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TEACHING LANGUAGE THROUGH MYTH

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ABSTRACT

The paper highlights the present status of our graduates in the countries and their unemployability due to the lack of communication skills in English and analytical skills which are often flashed on many dailies and articles. The paper also suggests using or teaching of myths for the students to improve their language and analytical skill to shed off the stamp of unemployed which they carry on. It further discusses the advantages of using myths as teaching tools to the students to gain confidence by knowing the origin of certain idiomatic expression and words in English which are born out of the myths many centuries ago. By employing myths in the language and Literature classes pragmatically learning and teaching of English can be made easier and more interesting. This paper aims to expose the possible methods and advantage of using myths to learn and develop English.

**Keywords:** Graduates, Unemployability, English, Myths, and Teaching.

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“Myth” is a word derived from a Greek word ‘mythos’ means tale or story. It is defined as a collection of traditional stories especially ancient stories dealing with the supernatural elements, heroes, social and cultural practices of a particular race, community and sometimes natural phenomena. It is a part of mythology which is neither history nor religion nor poetry and not even philosophy but the amalgamation of all these together passed from generation to generation. Some believe myth as fictitious stories. But in reality, myths are more than mere stories which act as walking sticks to human from ancient to modern. Unlike some fictitious and fairy tales, myths are not cent percent optimistic. They are most often true and practical to the nature of human life which acts as the guide to social and cultural norms in the world.

Allan Dundes, Professor of Anthropology, University of California, defines myth as:

“a story that serves to define fundamental world view, of a culture by explaining aspect of the natural world and delineating the psychological and social practices and ideals of a society”.

Myths are mostly very old and have been a light during the human’s predicament in the world even before the thought of science, technology and philosophy touched the human mind. Therefore it was the myth which helped ancient people to have good acquaintance with natural phenomenon, rituals and ceremonies. Myth of each race and community privilege their own identity, culture, society and life style. So myth has been an inevitable and indispensable part of the human race.

Romanian Philosopher and historian of religion Mircea Eliade says,

“Theorizing myth helps individual to know how to make sense of their world and how to behave in the society. Combined with religious rituals, myth helped them connect with deep shared societal events, memories and values”.

So myth, as was claimed by many is not just stories or fiction but a deep meaningful plot to the lives of many a society and community. It offers invaluable meaning to our lives as individuals as well as collectives. Myth helps to grow and develop our perceptible skills through epistemology to understand oneself whether one fits or not in a particular society, culture and time. It helps the human to shape and reshape themselves according to the change that takes place at different time, culture and society to make the human survival and life easier.

#### **Present Scenario of English in India:**

*“Most graduates display excellent theoretical knowledge. However when it comes to problem solving they lack analytical skills” –Amit Bansal, CEO,PurpleLeap.*

*“Over 50% graduates fall short of the mark in language and grammar as well”– reveals aspiring minds assessment private limited.*

The sorry status and stories of Indian graduates have been continuing for the last few decades. Despite a number of wakeup calls and warning by Surveys and Educationists this dilemma prevails in India for a very long time. The unemployment rates are increasing rapidly causing desperation among graduates. Many finds conclude that most of the graduates, irrespective of their streams, struggle with English casting them away from being employed. This reveals the poor teaching of English and the need to teach English effectively in Educational Institutions to starting from pre-schools to University.

#### **Why teaching myth would be suitable?**

Myths are stories based on tradition or legend with a deep symbolic meaning. It is a pre-scientific believes produced by human based either on facts or fantasy. However these myths were evolved to meet the need of time and changes prevailed from generation to generation, which concurrently challenged the human to adapt themselves to survive in the world. On one hand, these evolutions of myth itself teach people the essentials need of thinking, analyzing, adapting and surviving which most of the graduates lack even in the 21<sup>st</sup> scientifically advanced society.

Claude Levi- Strauss, a structural Anthropologist says, myth as,

“Stemming from a human need to make sense of the world and to resolve cultural dilemmas”.

Similarly, the students of today need to have good sense especially the rhetorical and the analytical skills in order to resolve the existing employment dilemmas to make and prove their education and life more meaningful in the society right from the choice they make in their education at crucial juncture.

