



ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING: COMMUNICATION CHALLENGES VIS-A-VIS CLASSROOM SITUATIONS

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ABSTRACT

English occupies a place of prestige in our country even after more than six decades of the departure of the British from India. No indigenous language however has come up to replace English, either as a medium of communication or as an official language. With the Independence, in spite of many a movement against the teaching of English in India under the influence of nationalistic feelings and emotional hostility English began to reassert its position and now we find that it has firmly established itself in the soil of India. Though still there are only a few who can understand and speak good English yet gradually the number is increasing. The present paper discusses the problems faced in English language teaching in different classroom situations, consequences and valuable suggestions.

Communication is the exchange of thoughts, messages, and information as by speech, visuals, signals, writing or behavior. But as far as communication with respect to English Language Teaching is concerned, the term becomes a bit special. Here it involves reading, listening, speaking, writing and observing with special reference to the classroom situations. Different classroom situations demand certain adjustments in all the five aspects.

Communication with respect to classroom situations can be categorized on the basis of size of the classroom, background of the students (rural & urban), level (school & college), course (professional & general) etc. But before moving into this direction we must understand and discuss what a typical classroom is. Teachers know that every class includes diverse learners—some struggling, some advanced, and all with different life experiences, learning preferences, and personal interests.

Key Words: Communication challenges, classroom situations, purpose, differentiated instructions, five aspects, English medium, non-English medium, rural, urban, overcrowded classes, atmosphere, regional tone and language, fluency, grammar, traditional method, direct and indirect method, familiarity, govt. and private school, discipline, friendliness, Indian sentiments etc.

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and emotional hostility English began to reassert its position and now we find that it has firmly established itself in the soil of India. Though still there are only a few who can understand and speak good English yet gradually the number is increasing. Let's here discuss communication challenges in English language teaching in relation to classroom situations which also demands brooding over communication purpose of English language teaching in Indian perspective.

The term communication has been derived from Latin "Communis" meaning to share. Hence communication is the exchange of thoughts, messages, and information as by speech, visuals, signals, writing or behaviour. But as far as communication with respect to English Language Teaching is concerned, the term becomes a bit special as the challenges are also special. Here it involves reading, listening, speaking, writing and observing with special reference to the classroom situations. Different classroom situations demand certain adjustments in all the five aspects i.e. reading, listening, speaking, writing and observing as mentioned earlier.

Communication is affected by every physical, emotional and mental element. Hence all the objects or things which are related to physical, emotional and mental facet of a classroom can contribute in good communication. On the other hand, discord or disharmony among them can result in bad communication. Equilibrium of sent and received information always results in good communication which amounts to a congenial and convivial atmosphere of the classroom whereas bad communication results in an unhappy state of classroom. The bad communication may further be categorized as there are few chances of a communication resulting into total failure. The mental capacities of students vary from student to student. Therefore the failure of a communication depends upon the level of students. It may be a failure with regard to weak students, may be partially successful even to average students and may not be as far as the intelligent pupils are concerned. Thus a bad communication may be categorized into- weak, average and successful.

Moreover communication with reference to classroom situations takes a totally different turn, which then needs to be categorized on the basis of size of the classroom, background of the students (rural & urban), level(school & college), course (professional & general) etc. But before moving into this direction we must understand and discuss what a typical classroom is. Teachers know that every class includes diverse learners—some struggling, some advanced, and all with different life experiences, learning preferences, and personal interests. Differentiated instruction adapts instruction to meet the needs of individual learners, providing all students with the appropriate level of challenge and the appropriate supports to help them reach learning goals.

Differentiated instruction is grounded in an understanding of how people learn. Instruction begins with an assessment of what students already know, and builds new concepts on their existing knowledge. Differentiation provides students with varied experiences to engage with content. A differentiated classroom offers multiple ways for students to access content, to process and make sense of the concepts and skills, and to develop products that demonstrate their learning. Technology supports classroom strategies by creating new routes to learning, addressing multiple learning needs, and providing forums for individualized access to content and expression.

To understand and make the communication purposes of English language teaching in Indian perspective successful, we must know the problems that exist and the ones that we may have to face while going for improvement. Every certain classroom situation needs corresponding adjustment in the manner and style of communication.

