

# Facing Problems & Changing Strategies in Teaching of English at Elementary School Level in India

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**Abstract:** The present Research paper focuses on problems before the English Language teachers in India are enormous and apparent. They should be able to cater to the practical needs of learners, to make them competent enough to interact with one another and also to retrieve information all over the world. English has a base in several countries and is considered as the most suitable and convenient tool for International Communication. The ultimate aim of Education is to impart knowledge to the learners, to prepare them for their future life. Teaching school students through chalk and talk approach has been in practice for long India. Various strategies for achieving the present goal of school education were discussed and some are put into practice. The present paper endeavors to unravel the positive and negative points concerning teaching of English in schools. The prospectus, methodology, teachers and methods of teaching English is also conferred in inherent way.

**Keywords:** English, Challenges, Strategies, Prospects, Elementary level, Teaching.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

There are typical Indian English classrooms at Elementary level are characterized by a poor attendance of learners, disinterestedness and constraint of time as well as the burden of an extensive course that fails to address the crucial and current need for attainment of English communicative skills. In order to bring a change in the whole scenario of English learning and teaching it is essential that we are aware of the pits that plague it presently so that we can avoid them in future. The curriculum requires re-assessing and altering, with a view to deal with the need for imparting of communicative skills to the students. The curriculum should be made from the students' need for development of communicative competence. The people who have proficiency in this language could access large number of jobs and also were seen holding high positions in many National and International Organizations. In the earlier days English was just like a Library language, but now that notion has changed totally. At present the challenges visible before the English language teachers in India are diverse and it is necessary for them to shape up accordingly to meet the demands of the day. If language teachers teach as they taught earlier, then one may not achieve the required goals of teaching English in the present global scenario.

When a child starts school, he or she has become an extremely sophisticated language- user, operating a system for self-expression and communication that no other creature or computer comes close to matching. For all children, regardless of great differences in their circumstances, provides strong support for the idea that there is an innate predisposition in the human infant to acquire language. We think of this as a special capacity for language which each newborn child is endowed. By itself, however, this inborn language capacity is not enough. Some children grow up in a social environment where more than one language is used and are able to acquire a second language in circumstances similar to those of first language

acquisition. Those fortunate individuals are bilingual. However most of us are not exposed to a second language until much later and our ability to use a second language, even after years of study, rarely matches ability in our first language. There is something of an enigma in this, since there is apparently no other system of 'knowledge' that we can learn better at two or three years of age than at thirteen or thirty.

A number of reasons have been suggested to account for this enigma and a number of different approaches have been proposed to help learners become as effective communicating in a second language (L2) i.e. English as they are in their first language (L1). The child spends five to six years learning English based on rules of grammar and through the method of translation. Therefore teaching of English in our schools is in a chaotic state today. In the light of this careful observation, it is possible to conclude, that the conditions under which English is taught and learnt in our schools need careful examination (Yule, 2009).

### What is Language?

Language is a symbol system based on pure or arbitrary conventions...Infinitely extendable and modifiable according to the changing needs and conditions of the speakers. Language is a system of conventional spoken or written symbols by means of which human beings, as members of a social group and participants in its culture, communicate. Language is a purely human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions and desires by means of a system of voluntarily produced symbols. Language is the institution whereby humans communicate and interact with each other by means of habitually used oral-auditory arbitrary symbols. Language is undoubtedly a kind of means of communication among human beings. It consists primarily of vocal sounds. It is articulatory, systematic, symbolic and arbitrary (Syal and Jindal, 2008).

## II. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The investigator has reviewed the literature so as to get better insight of the research problem and elucidated following research works viz. The author have undertaken a study (Goodwyn, 2012) on *the Teaching of English in Government Schools at the primary level in India* with the following objectives : (i) To study the status of teaching English at the primary level across the states and UTs in India both as a subject and medium of instruction.(ii) To analyse in depth the curriculum, syllabi and textbooks of English in selected states.(iii) To find out how English is taught in classes in which it is introduced for the first time by observing the classroom processes in the selected states.(iv) To observe the training programmes (both pre- service and in-service) for teachers of English and to assess their competence in teaching English at the primary level.(v) To make suggestions for improvement in teaching of English on the basis of the findings of the study. The sample of 154 schools was selected for this study from 2-4 districts in each state. In each state, two in-service training programme for English would be selected for observation and two institutions were selected for observing their Pre service training programmes for training teachers in English. The results of the study found that the nature of engagement with literature for teachers and their students has been distorted by official rhetoric's and assessment regimes and that English teachers are deeply concerned to reverse this pattern.

