

## An Overview of the Problems and Practice of English Language Teaching and Learning in Technological University (Hmawbi)

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**Abstract** -In Technological University (Hmawbi), English is a compulsory subject from first year to fourth year students in order to continue the chosen field of study. The prescribed textbooks are Grammar for IELTS and English Unlimited. The University's objective is to use English independently for global communication. Therefore, this paper gives overview of problems and practice of English language teaching and learning in Technological University (Hmawbi). Specifically, the study aims at identifying the activities of teaching by the teachers, the techniques of assessment employed by the teachers and the problems that impeded the classroom teaching and learning process. The research uses quantitative research method. The required data for the study are collected using questionnaire, interview and classroom observation from 120 randomly selected students from third year engineering students and 10 teachers from TU(Hmawbi). It can be as a reference to the students in improving their English Language and help lecturers to become creative in teaching and make the students engaged in learning English. The results indicate that teachers should follow more learner centered ways in their teaching of English and students should change their mindset on learning into meaningful learning which will lead towards better long-term retention than rote learning.

**Keywords** - communicative language teaching, English language teaching and learning, promoting active learning activities, possibility and problem

### I. INTRODUCTION

English as an international language plays an important and crucial role all over the world. In education English language teaching has undergone tremendous change, over the years, especially the last ten years. Students are burdened with studying, learning and grasping the materials, and of course, lectures with the collection of relevant information from prescribed texts. Nowadays too, English is taught as a compulsory subject in the education system of the country beginning from kindergartens up to tertiary level. The aim of teaching English at Technological University (Hmawbi) is to teach students how to use English for communicative needs.

One of the main methodological principles is the Principle of Communicative Competence. It means that students should be involved in oral and written communication throughout the whole course of learning English. Communicative goals are best achieved by giving great attention to language use and not just usage, to fluency and not just accuracy, to authentic language and contexts, and not just parallel structures. The main aim of these studies is to examine why our technological students do not see reasonable English literacy and proficiency after going through at least 11 years of learning at school. For this, a change in the trend especially the teaching learning process of English language has to undergo a transition for the betterment. It has also been defined as "anything course-related that all students in a class session are called

upon to do other than simply watching, listening, and taking notes". Active learning is "a method of learning in which students are actively or experientially involved in the learning process and where there are different levels of active learning, depending on student involvement.

According to Baynham&Prinsloo, 2009, literacy in a language is increasingly conceptualized as a social practice. Drawing largely on Bakhtin and Vygotsky, literacy researchers have widely argued that language learning cannot and do not take place primarily in the brains of isolated individual learners but are instead inextricably bound up with social factors as learners interact in human activities.

### II. LITERATURE REVIEW FOR TEACHING LEARNING PROCESS

Teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL) requires learners' exposure to the language skills: reading, speaking, writing and listening. The first and the last aim of acquiring such language skills is to achieve a high development of abilities of receiving and producing the target language either in oral or written form, i.e. achieving a good mastery in the productive and receptive skills. The teaching/learning process is like a triangle inside a circle. Teachers, students and the curriculum form the triangle and their interactions occur within the educational system. The weakness of one component among these will dramatically affect the entire teaching/ learning process. It seems in the area of second/ foreign language learning communicative language teaching is influencing our teaching practice.

However, it is believed that such methodological changes alone could not guarantee successful in teaching and learning English unless it is accompanied by proper classroom activities and mindset. It seems that most second/foreign language teaching today does not only focus on massive memorization of vocabulary and grammar rules as it was before. It appears that scholars now believe learning language to communicate is more important than learning about the language.

#### A. Problems Teachers/Students Face in English Language teaching and learning

As there are several obstacles to achieving desired language outcomes in the classroom, teachers play a central role. Their wishes, styles and instructions control everything that happens in the classroom, and they typically speak most of the time. Teachers are the only ones who benefit from this situation with respect to practicing speaking English in the classroom.