In rural areas the main problem in communication is the atmosphere. The students in the rural areas don't very often listen, read and speak English. Except for exams, they don't find any use of it. They don't find any practical purpose solved by it. In schools, they are taught using bilingual method i.e. they resort to either Hindi or any other local language to explain their point of view or to ask anything. They study English from

class VI which creates a big time gap between them and the city students. In the long run, some are able to fill the gap and some lag behind. The teachers teach them by translating every word. For the beginning it can be considered good but the tragedy is, the system is continued up to class XII which makes them lose all feel of language. The word for word approach can never be considered good for teaching a language. The language loses its beauty when translated in such a manner. This checks the growth of the students in terms of that language.

The students in the villages remain so much struck in the structure that the sentences appear to them like pictures having physical features. They don't find any aesthetic beauty in the language. In such cases it becomes a very onerous task to teach such students without having the language lose its beauty. Another big hindrance in the rural areas is that the sense of pronunciation doesn't even pass by them. They pronounce the words as they come to them with their limited knowledge without ever trying to know what the correct pronunciation can be. They have a wrong approach to the language. They try to learn it through grammar and it is a universally known fact that no language can be learnt only through grammar. This is the result of wrong approach to language that they develop an aversion towards language or they feel that it is very confusing or they can never learn it or it has no beauty or a foreign language cannot express Indian sensibility. They are not familiarized with the intonation of the language. They speak it in the tone of their regional language which makes it appear very awkward. Thus lack of proper training in speech and listening keeps them at bay. A teacher who uses proper accent and intonation finds it difficult to communicate his ideas to such students because the students who are not habitual of listening to such English don't understand anything and remain helpless and such a teaching proves to be unsuccessful as the purpose of communication remains unfulfilled.

Another problem that a language teacher has to face in Hindi medium or non-English medium schools is bad hearing and bad understanding of the students. The students are so poor at hearing that every word has to be repeated thrice and

sometimes more than that which destroys the joy of teaching and learning. Even though the teacher repeats everything, the students keep asking again and again in the midst of the lecture, disturb him and make him lose his mental equilibrium. Such an atmosphere makes the teacher lay undue stress on words which distorts them. Thus the beauty of the spoken word is lost and it sounds very awkward. In addition to this, the negative impact on student is, they get a wrong idea of the pronunciation of words. Using difficult words also create a big hindrance in communication because unless the sense is conveyed, it's useless to employ new words. Either they should be explained properly or should not be used just for the purpose of showing off. But explanation using indirect method takes longer time with imperfect result.

In government schools, it has generally been noticed that the teachers are generally lazy. As soon as they enter the class, they look for the chair and sit in it. They even don't complete the formalities on the blackboard and taking the book, they start reading and translating. Even, they indulge in gossiping with the students. The lazy teacher creates a dull atmosphere in the classroom. The students feel bored and because of the dull attitude of their teacher, they never develop a love for English. The reason behind the teacher's dull attitude in the class is lack of supervision. If the teachers have any fear of supervision or punishment, they will never do it.

One of the problems that create a big gap between English and the Indians is lack of correlation. Most of the contents that we find in the syllabi of English of different boards are written by foreign authors and have foreign settings. The students find it quite difficult to picture those things in their minds or to identify themselves with those characters e.g. "Bertrand was enjoying pork at D'Urbervilles in the north of Boston". Now this is quite a simple sentence but a common student of Indian background finds it difficult to identify himself with such a description. But if it is- "Mahesh was enjoying Dal-Bati at Maheshwari's at Gumanpura"- students find it quite easy to assimilate it. Therefore it can be said that such distant sketches create a gap in their understanding.

Thus the ability to interpret and understand English lingers in some dark corner of their hearts and minds. The other problem is correlation between English and other subjects. Unless there is any correlation with other subjects, the language becomes a dry piece of prose or poetry and can easily be indicted of dullness.

In urban areas, the communication maladies, as far as English as a language is concerned, are less complicated than in villages. The problems of Hindi medium or non-English medium classrooms remain just the same as that of a classroom in a village school but with regard to English medium schools there comes a difference. One of the most common problems in English schools that I have felt so far, is grammar. Though they can frame flowery sentences and use bombastic words but when it comes to grammar, they trust their heart. It's not only that they don't know but they don't even wish to know.