In a study (Meganathan, 2009) the researchers aimed to find out *the English language education situation in rural schools in India*, the state policy on language education, quality questions in second / foreign language education through an analysis of language policy practices and the curriculum and syllabi of five states (provinces) in the country. An analysis of curricular statements and syllabi of the states of Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Mizoram, Manipur and Nagaland reveals how planning for language in education is not looked at holistically in terms of basic assumptions about language learning / acquisition (how language learning takes place), learner profiles and the contexts in which learning takes place, and the recent developments in language learning-teaching. The result of the study showed most states refused to move beyond the good old structural approach of the 1950s and the 60s, while they stress for communication skills to help the learner for an upward movement. This, in reality, revealed the paradoxical situations of an English language education which would further place the rural learner in a very disadvantaged situation.

In another study (Hanumanthrao, 2011) conducted the author examined the impact of *Teaching English Language: Problems and Remedies*. The findings of the study reported that the experiences of the staff involved in the design and operation of a method of teaching problem-solving to undergraduates. The paper aimed at presenting the contemporary situations in India with regard to English and suggesting remedies where these are called for.

**Problems of Teaching English at Elementary School level:**

- **Lack of Clear-cut Aims:** There is a general lack of clarity about the aims and objectives of teaching of English in India. The policy framers have tried but failed to specify clear-cut aims and objectives of teaching English in schools. The teachers know that they have to teach the subject since it is included in the syllabus. The students understand that they must study this subject as they will be examined in it. In English medium schools, English is taught from the very beginning. Whatever the situation, students learn English as a knowledge subject not as a skill subject. It is this reason why teaching and learning of English in Indian schools is in a muddle.
- **Over-crowded classes:** With the expansion of education, there is unprecedented growth of numbers at the elementary stage. This phenomenon is carried forward to the school stage and from there to secondary and the university stage. Sixty to seventy students is regarded as the normal class-size and in certain cases the class size is 100 to 120 students. Teachers of English experience a lot of problems in handling such a big class. It is difficult to pay due attention to individual students and this is very much desirable in English classroom.
- **Unhygienic Physical Conditions:** English is being learnt in Indian schools under cramped, unhygienic and unfavourable physical conditions. In most of the schools the children are obliged to sit on the old-fashioned type of benches and desks which restrict the movement. The classrooms are neither well ventilated nor enough light is allowed to spread inside.
- **Lack of Competent Teachers:** Incompetent teachers are the main source of trouble as far as the teaching of English in our schools is concerned. They are either trained in old methods and have never cared to look for something better in new techniques or there are those who receive new insight but never apply their knowledge to actual teaching work and remain satisfied with routine methods. Sometimes, English is taught by those who did not offer this subject while under training.
- **Faulty Methods of Teaching:** The teaching of English in India suffers from the faulty methods of teaching. In most of the schools, the Translation Method is the sole favorite with the teachers. The teacher picks up the reader, translates the paragraph, writes the meanings of difficult words on the blackboard and assigns some homework and that is all. No attention is ever paid to pronunciation practice, listening comprehension and structure practice. So, when they pass out, they are as ignorant as they were when they first entered the English class.
- **Non-Availability of Good Text-books:** The text books of English used in our schools are sub-standard. The books are edited or written by those who are not actual practicing teachers. No effort is made to select beforehand graded vocabulary for use in the text books.
- **Apathy to New Techniques and Procedures:** Most of the teachers working in middle and high schools are both ignorant and apathetic to the new techniques and procedures of teaching of English. The new generation of teachers is being given training in new methods but these teachers fail miserably when they are actually put on the job.
- **Inadequate Provision of Teaching Aids:** A general survey of teaching in schools would reveal that most of the teaching is being done without the help of any aid. The teacher of English hardly takes any initiative to prepare even simple charts or flashcards which can greatly help them in teaching their subject well.
- **Insufficient Provision for the subject in the Timetable:** In the absence of uniform all-India policy, there is insufficient provision for the subject in the time-table. In most of the states, English is introduced in the V or VI class and it is taught for about six hours a week on the average.
- **Neglect of Correction Work:** Correction of exercise books which is most essential is not paid proper attention by our teachers. The students are not in the habit of having a remedial practice of the mistakes pointed out by the teacher remain only on the pages of the exercise books of the students which is absolutely useless. In fact, the right method is to correct in the presence of the students which is not possible in the overcrowded classrooms.
- **Dominance of a conservative Headmaster:** Sometimes, the domination of a conservative Headmaster or principal creates a difficult situation for a progressive teacher. The conservative head is concerned more about good examination results than about students grasp of the language. So, he would like the teacher to follow to follow the same old, stereotyped and examination-ridden methods of teaching the subject. He would not allow any variation on the part of the teacher.