In contrast, students are listeners and receivers of knowledge. Their participation in the classroom is limited to one- or two- sentence responses to questions. In addition,

teachers' negative discourse regarding students' performance on assignments or exams can affect students' motivation and willingness to communicate. This increases students' anxiety and creates an unsupportive classroom atmosphere. Moreover, many teachers use their mother tongue such as clarifying difficult concepts or explaining new vocabulary and grammatical points. This decreases students' motivation to practice language skills in the classroom, even with their classmates.

Regarding the role of students in the teaching/learning process, our students may not understand why they should bother to achieve English language proficiency. What do they need English for? Moreover, they regard English language as an English subject to pass in their exam. In their daily interactions and surroundings, students use mother tongue to get what they need. These important facts help to explain students' negative attitude towards learning English.

The challenge facing the teaching of English language in TU(Hmawbi) lies in making our classroom relevant to the current language needs. Learning is seen as participating and taking part in communities of practice, as meaningful and emergent. Implicit in the concepts of language learning as meaningful and emergent is that English language learning is about new learning, about promoting new knowledge and offering opportunities of continuity and discontinuity. As learners participate in a meaningful learning, they acquire new language skills.

Current formulations of language teaching and learning in our educational environment that reflect a heavy emphasis on the commodity value of disadvantageous to our learners. Students are evaluated based on their performance and ability to obtain good grades in the examination or display good writing skills. The practice of evaluating students based on their skills and competencies silences learners' voices, making them feel alienated and separated from meaningful language use. The new language classroom should encompass learning environments which encourage critical thinking, foster innovative culture, and acknowledge diversity in global spaces.

Based on the reviews presented earlier in this paper, it remains unclear how, and how well schools are preparing our students to live and participate in the 21<sup>st</sup> century 'literate ways' of behaving and doing things. When young people around the globe are already connecting and enthusiastically using English in an ICT-saturated world, how are the language teachers preparing our young learners to meet the needs of the present and future worlds? Also remains unclear is the nature of the practices that the learners currently engaged in with regards to learning English both in-university and out-of-university contexts. Some research has suggested that lack of connectivity between home, university, stakeholders need and local communities may have significant implications for student learning.

#### *B. Research on English language teaching/ learning in Technology University (Hmawbi)*

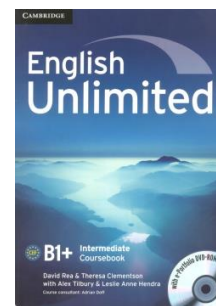
This Research studies show that 120 randomly selected third years engineering students from Hmawbi and 10 teachers from English department are found to have limited

critical ability to appropriately respond to an academic reading passage and lack the conventions of academic writing needed to write well in an academic discipline. The main purpose of this study was to look into the problem and practice of teaching and learning of English Language in TU(Hmawbi). Under this broad objective, the study had the following specific objectives:

- Looking at the problem that the teachers and students face
- Identifying the teaching strategies that the teachers employ
- Identifying the classroom activities, the teachers use to teach
- Investigating the assessment techniques practiced by the teachers to assess skills of students.

#### *C. Curriculum*

In Technological University (Hmawbi), English Unlimited B1+ intermediate by David Rea & Theresa Clementon with Alex Tibury & Leslie Anne Hendra is our textbook for 3<sup>rd</sup> year engineering students.



**Figure 1** current course book

It is consisted of fourteen units and each unit is divided into sections, with clear, practical goals for learning. The students can do more practice by themselves using self-study pack, which includes a workbook and interactive DVD-ROM.



**Figure 2** the contents of the book

Every part of every unit contributes to achieving purposeful, real life objectives. It is covered four skills that build learner's ability to understand the nature of English. It provides the extra ingredients for enhancing communicative ability-with additional speaking and writing skills sections based on real world communication.



Figure 3 an example of task in one unit

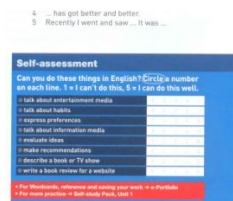


Figure 4 an example of self-assessment in every end of the unit

### III. METHODS OF RESEARCH

To collect the required data for this study, four types of instruments: questionnaire, classroom observation, interview and content analysis were used. The reason for using such multiple data collection tools is to triangulate the data and to increase the credibility of the study.

