. They also expressed that people who knew to speak and write in English had better scope in their future careers and job prospects. Christopher Winch in 'Economic Aims of Education' points out that "the economic aims of education are as legitimate as any other, particularly Liberal aims"; we can't but agree with him. He strengthens his statement by declaring that stress on economic aims of education does in no way belittle the intrinsic aim of education. Winch also feels that the economic aim of education will ensure a better life for the individual and society.

Keeping not just Winch's point which was one of the pointers in the research but also the fact that students admitted to the course had certain special needs we were now ready to look at the second step to be taken. This was for the students enrolling in the undergraduate programme after the completion of their pre-university studies. We evolved a text independently, to suit the needs of the students. The text and the exercises were so designed as to facilitate both learners with advanced language skill and learners in need of language skill development (English). The curricula took into consideration their field of specialisation, namely Bachelor in Social Work and Bachelor in Arts. The selection of the contents for their texts and the class

work exercises were designed keeping their subject orientation in mind and also to facilitate intrinsic growth.

The third step was to evolve a teaching-learning and evaluation process. The typical teaching-learning session involved independent learning with the teacher as facilitator, and peer group learning. Peer group learning promoted group dynamics where there was space for empathy, motivation, social processes of an interdependent learning environment and leadership role play. This process created an atmosphere conducive for teaching/ learning as also in aiding continuous assessment and evaluation.

The exercise at the end of each lesson was structured to lead the learner within and beyond the context of the lesson at hand. It not only dealt with the language component but also called for critical and creative thinking with regard to the central issue of the text. The internal assessment at the end of the learning process was not only written but involved group discussion, creative representations through collage, skit, speeches and other re-creation of the text as learning outcome. Students were motivated to express themselves with regard to the content in the text material in the language they had competency in (Kannada /Malayalam) as well; this was to promote creative and critical thinking and enhance their self image and self confidence. This enabled both the section of learners to work within their learning environment, their individual skill sets and talents. During interactive sessions, they would exchange their experience and resource with others in the class thus creating a knowledge transference which was inclusive. This created space for multifaceted ways of assimilating knowledge and a learning environment favorable for students as recommended in UDL (Universal Design for Learning).

The final assessment in the semester examination was done by dividing them into 'Division I' (advanced skill sets) and 'Division II' to enable the better skilled and those in need of skill development to face a level of assessment in line with their competencies. This group included individuals with 'Learning Difficulty'. This segregation in the examination system into two divisions was practiced for the first two semesters only to facilitate improvement in skill level for those disadvantaged

and to integrate the class to a semblance of uniformity with reference to their English Language skill levels in subsequent semesters. The aim was to promote learning and advancement with both sets of learners and not compromise the advancement of one set of learners for the others.

The division of the class into two sections was arrived through a test at the entry level. The students were given the objective of the English language teaching/ learning programme and the two section of evaluation method we would be providing. The students who were assigned to Division II on the basis of their test results were given the choice to be evaluated under Division I if they so wished. This division was applicable only at the time of final examination and was not applied at other times. This ensured a classroom environment where the students did not feel discriminated or less privileged and made sure each student was able to face the exam from his/her level.

The evaluation was done in two ways. The internal assessment module was worked within the classroom. It was a more flexible, personalised space specifically designed to promote learning by all at an individual level and a formal examination module which was customised for each division which ensured fair assessment. The Rationale behind the second revision of English Language Teaching curricula and the next that followed have been based on the following principles of Teaching learning and evaluation process discussed below.

At the outset I wish to state that some of the authors, their theories, concepts and practices cited below are often with reference to primary and secondary education and not so much tertiary education; but, I see these concepts and theories as universal to the education process. The material accessed herein deals with the issues this paper is concerned about and is interested in realising as teacher facilitator.

