

Academic Gaffes And English

Resurfacing of English at the degree level is to be seen more as making amends for an error of academic judgement than a subject for fresh controversy among academics or others. The price paid for the mistake has been pretty heavy and that for very pragmatic reasons: A degree (graduation) without English hardly sold in the job (labour) market at home or abroad. In force for about 7 years, the reformed BA pass course (without English) accounts for thousands of university graduates smarting under the crippling disadvantage of having not done English in their degree examination. The result, needless to say, is: they have only swelled the ranks of the educated unemployed. Their predicament is to be blamed on those who made the hasty but thoughtless decision to abolish English at the degree level.

The unannounced motive behind the abolition was mainly to remove the barrier to passing the degree examination in English. They never considered the short or long term cost at which the percentage of success in the examination was enhanced. In the final analysis, it is the nation that has paid the price for a step taken in the name of examination or academic reform.

Of about the same magnitude is another (so-called) reform introduced at the secondary school certificate (SSC) examination level: the introduction of the five-hundred-question-Bank, made available, in advance, to students to accelerate the pass rate at the SSC examination.

It has been a fantastic success—if you could call it a success. Students who would thank their stars for a bare pass (third division, at best) ended up securing star marks thanks to the Bank.

In the name of reform or/and with the misdirected intention of raising the percentage rate of success in the SSC examination, the greatest damage has been done to secondary education. Almost institutionally, it has destroyed the creative potential of students turning the SSC examination into a farce. In the first row of those who have suffered the mentally crippling loss are the 'successful' students themselves, which translates naturally into a national loss. The school graduates will not take long to discover how they have been done for. In the process language teaching or the proficiency in using it, specially English, as a foreign language, has been the major casualty. Heaven forbid that some hyper-inventive reformer will draw a new rabbit out of his hat, say, a more prolific bank of questions, for degree examinees to get through their examinations in English.

One simple conclusion from all this is that education both at secondary and degree level have been made painfully unproductive—in the former by the examination reform introduced; in the latter, by the elimination of English from the degree course.

The task, if the government and others would seriously set about it, is a colossal one of correcting these mistakes of the past and reversing the process. Immediately please reintroduce the traditional examination system—the essay system, both in language and other sectors, at the secondary level. Scrap the Bank. The focus will remain fixed,—on developing the creative potential of the pupil and to enable him to think freely, to marshal and arrange his own ideas on a given subject.

As for the controversy relating to Medium of Instruction it is too late in the day to try to change it. Let it be a free and untrammelled bi-lingual one with one central aim, namely, full and clear delivery (by the teacher) and as full and clear reception by the student.

One continuing gap in English teaching, particularly in mofussil schools and colleges is the acute shortage of English teachers. To fill it, at least partially, a scheme can be drawn up to use, on a part time basis (and on handsome remuneration), the services of experienced English teachers of the best schools. That is a thing the British education department is going to do, for schools in Britain have long been facing teaching problems for their schools. Retired senior teachers of English can also be reappointed in most schools with good results for the latter in matters of English teaching.