

The Reasons Behind the English Major Students' Weaknesses in Philadelphia University

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Abstract

This paper is intended to investigate and scrutinize the reasons behind the weaknesses of English major students in Philadelphia University. One thing I would like to make clear before hand is that my observations and conclusions are based on my personal experience gained during my work as General Education Specialist (English) UNRWA – UNESCO through classroom visits to some community colleges and Education Science Faculties in the five fields of UNRWA operations, namely, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, West Bank and Gaza on the one hand, and as a teacher of English at both Philadelphia University and the University of Jordan on the other hand. I have discovered that the reasons behind our students' weaknesses may refer to the learner, the curriculum or the study plan with its three major components, namely, language, linguistics and literature, and methods and teaching strategies.

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Introduction:

English is a lingua franca of our age. It is important nowadays to be aware of the fact that English is essential it was predicted to be "the most respectable and most universally read and spoken in the next century, if not before the close of this one" (Kachru 1996: 72. The prophesy has been achieved so we need to equip our students with such a language in order to help them cope with their life.

The thrust of this paper is to throw light on the most discrete problems which relate to the teaching of English to Arab students at the university level. Continuing dissatisfaction with the overall performance of Arab students in English courses suggests a lack of fundamental standards of curriculum design, testing oral communication skills, developing productive skills teaching strategies at the university level.

The departments of English at Arab universities exist to serve our needs of the English Language and literature. Now we need English not because it is the language of the British or the Americans and the rest of the English-speaking world (political reasons), but because it has become a lingua franca indispensable in conducting diplomacy, business and other practical transactions with the whole world. Although many educational institutions, other than universities, have proved very successful in improving their students' basic skills of the English language, it is still conceded that one of the primary functions of the university department of English is to improve its students' standard of English.

But since the departments of English invariably combine language and literature, language in spite of its utmost importance must remain a means to an end. The end with which we are now concerned is the acquisition of the literary experience which is expressed in English. The trouble here is that we have sometimes allowed our needs for English as a language to determine our needs for it as a literature. We often use literature primarily as a means of teaching the language.

Like other departments, the department of English may be considered as a composite of three major components: the learner, the curriculum / study plan (with its major components : language , linguistics and literature), and the teacher and methods and teaching strategies.

1. The learner

It was not long ago when the departments of English at Arab universities represented one of the most prestigious fields in university education and was, thus, able to attract some of the best students. Both the prestige and the appeal of English as a field of study, however, have declined in recent years. It appears that this is the age of business studies and economics which rank next to medical and engineering studies.

To have a fairly clear idea of what students in the English Department at Philadelphia University think that the rationale behind studying English is, one hundred students were asked to state their reasons for specializing or majoring in English languages and literature. This number constitutes roughly about 24% of the total student

population in the Department during the academic year 2006-2007. (See Appendix 1: the questionnaire).

The reasons that come first in the list is that sixty three English major students feel that English is more instrumental particularly in finding high status jobs and going into graduate programs. In other words, English majors get better jobs than graduates of other departments of the Faculty of Arts, and therefore, get relatively higher salaries. Fourteen students mentioned that they chose to major in English because of an interest in the subject from their school days. Twelve students studied English to comply with their parents' interest. Similarly, twelve students chose to major in English as a matter of prestige. Only five students, however, mentioned that the chief reason behind their choice of English is that it exposes them to a different culture and to a different way of thinking. The majority of our students is thus job –oriented. Job-wise, their choice of English is very much justified. Graduates of the English Department have indeed better work opportunities. Some of them can even secure a good-paying job in the Gulf states and Saudi Arabia. To our students, the financial factor is simply the rationale.

With regard to the admission policy, students are admitted on the basis of their performance in Tawjihi. (General Secondary Certificate) Students can join the Department of English if they get 55%. As teachers, we always complain about this practice and argue that this is not valid enough. In short, we want to determine who is qualified enough to study English. Unfortunately, we are not granted the power by the university to take the appropriate measures. Therefore we suggest the following:

1. A remedial English program to help students who are not proficient enough in English to qualify for admission to the Department to attain a sufficiently high level of proficiency that would enable them to major in English.
2. The students who want to join the Department should get 70% and above in English in their Tawjihi.
3. As for the service courses 0130101, 0130102, the student, who wants to join the Department should take the two courses in certain classes by certain teachers in the Language Centre.
4. Admission exam should be administered by the Department.
5. Immediate measures should be taken to solve the worsening state of affairs pertaining to EFL in the public schools and universities.
6. Training courses for newly appointed teachers, particularly language component teachers, on teaching methods, assessment methods, and student progression and achievement.
7. Student should have their opportunities to practice the performance skills/production skills, i.e., to focus on communication skills, speaking and writing through curricular activities.

