ENGLISH PRAXIS COURSE-I: A BRIDGE GAPING COURSE AND A GENTLE PUSH INTO HIGHER EDUCATION

a. Mrs. B. Sulochana, Research Scholar (Part-Time, Regd. No: 9097978041)
TDR-HUB, Andhra University, Visakhapatnam-530003,Andhrapradesh,INDIA

b. Dr. V. Radha Devi, Research Supervisor & Associate Professor, Dr. Lankapalli Bullayya
College of Engineering (Affiliated to Andhra University College of Engineering(A)),
Visakhapatnam-530003,Andhra Pradesh, INDIA
c. Mrs. Mercy Miriam P, A Part-time Scholar, TDR-HUB- 2023S329, The Department of HSS,
A.U.Collegeof Engineering, Visakhapatnam, India,

ABSTRACT:

Students have emerged into a paradigm shift from a closed framework of Intermediate Education to a flexible Choice Based Credit System(CBCS) existing in the general undergraduate courses(B.Sc/B.A/B.Com/B.B.A), being offered by the Andhra Pradesh State Council for Higher Education (APSCHE). So they need to be offered knowledge along with 'practicing skills'. The revised syllabus for English, which is implemented as 'English Praxis Course' (in three parts) offers specific skills that are needed to impart to the students at each part of the English Praxis Course during the three semesters. Praxis Course implies a course that always undergoes the formula of 'theory into practice'. Significantly, the syllabus for 'English Praxis course-I: A Course in Communication Skills' seems to have been framed as a bridge-gaping course between Intermediate Education and Higher Education. This paper primarily aims to discuss the following.

  a. The Implementation of Praxis Course-I in a sensible and practical approach.
  b. Its challenges of making a student leap forward to embrace Higher Education
  c. Pragmatic Strategies for creating a vital teaching and learning environment.

KEYWORDS:

Praxis Course, Paradigm shift, Hours allotted, Methods, Preparedness, CBCS, Bridge-gaping course

INTRODUCTION:

We are aware that the syllabus for General U.G courses (B.Sc/B.A/B.Com/B.B.A) in Degree Colleges has been revised under the Choice Based Credit System (CBCS) across Andhra Pradesh with effect from the academic year of 2020-21. This syllabus revision of English has become a prominent action as English medium became mandatory in all Degree Colleges across A.P w.e.f the academic year of 2021-22. It's become an arduous task for many students pursuing primary studies in the medium of Telugu. They are unable to simply adapt the new course to study in other mediums at the level of higher education. So, it would be rather practicable when the students are sent to undergo a bridge gaping course during the first semester. Moreover, a bridge course is needed for the transition of a student's 'level of study' from the lower stage to the upper stage. A bridge course

should not be confined to conducting a program for one week or ten days. It will be beneficial when it's extended in a complete semester. English Praxis Course-I consists of certain attributes that let them be accustomed to pursuing studies in higher education. However, the confinement of instructional hours allotted to English (four per week) prevents the students' enthusiasm towards language skills into practice. Also, the teachers using various methods for the same topic wouldn't be helpful for the existence of a revised course which necessitates a certain orientation offered by the Department of Higher Education.

A. Syllabus Design:

As Breen mentioned in 1984, "Any syllabus will express_however indirectly_certain assumptions about language, the psychological process of learning and the pedagogic and social processes within a classroom." The syllabus design of a course is usually ignored by the concerned authorities. The content of the course should be designed by the people who are dwelling in the field of teaching. The design of the course should reflect the needs and interests of the students from all regions. It is not supposed to confine to something which fulfils a person's requirements. Designing the syllabus can dictate the prospect of the forthcoming generation. So, it's essential to take the stakeholders' feedback on a course and to be reviewed by the experts' team. As well, following a meticulous approach in determining objectives and specifications for each topic would be a fundamental obligation of syllabus makers. During the Preparation of the English curriculum, one should keep in mind whether the language proficiency of teachers, learning resources, the time bound for syllabus completion, and standardized testing tools are conceivable in the institutions or not. If it is not possible, we should focus on how to make it customized to our institution in accordance with the adaptability of the syllabus. Candlin suggests that curricula are concerned with general statements about language learning, learning purpose and experience, evaluation, and the role of relationships between teachers and learners. When you are part of the syllabus design for the freshers at UG level into Higher Education, we should carry out a few things like selecting suitable materials, stating the objective of the course, listing grammatical and functional components, and formulating a teaching-learning act.