#### A. Data Collection Procedure

The task of the data collection was started with the classroom observation. Then administering the questionnaire to both teacher and student participants of the study followed. After the classroom observation was finalized, the interview with selected participants was done. These procedures help to avoid the risk of sensitizing the participants to show behaviors different from the usual ones.

#### B. Method of Data Analysis

The data that was collected from the participant teachers and students through questionnaire was analyzed descriptively in terms of the percentage, frequency distribution and mean score of the frequency of the students and teachers' response. The data from the classroom observation was also carefully recorded in to Yes/No category and rating scales (always, usually, sometimes, rarely, never) as they happen in the speaking classes. Then, the frequency distribution of the observed practices was summarized and interpreted together with the data obtained in the questionnaire and the activities of speaking skills in the course material.

#### C. Research Questions

This study tried to answer the following leading questions:

1. What kinds of activities used by the teachers are to teach English in the classroom?
2. What language do teachers use while teaching?
3. What aspects of language skills do teachers and students emphasized in the classroom?
4. Do teachers plan lessons before teaching?
5. What kind of teaching aids do teachers use to improve students' four skills?
6. What are the techniques of assessment used by the

teachers to assess skills of the learner?

7. What are the challenging process of teaching and learning of language skills?

### IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Recording and analysis of results for interviewing ten English teachers

**Question one: How do you think of your English teaching methods? Question two: What's your current teaching aim?**

**Teacher first and sixth said:** "With the development of Internet, students have many ways to acquire knowledge and they will not regard their teachers as the authority of knowledge. Many students had learned English for more than ten years before they entered universities so the purpose of English teaching in universities is to combine many teaching models to assist and help students study improve their studying interest and help them solve the difficulties in their studies. Now I have seven English lessons for every class and teaching time in the class is short and teaching materials are limited. I will assign students some studying tasks after school and supervise and urge them to finish. I think under the current social condition EFL teachers should change teachers' roles."

**Teacher second said** "In my English class I think the focus is to make students keep their interest to study English then students will study actively. But it's hard to achieve it. In this term, I teach three different classes. Three classes are the different level classes. Students' English levels are quite different among different classes. When I teach in the adjustment classes, I often help students review some English grammar which they didn't learn well in their schools and most students always keep silent in the classes and most of them cannot finish the studying tasks after school. I have to use the traditional teaching methods to teach them, which means that I still guide the whole teaching in the class. Although I know English teachers should change their teaching models, it still depends on the specific students' English levels. My teaching wish is to teach my students well and finish the class activities assigned by my university."

**Question three: How do you improve your teaching quality? Question four: How do you practice for your English proficiency in your spare time?**

**Teacher third and fourth said** "My university puts forward the major tasks for English teachers who help students pass examinations, and if the ratio to pass examinations is too low the teacher will be blamed by the leaders and will feel lose face. Although we want to give students more autonomous studying, our English teaching still focus on the practice of English grammar and English vocabularies studying because it's useful to pass the examinations." I ask them to read and write workbook and students' book again and again as the exam question based 70% on their workbook and students' book. Teacher fifth, eighth and ninth said teachers have to hold the observation and learning teaching activities. In summer vacation, teachers should attend English training classes held by the publishing houses and can listen to some English lectures given by some experts in this field. But, in our university, there is no training for teachers to be proficient in their language skills. As a teacher, I have to learn skills that I

need by my plans. I think it's still not enough for English teachers to improve their teaching quality. Teacher tenth said, I have made some researches and interviewed some teachers and their students in some classes, hoping to find the valuable topic to research. It will last long time to do it and I haven't done it continuously because of my busy teaching job because I have fourteen lessons in an academic year. I have to calculate students' attendance, activities marks and arranging the tutorial sheets that are odd jobs for a teacher. I hope we don't need to teach so many lessons every week then we can have time to research and improve the teaching methods to teach students well and students can also learn more from teachers." As a young teacher, I have a lot of teaching tasks to finish every week and at the same time I need to write the academic paper. So, I don't spend much time in my teaching and often teach my students in the traditional teaching ways."