It is my personal observation that the students in English medium schools (especially in higher classes) don't like them to be taught grammar. They find it boring and in that they can't be totally blamed because partly it is due to the method which is generally followed to teach grammar; the traditional method. If you are taught the same thing again and again, in the same way as you were taught earlier, won't you be bored?

The English medium schools, what is generally noticed, stress mainly on fluency and style. There it becomes a means of flaunting; a status symbol; a means to show that we are better than else. Apart from the undue emphasis on fluency and style, disregarding logic and beauty between the lines makes communication difficult and thus understanding also. If a teacher speaks fast, I am not using the 'fluent' because fluency and fastness cannot be confused; the speed of transmission will be fast but the speed of understanding may not be fast because a class comprises the students of all intellectual levels. It has also been noticed that students being from different backgrounds find it difficult to express their views in as effective a manner as they wish to. In the same way, the teachers also sometimes find it difficult to convey their views in an intelligible manner to all the

students. To many, English doesn't appear to be the language of heart and Indian sentiments. Although Direct method is preached for English medium schools but what I personally feel is, it is only partially successful. Except in higher classes where students are mature enough to understand and express properly in English, the purpose of communication cannot be achieved without being resorted to any other language.

There come times and situations when a teacher has to teach in overcrowded classrooms and in such classrooms part of attention goes to discipline and so with partial concentration on the subject, the objective cannot be achieved successfully. The students find it difficult to be at the frequency level of the teacher, their conscious being split between sitting properly and comprehending the lecture. The real problem for the teacher is how to deliver his full, maintaining the discipline of the classroom. It is easy when there are a limited number of students in the classroom but when the class is brimming with the students, the teacher has to exert because there are always some pranksters and miscreants in the class who create disturbance. They try to utilize such situations to the full because taking advantage of such a situation they can go scot free. Some teachers effectively control such situations and to some it appears to be a herculean task. Mostly, the problem of discipline has been found with lady teachers. Perhaps, the students take undue advantage of their motherly heart. An ineffective teacher is no help in such overcrowded classrooms. In want of proper ability to command the students, such a teacher wastes his and his students' time, and the content conveyed during that period lingers at the outer sphere of their physical intellect.

Another big problem is, the class having a multi-religious, multi-cultural and multi-lingual atmosphere. Although language as a subject never creates any problem in such an atmosphere yet the teacher has to be very careful about not making any anti-religious or anti-cultural comments. Such comments can hurt one's sentiments and can exacerbate the atmosphere of the classroom stimulating religious and cultural extremism. I remember an incidence occurred to my sister-in-

law's friend who teaches in a Muslim-predominant school. One day, while in class, irritated by the pranks of some students, she unknowingly said, "It is really a tough job to teach you Muslims." The comment, more de-morphed when reached the parents; they created a lot of uproar in the school. The teacher had to say 'sorry' to the parents and she could save her job only by God's grace. As far as multilingual aspect is concerned, this is generally seen in higher education centres where students from different parts come together. The problem is mainly noticed among the students of north-western parts going to south and the students of south-eastern parts going to north - the teacher has to rely on a common language and if the teacher is not deft at any common language, the result is dissatisfaction and failure. Such problems can be surmounted easily if the teacher is competent at more than one language.

Evaluation and problem-solving are as much the part of English teaching as any other subject. These are the parameters through which we can judge the progress of both the teacher and the students; can diagnose the problems and can do proper efforts for betterment. Without systematic evaluation and problem-solving aims cannot be fulfilled. The problem is, as it is quite obvious from different reports which get published in the newspapers and personal experiences, that the teacher-student ratio in the present day schools crosses the optimum limit. Moreover, due to the CCE pattern being enacted, the teachers are burdened with several other activities except teaching which makes teaching and evaluation work difficult for the teachers. Language requires comparatively much time than other subjects in proper checking and evaluation and due to the excess of work they don't find sufficient time to check the children's copies properly and on time. In such cases the purpose of evaluation loses meaning as it becomes a burden for him; it becomes just a work and not something to which he is devoted to. He, then, evaluates just for the sake of evaluation; affects trying to solve their problems but not actually does so; work exceeds and quality deteriorates.