As the title of the course suggested, the Praxis course recommends the practice of exercises rather than mugging the vocabulary and grammatical rules. The syllabus must be knitted with the scope for using authentic learning material and suggesting various methods and activities during the teaching-learning process in order to touch the distinctive paths of the syllabus. Every college should be equipped with an English Language Lab to deal with topics from II Unit (speaking skills) like Sounds of English, Stress, and Intonation. The teaching methodology has to be suggested in the syllabus design for dealing with new topics like Soft Skills. Finally, a Continuous Comprehensive Evaluation has to be executed to assess the constant progress of the student across all aspects mentioned in the syllabus of English Praxis Course-I.

B. Choice-Based Credit System (CBCS):

The University Grants Commission (UGC) has initiated several steps to bring equity, efficiency, and academic excellence to the National Higher Education System. The important ones include innovation and improvement in the course- curricula, the introduction of a paradigm shift in learning and teaching pedagogy, examination, and the education system. Choice-based credit system (CBCS) offers opportunities to address students' educational needs and aspirations of a student. This choice-based credit system in higher education provides flexibility in preparing the curriculum and granting credits based on the course intensity and teaching hours. This helps students to pursue courses of their choice, study at their own pace, learn extra lessons, and acquire more than the required credits. The framework of CBCS emphasizes group discussions, assignments, class activities, and internal examinations which creates an environment that is appropriate for English Language Learning. According to the guidelines issued by UGC on the CBCS framework, the student is supposed to take the Praxis Course, the Language Course which is given with 3 credits and 4 hours in each semester. (Ref.2). As conducting the activities of the English Language Lab is also part of implementing the English Praxis Course,

allotted hours (4 per week) are scarcely enough to conduct other language activities. So, it necessitates extending two more instructional hours per week.

C. English Bridge Course:

English has been considered the lingua franca which gives the scope for exploring global knowledge. Nehru and other like-minded leaders agreed that English should be allowed to continue as the official and link language in the country until Hindi was accepted and spoken fluently by the non-Hindi-speaking people in the country. The Teaching of English at the UG level plays a vital role in the level of achievement of students ensuring they acquire the English language skills for application at various levels. The Bridge Course, when conducted as a sustained system of language input and acquisition of a student's undergraduate program will yield the best results. However this, according to the teacher's feedback, is not practically feasible due to time and space constraints in the regular curriculum in colleges. The English Language Program is specifically designed to assist a student with initial English proficiency to attend college courses in the English Medium and to develop English Language Skills. The English Bridge Course is designed to give a rapid revision and training of the language skills namely Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing. Language learning is complete only through the acquisition of Language skills with appropriate Grammar and Vocabulary skills. Hence, it is vital to evaluate any English Bridge Course material concerning its coverage of lessons including exercises and activities in Language, Grammar, and Vocabulary skills. When we look into the syllabus of English Praxis Course-I which is meant to be designed for students preferring higher education in degree colleges, the following features may turn it out as a bridge course for the beginner of higher education.

1. **Exclusion of Literary section:** It is the most astonishing feature of the English Praxis Course-I which can be evidently endowed as a bridge course for a beginner of Higher Education. As we are aware no English course was designed so far at the level of Higher Education unaccompanied by a literary section. However, English Praxis Course-I has been mapped out in consideration of accustoming a beginner to the new environment of Higher Education. Also, something goes under discussion that English Praxis Course-I doesn't make room for creativity at the exclusion of the literary section.