Myths also teach the students the leadership skills and cooperation as these are passed from generation to generation and shared by group of people unanimously. Thus myths pose as a strong contender to be taught and learned by all.

#### **Teaching English through myth:**

Teaching English, in fact any second language, to the students should not be done through extensive use of conscious grammatical rules or tedious drill work as that could really tamper the learners confident and impede their natural learning due to the psychological & mental struggle and lack of conducive environment. So the best methods are those which supply the students “comprehensible, interesting and encourageable input” in low anxiety situation, containing text that the students really like to learn.

This may very much match with what Stephen Krashen, Prof. University of Southern California calls as ‘acquiring system’ in second language learning. Since myths are in story form with number of fascinating creatures, characters, plot and setting, myth can function as a better source for teaching English to the students. In addition, myths also have folklore, folktale, folksongs and legends which would captivate the students to study and learn it at sub-conscious level like kids master its mother tongue. The following express why and how myth could be used and taught to help the students to develop their English.

#### **Myths help students to hone reading and listening skills:**

Tamil poet and philosopher *Thiruvalluvar* says :

Wealth of wealth is wealth acquired by ear attent;  
Wealth mid all wealth supremely excellent. (411)

The poet states that among many wealth in one's life the knowledge received through listening make one more wealthier and knowledgeable than any other means of wealth. People without the gift of sight can still learn with the gift of hearing and listening. Many unnoticeably acquire knowledge through listening. Numerous research have pointed out that by the time a child reaches 6 years of age, the child knows about 75% of what he or she would learn in his or her entire life. Since myths have been transported to us orally, it sharpens the listening skills of the receivers or the listeners. Myths have reached us chiefly by means of oral teaching, chanting, sharing and repeating in which listening plays the predominant role. If the oral teaching and listening had not existed, myths too would not have prevailed today. Listening turns off other sense organs and stimulates the listeners more focused. Speakers' expression of myths helps one to involve himself in what he listens.

Due to the nature of its genre and charming plots, myth helps students to develop their reading and listening skills. If the text is interesting and suit the need and expectation of the students', the reading and listening tendency would be generated within the selves. When they come out from the text of myth to narrate it to others, they would use their own words and look into their own insight to express it in a more imaginative way as they perceived the myth. Thus the myths make the students not just a good reader or listener but also make them to be more creative and enhance their comprehensive and persuasive skills. Since mythologies are different in types like Celtic, Egyptian, Greek, Japanese, Mayan, Norse and Roman, each mythology has unique theme, plot structure, character and set up which gives students ample opportunity to understand culture and history of various people in the world. This makes them to comprehend the modern culture and its root, its history and its evolution. Further these myths also teach the students on how to pronounce words, name and phrases in accordance with each myth and nation which has unique way of spelling words.

Unlike other books reading, myth encourages students to read any text perfectly. This includes changing of tone, rising and lowering ones voice according to the characters, expression according to the moods of the character, using of gestures and pausing. Myths with the number of incidences, characters, places sharpen the students' memory and develop their ability to predict the possible events and sequences and infer making the students very thoughtful in their study and life.

#### **Myths stimulate interest among the students:**

*"The very first steps towards success in any occupation is become interested in it"* – Sir William Osler.

Since the myths are in the form of stories with high themes, exemplary characters and charming dialogue, all the readers and listeners would definitely get into it. In addition to that the stories of myth are always interesting and motivating the kids and the older alike. For many centuries human told stories to transmit valuable information, share histories and to teach important lesson to their offspring. These stories most often immerse the reader and the listeners to involve in it emotionally and subconsciously.

A study by National Academy of Science in 2010 showed that by engaging students with compelling stories, the teachers can reach the students emotionally to increase their potential to learn more. When the learning is stress-free and interesting the learning will take place automatically. In such cases, myth provides a concrete platform for the learners of language.

Myths are created for the real life situations which teach its readers the perfect grammatical structure of sentences and rhetorical powers. Legends and folktales are inextricably tied with myths which teach us the proper uses of tenses especially past tense as they always says about the past heroic achievements. The myths of various cultures and races expose the readers to various idiomatic expressions and wise sayings which increases the learners' vocabulary. The following are a few idiomatic expressions which are originated from myth but still used very effectively in English today.