2-Curriculum / Study Plan

English major students at Arab universities have to go through three major different types of courses. These are the components of the program. The first is the language component which includes courses related to communication skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) grammar and translation. The second is the linguistics component which

includes courses in linguistics mostly on phonetics, phonology, morphology and syntax or other courses about language. The third is the literature component which includes courses on the different periods and genres of English literature.

Before examining the facts of our study program, let us first identify our students: who are they and what they do after graduation. This will make it easier for us to judge the quality and suitability of our program and course offerings.

Concerning learners, the overwhelming majority of our students are products of our school system. They come to the university with varying abilities in English and they graduate from the English Department with approximately the same range variation in English proficiency. I should say that we are not happy with the quality of English with which our graduates leave the university.

Until three or four decades ago, most of our students were expected to become teachers of English upon graduation. This was when teaching was still socially respectable and financially rewarding. But social values and the job market have changed so radically. Today our graduates are found in a great variety of careers such as employees in banks, companies or translators.

To what extent have our curricula changed to reflect these changes, and to what extent do these curricula meet our students' need and prepare them for life? The answers to these questions depend on the answers we give to another set of questions: What sort of graduates should an English department produce? Is there enough harmony between our English

curricula and the use of English by our students once they have left the university? How many of us have given enough thought to clarifying the concept of an English department in an Arab context and to how and why we are teaching English (cf. Broughton et. al, 1978:203).

It is convenient at this stage to look at our English study program as having three major components, namely, language, linguistics, and literature. I shall deal briefly with each component in the light of the questions just raised. Although the following discussion is based specifically on the curriculum of the Department of English at Philadelphia University, I believe it would be generalized to most, if not all, other Arab universities.

The Language Component:

Although most of our students are deficient in the basic language skills when they join the Department, we have not yet succeeded in offering them an adequate integrated set of language courses to improve their proficiency significantly. For example, there are only two courses devoted to training students in "Reading Comprehension" (0120113) and Advanced Reading (0120114). The first is a Faculty elective, i.e., English major students may or may not take it. Moreover, there is not a single course among our offerings devoted to training students in reading comprehension and speed reading. The precariousness of this situation becomes more obvious when we realize that reading with speed and comprehension is duly needed more than any other skill by our students, at least during their university years. (cf. Aziz, 1973:27-8). Similarly, our students receive only one course in "Listening Comprehension"

(0120117) which is a Faculty elective as well. That is to say, tens of our students graduate without ever having been exposed to any native variety of spoken English. Only two writing courses: "Writing" (0120115) and "Advanced Writing" (0120116) are offered which aim at teaching the students how to write correct sentences and paragraphs. There is no required course which teaches students how to write short essays or short research paper. Moreover, there is only one course devoted to spoken English "Listening and Speaking" (0120118). But this course is not enough to help our students become better and more fluent speakers of English. Moreover, two courses in Grammar are not enough.

Accordingly, I dare say that the language component is the weakest. Since language is a tool, it is unrealistic for us to expect any meaningful learning to take place in the other two components, .i.e., linguistics and literature, if our students are deficient in the basic language skills. Do we, realistically, expect such a student whose ability is very limited in the language to study Chaucer's "*Canterbury Tales*", Milton's "*Paradise Lost*" or Shakespeare's works?" Or would it be necessary to teach our students the modernized versions?

The Linguistics Component

Linguists realized that while linguistics was a discipline in its own right, concerned with the study of the formal properties of language, it had little to do with language teaching, which is an intellectual and a psychological matter (James, 1980:11). Thus, being a linguist is not substitute for being an expert in language teaching. In other words, linguistics and language education are two different fields (cf. Jernudd,

1981:43 and Wilkins, 1972: 215-29). What I intend to say is that what we need most in our study program or curriculum, but so far neglected, is language education , not theoretical linguistics. The majority of our students opt for a relatively large number of courses in linguistics of a highly theoretical nature. The list of our courses in linguistics is long indeed. These courses do help our students to be linguistically competent but not communicatively complement, because we, as teachers, teach about the language but not the language itself.