One of the major problems that we find widely prevalent today is exam-centred teaching which digresses the teachers from the main purpose of English teaching which involves five points viz. reading, writing, listening, speaking and comprehending. But today, as we know that our education system is predicated on rote learning and excellence in examination, the teacher teaches not the language but tricks and formulas to gain good marks e.g. while teaching Reading Comprehension the teacher tells the students to copy the same lines from the passage as given in the question. Also, while teaching grammar, they give some clues that if such and such a thing comes, you can fill such and such a word or you can make such and such a correction. The trick works because they know what type of questions are asked but the detrimental factor is, it confines the vision of students and proves to be a big hindrance when they grow up because what I feel is- what is rote cannot be blotted or say, it requires one's own efforts to blot what is imprinted on one's skull.

A classroom becomes a perfect classroom when all the necessary resources are available in adequate numbers. There should be proper and comfortable seating arrangement. Uneven and rough boards cause bad reflection of light and make the letters appear blurred which shifts the attention of the students from comprehending to see and write clearly. Unavailability of charts and pictures drains the class of some of its energy. If chalk pieces are unavailable or are poor in quality, it directly affects the teacher and sometimes results in his losing concentration.

Sometimes the students ask quite strange questions or say stupid questions and they are generally related to pure translation or meaning. In this way they create a very awkward situation in the classroom. To satisfy such students is really a challenge for the teacher. In higher classes there are some elements who deliberately try to trouble the teacher by asking meaningless questions and thus spoil the atmosphere of the class resulting in imperfect communication.

In schools and colleges we find the students of the same age group but if it is a classroom for competitive exams, there we find the students from

varied backgrounds and different age-groups. Sometimes the students are even older than the teacher there the teacher has to face two different outlooks towards him: one, as usual of respect and two, of sneer. A good and capable teacher maintains his equilibrium in such a classroom and overpowering even the second type of students, he compels them to change their view and makes room for himself as a Guru in their hearts. But all this is possible only through perfect communication which only a versatile teacher can make happen.

The teaching of English has taken a different turn with the changing scenes in our education system. In the present scenario where B-schools are mushrooming English has become a part of personality and soft skills. Here it becomes more of a practical thing rather than theoretical. Here it is not taught the traditional way but rather as a part of presentation, a style and a fashion. The main emphasis is on stress, intonation and clarity. The teacher has to build their confidence by removing their hesitation and training them in a proper way but the quandary is how to teach the students style and manner who can't frame even a single correct sentence. In north-western regions, it has generally been noticed that even good students are poor at English especially those who are from Hindi medium backgrounds.

Given the fact that English has now become an international language, it is the duty of every teacher teaching English that he should familiarize the students with the growing importance of English in every society. English has penetrated our lives to the extent that today, we can't do without it. Whether it is a matter of getting a job or higher studies or going to another state or going abroad, the importance of English is undisputable, and unless the students realize it, they won't develop a keenness for learning it.

The biggest challenge, what I feel, for any teacher in any given classroom situation, is to teach the students as per a standard pattern fulfilling all the basic requirements and not as per the demands of the students because imparting what one demands without thinking right or wrong brings about a lawless change but following a standard pattern will always bring about a positive change; a

transformation. An easy beginning always leads to difficult ending and a difficult beginning always leads to an easy ending. This is the rule of nature. Therefore, it is always advisable to follow standards.

There are challenges and there can be no life without challenges but if there are challenges, there are palliatives too. Life without challenges becomes dull and dreary and becomes meaningless. Challenges are to be met boldly and resourcefully, and only by meeting them teaching can be made meaningful and successful and as a result, life also.

The problem of atmosphere can be resolved if the teacher taking the students in his confidence asks them to converse in English; if he encourages them whenever they hesitate and thus creates a healthy and conducive atmosphere in the classroom, the teaching will be more productive. The students can be asked to watch at least one English news or programme daily and try to follow the style and manner as well as to learn the usages. The teacher can take extra class which corresponds to his dedication and devotion. The teacher's approach should be five-fold including all the five elements as already mentioned, so as to render the real feel of language. Time to time, the teacher can also use audio-visual teaching aids which arouse the interest of the students and thus create a supportive learning atmosphere.