2. **Prominence to Listening skills:** Listening-skill which is commonly ignored among the four skills of language acquisition, differs from hearing and is contemplated as an amalgamation of Receiving, Understanding, Remembering, Evaluating, and Responding. English Praxis Course begins with an introduction to listening skills which includes the importance of Listening, the differences between Listening and Hearing, the stages involved in the Listening Process, Barriers, and Strategies for effective listening. The weightage identified for Listening skills is rather high among other aspects that existed in English Praxis Course-I. As the students are familiar with note-taking exercises at the intermediate level, they can apply them for the acquisition of listening skills.

3. **Likelihood of syllabi:** A significant feature of English Praxis Course-I which made it envisaged as a bridge course is to extract the syllabus of grammar, speaking, and writing skills from the syllabus of the Intermediate course which students had been already familiar with, by the time they blended in higher education. It will surely support the students to embrace the undaunted sphere of higher education. All the segments of the grammar section from the Intermediate syllabus have been astonishingly repeated in English Praxis Course-I. Except for the topic of Intonation, each topic has been readdressed in this new one.

The major resemblances between the syllabi of Intermediate and English Praxis Course-I shown in the table would make it embodied as a Bridge Gaping Course.

S.No	Unit	Segment of Syllabus	Topic included in the syllabus of 'English Praxis Course-I(Sem-I)'	Whether it is covered in the syllabus of "Intermediate'
1	I	Listening skills	1. Importance of Listening 2. Types of Listening 3. Barriers to Listening 4. Strategies for Effective Listening	Yes, this section is addressed to a certain extent in the form of comprehension passages which can assess the listening and reading skills.
2	II	Speaking skills	1. Sounds of English: Vowels and Consonants 2. Syllable division 3. Word accent 4. Intonation	Yes, Except for the topic on Intonation, students are well-acquainted with the rest of 3.
3	IIII	Grammar	Concord: Agreement of Subject and Verb	Yes, students are familiar with every grammatical segment at the Intermediate level.
			Modal Auxiliaries	
			Tenses	
			Articles	
			Prepositions	
			Question Tags	
			Sentence Transformation (Voice, Speech, Degrees of Comparison)	
			Error Correction	
4	IV	Writing	1. Punctuation	Yes
			2. Spelling	
			3. Paragraph Writing	
5	V	Soft skills	1. SWOC	Yes, this section is