- **Parental Interference:** Certain parents interfere with the work of good teachers. They measure the progress of their children in the subject by the number of pages of the reader covered, translation exercises done and grammar lesson given in the given the English periods. When the coverage is not their satisfaction, they would come and comment upon the teacher's work or his methods. They would offer suggestions as if they were the master of the subject.
- **Exam oriented:** The English language learning syllabus is created wholly from the exam point of view; As a result the content does not focus on raising the level of communicative competence of the students and is confined in the narrow confines of the exam paper.
- **Impractical:** Today's world is a world based on effective communication and exchange of information on a global scale. Keeping this in mind it is necessary that the language teaching course as implemented should prepare the students for this world. However it is really tragic that it fails miserably in this context for the curriculum does not address this particular aspect of language learning, which is the need of this practical world. The course does not include any kind of practical impairment of knowledge especially in language learning. "In Indian classrooms, lecturers speak, the class listens passively.....Indian classroom (up to graduation level) often do not allow projects, seminars, conferences etc" (Bhatia, 2008).

#### Remedies for the Problems of Teaching English Language at Elementary School level:

- **The Policy regarding the Place of English should be well-defined:** English offers vast opportunities to all. The policy regarding the place of English in our education system should be well defined. This should be determined keeping in view its use and vast opportunities in the field of science, technology, social sciences, philosophy, area studies, journalism, international trade and diplomacy.
- **Building a rapport with your class:** When you enter the class for the first time, it is very important that you give a welcoming smile to your students and greet them saying, 'Good morning, class! How are you feeling today?' or something like that. This is a very significant first step. There are many levels at which this works. First, your class is probably intimidated about the very fact that they are learning the most important language of the world. Your assuring smile and greeting them in a familiar manner helps them bond with you instantly. When they bond with you, they will find learning the language easier. Remember a smile always welcomes people to interact with you. Same way if you have a smiling face, then the students will feel free to express their views to you.
- **Utilizing the different methods of Teaching in the classroom teaching-learning process:** The teacher while teaching English should use the different methods of teaching English to the students. The different methods will make her teaching and the learning of the students effective. Language education usually takes place at a language school. There are many methods of teaching languages. Some have fallen into relative obscurity and others are widely used; still others have a small following, but offer useful insights. The teacher can also make use of the Language Lab. Some of the methods of teaching English are as follows:
  1. The grammar translation method.
  2. The direct method.
  3. The series method.
  4. Variation of direct method.
  5. The oral approach/Situational language teaching.
  6. Audio-lingual method
  7. Communicative language teaching.
  8. Language immersion. Minimalist/Methodist.
  9. Directed practice.
  10. Learning by teaching