The results of interviewing reveal that most teachers know they should change the traditional teaching models in which teachers dominate and guide the class teaching and students only listen to teachers' teaching passively. Because of different teaching requirements of different universities and diverse students' English levels, most teachers do not spend much time and energy studying and trying the new teaching models in their classes and still adopt the traditional teaching models. Teaching models are static monotonously. Because of their busy workload, the teachers cannot spend much time and energy to study and get further training, so the teachers cannot write enough academic papers, which can make them not to get the higher professional titles.

In a real second language-learning environment (i.e. within the target language speech community), language development may occur outside the classroom. But, such outside exposure to the target language is minimal in our situation where English is considered to be a foreign language. Students learn English in classrooms alone. Therefore, the findings of this research could help generate pedagogical insights into effective teaching/learning of language skills in the classroom. It may potentially benefit the following groups:

1. Help English teachers to evaluate their own practices of teaching and assessing language skills.
2. Initiate English language teachers to use different techniques and activities of teaching
3. Researchers who are interested in the area may also use the findings of this study as a basis for further study.

Studies conducted to look for ways to improve English language learning in TU(Hmawbi) have largely focused on the teaching and learning of English in the language classrooms. It is important now to look beyond the language classrooms in order to understand the position of English learners. More studies are needed to examine learners' ways of using different linguistics repertoire when they are outside of the classrooms. Studies are also needed to find ways to situate English language among the available linguistics codes our learners have.

Most of the studies reviewed in this paper are situated within the structure of autonomous model. Within this perspective, learning is viewed as concrete, cognitive skills that are transferable to any context. The review here however points towards the need to look at language

learning as joining or 'membership into a discourse community'.

The studies also mainly use questionnaire or survey methods to examine the problem in hand and the methods used underplay the intricacy and the psychological nature of English language learning in TU(hmawbi). The use of quantitative methods such as survey questions could limit the critical areas that can be examined by qualitative case study researches. This paper therefore suggests that in order to look at English language teaching/ learning as inclusive and relevant to the present needs, many studies that employ qualitative research design are needed to provide empirical evidence of localized, contextualized use of the language.

## V. CONCLUSIONS

This paper highlights a number of points that put forward important pedagogical implications in the teaching/learning of English in the target University.

- The teaching of English in our classrooms that emphasizes rote-learning and the mastery of specific language skills that are then tested via examinations should be revised.
- The teaching of language skills in the target University was found to be dependent on few commonly used activities.
- This can limit the opportunities of learners to practice the target language in various situations to develop their communicative competence.
- The assessment techniques used by teachers for assessing speaking skills are not the reflection of the instructional procedures used in the practice of teaching the skill.
- Concerning the problems that impeded the practice of teaching and learning speaking skills, student' poor language background, mother tongue used in discussions, students' lack of interest, absence of encouragement/motivation from teachers, students' fear of making mistakes and shortage of practice time are found to be major problems.
- A language curriculum that advances on inclusive, learning-by-doing experiences would encourage a more meaningful learning.
- An improved English language curriculum that operates on reflective learning pedagogy would encourage learners to become independent and critical language learners, in line with the current trends in language learning.
- Teachers should adopt contemporary teaching methods that appreciate students' needs and learning styles and encourage stress-free classrooms that engender positive attitudes towards language learning, such as the CLT approach.
- Authenticity and technological devices are essential in creating a lively classroom and avoiding boring textbooks and tasks.
- Implementing some of these changes will improve students' motivation to learn English and change their attitude towards language learning.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The author would like to acknowledge her enormous thanks to DawThweThweOo (Head and Associate Professor Department of English, Technological University(Hmawbi) for her suggestion and encouragement. The author would like to thank to Professor, Faculty of Languages, University of Information Technology) for her kind supervision and grammar check. The author would like to express her sincere thanks and appreciation to U Aung Kyaw Myint lecturer Department of English, Technological University(Hmawbi) for his invaluable advice and guidance. Special thanks to teachers and students from Technological University (Hmawbi)for their support and participation to survey this paper.

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