Padma Sarangapani while making a point on the need for quality in education in the Indian scenario at a workshop on 'Studying Quality in Education' held at TISS Mumbai(2010) says, "Quality in education' has to do with making an assessment of the worthwhileness of a programme/system of education". The Assessment must be based on and

create an opportunity for teaching and learning to take place in an inclusive setting. Traditional forms of assessment primarily were used for determining the placement of a student, assigning marks and using that to detain or promote them to the next grade. It focused on how much a pupil knew and did not, and is rarely used as information to guide further action. Today that shift is being acknowledged; assessment is viewed not just as information regarding the learning of the student but also as contributing to decision making across different areas in the teaching/learning programme.

For the education programme to be a success the intention of each aspect of it needs to be clear; there should be clarity right from the philosophy the programme intends to follow the curriculum, pedagogy and assessment. These components are not distinct entities but are each interrelated and work only if seen as such. The goal of education goes beyond knowledge transference. Hence when we speak of curriculum pedagogy and assessment there is the dynamics of several factors operating. This is the point Naik makes in *Equality, Quality and Quantity: The Elusive Triangle in Indian Education*, "Education cannot be transformed in a vacuum. It is a sub-system of society and a largely dependent sub-system at that. Consequently one must make a simultaneous effort to change society and the educational system in a complementary fashion to get the best results". In today's era of 'mass education' there are many factors, individual, social, political and that of economics operating simultaneously.

The success of a programme lies in its coherence. All aspects of the education process need to follow the same stream of thought and each must contribute towards strengthening the other, only then the purpose will be met. A programme should aim to be inclusive and inculcate education that is participatory and experiential. It should be one where the students engage with the concepts, learn and construct it according to their strengths and are included and appreciated for their unique needs and abilities. For this to be achieved there must be a clear link between curriculum goals, pedagogy, teaching and learning materials, and assessment schedules

and approaches. Assessment of pupils is a "pedagogic process" and not one distinct step in the process.

Assessment should contribute to all aspects of evaluation and the programme as a whole has to be taken into consideration. The assessment will bring within its purview, teaching learning experience inside the classroom, curriculum material, pedagogy, up to the students learning process and knowledge transference. It should also have an overall influence enabling "informed educational decisions" at every stage (Watkins. A, 2007). The information gathered through the assessment process should be used to decide the next step in the pupils' learning programme. The significance of the assessment should be such that it should even influence the administration of the institution, selection and monitoring of standards and resources. Differentiated assessment that caters to individual learning strengths and needs, also direct the teacher towards pupil placement and support allocation, which are key to an inclusive setup as there will be some students who may need shadow teachers or special support at certain instances or situations.

In the Netherlands, Iceland and Switzerland innovative practices are being developed for assessment in inclusive classrooms. In Netherlands,assessment is not used for labeling or categorising, but for needs assessment. The assessment done throughout the learning period is used to direct the teachers' further steps to better the learning process, and also better cater to the areas the student requires help in. In Switzerland assessment is interdisciplinary in most inclusive classrooms whenever possible. Thematic learning and interdisciplinary assessment help both the teachers and the students. Teachers also work together so as to create a comprehensive system of assessment that includes all the learning goals or objectives they wish to achieve as well as collaborate and design a interdisciplinary assessment which will benefit all of them in their teaching and learning process. In Iceland and Switzerland the pupils are involved in the assessment process. In the former, in particular the students are directly involved and often responsible for parts of their assessment and even set their own learning goals. Here the teachers are facilitators and the learning process student centric, where the

autonomy of the student and their individual learning methods and needs and abilities are respected and the curriculum designed keeping it in mind.

Another method of designing innovative assessment patterns are by utilising theories of learning that allow for flexibility and stress upon the learner being the constructor and the deciding factor for the learning process. Both Vygotsky's socio-cultural approach and Howard Gardner's Multiple Intelligence theory both support the above claim. While these are very beneficial in influencing curriculum designs of inclusive setups, they can be used effectively to design the assessment section of the same as well. The socio-cultural approach talks of a lot of learning taking place through experience and through social interaction, thus group work, engaging with communities for data and other such experiential and social activities are designed for learning to take place. The happenings and data brought can be used as assessment as well. The multiple intelligence theory talks of how individual have different leanings and strengths and that each of us tend to learn in a particular manner best. Gardener talked of how some individuals learn better kinesthetically, some musically, verbally, linguistically, mathematically and so on.