			2. Attitude	addressed to a certain extent through literature topics though they are not provided as specific segments.
			3. Emotional Intelligence	
			4. Telephone Etiquette	
			5. Interpersonal Skills	
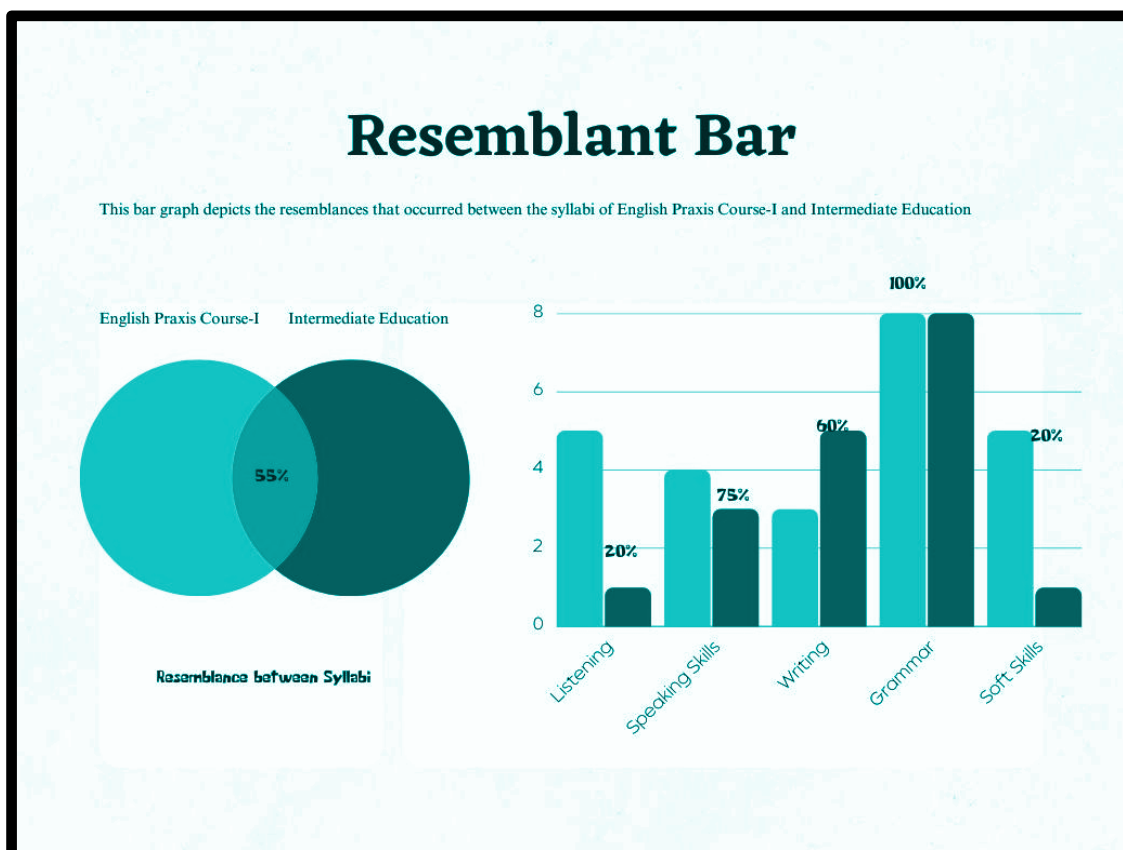
So, this study reveals that 55% of the syllabus from Intermediate (Previous Class) has been revisited by the syllabus designers of 'English Praxis Course-I (Sem-I)' for the students of I-B.A/B.Com/B.Sc. They might have contemplated making the beginners accustomed to the new syllabus. It justifies that 'English Praxis Course-I (Sem-I)' can act as a bridge-gaping course that can give a gentle push towards higher education.

D. Introduction to Soft skills:

'Soft skills' is an umbrella term that comprises personality traits, social graces, and a facility with language that marks people to varying degrees. We witness that students don't even hesitate to take their lives when they are unable to bear the stress and conflict they face in daily life. The student with soft skills can effortlessly manage turbulent times during the course of life. Students do not come across the segment of soft skills at the level of Intermediate Education. When students take up higher education, they must be provided with certain soft skills that are essential to growing up as adults. The maturity that is acquired by learning soft skills makes the students balance success and failure on the same terms. They choose career paths effortlessly by moving forward despite facing failures and can determine the course of action for the next attempt.

Findings & Suggestions:

1. **Adapting experience-based approach**: The praxis course can adapt the experience-based approach that links theory and practice and allows students to participate in real-life situations instead of regular class sessions. Unlike the other subjects, English Language acquisition demands an interactive approach among pairs and groups. Much of the class time should undergo collaborative learning that includes JAM sessions, Group discussions, and role plays instead of being encouraged to learn grammar and spelling rules by heart. The experience-based approach may bring out the students from their comfort zone of expression. It leads to evolving themselves for exposure to the language. Though Reading skills are not addressed in the syllabus of English Praxis Course-I, teachers can facilitate the students to explore comprehension passages for preparing summaries and analyses. As well, the creation of opportunities to participate in Word-building games will enhance students' enthusiasm for learning Vocabulary.

2. **Preference to Functional Grammar:** As we can see, students learn more grammatical patterns at the level of Intermediate Education than in the English Praxis Course-I from semester -I of B.A/B.Com/B.Sc Courses. They might be given much emphasis on practicing exercises by the time they join Higher Education. So, teachers would better encourage them to participate in real-life situations in order to acquire grammar organically. In the English Praxis Course-I, much emphasis is given to functional grammar which lets the students make use of appropriate grammatical patterns in the various discourses.

