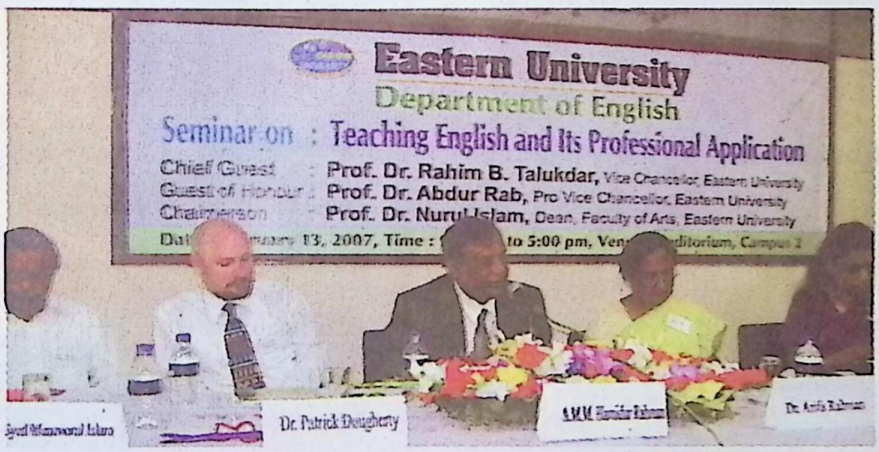
Seminar on teaching English at EU

Hammad Ali

ON the first day of Falgun, the 13th of February, Eastern University organized a daylong seminar on 'Teaching English and its Professional Applications in the context of Globalization'. The Chief Guest on the occasion was Professor Rahim B. Talukdar, Vice Chancellor of Eastern University. Pro Vice chancellor Dr. Abdur Rab was the guest of honor. Dr. Nurul Islam, Dean, Faculty of Arts in Eastern University, served as Chair on the occasion.



The seminar was divided into an inaugural session and three presentation sessions. The first session was geared towards the topic of English in academia, while the second session was where student representatives from different institutions spoke about steps taken in their universities to improve the level of English of the students. The third and last session was about English in the professional arena, and what the corporate world in Bangladesh expects in terms of English skills.

The speakers for the inaugural session were Dr. Nurul Islam, Dr. Saiful Majid, Vice President of the Eastern University foundation, the VC and the Pro-VC. Vice chancellor Dr. Rahim B. Talukder welcomed everyone in the audience to the seminar.

The first session was about strategies to achieve professional expertise as an instructor of English as a foreign language (EFL). The moderator for this session was Professor Hamidur Rahman, teacher of the Institute of Modern Languages (IML). The speakers were Iffat Ara Nasreen Majid, Arifa Rahman, Dr. Patrick Dougherty and Syed Manzoorul Islam. Iffat Ara Nasreen Majid, the Chair of IML, presented the result of surveys they had conducted about the teaching methods used in schools, colleges and universities. Dr. Patrick spoke about how he is trying to use creative writing to teach English, and mentioned a course in creative writing he is currently conducting at Presidency University. Dr. Patrick spoke at length about the methods he uses in conducting the course, about feedback he has received from the students and certain presentations and performances organized as part of the course. He also mentioned 'Deshi Dreams', a book consisting of writings the students had done as part of the course work. Arifa Rahman, President of Bangladesh English Language Teachers Association (BELTA) spoke about the need for motivating the students, and convincing them of the need of proficiency in English. She said there is no panacea when it comes to teaching English, and each group of students deserves unique consideration. The last speaker, Syed Manzoorul Islam, spoke about teaching language through literature. He emphasized that a language has not only functional but also imaginative aspects to it, and the use of literature can provide an emotional content to the teaching of language, as well as enrich a culture and language. He also mentioned the motivational role good literature can play is generating interest about a language.

The second session was all about student representatives from several universities of the country, who spoke about the measures taken by their universities to develop English skills among the students. Among the universities present were Dhaka University (DU), BRAC University, University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh (ULAB), North South University (NSU), Eastern University (EU) and Jahangirnagar University (JU). As a special attraction, Brine Pickles was also present on the occasion. Brine Pickles is a group of young creative writers using English as their language of expression, and they spoke on the events and performances they have done till date. The session started with Fatima Tuz Zahra from Dhaka University, talking about the aims and achievements of the English Department Language Club. This was followed by speakers from BRAC University. Naufela Nafisa Ahmed, Salma Sultana and Tamara Zaman spoke about the increasing importance of English, the El-Pro department of the university and their efforts at helping students as best they can.

Two students from Jahangirnagar University, Humaira Shagufta Chowdhury and Tasneem Amin, spoke about their syllabus and the importance of literature in teaching English. Maherin Ahmed from NSU was next, speaking about the steps taken by the NSU Debating Club in order to develop the students' communication skills. Last was the team from Presidency University, Idraq Hossain and Kazi Sarmad Karim. Following this, Tanvir Hafiz from Brine Pickles spoke about the objectives of the group, their performances at the British Council as well as some universities. He also mentioned workshops conducted and attended by members of Brine Pickles.

The third and final session was about the need for English as a professional skill. The speaker for this session was Mr. Zakir Ibne Hai, Head of Advertisement and Research Division, AKTEL. Dr. Nurul Islam, thanked all the organizers, volunteers and speakers for making the event a success, and expressed his hope to see more such efforts from Eastern University in the future.