Assessing learners should be done in accordance with the way they best make sense of the world or learn about it. Gardner said his theory enabled learning for all and assessment for learning should assess Multiple Intelligence. While a lot of them can converge, each of us does have our own inklings towards one or more of these intelligence Gardener mentions. Other approaches that can be used are the multicultural approach that caters to diverse cultural aspects. Thematic instructions, Cooperative learning modules, and community based approach or contextual learning are other such models that allow interesting ways of designing assessment. Cooperative learning modules can be clubbed with thematic instructions and children can be made to work in groups where each of their strengths are required to complete tasks, or add value to the final product or process. Contextual learning or that which is familiar to children are keys especially those with behavioral disorders. Some of them do not like new facts or unknown spaces hence

when concepts are introduced or accessed in context to their backgrounds the student is more at ease, and their learning and performance is better. Traditional measures of performance as Perone (1994) says "portray artificial and decontextualised views". Standardised norms too fail in bringing out the varied capabilities of an inclusive classroom, and as results show "unidimensional and deficit based profiles (Solner.A, & Thousand.J, 1996)".

Including the pupil in the assessment process is also very impactful for learning. Here children are shown their portfolios, graphs and all of this can be discussed with them allowing them to negate points of the teachers if they deem necessary. Include them in negotiating criteria and in the planning process of the assessment too. This gives them a certain confidence and encourages them to do well as they had a role to play in deciding how it is done, and will be motivated to work towards doing well. For motivation levels to be kept up assessment needs to be done periodically and feedback regularly shared. As learners they often would like to know how they are doing and this motivates them to engage and perform. The discussions should focus on process and the means not the end result, for analysing the process provides more insight than just the end. Self evaluation is also said to help intrinsic abilities such as emotional regulation and motivation. While these are methods that should be ideally done in all educational setups for assessment, it is a must in inclusive setting as the children are more diverse and standardised assessments are of no use.

The three main principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) are:

1) Provide multiple means of representation, thereby meaning that individual self expression must be encouraged and no pre-defined structure for representation should be assigned.

2) Provide multiple means of action and expression- This principle talks of how individuals differ in ways they learn and navigate through it, some may read print and understand, others may require visuals or to practically do it and so on.

3) Provide multiple means of engagement- each individual engages and is motivated to learn in varied ways. Some are excited by facts and the newness of

concepts, while others prefer familiar concepts and associations and routine.

The UDL model assures that if while assessing these areas are kept in mind, and by doing just these three, the assessment automatically would cater to a varied audience. In UDL the goal is for the learners to become experts in their own right, following paths they design and using their interests and capabilities in the best possible way. The moment these differentiated needs are accommodated, barriers to learning will be reduced and removed. Portfolios that are interactive, checklists, observation sheets, anecdotal records and other such forms of documentation too are possible ways of assessment but can only serve as one of many ways and cannot be the only. However even while implementing these methods they have to be tweaked to suit the needs of the class.

The need of the hour today is to make sure education caters, reaches and brings everyone into its fold. There are many who are pushed out of the education process at different levels because, they either do not fit in due to their positioning in terms of the geography, societal, cultural, religious, ethnic or other special needs.

Firstly, education or the system should be made available to all. Thereafter, we don't need resources, funds, technology or gadgets to make the classroom experience inclusive; all we need is the teacher as facilitator, peers in society, a class of students which is willing to make minor changes, a curricula design that is learner friendly and an assessment process that appreciates plurality and difference. The students with special needs will then be willing to go an extra mile; then teaching and learning will be a fruitful experience overall.