S.No	Phrases and idioms	Meaning
1	Achilles' heel	A person's weak spot.
2	the face that launched a thousand ships	Any one person causing disaster
3	Herculean effort	A mighty try
4	a judgment of Paris	Any difficult decision.
5	Oedipus complex	A son's attachment to his mother
6	<b>Beware of Greeks Bearing Gifts</b>	wary of anyone offering something
7	<b>Gordian Knots</b>	An extremely perplexing
8	<b>Midas Touch</b>	A person who always is lucky
9	A mercurial disposition	unexpected changes in mood
10	<i>Pandora's box</i>	introduce yourself to trouble

#### Myths stabilize the words power:

Studying various myths students can learn umpteenth number of words and its origin. When the students learn the exact origin of the words they always have self-confident and sense of satisfaction in using those words in their real life. This provides the readers a strong impetus in learning along kindling their interest on myths. The following are such words being used today which have mythical origin:

Real word from Myth	Real meaning from myth various mythologies	Word used today	Meaning
Atlas	a Titan who was condemned to carry the heavens upon his shoulders	atlas	Book of maps
Narcissus	a very vain god who fell in love with his own reflection	narcissism	Extreme love of self
Nymph	beautiful maidens, lesser deities who cared for plants and animals	nymph	Beautiful woman
Typhon	father of all monsters	typhoon	Huge rotating tropical storm
Muses	Greek goddesses of inspiration for music, poetry and literature	Music	Pleasant sound
Pan	Greek god of the wild and shepherds	Panic	Fear
Odyssey	An ancient Greek epic by Homer, mostly starring Odysseus during his journey after the fall of Troy	Odyssey	Journey
Hel	The Norse underworld and also its ruler	Hell	Under world
Fury	deities of vengeance in Greek Mythology	Fury	Anger
Lakshman Rekha	A line drawn by <u>Lakshmana</u> to protect <u>Sita</u> , while he is away searching for <u>Rama</u> in Ramayana of India.	Lakshman Rekha	Safety line or limit of freedom
Husbandi	master of the house from Norse mythology	husband	Married man in relation to wife
rangr	Means 'crooked, wry' from Norse mythology	wrong	Not correct or mistake
vanta	Means "to lack" from Norse mythology	want	Desire or lack of something
slahtr	Means butchering from Norse mythology	slaughter	Kill
rannsaka	Means 'to search the house' from Norse mythology	ransack	Go hurriedly through a place stealing

Knowing the origin of words and its context will always give the students the much needed confident to speak the language better. Besides, it also encourages the students to learn more words with such context provoking their thirst for learning the language and making it interesting and fun rather than stressful and work.

**Myths enhance imagination and analytical skills:**

Robert Fulghum, an American author says,

“Imagination is stronger than knowledge. That myth is more potent than history”.

Richard Wagner, a German composer, says, “*Imagination creates reality*”.

Without the faculty of imagination and ability to analyze one cannot achieve anything in the life. Imagination is the only vehicle on which the man can travelled from the dark ages to its present state of high civilization. It was imagination that showed the way to Columbus to discover America, Franklin to discover electricity, Edison to invent electric bulb and many. So along with imagination and analytical skills success is very much possible. Since myth have dealt with super power, Gods, Goddesses, heavenly bodies, legends and heroes it provoke such high levels of imagination and the ability to think differently and high than others who don't read myths. So when these two, imagination and analytical power, are stimulated one would naturally be derived to speak out more.

Max Muller, an Orientalist and philologist, considers

“Myth as “disease of language”. Primitive people had ideas and theories about world and then developed words for them. From the words they developed stories and abstract concepts were soon personified into mythical being”.

In this aspect, myth can be used as a perfect tool and impetus among students in teaching and developing their language.

As myths are passed from generation to generation through orature it also encourages the illiterate and less educated to have good fluency and vocabulary skills in the language. Due to the approachable and easily understandable nature of myth people of any level of intelligence can pick up and speak the language equal to people who are educated and intelligent.

**Conclusion:**

From the above it could sum that Myths not only help the students to develop English but also enhance their analytical, imagination and memory power which are essential for students to be successful in their academic and career. Myths combine all these different facets of learning into one object of study and present it in stories which are more fun, entertaining and informative. If teaching language through myth is used rightly it can indeed develop the students' language and life skills.

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