In this context, it is worth mentioning that by 1980, our teachers were mainly equipped with communicative language teaching approach (CLT) which aims at developing procedures for the teaching of the four skills that acknowledge the interdependence of language and communication. This approach also aims at having students become communicatively competent. Communicative competence requires being able to use the language appropriately in a given social context. This requires the knowledge of the linguistic form, meanings and functions. Students must be able to manage the process of negotiating with their classmates (Knight 2001:155).

Authenticity is an important aspect of CLT. Authenticity, as Mitchel (1994:39) defines it is " the use of materials originally produced (in the target culture) by native speakers such as a media program, a magazine, or a newspaper". The idea behind authenticity is that texts used in class should be composed for genuine communicative purposes rather than texts composed artificially. For Mitchel (1994:40), there is no fixed authenticity because we cannot control real-life situations. Texts should

be a mixture of both authentic materials and modeled ones. According to Lee (1995:328), models of language have never established and they will not be due to the fact that the use of language is not completely situated in a can.

The Literature Component

Our course offerings in literature are similar to those offered by any English department in English-speaking countries. This fact alone is enough to cast doubt upon the wisdom and validity of such offerings. For how can we organize our curriculum in such a manner as if our students were native speakers of English? Instead of following the pattern of English departments in English-speaking countries, it would be much more fruitful to look for a model that suits and meets our objectives.

In terms of requirements, the literature component represents 35% of the English Department study program. The main problem with our literature offerings is that most of our students are not proficient enough in English to be able to understand, analyse, judge and appreciate what they are asked to read. I may say that it is often the case that no reasonable degree of appreciating a foreign language or literature is possible without some detailed historical and cultural knowledge of the country where that language is used and the literature is produced. It is also usually the case that this type of knowledge is not available to graduates of secondary schools and it is, therefore, the responsibility of the university to make up for this deficiency.

Now to recapitulate the foregoing discussion on the study program, we seem to be facing the following major problems: the

inadequacy of the language component, the uselessness of much of the linguistic component, and the insufficiency and/or inappropriateness of the literature component.

By equipping our students with the needed language skills, we make them better learners of literature and culture, and thereby prepare them for any career which requires English. In this way, we make our English language courses "serve both pragmatic, vocational purposes and intellectual, literary pursuits" (Banathy, 1972:110). If our graduates find themselves in many professions, then what they need most is "to become creative, aware, and critical learners" (Clayton, 1981: 123). Through their study of literature, our students can attain these qualities, provided that our literature syllabus is properly organized.

Our study plans and curricula should be constantly examined and reorganized to ensure a reasonable balance between courses in language and linguistics on the one hand, and literature and culture on the other.

The question that raises itself is "Can the two components, Linguistics and Literature be separated?" Can English literature be studied as a means for better proficiency in the language?

Defining the philosophy of teaching literature, Widdowson (1990:80) concludes: "On this interpretation, the reason for teaching it would be essentially a linguistic one. I mean by this that its basic purpose would be to acquaint students with the manner in which literary works in English use the language to convey special meaning .Pupils and students are engaged in learning the English Language: this involves in part a learning of language system– the structures and vocabulary of English,

but it must involve also the learning of how this system is used in the actual business of communication."

"Literature in this case will, according to Povey (in Celce-Morcía and McIntosh (eds) 1979:162)"gives evidence of the widest variety of syntax, the richest variation of vocabulary discrimination. It provides examples of the language employed at its most effective, subtle and suggestive."

This may lead me to say that it is necessary to reduce the literature courses in favor of more language courses, in the initial stages of joining the Department courses, aimed at raising the level of proficiency of the students to be able to cope with literature.

The language of literature might sometimes be distinct in various aspects from common language or in Chomsky's term "the ideal native speaker-hearer conversation" (Chomsky, 1957). The Prague school of linguistics (as quoted in Freeman, 1977) maintains that "violation of the norm of the standard, its systematic violation, is what makes possible the poetic utilization of language; without this possibility there would be no poetry". The deviations are clear in syntax and semantics. The grammar of natural language cannot account for these deviations within a generative transformational framework "not by attempting to complicate the grammar of natural language to include them, but by writing a grammar for such poetry as if it were a different language".

Accordingly then, I do believe that the study plan should include a course entitled "Learning English through Literature" where students can learn the grammar of English through learning literature. Moreover,

some syntactic and semantic issues should be applied in literature classes. Besides, some literature examinations should include some linguistic issues and vice versa. Appendix 2 is an illustrative example.

