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Problems of teaching and learning in English in India

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Abstract

The scenario of teaching and learning English at higher and lower level is not appreciating. Specially in backward states like Bihar and others, all the Primary schools are identical at geographically, socially and academic angle. The syllabus implemented at this level is not language oriented. Our motto should be to enhance the proficiency of the learners in the target language and thus to enable them to square up the communication skills. In this direction, the amount of effort by the local/state Govt. is negligible in improving the proficiency in the language which is on the decline.

Keywords: Communication skills, scenario, strategies, performative skills, principle and technique

Introduction

While English is the most preferred language for the students of India. The teaching of English language and literature is not less valuable than other subjects of science at graduate and undergraduate level. Instead of the above facts and greater than ever popularity of the language, the standards of teaching as well as learning English have been on the decline without any sign of improvement. That's why the higher studies in USA and in English spoken countries test of spoken English is mandatory.

The scenario of teaching and learning English at higher and lower level is not appreciating. Specially in backward states like Bihar and others, all the Primary schools are identical at geographically, socially and academic angle. The syllabus implemented at this level is not language oriented. Our motto should be to enhance the proficiency of the learners in the target language and thus to enable them to square up the communication skills. In this direction, the amount of effort by the local/state Govt. is negligible in improving the proficiency in the language which is on the decline. English being an international language even it occupies a place of prestige in our country. Since Britishers left our country, four decades have passed but no language other than English even our national language Hindi has come up to replace this. It is still used as a medium of communication or official language. Though Mahatma Gandhi was not in favour of English Education, but he appreciated the importance of foreign language especially English. "I do not want my home to be walled in on all sides and my windows to be stuffed. I want the cultures of all the lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible.

"Many educationists and scientists have, therefore, expressed the opinion that under no circumstances should be sacrifice the many advantages that we have gained by matters pertaining to education sentiment should not be the ruling factor and that what was most urgently needs was that our youth require knowledge from all sources and contribute their share to its expansion and development. In attainment of the objectives, the study of English was bound to play an important role."

The efficiency in English language will enable us to set up intellectual, cultural, economic, commercial and political relations with the rest of the world and it will help us in acquiring knowledge in legal, technical and scientific education and research in almost all branches of learning.

Since the independence we are regularly trying to upgrade the teaching and learning of English language. Seeing the importance of this our late Prime Minister Mrs. Indira Gandhi expressed her apprehension on poor standard of teaching English.

India today equals itself with many developed countries of the world in so far as the use of English is concerned. Though a language brought and popularized in India after the dawn of the British. Indians felicity of its use has enabled even the native users to look at us in

wonder and admiration. A study rightly says that India is the third largest English spoken nation after US and UK. The awareness and growth of English in various forms in India can be accounted to the explosion of English medium schools and paying capability of Indian parents but the scenario is not so glowing in every nook and corner of India. We cannot deny the fact that English has become a part and parcel of our day to day life. The English has established itself as language of trade, commerce and science. The burst of technical revolution too conforms to the accessibility of English. English empowers each and every age group i.e. the young and adults and its application seems an unavoidable reality from the kitchen oven to military siren. Further, effective English communication skills provide better job opportunities inside and outside the country. This way we can say that English communication skills are passport to placement. The use of English all over the world is not out of imposition but because of realization that it has certain advantages. English is a progressive language. It is dynamic and flexible.

It is universally well-known for its power of expression and its rich literature. A very important reason for regarding English as a world language is that the world's knowledge is enshrined in English.

In order to understand the students' strategies for learning English as a second language (ESL), it is essential to give a brief account of the context of English language learning and teaching, the role and status of the language and the aims and objectives of teaching English. These aspects influence the way in which teachers/students teach/learn English at graduate and undergraduate levels. The learners of English language face difficulty in learning the target language through English. There are many problems in teaching /learning English. The primary aim of teaching /learning English should concentrate on the fundamental skills of the language ability of the students i.e. listening, speaking, reading and writing. It is of paramount importance that teacher should know what his task is and what he is trying to achieve by teaching English. In our English syllabuses, we do not have a specific plan of what to teach and when to teach. It makes a teacher handicapped in implementing the teaching effective and easy for the students. Sometimes a teacher has to decide how and when to teach a particular teaching item. This attempt of the teacher cannot make the teaching effective as he himself has no sufficient knowledge of effective teaching of the language. Thus, they only believe in cover the whole syllabus without having perfect idea of aims and objectives. They simply go on with their job of teaching without knowing the difficulties of the learners. Being a teacher he should be aware of the fact that students' proficiency in English is not up to the mark. They (students) come from the schools having no proficiency in English due to deteriorating standards of teaching English in schools. Our objectives of teaching English should be practical and emphasized on the activities to read and understand the target language through books, journals and teaching materials in English.

It is also a strong factor that there is dearth of competent teachers of English language in our country. Very few teachers have competency in English language. Consequently, they fail to set their aims in the new setting and they cannot teach English effectively. T.P. Tripathi, Oct, 1977- Suggests in his Presidential address – “We, the

teachers of English, are keenly alive to the responsibility that rests on us. We have to see that English is taught at levels and taught well and its standards are properly maintained [3].” We, the teachers of English (especially of colleges) do not keep ourselves very keen to the recent developments in the field of linguistics and theories related to learning and teaching, without which we cannot teach our students effectively. This dearth is due to the lack of teachers who are specialized in the method of teaching English.

