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## TEACHING ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN INDIA: PROBLEMS AND SUGGESTIONS

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### Abstract

As English is widely used in many countries, it has become the world's link language. Moreover, many Indians know English as a second language. This has made English as a link language within India also. English has a large role to play in education, science, technology, social sciences, trade and other fields. It can be rightly said that not knowing English will definitely prove to be a handicap. Most of the students come from the rural background as India is a country of villages. Such students consider English as a scary, dreadful, terrible language. Learning English is considered by some as a hard nut to crack. The students feel uneasy as soon as they hear English words. This attitude of aversion naturally leaves the English teacher in a mound of difficulties or problems. The students who pass primary schooling will have little knowledge of the English language and are unable to use it effectively in routine communication of daily life. This failure is not because of a single problem; there are many problems that are faced by English teachers which hinder them from teaching English effectively in the schools. Let us examine the problems of teaching English as a second language in the primary schools.

Keywords: multi-class system, Overcrowded classes, Sub-standard textbooks, Innovative teaching methods, Appropriate pupil –teacher ratio (PTR).

### Problems that hinder effective teaching of English in Indian schools:

Children poor in English language usage often fair badly in their academic achievements. The academic achievement in different subjects depends on the mastery over the language. Language is closely related to general intellectual development. The effective teaching of language influences the learning of other subjects.

### The problems are:

**1. No specific aim:** Neither the teacher nor the students are acquainted with the aims and objectives of teaching English. This is so because the teaching of English is not based upon specific aims and objectives. Passing in the examination becomes the teacher's sole aim in his profession. The true purpose of teaching English, to enable the students to use language properly, is altogether neglected.

**2. No uniformity:** There is no uniformity in the teaching patterns adopted by different states in India. Especially at the primary level of school

education there is much discrepancy noticed. That is one of the potent reasons why the national standard of English language varies from state to state.

Lack of uniformity is noticed also in the policy regarding the beginning of English teaching in our schools. At present, there are three different stages at which the teaching of English is introduced.

- a. Early stage (6 to 9 years of age) – in parts of West Karnataka, West Bengal, Rajasthan and in public schools, it starts from classes I or III.
- b. Middle Stage (11 or 12 years of age) – In parts of West Bengal, Kashmir, Orissa, Delhi, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh, English is introduced at the beginning of secondary education.
- c. Later Stage (14 years of age) – In some states, e.g. Gujarat, English is introduced during the last four years of secondary education. (Ref. No.1)

**3. Condition of Classes:** The following conditions of classes pose a serious problem to teaching of English.

- i. **Overcrowded classes:** The school classes are over-crowded, while the size of the class rooms is very small. It becomes very difficult for any teacher to maintain discipline and to teach effectively. It is unmanageable especially for an English teacher who happens to teach a foreign language. The students will be heterogeneous in all respects and present mixed abilities. Consequently, the teacher cannot cater to the needs of all the students. English teachers are unable to solve the individual problems of English language as there will be no scope for individual attention. Therefore, the teacher is forced to adopt the lecture method to meet the needs of the students.
- ii. **Dilapidated classrooms:** Decrepit building, dark and dirty, with small rooms and leaking roofs, etc. describe the classrooms of most schools all over India. More strength of the students to get accommodated in a small room is

inconvenient and not conducive for learning. Such situations discourage the students from learning, and are also a cause of disappointment for the teacher.

- iii. **Multi-class system:** Multi-class system is another problem being faced in the process of teaching-learning of English language in the primary schools. In the lower primary schools, under the 'Nali-Kali' Scheme, the teachers are expected to teach English to the students of 1-3 classes gathered together under one roof. The texts differ from class to class. Yet, the students are expected to sit in a single class-room and learn the new language. No doubt, the introduction of English language from the 1<sup>st</sup> standard in Karnataka is a welcome and encouraging feature, but the way it is being handled is somewhat hoodwinking and unimpressive.
- iv. **Lack of facilities:** The majority of schools have no proper facilities and infrastructure to encourage the students for learning. The class rooms have chipped black boards, improper ventilation and lighting, non - availability of teaching aids, no drinking water facility, no toilet facility, no proper seating facility, etc. Such poor infrastructure of the schools hampers the learning. The government is now-a-days, providing many more facilities like posters, charts, T.V.s, Computers, Internet, tape-recorders, etc. It is unfortunate to state that these CAL aids are usually unused due to lack of manpower either to use or operate them. They are just kept in the schools as show pieces.
- v. **Unfriendly school environment:** Readiness to learn a new language depends upon the environmental opportunities. The environment should be more affable, inspiring and permissive for the learning of the new language. The English teacher has to create such an atmosphere in the classroom or in the premises of the school so as to enable the students to learn the