To improve pronunciation, intonation and manner, the children should be imparted a basic knowledge of phonetics and workshops should be organized to provide them an interactive learning atmosphere. Moreover, now almost all the mobiles have recording device. The students can be asked to record the English talks and conversations and listen to them again and again. Also, they should be asked to record their own English speeches and compare them with the others. Mirror practice is also advisable. It helps one to judge and analyze oneself. Moreover, loud reading can help remove hesitation. Language laboratory can be set up that can bring about a total transformation in the language of the students.

In English medium schools where the students are already familiar with multiple ways of expression, there should be some innovative way of language teaching. Deductive method should be

used to teach grammar instead of inductive. Just as in life after reaching a certain age and level, people learn from experience and not from teaching or preaching; in the same way, after reaching a certain level, the students don't like to be taught in a traditional way rather they like to learn it through experience; and language is life. They should be taught different new usages, idioms and phrases. Grammar should be a matter of communicative and interactive approach rather than just traditional theory. Projects should be given and they should be asked to prepare Power Point Presentations. They should be taught that language is not just about speaking fast but the real beauty lies in understanding the text and playing with the words.

The best method to teach any language is the Direct Method. It is the only way through which one can have the real feel of any language. The use of any other language to explain and to make things more clear should totally be left on teacher's discretion. He should be allowed to do what he feels unless the objective of communication is put aside. Up to Class XII all the aspects of language should be tested through loud reading test, listening test, oral test and the usual writing test. Teaching language only through books is not perfect because it confines the language. Though a system is required, limiting it strictly with the trammels and shackles of patterns and formulas is not aright because language can grow only if it is set free.

To avoid overcrowded classrooms, an optimum teacher-student ratio must be strictly adhered to. The teacher should be both strict and friendly in the class. The strictness maintains the discipline and friendliness makes the students feel free to ask questions to satisfy their curiosity. Thus a healthy teaching-learning atmosphere is maintained. If the teacher is too soft or too strict, it affects the class and the process of communication negatively. In addition to this, the content delivery and presentation should be so much perfect that students won't be able even to stir. Only a competent teacher can do this.

It appears very bad that teaching should be disturbed because of the lack of resources. Infrastructure and the resources are the elementary things which must be managed properly. The

availability and quality of furniture must be ascertained timely. The availability of other necessary things must be checked time to time so that teaching can go on undisturbed. There should be a person responsible particularly for these duties i.e. availability of chalk pieces, dusters, maps, globe, charts and other teaching aids.

It is quite natural for the learners to commit mistakes and so the teachers, maintaining the dignity of their position, should handle those mistakes with care. They should diagnose the problem and with love they should offer the remedy of the problem. They should always wear a smile on their face and should be very polite to the students. Such behavior makes everything easy for both the teachers and the learners. The angry behavior of the teacher makes students stay away from him/ her. They hesitate to go near him and so they don't try to satisfy their curiosities which hinder the progress of the students. Such a teacher is useless for the teaching community because he doesn't fulfill the purpose of his being a teacher by being harsh to the students.

Family also has a role to play in it. There are people who even admit their children go to school because being a part of society, they have to follow certain set of norms adopted by the society. More than this they don't bother about school and education. They engage the child in some futile activity or let him play for the whole day. The best thing that they can do is- if the child is studious, they should not at least disturb him, if they can't help him. On the other hand, if the student is careless, they should guide and instruct him so that his digressing mind can be brought to a right direction and he can follow the guidelines given by the teacher. The educated parents can do a much better job. They can discuss the things taught at the school; teach him; correct him and can give him a good atmosphere of studies. Some parents send their children to tutorials or coaching centres and think that their job as responsible parents is over but the real duty is to pay proper attention at home.

Finally, to conclude, I would like to say-
Teaching a language, building an age,
Feel it profound an' yourself bound,
Burn yourself an' let the world be lit,

Be the epitome an' let everybody learn from it.

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