



## TEACHING ENGLISH IN INDIA: PROBLEMS AND REMEDIES

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In the modern era of science, technology and IT boom the world has turned into a global village, which involves frequent deliberations among the nations on various important international issues. The important books in science, technology, medicine, law, etc. are mostly in English, which renders the knowledge of English necessary to conduct higher studies in the above fields. It is also a source of forging better understanding among the nations, which helps in interacting with one another and establishing better international rapport at the time of need. Being a major link language, it helps to deliberate on the major global socio-economic, geo-political, geo-physical and environmental issues in their various manifestations, enabling to evolve proper mechanism to address them effectively and timely. Besides, it also serves as a tool necessary for developing better cultural, intellectual, political, and economic ties between the nations, which of necessity turns it into the language of the common man rather than only that of the elites, hence the importance of English cannot be overemphasized.

The British Council, while launching its English Project- 2000, highlighting the importance of English has stated, “English is the main language of books, newspapers, airports and air traffic control, international business and academic conferences, science technology, diplomacy, sport, international competitions, pop music and advertising.” (Vide Press Release, 1995) In view of this, English is becoming increasingly popular and is rapidly becoming the world language, with

the result that 1000 million people of the world speak it as either a native language, a second language, or a foreign language. The

British Council's above report summarizing the position of English further states:

Worldwide, there are over 1,400 million people living in countries where English has official status. One out of five of the world's population speaks English to some level of competence. Demand from the other four fifth is increasing....By the year 2000 it is estimated that over one billion people will be learning English. (Vide Press Release, 1995)

In fact, apart from being the first language of U.K., U.S.A., Canada and Australia, English is also popular in the Asian countries like India, Pakistan, China, etc. Consequently, one person out of ten in the world has become a bona fide speaker of English that enables mutual access to one out of every four people on the earth, thereby serving as a window to the world. Hence, English has come to occupy a place of honour across the world, more so in a developing country like India. Since in India there exists a huge linguistic diversity, where no indigenous language has come up to replace English, as either a medium of wider communication or an official language, it ipso facto continues as the most important medium for interstate and intrastate communications.

In view of the above, though learning English has become an integral part of our academic curriculum, yet a great number of people are still unable to speak and write correct English. Commenting on the pathetic state of English in the country, R.K. Sharma observes, "English language teaching in India...has suffered a lot, so much that our students who pass intermediate or degree examinations with English either as a compulsory or as an elective subject, can neither speak nor write it correctly." (Sharma, 1999: 66-67) In fact, the problem is mainly due to the defective mechanism our schools and colleges adopt in teaching it. It is, therefore, imperative to adopt effective method to teach English to Indian students, so that they are not scared of it, and suffer from an anti English phobia. Thus, the main concern of the present paper is to visualize the problems, which impede the process of teaching and learning English in India along with appropriate and adequate remedial measures to deal with them.

In fact, the students in India receive their preliminary education mostly in their respective mother tongues, in which they always feel uncomfortable. Since, the teachers teach them their different subjects in the native languages, they encounter English only at a later stage, which creates problems for the students to acclimatize them properly with the language. The poor social and economic background of the students also accounts for their poor English, inasmuch as they hardly get an opportunity in or outside their homes to hear somebody interacting in English, which affects adversely their chances to learn it in a natural course. Consequently, the students coming from the institutions with vernacular-medium lag behind performance wise even if they get admissions in the prestigious technical, commercial and medical institutions, which at times even lead to their expulsions. As for instance, IIT Roorkee expelled 73 B.Tech. first-year students last year for their poor performance. Curiously, Rajveer Choudhary, the treasurer of the Students' Affair Council of IIT Roorkee, while pleading mercy on behalf of the expelled students contended:

Students should not be removed from college like this. Many of them come from vernacular-medium backgrounds and it is difficult for them to comprehend certain subjects. They should have been given time to adjust to the academic environment in the institute. (Saxena, Jul.10, 2015)

Besides, the lack of proper infrastructure is a common problem with the schools and colleges in India. It makes the process of teaching difficult, particularly when it comes to teaching a foreign language like English, leading to the unpopularity of the subject among the students. In most of the institutions, there is unavailability of adequate number of classrooms, which forces the teachers and students even to sit in the open space, braving at times the inclement weather conditions. There is also the lack of staff, which due to the growing number of students every year leads to accommodate at times even 100 students in a section. The problem of overcrowding in the classrooms being a common phenomenon, it makes practically impossible for a teacher to pay individual attention to the students. The allotment of insufficient time to the subject, which is often only 3 periods of 45 minutes duration per week instead of 6 periods as usually given to other subjects, is another impediment. For, in that case, it becomes difficult for the teacher to do full justice with the subject and particularly the students having a rural background. This leads both teachers and students to become selective and concentrate only on the topics important from

the examination point of view. In such a situation, students resort to cramming from the cheap guides rather than developing a proper understanding of the subject. To add to the problem, a large number of English teachers are not well conversant with the latest techniques of teaching the language, their knowledge of English too is inadequate and their pronunciation faulty, particularly the teachers from rural backgrounds are worst affected by this malady.