- **Building confidence for the language in the students:** At the first meeting itself, train your students to ask some simple English questions, and give their answers. Examples are 'What is your name?', 'Which country are you from?', 'Who is your best friend?' etc.
- Many teachers of English as a second language make the mistake of beginning with the alphabet. This is wrong. When you train them to ask questions on the first day itself, your students will definitely show off these questions to their folks. And their interest in the language will be built. They will come with higher hopes of learning more things the next day. Starting out with the alphabet cannot achieve this 'English is fun' feeling in the minds of your students. Same way, the teacher should emphasize more on the language learning skills than the portion completion at the under-graduate level.
- **The teacher should keep in mind the aims of teaching English:** The teacher should always emphasize on the aims of teaching English. It will help her to teach effectively. These aims are:
  1. To enable the students to understand English when spoken,
  2. To enable him to speak English,
  3. To enable him to read English,
  4. To enable him to write English.
- **Improvement in the teaching facilities:** Special efforts should be made to ensure that teachers get proper teaching facilities, including space, books, and teaching aids. The school and the college libraries should subscribe good journals which may enable them to know the latest developments in the field of linguistics and English Language Teaching.
- **UGC should play active role:** The University Grants Commission should play an active role in the development of foreign language discipline in the country. Research in the field of methodology, materials production, textbook writing and original research in English and foreign languages should be liberally financed.
- **Starting a thought process in the students' minds:** Make it a very firm rule, but subtly implied, that there will be no other language spoken in your class other than English. This will be very difficult at first, especially when the students are hell-bent on translating new English words they learn into their own language. Do not encourage this. But also remember that the students are trying their best. Be gentle with them when they attempt to translate English into their language. Exhort them to think in English. This is a mammoth task, and can be achieved only after some weeks, or probably months, of teaching.
- **The teachers should be competent:** Special efforts should be made to ensure that teachers of English themselves possess a good command of English. The teachers appointed should be very competent, and should always update their knowledge from time to time.
- **Eradicating the Socio-Psychological problems:** The efforts of the teacher should be in eradicating the Socio-Psychological Problems of the students, by motivating them and giving them some responsibility. The teacher should increase the interaction session between her and her students, which will overcome the lack of motivation and communicative needs in the students.
- **Building basic communication skills in the students:** Never teach your students. Always speak with them. Converse with the students about day-to-day things. Keep talking with them in simple English. They will talk when the initial icebreakers are done with. And when they will talk, they will learn. Encourage your students to talk.
- **Removing barriers to Language communication:** The teacher should try their level best to remove the language barriers which comprises of difference in languages, culture, and behaviour. The teachers should avoid the use of jargons and regional dialects during the delivery of lectures in English.
- **Handling Mistakes with care:** Do not convert your English class into a caricature of Mind Your Language. Mistakes will happen in the class, and you have to learn how to handle them deftly. If you laugh at the students, they will be too embarrassed to make any further attempts at speaking the language. If you do not laugh, students will feel you are only being too kind to them, and might always think they have said something wrong, but you are hiding your amusement. What I do is, I laugh with the student. Yes, this is possible. I give a very polite laugh, and then explain the student why

what he or she said was funny. This makes the student laugh too. Invariably! In time, some of the students in your class will point out the mistakes of others. When this happens, follow a subtle approach at correcting the mistakes, laughing with them wherever appropriate.

- **Strict supervision:** The college authorities should see that the teacher is well conversant with good methods of teaching. The examination in English need to be improved. Necessary Audio-Visual aids should be made available to schools and colleges (Hanumanthrao, 2011).

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Teaching English as a second language is really fun if you do it the right sporting way. You have to make it fun for your students too – that's the way they will learn better. English occupies a place of prestige in our country but at the same time we must accept that the standard of its teaching has deteriorated vastly and that is why it is essential to know the problems of teaching English in India at Elementary level in the schools. Then alone we can remove these problems and teach students effectively for better results. The whole approach is very flexible and eclectic, without being rigid and dogmatic. These above underlying principles of successful foreign language teaching can be applied to real classroom situation in Indian schools to impart good knowledge and improve learning conditions. Some drastic changes are needed in our approach covering different areas such as syllabus construction, course books, methods and teaching, evaluation of pupil's achievement in the subject and other related matters (Bhatia, 2008).

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