new language. In most of the schools, especially the Government-run schools, we find that the learning environment required for the new language learning is rarely found which in turn, leaves the teacher discouraged and ineffective.

**4. Sub-standard textbooks:** The textbooks of English are of very low standard. They are uninteresting to the students. The textbooks are usually void of material which would make learning interesting. The English text books prescribed usually contain prose lessons, poems, stories written by foreign English writers expressing their culture and thoughts. Thus, the Indian students find the text books difficult dealing with foreign language and culture. Naturally, the students find it uninteresting, unattractive and they lose pleasure in learning the language. Therefore, the textbooks appear dull.

**5. Lack of suitable language teaching aids:** The textbooks contain alien references. In order to get acquainted to such references for better understanding, it is necessary to have teaching aids. But our schools are not well equipped with suitable language teaching aids. In most of the rural primary schools, the teachers have to struggle hard to get the teaching aids like pictures, charts, models, posters etc.

**6. Lack of effective and trained teachers:** The teaching of English in schools is in the hands of teachers who neither know English nor are trained in the teaching methodology. Teachers are appointed on the basis of their necessary qualification like D.Ed. Such teachers will have insufficient professional knowledge. The teachers should possess and develop necessary skills of teaching to make teaching more effective. Moreover, the training programmes conducted by many organizations or units are of usually poor quality. Sometimes they lack the facilitators. The government training centres like Block Resource Centres under Sarva Siksha Abhiyan are started to train the teachers. However, the non-availability of the trained facilitators make the centres ineffective. The inadequate training programmes cannot compensate for the lack of skills in the teachers. These programmes usually do not focus on the

special needs of the primary school children. Therefore, the lack of training has become a problem in the teaching of English.

**7.Old method of teaching:** The methods adopted by the teachers are ancient and outdated. The traditional methods were once the requirement of the day. Now, the situation has totally changed. The methods should be in tune with the computer age.

**Suggestions for improvement of teaching English in India:**

**1. Aims and objective- based teaching of English:**

The primary purposes of teaching English should be to-

- i. enable the students to understand spoken English.
- ii. enable the students to speak English.
- iii. enable the students to read English.
- iv. enable the students to write English.

**2. Uniform policy should be adopted:**

There should be uniformity in the teaching patterns throughout India. There is much to be done to improve the standard of teaching English in India. The teachers and students should be provided with teaching/ learning materials like — good textbooks, workbooks, handbooks, TV, radio, charts and other useful audio- visual material which are essential for effective teaching. Infrastructure should go on par with the exploding number of students. The teachers should be trained thoroughly and comprehensively. Appropriate methods should be adopted. Open- ended activities certainly can improve the quality of ESL classes.

Uniformity should also be brought in the policy regarding the initial stage of English teaching in our schools. Research has shown that if children are exposed to two languages by age seven, they gain proficiency in both the languages. Young children use their individual, innate language-learning strategies to acquire the language spoken at home. They can also use these same strategies to speak English when it is introduced at an early

stage. Language is 'naturally acquired' by younger children, while it has to be 'consciously learnt' by older children.

### **3. Textbooks should be prepared by those who actually teach it:**

Ralph Waldo Emerson says "If we encounter a man of rare intellect, we should ask him what books he reads".

The textbooks occupy a very important place in the field of education and form the most important equipment for pupils. The framing of proper textbooks is crucial in the educational system. Education is a state subject in this country. Therefore, the framing of textbooks is handled by different states in different ways. The states constitute various bodies of which the most commonly known are the Textbook Committees. The school textbooks are prepared and recommended by these Committees. It is often alleged that the members of the committees are usually not fully aware of fundamental educational principles required in the preparation of textbooks and many a times they are not the teachers of the prescribed textbooks.