Higher education is an area which has to be paid attention to, especially in the present scenario where every third Indian is a youth; by 2020 we will be the 'youngest nation' in the world. National Education Policy (NEP) was framed in 1986 and modified in 1992; presently the HRD ministry is intent on bringing about NEP which will take into account the changes occurring in all spheres. Under the leadership of ex-ISRO Chief K Kasthurirangan much work is envisaged in the area of quality, innovation, research and technology. We as teacher facilitators are in the epicenter of this change and are a part of this process. We are in an enviable position where we will be heard and thus to act in the right direction should be our motto. To be that agent of change and dynamics of advancement so that the fruits reach every individual that enters the portals of an institution and those thus far got excluded and not catered to will benefit. This is possible if education is made contextual, sensitive and universal in its objectives and approach. The HRD ministry proclaims to make India a "knowledge superpower" and this means the political mindset is in our favour; all it needs is a concerted effort where our time and our students' are made accountable towards the betterment of the individual and the world of which they are a part of. If conceived well and functioned effectively it is us who through 'Inclusive Education' can bring about a sensitive, sensitized, skilled, empowered youth force for a better world.

The paper acknowledges the fact that the strength of the curricula is as good as its assessment. As much as we as a department have tried to evolve an inclusive and learner centric text we have to accept that all our ideologies, testing methods end at the classroom level. The assessment process which will benefit every student ends there as the internal assessment fetches only 30% of the total score of a student and the other 70% is through a written exam which has been there for ages and seems not to go away. The endeavour to bring forth change in the students' skill sets rests not in the final grade but in the final formation of the individual as individual. If our enterprise in human resource development should continue along a healthy course we need to evolve and shift from the traditional examination system which is written and rote oriented to a more personalised, individual, skill oriented assessment. This will be both a challenge to the teacher as well as the system. It calls for a policy level change, changing texts and its content and evolving new methods of teaching, learning and assessment. As I come to end of the paper I must confess that our attempt was not to boast of a successful enterprise but an effort to question the present and work towards changing perceptions for individual and societal benefit.

REFERENCES

[1]. Doubet. K (2012). "Formative Assessment Jumps Starts a Middles Grades Differentiation Initiative." Vol 43, No.3, pp-32-38

[2]. Eisenman.L , et al, (2010). "Voices of Special Education Teachers in an Inclusive High School: Redefining Responsibilities."Evaluation Techniques for Children with Special Needs (CWSN) in SSA.

[3]. Moon. T (2005). "The Role of Assessment in Differentiation". Differentiated Instruction. Vol.44, No.3. Pp 226-233

[4]. Naik. J.P (1979) "Equality, Quality and Quantity: The Elusive Triangle in Indian Education"

[5]. Purvis. A (2015) "Inclusive Practice: Seeing is believing!"

[6]. Sarangapani. P (2010) 'Notes on Quality in Education' – Annexure B

[7]. Smith. M.K. (2002,2008) 'Howard Gardner and multiple intelligences' - T*he encyclopedia of informal education*.

[8]. Solner. A & Thousand.j (1996) "Creating a Responsive Curriculum for Inclusive Schools." Vol.17, No.3

[9]. Thijs. A, et al. " Inclusive Education in The Netherlands" . SLO, National Indititute of Curriculum Development. Universal Design for Learning Guidelines (2011). Version 2.0

[10]. Watkins. A (2007). "Assessment in Inclusive Settings- Key issues for Policy and Practice."

[11]. Winch. C (2002) "The Economic Aims of Education", The Journal of the Philosophy of Education Society of Great Britain

WEB LINKS

[1]. https://www.jisc.ac.uk/guides/transforming-assessment-and-feedback/inclusive-assessment

[2]. https://www.plymouth.ac.uk/uploads/.../path/.../7_Steps_to_**Inclusive_Assessment**.

[3]. http://www.holmesglen.edu.au/services/student_services/disability_support_service/staff_resources/inclusive_teaching_practices_benefit_all_students

[4]. www.udlcenter.org/aboutudl/udlguidelines

[5]. http://www.unesco.org/new/en/education/themes/strengthening-education-systems/quality-framework/technical-notes/influential-theories-of-learning/

[6]. http://www.infed.org/mobi/howard-gardner-multiple-intelligences-and-education