3. **Computer-assisted Language Learning (CALL):** It is a well-known fact that the coronavirus pandemic has altered the world's perspective of language learning. It made us experience global learning through a single window of technology. Using computers for language learning began in the 1960s. During the age of technology, all learners dwell in the world of machine learning. So, it would be recommended to adopt technological platforms for effective language learning instead of discouraging them from keeping away from technology. Computer-assisted Language Learning (CALL) is identified as a cross-disciplinary science that emerged between 1960 and 1970. Computer-assisted Language Learning (CALL) has recently grown up to make use of various applications and virtual learning platforms. In addition, learning becomes more personalized when CALL has been modulated portable with the usage of mobile phones. It is known as Mobile Assisted language learning which brings global learning into the palm of learners. The platforms like National Digital Library, Swayam Platforms, and Amazon Kindle throw opportunities for learning. With the aid of CALL and MALL, students are offered to listen to Podcasts and watch video discussions in order to enhance their listening and speaking skills.

4. **Adapting 360-degree evaluation to assess soft skills:**
   Attitude, SWOC Analysis, Emotional Intelligence, Telephone Etiquette, and Interpersonal skills are the five soft skills which are included in the syllabus of 'English Praxis Course-I(Sem-I)' By only providing experiential learning opportunities through hands-on practice in communication, collaboration, and problem-solving, a teacher can manage to accomplish the objective of instructing soft skills though it's a strenuous exercise for the teachers'. However, the evaluation of soft skills is such a challenging task it is transcendental to draw the results by conducting paper-pen examinations. Some Interviews and personality tests should be conducted to measure students' perspectives toward a problem or a situation. Sometimes they may not bear full-fledged results. So, adapting 360-degree evaluation will make the assessment non-subjective and comprehensive. It will provide a holistic view of assessing students' soft skills. Having feedback from multiple sources under 360-degree evaluation, the teacher can identify the strengths and weaknesses of students in certain areas of performance. Peer feedback plays a pivotal role in 360-degree evaluation for evaluating students' soft skills. In addition, extracting feedback from all the stakeholders will grant us fair and accurate results.

5. **Four Quadrant Generation of Learning Management System (LMS):**

Based on the application of MALL (Mobile Assisted Language Learning), the Andhra Pradesh Department of Higher Education has come up with an amazing initiative of a Learning Management System (LMS) that brings an ICT classroom to students' mobile phones. Unlike the Department of School Education, they don't entertain corporate companies like BYJU's. Under LMS content generation, many lecturers who are adept and experienced have sorted out to act as master trainers. They are offered training classes in the utilization of various technical platforms like OBS (Open Broadcast Software). Every lecturer has to be part of the LMS content generation in 4 quadrants as claimed by the APCCE.

1. E-Notes
2. Presentation (PPT)
3. Video class
4. Assessment (Objective)

Each topic has been formed into the above 4 quadrants, made available in the portal of APCCE (Andhra Pradesh Commissioner of Collegiate Education). The student is supposed to log in using credentials provided by the Department of Higher Education.

Conclusion:

As discussed in this paper, the syllabus of English Praxis Course-I plays a prominent role in shaping the learning experiences of students. 'Introduction to English medium', as a mandatory policy was implemented in degree colleges across Andhra Pradesh. Primarily, this study focused on how English Praxis Course-I can act as a bridge course for beginners who have to be accustomed to performing effectively at the level of higher education. This paper explored the various aspects to be adapted to the syllabus for English Praxis Course-I. Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL), Experience-based approach, and four-quadrant content generation will support the pragmatic implementation of English Praxis Course-I. As well, this paper suggested 360-degree evaluation which is an appropriate technique for the assessment of soft skills. I hope this paper has accommodated precious insights into the best initiatives that have to be adapted by syllabus designers.

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