

English Language Teaching: Tertiary Level Problems — II

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Existing Teachers Of English

Though severely understaffed, the existing English Departments are mainly involved in the teaching of English Literature. With the background in Literature, these teachers have mainly chosen to teach English Literature, and many of them resist the idea of being forced to teach English language. The fact that the majority of them have no training in ELT must also be considered.

Teachers Of Other Subjects

Quite a good number of tertiary-level teachers are old enough to have attended university when standards of English were still high, and they have presumably kept their English alive by updating themselves in their own specialist subject areas. (i.e., through academic journals and books published in English). The argument is that they have a level of competence in English that will enable them to teach it. But the previous arguments apply here: these teachers have chosen to teach in their specialist area, are probably not interested in teaching English language, and they have not been trained in ELT.

Recent Graduates In English

It seems that the recruitment situation at present is that of English (Lit.) graduates, those who get a first or a second division pass are recruited to teach at the universities, those with lower seconds (and even thirds) teach in colleges and schools.

We do not have accurate figures for either the number of English graduates a year of their grades.

Nationwide there are probably about 1,000 Masters graduates in English a year, and it is generally acknowledged that the results in English are poor, even allowing for the fact that to get accepted on an English (Lit) course a student generally has to be above average. English is regarded as a HARD subject.

One university reports that out of about 120 Masters graduates a year, there will probably be no first divi-

sion passes, only one or two second divisions, and the rest are third class — or fail. The National University has figures to show that in the degree colleges, approximately 600 students took Masters Part 1 exams last year, of whom only 60 passed (10%). Those who failed will get a second chance this year, with about 150 students expected to pass in all (25%). It should be noted that this will include many third division passes, in what is seen to be a lenient examination.

Even if we ignore the results and assume that the 1,000 English graduates a year have a reasonable standard of English language, and that they all want to become trained ELT professionals, there are still not enough to meet current requirements immediately.

Recent Graduates, Any Subject

Various sources have suggested utilising recent graduates in other subject areas to teach English in their subject department. The argument here are quite persuasive. Assuming these graduates are screened for their competence in English, they will have a good knowledge of the English terminology required in that specialist field. If they were to receive further training in ELT, which would inevitably involve a further upgrading of English language skills, they would be in a strong position to meet the demands.

But more important is the size of this pool. If there are about 300,000 new entrants to tertiary education each year, there must be a similar number of graduates. From a pool that size, it seems reasonable to expect that at least one per cent has a reasonable competence in English, given that they will all have had ten years of English at school, a large proportion of their lectures conducted in English, and virtually all the books in the library are in English.

Further study is needed into the standards of English competence of graduates who have not specialised in English. It is likely that from certain sources (e.g., those universities or colleges that have remained English medium throughout, or at

least in those subject areas that rely heavily on a knowledge of English) there will be a significant pool of recent graduates who could be capable of teaching the language. Whether they would want to is another question.

Native Speakers Of English

This is another source that could be considered as a temporary, 'emergency' measure. But the cost of bringing in the number required could be prohibitive. If expertise from overseas is sought, it would be better if it were channelled into the teacher-training programmes where the effect would be more lasting.

Probable Solution In Sight

There should be a clear plan for the creation of a cadre of ELT professionals, and the plan should include recruiting, training and retaining the best possible people to meet the ELT needs of the education system. The plan should be at a national level, and include primary, secondary and tertiary education.

Because of the inevitability of having to accept teachers with lower standards than are desirable, and in order to avoid stagnation in the ELT sector, *the majority of posts created should not be permanent.* Permanent posts should only be offered to those who meet the requirements.

If, as a measure of quality control, only temporary ELT appointments are offered, there should be *some sort of financial compensation in order to attract the best possible recruits.* This issue needs careful planning.

In order to get the commitment needed in what is inevitably going to be a problematic area, *teachers should be full-time where at all possible.*

Given the large gap between students' entry and target competence levels in English, and the lack of resources available to bridge that gap within the existing system, *institutions should systematically screen for existing competence in English.*

Because of huge variance in levels of competence, where numbers permit, students should be grouped by level (e.g., elementary/intermediate/advanced), and teaching geared to the level of the group.

There should be a *national body formed to act as a point of liaison* for the teaching of English (and the training of teachers of English) at primary, secondary and tertiary level.

Where possible, the *responsibility for ELT should be with a language institute or department rather than the English (Literature) Department.* A clear division between the two subjects will help the country prepare for the long-term development of ELT skills.

The eventual aim should be for a maximum class size of 25 to allow for individual attention. There should also be small tutorial groups to allow all students the opportunity to speak.

The FOCUS should be on effective methodology and formative assessment, with teachers interacting with students rather than lecturing.

Language should be viewed as a means of communication rather than a subject to be studied academically.

The syllabus should have a strong emphasis on SKILLS DEVELOPMENT (including sub-skills), particularly reading and study skills. Set reading texts should be mainly of an academic/subject-related nature rather than literary texts (especially for those students in Science and Technology fields). Published sources should be used, which will both provide for the English For Specific Purposes (ESP) needs of the students.

Because of the lack of suitable teaching staff, *no course or teaching materials should be recommended unless there are clear suggestions as to how the teacher can exploit them.*

The most satisfactory 'compromise' in course length would be in the number of years — i.e., reduce the requirement to a one-year course. In this way, students can get all the language training allowable in their first year, and thus be equipped for their studies in the second and subsequent years (they need proficiency in English as early in their academic lives as possible). It also gives students the chance to re-take the English exam in the second year if they cannot pass in the first.

(The article is based on a UGC study conducted by the British Council).