3- Methods and Teaching Strategies

In Jordan during the 1960s and 1970s, teachers were equipped with only a limited number of methods for teaching English such as the direct method and the grammar – translation method. Then by 1980s they were mainly equipped with an approach called communicative language teaching (CLT). This approach is still popular till now. But still our students are unable to cope with such a language. One reason behind this, I think, is the methodology used in our educational system at both schools and universities which in turn provide our schools annually with hundreds of teachers who are not capable enough of handling the process of teaching English efficiently due to their minimal exposure to the various methods of teaching English at universities.

All teachers at the Department are highly qualified. Concerning teachers, at methods, and teaching strategies, any plan, any attempt, and any effort that purport to surmounts the English major students' deficiency, particularly in communicative competence and self- expression should incorporate explicit answers to the following questions:

- What are the methods and strategies of teaching used by the teacher?
- Does the teacher use lecturing only or does he use other methods?
- Does he involve his students in discussion?

- Does the teacher administer teacher- centred class or student-centred class?

- Does he focus on communication and interaction?

S → S interaction

T → S interaction

Pair / group work

Cooperative learning .

(cf. Murphy,1991 and Kumaravadivelu, 1994)

- Does the teacher ask his students to write term papers? Does he give his students chances to present their term papers?

-Does he vary his types of exam? ie., oral and written exams, essay questions and objective questions?

-Does the teacher focus on the low levels of Bloomfield's Taxonomy, i.e., memorization and comprehension and understanding or does he move to Higher Order Thinking skills (HOTs): analysis, synthesis, application, appreciation and judgments?

- Does the teacher bear in mind the Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs): Knowledge and Understanding, Intellectual skills (cognitive and analytical), Practical skills and Transferable skills?

- Are teachers after accuracy (form) or appropriacy (meaning) or both?

- Are teachers after linguistic competence or communicative competence or both?

- Do they motivate their students or do they underestimate them? (cf. Harmer, 1984:3) and (Prawat, 1989).
- Does the teacher use authentic materials and authentic language where possible to help students learn how language is used in real life contexts? (cf. Larsen- Freeman 2002 :128)
- Does the teacher give his students feedback?
- Is the teacher tactful about the errors of his students? (cf. Murphy 1991) and (Ur 1991)
- Does the teacher vary his techniques and methods? e.g., role play activities, pair / group work and discussion among others?
- Does the teacher make his lessons interesting?
- Does he account for different learning styles?
- Do they administer co-curricular activities such as English language clubs?

Moreover, the most noticeable problems which impede the progress of our students at the university level may be attributed to the inadequate mastery of the four language skills, namely, listening, speaking, reading and writing.

1. Listening Comprehension:

This receptive skill "the forgotten skill" as termed by (Chastain,1988:278) seems to have been subsumed insignificant and eventually neglected. I personally assume that listening comprehension is an inevitable by-product of learning to speak. That is to say, advanced students who are going to study in an English- speaking environment need to learn how to listen to lectures and take notes, to comprehend

native speakers in all kinds of speech situations, and to understand radio and TV broadcasts. (cf. Paulston and Bruder, 1976: 278). In essence, the phonological system of a foreign language (i.e., English) is acquired by listening, and oral communication is impossible without a listening skill. Listening skills serve as the basis for the development of speaking.

As far as our students at the university level are concerned, their listening comprehension is lacking and poorly developed. Their speech perception reflects a low level of competence and language proficiency. Most Arab students for example, who can understand vocabulary and structure when used by someone else, have not necessarily incorporated them into their own speech. By the same token, students who can do a pattern drill orally with no errors and little hesitation may not be able to write the same forms correctly. In addition, students who can read an assigned text with ease and almost total comprehension may not be able to discuss the content in class afterwards. As a result, teachers need to be constantly aware of their obligation to provide practice in all four language skills(Chastain, 1988 : 280).

2. Communicative Competence (Speaking Skills)

Language comes not out of a dictionary but, rather, always and inherently out of the mouths of other people. Spoken English aims at developing the student's speaking proficiency so that he can communicate with a native speaker of English in a social situation and on a variety of topics ranging from very simple to fairly complex and intellectually sophisticated. This formulation includes both the development of the student's linguistic competence as well as his/her communicative

competence through exposure to various authentic situations (cf. Mitchell 1994:39).

The majority of our students find it difficult to communicate in English. Since communicative competence is the objective of language teaching / learning process, it follows that efficient communication indicates the ability to carry out linguistic interaction in the target language. It is of the greatest importance therefore to realize that linguistic competence forms part of communicative competence, so students need to acquire a basic knowledge of linguistic forms " skill-getting", supplemented by an equally important stage of " skill-using". (cf. Knight 2001:155).