Recently, in Karnataka State, revision of school textbooks, under the supervision of the state government-constituted Textbook Revision Committee, politicised school education in an unprecedented manner. While the opposition blames the state government for the revision being ideologically driven, the latter defends its line, saying it was done with a "corrective approach" in mind. It created a huge uproar across the state. (Ref.No.2)

So, care must be taken to see that such issues do not happen in educational field. The standard of textbooks can be greatly improved, if they are prepared by teachers who actually teach the prescribed textbooks. Guy Boas says "The only persons equipped to choose these textbooks are school teachers who really know the fodder, suited to their flock". Competent English teachers should be in the panel of textbook committee.

### **4. Appropriate pupil –teacher ratio (PTR):**

RTE (Right to Education) Act 2009 mandates pupil-teacher ratio (PTR) at primary level at 30:1 and at the upper primary level, it is 35:1. While as per the UDISE (Unified District Information System of Education) data, the pupil-teacher ratio at national level is 23:1 for primary, 17:1 for upper primary and 27:1 for secondary schools.

But the shocking numbers of the present day educational situation in India show that as many as 92,275 elementary and secondary schools in India are run with a single functioning teacher. Madhya Pradesh (18,307) and Rajasthan (12,052) have the highest number of single-teacher schools, together accounting for nearly one-third of the total of 92,275 schools. (Ref.No.3) This kind of situation in Indian schools definitely hampers the teaching of English language. Therefore, appropriate measures should be taken to maintain pupil-teacher ratio set by RTE Act.

### **5. Innovative teaching methods and approaches to be adopted:**

Anatole France says "The whole art of teaching is only the art of awakening the natural curiosity of young minds for the purpose of satisfying it afterwards."

The biggest challenge for any teacher is capturing each student's attention, and conveying ideas effectively enough to create a lasting impression. Innovative teaching methods and approaches can significantly enhance the learning process of the students. By experimenting new methods and strategies, the teachers can improve student engagement, motivation and attainment.

Innovative experiments like use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and Joyful Learning Techniques should be adopted by teachers for better impact on their students. The concepts of paperless and pen less classrooms are promising as an alternative to the old teaching-learning method. Teachers should develop and use appropriate pedagogic approaches in day-to-day teaching activities.

Modern teaching methods have various advantages over traditional teaching methods-

- Modern teaching methods create more interest among the students with the help of interesting animations and videos.
- Research has shown that use of visual media for teaching helps the students to understand the subject better and also to retain the concepts for a longer time.
- With the help of modern teaching methods, the teachers can cover more syllabus in lesser time as they don't have to waste their time in writing on the blackboard.
- Videos and animations used in the modern teaching methods are more explanatory than the teacher can afford to do with traditional blackboard methods. (Ref.No.4)

#### 6. Positive evaluation:

Frank A. Clark says "Criticism, like rain, should be gentle enough to nourish a man's growth without destroying his roots." Positive evaluation boosts the confidence of the student to learn the English language. It is important to make sure that students do feel like trying again. If the students are told that it is incorrect when they commit mistakes, it can lead the students to think that the language is too hard to learn. They may want to give it up and stop trying.

Instead, saying things like,

"That's a really great start, but perhaps you could....."

"You're on the right track, but you're not quite there yet....."

will help the students not to lose courage in learning English even when he is told that he has committed a mistake. Such positive phrases help students see that learning is a journey, of course with some speed bumps along the way!

#### Conclusion

It should be remembered that every cloud has a silver lining and every problem has a solution. The teachers must find the ways to overcome the problems of teaching English to students. Benjamin

Franklin says "Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I remember. Involve me and I learn". Innovative methods of teaching should be introduced. Government should implement appropriate measures to provide quality education in villages. The infrastructure like Language Lab, Smart Boards, Internet facility, quality textbooks, hostel facility, availability of job opportunities will inspire the students to learn English effectively. The teaching-learning process and examination system should be reformed. The facility of mid-day meals plays a vital role in the education of specially the underprivileged children. The mid-day meal scheme acts as incentives for students to come to school and for parents to send them.

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