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REVIEW ARTICLE

TEACHING OF ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE IN INDIA: AN OVERVIEW

*Dr. Jyoti Syal

Assistant Professor of English, MMIHM Maharishi Markandeshwar Deemed to be University, Mullana, Ambala

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ABSTRACT

English language has become a world language. It is the official language not only of the native countries (U.K., U.S.A) but also of almost all the countries across the globe. The number of people who use English as a means of communication exceed much more than the number of people who speak it as their mother tongue. If we talk about India, English has been used directly or indirectly for almost two centuries. Teaching of English language in India as a second language is affected by many factors. Environment and family background play a vital role in the success of teaching - learning process of English. Moreover, the infrastructure i.e. the classrooms, lab facilities are not as adequate as required. The importance of English can be guessed by the fact that every latest information and the text books of almost every subject are available in English language only. India is a multilingual nation, there is no single language which can unite the whole country. No doubt, Hindi is our mother tongue, but it is not widely spoken throughout the country. That is the reason, we have to borrow a new non- Indian language, English. English has become the official language of India, as it is spoken and understood not only across the country but across the globe. It is the language which is required by the world for greater understanding. Considering the above facts, teaching and learning English language has become indispensable and unavoidable in India. The present paper is an attempt to discuss the importance of English as a second language and various factors which effect the teaching-learning process of English language in India.

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INTRODUCTION

Some centuries ago, English language was not as popular as of now. Today, due to globalisation in all the fields, English language has become a world language. Perhaps, there are more than 1.5 billion people around the world, who use English language. They speak English or write in English. It is the official language not only of the native countries (U.K., U.S.A) but also of almost all the countries across the globe. According to Prof. Randolph Quirk, "Paul Vargheese says that most people who speak English are not English and were not born in England." (2). Thus it is clear that the number of people who use English as a means of communication exceeds much more than the number of people who speak it as their mother tongue. The people, who speak English, can be broadly classified into three major groups:

- The native speakers, those who have inherited it as their native language;
- The Second language speakers, those who have acquired it as a second language with in a society.
- Those, who due to some necessity, professional or administrative, use it for practical use.

*Corresponding author: Dr. Jyoti Syal

Assistant Professor of English, MMIHM Maharishi Markandeshwar Deemed to be University, Mullana, Ambala

There is no doubt that in today's modern world, in the 21st Century, English has become the world's widely spoken language. Almost in all spheres of life, science and technology, medicine, sports, media, international affairs and so on, the importance of English can be seen. Thus, it can be said that English has become a tool for international communication. David Crystal in his book *English as a Global Language* emphasizes on the importance of English language. He says, "it is the language on which the sun never sets." (4) Due to the extensive use of English language in all spheres of human being's life and the fact that English is the language of international communication, teaching of English as a foreign or second language has become an important occupation throughout the globe. There is no country across the world where English is not studied, taught or used. In short, it can be said that of all the languages in the world today, it is only English language which deserves to be regarded as a 'World-language', being the common means of communication between the people of different nations. The U.N.O. has also given English the status of being an official language. If we talk about India, English has been used directly or indirectly for almost more than two centuries. This language was given to Indians by the Britishers, who ruled on us for almost two decades. Lord Macaulay wanted not all but a few selected ones to be educated. He wanted "... a class of persons Indian in