It should be noted that oral communication skill is a good indicator of language proficiency in a foreign language. Nofal (2006) points out that when producing an utterance, the student needs to know that it is grammatical (accurate), and also it is suitable (appropriate) for a particular situation. For example: "Give me a glass of water!" is grammatical, but it would not be appropriate if the speaker wanted to be more polite. A request such as: "May I have a glass of water, please?" would be more appropriate. Consider the following situation: Ali is a foreign student in London. He does not know how to reach Trafalgar square. He approaches a policeman. Think carefully if Ali is using his English appropriately.

Ali : Good morning, Sir. How are you?

Policeman: (No response, only looks at Ali)

Ali : Do you know where Trafalgar square is?

Policeman: Everyone knows that. Why do you ask?

Ali : You know, I am a foreigner. I want to go there.

Policeman: Go ahead.

Ali : I don't know how to get there.

Policeman: Ah! So you want to know the way to Trafalgar square. Well, you see that red sign there. There is a bus-stop where you can catch bus No 23.

Ali : Thank you Mr. Policeman. God help you.

Policeman: (Smiles).

In the above example all sentences uttered by Ali are accurate, i.e., grammatical but they are not appropriate. In short, being able to communicate requires more than linguistic competence, it requires communicative competence (Hymes: 1971)- "Knowing when and how to say what to whom". Such observations contributed to a shift in the field in the late 1970s and early 1980s from a linguistic structure-centred approach to communication approach (Widdowson: 1990).

Accordingly then, teachers have an important role in presenting the materials to their students and letting them do the job. This minimized role of teachers depends on learner- centered class. This role can not be taught; it is a skill that many communicative teachers should acquire. The role of the teacher is to facilitate the learning process between all students; to encourage all kinds of activities; to urge students to become actively involved in the learning process as much as he can (Mitchell 1994:39). According to Larsen- Freeman,(2002:129) one of the roles

should be an advisor in relation with their activities. Teachers should answer students' questions and they should monitor their performance.

I do believe that Communicative Learning Teaching (CLT) can not work properly without relating it to the context in which the process of learning takes place. A proponent of such an approach, Stephen Bax (2003:284) claims that we are moving from CLT to a more context approach. Context approach has always been crucial in teaching English. "Good teachers naturally take account of the context in which they teach.....the culture, the students and so on..... even when they hold that CLT is essentially the answer .

The context approach focuses mainly on the analysis of the context of the learning process. Its first step in that process is to recognize "key aspects of the context "making the decision of teaching any material. This step involves the "understanding of individual students and their learning needs, wants and strategies in addition to local condition.... national culture and so on as far as possible "(Bax 2003:285)". Secondly, the teacher needs to adopt the most efficient method. Thirdly, to make a decision on what should be learned concerning language aspects such as lexis, phonology, grammar...etc.

3. Reading Comprehension:

As a receptive skill, reading entails a set of learning processes similar to those actualized in Listening Comprehension (i.e., students are engaged to encoding a message rather than decoding it) .

This area of skill development has to do with the students' ability to understand not only individual words but sentences, textual passages

and whole texts. In this context, a distinction should be drawn between reading aloud and reading for comprehension. In essence, reading aloud is a preliminary step to both comprehension and writing.

As far as reading comprehension is concerned, what is needed is not the recognition of individual words, but the ability to see the connection between words as well as that between sentences, and the ability to understand the methods conveyed by larger textual units such as sentences, textual passages, and entire texts.

As far as teaching English is concerned, our students demonstrate a lack of necessary linguistic knowledge of phonology, semantics and syntax before attempting to read for comprehension. Two subfields of linguistics are concerned with this: the study of meaning (semantics) and the study of the structure of the content of the text (textual analysis or discourse analysis). A third subfield of linguistics, that is syntax, is considered to be highly relevant to reading comprehension.

4. Writing:

The ability to write is recognized as an important objective of language study. That is to say, writing as a productive skill, is the ultimate goal of learning a language. Very importantly, it provides the student with physical evidence of his achievements and becomes a source whereby he can measure his improvement. Most importantly, writing serves as reinforcement for reading and this purpose is reflected in the specific teaching points. At the university level, the teaching points of composition include some work of syntax and vocabulary, but the major emphasis is on rhetorical organization on the paragraph level as well as

on the overall text level. This work includes rhetorical devices like transition words and parallelism, the organization and development of ideas, outlining, notetaking, the writing of footnotes and bibliographical entries (cf. Paulston and Bruder, 1976).