One of the factors responsible for the deterioration of the Standards of teaching English is the teachers' Performative Skills – the examination system, question setting pattern and evaluation. In most of the universities stress is given on the result of the students. They are only interested in to have a degree to get a good job. But when they go for a good job, they find themselves nowhere. Teachers as well as students believe in a traditional question pattern which is literature oriented not language oriented. They do not have proper orientation in language oriented syllabi. This is why students having graduation degree do not have proficiency in spoken English language. They are unable to possess the ability to develop the power of written and oral expression in a classroom situation. This does not fulfill our aim in learning/teaching English.

The other vital part of an English language teacher is methods and techniques used by them. “Method is an overall plan for orderly presentation of language material, no part of which contradicts.....the selected approach” – Anthony. It is true, good teachers are more important than good methods, but an efficient teacher can improve the quality of teaching by applying good methods and teaching techniques. Most of teachers having no linguistic background use traditional or Grammar Translation method. They try to make them understand the meaning of the prescribed part of prose or poetry in local/mother tongue of the students. This action of a teacher diverts the learner from achieving the target language. The term method in the context of language teaching has been subjected to varied interpretations. Larsen- Freeman considers method a super ordinate term that comprises Principle and Technique, the Principle represents the theoretical framework of the methods while techniques reflect the behavioural manifestations of the Principle. Anthony explains – “A technique is implemental – that which actually takes place in the classroom. It is particular trick, stratagem, or contrivance used to accomplish an immediate objective. Techniques must be consistent with a method and therefore in harmony with an approach as well”.

The following are the major teaching methods, which have influenced the teaching of the English a second language

1. The Grammar – Translation method
2. The Direct Method
3. The Reading Method
4. The Audio-lingual Method
5. The Cognitive Method
6. The Communicative Approach
7. The Silent Method

The Socio-Psychological problems also influence the teaching of English. In learning second language motivations is the crucial force which determines whether

the learner embarks on a task at all, how much energy he devotes to it, and how long he preserves. It is known as complex phenomenon and includes many components, such as, the individuals drive, need for achievement and success, curiosity, desire for stimulation and new experiences, and so on. The primary motive to learn a language is that it provides a means of communication. The extent of the communicative need depends upon the nature of the social community in which the person lives. A person is drawn towards learning a second language if he perceives a clear communicative need for it.

At the same time teachers are not competent enough arousing emotions among the students during their teaching. The teachers should create an environment/situation according the nature/location of prescribed texts. They should create a sense of pity or sorrow in the heart of the students when a tragic or sad poem is taught. Similarly happiness, bold and other situations should be produced during the teaching as to make teaching effective and powerful. But in reality very few teachers are there who have such type of features. Since the teachers are under pressure of competition of syllabus, they can not apply such type of experience in the classroom. They believe in completing the syllabus only. Students at the same time are too not in a position/have no capacity to follow such experience. This is due to lack of communication of language. That's why teacher do not feel themselves at ease in concretizing the abstract idea of the novel, poem, passage and words etc. They often face difficulty in creating live pictures in the eyes of the learners. For this lacking both are equally responsible. In this critical situation we should take help of audio-visual aids for teaching English. Through visual demonstration we can attain perfectness in teaching. But there is scarcity of the audio-visual aids.

In our students we find lack of creativity. They are to a great extent not able to handle the power of self expression; therefore, great emphasis should be given on language courses, which comprises essay writing, précis writing, grammar and syntax. Students prefer to use and to write at the examination readymade notes either given by teachers or purchased from the market. Instead of using their creativity, students like to write paragraphs from the notes or books available with them. They never like to visit library/seminars to consult the books available there which can help them to make them self sufficient. "What is known as critical study of any author really means nothing more that picking up a few telling sentences or striking phrases from some books of criticism without real attempt at entering into the spirit of the author or appreciating his point of view."

Syllabus, which plays an important role in teaching of English language, is not up to mark. Different universities have prepared their own English syllabuses – they traditional syllabus and have no uniformity. Very universities have language-oriented syllabi. In recent years, the focus of syllabus has shifted from structure to situations, functions and notions to topics and tasks. That's why, as Nunan (1988) highlights- "the traditional distinction between syllabus design and methodology has become blurred" A syllabus can be seen as "a plan of what is to be achieved through our teaching and our students' learning."(Breen, 2001) While its function is "to specify what is to be taught and in what order" (Prabhu, 1984). In Wilkins words, syllabuses are "specifications of the content

of language teaching which have been submitted to some degree of structuring or ordering with the aim of making teaching and learning a more effective process". In simple words, it (syllabus) performs as a guide for both teacher and learner by providing some goals to be accomplished. So, when syllabus is being prepared we must keep in our mind that it, in fact, deals with linguistic theory and theories of language learning and how they are utilized in the classroom.

Lastly to overcome the problems of teaching English and make it easy and effective we should adopt the latest teaching methods and techniques.

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