blood and colour but English in tastes, morals and opinions." Explaining the importance of English, Macaulay in his minutes on education (1835) says, "English stands pre-eminent among the languages of the West, whoever knows that language has ready access to all the west intellectual wealth which all the wise nations of the earth have created." (10). Even Indians themselves, like the contemporary patriots like Raja Ram Mohan Roy preferred English education. As a result, English was adopted as the 'official language' of education in 1837. The British empire disappeared years ago but the empire of English language has been extending throughout the country. English became the unifying force in India because it was the only language in which, many English educated Indians could think in and express themselves as effectively as the English people. After Independence, the place of English in India underwent drastic changes. Hindi in Devnagri script was declared to be the official language by Indian Constitution. But as English with deeply rooted in the system, English was declared to be the associate language with Hindi till 1965. Almost all the commissions and committees, which came in existence to study and analyse the problem of education in India have in one way or the other emphasized on the importance of the mother tongue as the medium of instruction and also on the study of English as a subject. The constitution of India too gave Hindi in Devanagari script the status of the official language of the country. But when in 1960, the then President of India, Dr. Rajendra Prasad tried to make Hindi the language of the Supreme Court and all High Courts, there was immediate reaction in the non-Hindi areas. Thus, realizing the importance of English language, The Chief Minister's Conference (1961) concluded that English should also be taught along with Hindi in order to get out side affairs' for All India Services and other departments. In 1967, a law was passed according to which "English will continue as an associate official language for an indefinite period." (Krishnaswamy and Krishnaswamy 2006: 123.) The first education commission which was appointed in free India was the 'University Education Commission', which stated that English should be studied in high schools and in the Universities in order to keep ourselves in touch with the ever growing knowledge.

If we talk about the present scenario of India, English has become a part and parcel of Indian academic, professional and administrative system. The increasing employment opportunities for people who know English have made the importance of English language acceptable to the majority of people of the present India. The importance of the ability to speak or to write English has recently increased significantly because English has become the defected standard. English is used among Indians as a link language. It has become the first and most preferred language for many well educated Indians. It is the second language for many, who speak more than one languages in India. English language has become a unifying force that helps to bind all segments of society. It enjoys a special status in India. If we talk about teaching of English as a second language in India, there are numerous factors that affect the teaching-learning process, which can be discussed as follows:

Neglecting the Aims of Teaching English: The first and most important factor which affects the teaching-learning process in India is teaching of English is not in accordance with the aims of teaching English. The objective of teaching a language is to enable the learner to understand and communicate the

language effectively. If we talk about teaching of English language in India, English must serve as 'a window on the world'. It means that the learner must be able to observe and learn other persons' behaviour. At the same time the contemporary knowledge of all the subjects should be accessible to him. But it has been observed that a many times neither the teacher nor the student is aware of the aims of teaching or learning that particular language. The student learns it just for the sake of passing the examination and the teacher also aims that his student can get passing marks in the examination. In this way, the main objective of teaching English language is often neglected.

Faulty Curriculum: Another factor affecting the teaching learning process in India is that the curriculum of English has not been designed to reach desired outcomes. In India, students can be classified into two groups, one group belongs to the group of students who are compelled to attend classes under trees despite implementation of several plans to raise teaching learning standards. These students mostly are from rural background. Their family background and environment is not conducive to provide them even basic education. The second group belongs to those students who are having good background in basic education as most of their parents are educated. They join English medium schools and do not face much difficulty in pursuing their higher studies. The reason being in English medium schools, English is taught right from the beginning. But on the contrary, in schools other than English medium, English is introduced at the middle level. This creates a gap between the students studying in English medium schools and that of other schools. The problem of giving a proper place to English in school curriculum is still not tackled. There is a need of a proper programme to bridge the gap between the two groups. The curriculum should be designed in such a way which can be beneficial for the first group in reaching up to the mark of the second group and lessen the gap between the two groups.

Old Method of Teaching English: In India, in most of the schools, the old and traditional 'Translation cum Grammar' method is being followed. The modern approaches like 'Structural and Situational' are not yet as popular with our teachers and students as the need is. As a result, the practical approach and aspect of English is missing. That is the reason, most of our Indian students lack proficiency in all skills of language, i.e. Listening, speaking, reading and writing. Moreover, ineffective use of audio-visual aids further intensifies the problem. Due to lack of funds, expensive aids to teach English are hard to buy. So the teacher uses whatever cheap aids of teaching like pictures, charts and models are available. Audio-Visual aids are multi dimensional and can be used effectively for teaching any language, including English. But unfortunately, the importance of these things are neglected in our education system. The teaching method should be such which can help in acquiring practical command on language.