In writing, as in speaking, our students find it difficult to express themselves adequately. The most discrete characteristics of a good paragraph are virtually absent in the writing of most students. Unity, consistency, order and coherence are obviously lacking, students fail to signal the direction of their thoughts by the use of transitional words such as, *however, moreover, nevertheless*, and phrases like, *on the other hand, in fact, of course*, etc.

One of the most common flaws in the written product of our students is their tendency to translate whole sentences from Arabic into English.

A further point to be stressed is the low level of vocabulary building. One of the commonly held assumptions is that a student's command of a language can be measured exclusively by the amount of vocabulary he knows. This is based on the conception that a language essentially consists of words and therefore the more words one knows, the better one masters the language. What is forgotten, as stated by Garvin (1973:14) is the importance of grammatical competence. In order to have adequate command of a language, one should know not only its vocabulary but also its grammar.

Summary and Conclusions

Our students usually make some basic and irritating errors in pronunciation, spelling, morphology and syntax. Moreover, they cannot express themselves efficiently either when dealing with academic topics or common everyday topics. This deficiency is most obvious in the productive skills (speaking and writing). The students' major difficulty arises from the fact that they cannot use English correctly and appropriately inside and outside the classroom. We, as teachers, the study plans or curriculum we set, and the methods of teaching we adopt, are responsible for our students' failure to use English as a tool of self-expression.

It would be useful for every Department of English in an Arab University to clarify its concepts of why and how it is teaching English. For this purpose, it is suggested that "a scheme of work" be prepared which should define "the role of English in the country and the basic needs it may have to serve"(Brighton et al., 1978:103)

It is our responsibility as teachers and administrators to see to it that no student should be precluded from the study of English for accidental reasons not related to his language aptitude. It is also our responsibility to find the ways and provide the means which will help us discover potentially good students for our departments.

Our study plans and curricula should be constantly renewed and modified to ensure a reasonable balance between courses in language and linguistics on the one hand, and literature and culture on the other. We should also ensure against excessive emphasis on traditional courses

in literature as well as against theoretical linguistics. And, finally, every effort should be given to increasing the number of speaking and writing courses.

A role should be given to graduates, visiting professors, and employers to play in revising syllabuses. Their suggestion and ideas serve as an indispensable bridge linking the academic world with the larger world outside. Their observations concerning what kind of education they should have make us as academicians better enlightened on how we can serve our society and make literature more relevant to the needs and demands of life.

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Appendix 1: the Questionnaire

Philadelphia University
Faculty of Arts
Department of English
Questionnaire
The Rationale behind Studying English Language and
Literature

Directions: Dear student, please circle the most appropriate choice(s) to you.

I am studying English language and literature because:

1. My partners want me to study English language and lit.
2. Studying English is a matter of prestige.
3. English is a mean of communication. English is lingua franca nowadays.
4. Studying English at the university level provides me with knowledge that is not available in secondary school. It is a matter of intrinsic interest from school days.
5. It exposes me to a different culture and a different way of thinking.
6. English is more instrumental than other specializations in the faculty, particularly in finding high status job, and going into graduate programs.
7. Other reasons (State below :)
 - a)
 - b)
 - c)

Appendix 2

Nature's most secret steps
He like her shadow has pursued, where'er
The red volcano overcanopies
Its fields of snow and pinnacles of ice
With burning smoke, or where bitumen lakes (5)
On black bare pointed islets ever beat
With sluggish surge, or where the secret caves
Rugged and dark, winding among the springs
Of fire and poison, inaccessible
To avarice or pride, their starry domes (10)
Of diamond and of gold expand above
Numberless and immeasurable halls,
Frequent with crystal column, and clear shrines
Of pearl, and thrones radiant with chrysolite.

37. The subject of the main clause of the sentence above is
- " Nature's " (line 1)
 - " steps " (line 1)
 - " He " (line 2)
 - " volcano" (line 3)
 - " caves " (line 7)
38. In the context of the passage " expand" (line 11) is
- a transitive verb that takes " domes" (line 10) as its object
 - a transitive verb that takes " halls" (line 12) as its object
 - a transitive verb that takes " shrines" (line 13) as its object
 - an intransitive verb with " domes" (line 10) as its subject
 - an intransitive verb with " halls" (line 12) as its subject
39. " Burning smoke " (line 5) is syntactically parallel to
- " secret steps" (line 1)
 - " sluggish surge " (line 7)
 - " bitumen lakes" (line 5)
 - " Numberless and immeasurable" (line 12)
 - " clear shrines " (line 13)