Besides, the absence of proper curriculum, designed scientifically needed at different levels, also impedes the process of teaching English. Presently, the paper of compulsory English introduced at the undergraduate level is based on the old pattern, which includes selected texts of the old Masters like Shakespeare, Keats, and Wordsworth etc. The English used in these texts is of the age when the language was in a developing stage and some of the words used in them have now become obsolete. Generally, the students today do not understand the old literature related with the historical and cultural backgrounds of the west, and feel bored studying them. This also gives rise to a cramming tendency of the stuff without understanding its real content. The texts by the Indian writers, stands generally ignored, while framing the syllabi for a particular class. Most of the teachers in the rural area are poor at spoken English and are not conversant with the correct pronunciation and proper teaching methodology. They commonly follow the old pattern based on simple translation and grammar and seldom speak English before the students, depriving them of the opportunity to hear somebody speak the language. The teachers often dictate compositions, give pieces from the textbook for translation and their focus is only on passing the examination. Hence, the students never feel at ease with English and develop a sort of complex against it. The faulty examination system too is responsible for the poor state of English in the country, which focuses on writing skill with no provision of testing the spoken ability of the students. The lack of proper and frequent inspection by the supervisory staff to ensure that the teaching in the institutions under them goes on smoothly and the teachers are sincere with their works is also responsible for the problem. They often do not go to the classrooms to see for themselves that the students are doing satisfactorily. Trained in the old method, they are not aware of the new pattern and are themselves incompetent for their jobs. Because of this, even if a school wants, they do not allow the introduction of a new technique of teaching.

The undue interference by the government, which sometimes gives a step-motherly treatment to English, is also not conducive to its learning. As for instance, for more than a couple of decades

now, some of our politicians mainly from north India have been discouraging English as a matter of policy, doing great disservice to the students. It is at their behest that the School Boards and Universities introduce frequent changes in the syllabi with regard to the status of English to suit to the policies of the government in power. Accordingly, many School Boards have made English an optional subject, due to which a number of students pass their Intermediate without English, which makes them unfit to take admission in the Universities and colleges, where English is a compulsory subject. Consequently, of late many universities in northern India, relenting to the pressure of the government, have to relax the rules making compulsory English optional to accommodate the students passing their school examinations without it. Besides, where English is still a compulsory paper, marks scored in it are not included in the grand total while working out the division.

It is, therefore, imperative for those over the helm of affairs to ensure that in both Boards and Universities there is a compulsory paper of English, the marks of which are invariably included in the total score. Besides, the teaching of English as a subject should commence from the very start and not after passing the primary school, as is generally the practice in government run schools in many states. The academicians and the experts should frame the syllabi at different levels and the government should have minimum interference in it, so that there are no frequent changes in it. Besides, the government also needs to provide the required facilities timely for the betterment of the teaching conditions of the subject at different levels, which implies better infrastructure, good teachers and atmosphere to create attraction towards English among the students. There should be adequate and well-equipped classrooms along with necessary teaching aids, including good textbooks, blackboards, charts audio-visual aids and computers, etc., to make the teaching more effective, communicative and lively. In fact, a judicious teacher-student ratio is must for effective teaching in the classrooms. It is also necessary to ensure providing quality education using the modern aids and techniques to save their students from embarrassment at various levels. Besides, there is growing indifference among the students towards English, particularly among those belonging to rural background. Their family atmosphere, economic and social constraints contribute a lot towards this apathy for English. Since it is not practically possible to create for the students an atmosphere conducive to learn English at their respective places, it is incumbent upon the schools to encourage the students to speak English in the classrooms as also outside in their interpersonal interactions. Meanwhile,

the judicious use of the mother tongue, needed to explain the meaning of a word, should also continue, provided the teacher gets back to English as quickly as possible. The teachers should take the responsibility to motivate their students to develop their own ability and confidence towards learning the language independently. There should also be remedial classes like weekend classes, evening classes for weaker students

The libraries of the schools and colleges should have sufficient number of books and journals for the benefit of both teachers and the students to update their knowledge about the latest developments in the field. The teachers must also have their own cabins where they can not only relax in the gap between two periods, but also help students solve their individual problems in the subject. The curriculum should be on scientific lines, consisting of both the works of the modern Indian and the foreign writers along with the contents interesting and useful in learning the language and linguistic skills. The examination system needs a drastic change, where there is also the provision of oral tests along with theoretical ones, requiring students to give presentations and to participate in group discussions and mock interviews. The workshops, refreshers and orientation programmes for both teachers and the inspectorial staff should take place regularly. The need is to ensure that the teachers themselves are good at spoken English, who also encourage their students to speak English. Besides, along with the 'Translation Method', they also need to adopt various other methods, like Structural, Direct and Bilingual Methods blending all of them together, which is sure to give the desired result. Besides, the individual teacher should also have the guts to evolve his own method according to the need of the students. The Department of Extension Services and training colleges should take the responsibility of training the inspection staff in their respective areas regularly.

In short, to ensure teaching of English in India in a worthwhile manner, it is necessary to have proper infrastructure, efficient and well-trained teachers, good library and other teaching aids. There should also be proper students- teacher ratio and no overcrowding of the classrooms should be there. The teachers should be proficient in the subject and have the aptitude to teach. The government should facilitate the smooth functioning of the schools and colleges and should not interfere with either the syllabi or the day today work. Depending on adopting the above measures, English has a bright future in India. Generations will come and generations will go,

but English will continue to live and spread in India as a link language and as a medium of technical knowledge and establishing international relations.

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