Lack of Effective Teachers: Teaching is a two way process. In the teaching learning process, two aspects play a vital role - one is the delivering capacity of the teacher and the other one is the receiving capacity of the students. In the absence of a right teacher or a student, teaching is meaningless. The role of the teacher in teaching English language is not only to teach the rules of grammar or paraphrase texts but he has to facilitate the language being taught. His objective should be to provide

the learners an effective mastery of the language. The primary role of a teacher is not only to enable the students to understand what he is intending to say or teach. It is also the duty of the teacher to understand what the student wants and says. Teaching should be such which will facilitate the students to face the world which is full of controversies with confidence. For this objective, it becomes essential for the teacher that he should try to understand the student first. Only then he will be able to make them understand what he wants to convey adopting a proper method. Success of a teacher in enabling the students to understand the concept taught by him majorly depends on the teaching method adopted by him. If a teacher pays equal attention to all students of the class, encourages them to take part in classroom activities, there are bright chances that he can enhance the willingness of the students to communicate in English. He should try to build an excellent rapport with his students. As a teacher it is his duty to make his students aware of their mistakes in the teaching learning process. He should try to remove their fear of making mistakes and create an interest to use the language. But unfortunately, in India, we have lack of efficient teachers with such an attitude. The reasons can be many: It may be lack of formal training, lack of initiative and innovation in teachers and absence of right motivation in the teachers. Not many want to be teachers. Very few of the teachers are actually qualified or trained. Thus, their approach towards teaching is different. Most of the teachers are concerned that their students can get passing marks in the exams. In the classrooms, main emphasis is laid on translation method or other such traditional method. It has been observed that the sole purpose of the majority of teachers these days is to get their students through examinations. They are least bothered whether their students have a clear understanding of all the four basic skills of a language, i. e. Listening, speaking, reading and writing.

Miscellaneous Factors: A part from the above mentioned factors, there are numerous other factors which play a significant role in teaching of English as a second language. Environment and family background of the student play a vital role in success of teaching - learning process. In countries like India, where majority of the people are farmers or having the poor background in education, the parents are least interested in providing good education to their children. Moreover, the income of majority of the families is not adequate, hence the parents are more interested to engage their children in some petty jobs to earn money. Moreover the infrastructure of most of the government schools in India is not as adequate as required. Most of the students from rural background are compelled to go to such schools. Such students also lack proper guidance, their parents being farmers and uneducated. When they are asked to participate in any speaking activity, most of the time they don't speak or end up speaking in their own mother tongue, which results into the failure of teaching-learning process. Thus family background along with environment of the student play an important role in affecting the teaching - learning process of English as a second language.

Another important thing which affects the teaching- learning process is that the learners generally make an excessive use of their mother-tongue when it comes to speaking. They feel comfortable in the use of their mother tongue. This excessive use of mother tongue results in lack of practice in the usage of English in daily life situations. Moreover, when asked to speak, they think in their own language, translate it into English, which often results in mistakes. Influence of mother tongue also affects one's accent, i.e. One's way of pronunciation. Indians are used to a particular set of pattern of pronunciation and Intonation as per their mother-tongue. While using English language, the pattern of their mother tongue and that of English create confusion among the learners. which has an obvious impact on acquiring a foreign language. They need to first unlearn what they have learnt as per their mother-tongue and then acquire a second language. Thus, the influence of mother-tongue often becomes a major hurdle in the learning process. Students can learn effectively if they have keen interest to what is being taught. Lack of interest, on the other hand creates a barrier or hindrance in learning anything effectively. Another factor which affects the teaching learning process of English language is lack of interest towards English among the students. The reason can be any. It may be that the students having rural background feel inferiority complex in front of other students as they are not as affluent as other students. Sometimes it also happens that the students who are from good educational background, do not give much importance to English and thus lose interest in learning English.

Conclusion

To conclude it can be said that no doubt there are many hurdles and constraints in the teaching learning process of English as a second language in India. Many suggestions need to be implemented. But it is also a fact that acquisition of second language is effective when there is equal participation of both, the learner as well as the teacher. When both are involved in the teaching learning process only then the level of interest and motivation can be high. There is a need of detailed discussion on the existing curriculum, adopted teaching methods and other aspects which are important in teaching English language.

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