

Abstract

A STUDY OF PROBLEMS OF TEACHING ENGLISH AT SECONDARY LEVEL BENGALI MEDIUM SCHOOLS IN SILCHAR SUBDIVISION, ASSAM

English is a potent vehicle of communication which serves as a link language in a multicultural and multilingual society like India, and also serves as a global Linguistic mediator. It is a symbol of learners' aspirations for quality in education and it plays a major role in the field of communication globally. An understanding of and a command over English language is the most important determinant of access to higher education, employment possibilities and social opportunities. The (un)fortunate historical accident in the form of India's encounter with the British brought English in our country, and its continued presence in our classroom eco-socio-political and cultural discourse for different reasons demands re-thinking of its role and its significations. English symbolizes in Indian minds, better education, better culture and higher intelligence and therefore acquiring adequate knowledge in English for learners is inevitable in the present scenario. The changing time has witnessed the growing importance of English language in all walks of life which can't be denied. In present society, English attains such a high pedestal that the nationalist feel it urgent to do something to shake this invasion of English over the territory of mother tongue.

English has been caught in the ceaseless flux of Indian life at the present time. There are a lot of political incidents championing the opposition to the learning and use of English. Nevertheless, English is being studied /taught in a greater or smaller degree in schools, colleges and the universities all over the country. Because of rapidly increasing web of educational facilities, rural areas too, have been enjoying the facilities of the institutions. But the irony is that though English is widely studied, it has neither helped in raising the level of learners, nor made them learn English as a language for the communicative skill.

The students of mother tongue medium schools in India have to face many problems in English learning due to their adverse environment and unpleasant circumstances that they have to go through. In India, English is taught as the second language in educational

institutions where the students find themselves unable to express in English. They have no idea of proper sentence structures, and do not know proper pronunciation, spellings and grammatical rules. In most of the situations, majority of students interact in mother tongue inside the classrooms. Grammar – Translation method is the predominant method of teaching English in most of the cases. Nowadays most of the institutions are with mixed ability students of different levels of attention, interest, learning styles, speed, maturity, types of intelligence which pose challenges to teachers. Teachers' aim is to reach all the students by monitoring them in a variety of ways to achieve effective teaching. Students of the mother tongue medium schools assume English as a subject and do not realize English as a language of communication used globally.

Teaching of English suffers from the general malaise that afflicts the educational system of India. It has been dawned upon the country's educational policy-makers that if English is at all learnt and taught then it should be learnt and taught well. This implies the learning and teaching of English in terms of the well-known four basic skills of language learning, viz., speaking listening, reading and writing. Listening and speaking are the two neglected skills in classrooms in India. Further, we cannot expect a uniform standard of pronunciation for a second language in such a vast country, where even the mother tongue is spoken differently by different groups of the people belonging to the same language community. In learning to speak English, the mother tongue generally interferes with its pronunciation. The learners as well as the teachers speak English with regional language habits. Since English is not a medium of instructions in schools and colleges in India, Indian students cannot practice and perfect their English pronunciation. Even during the English periods most teachers teach English without giving the students proper practice in speech because they are not properly equipped enough to practice it. The result is that after learning /teaching English for many years at school and college, most people cannot speak the language with intelligible accuracy.

Listening is an important skill in language learning and yet it is most neglected in Indian class rooms. It is neglected because the teachers take it for granted that learners automatically acquired this skill without any special training. But they are unknown of the fact that it is an active process. Good listeners must possess good understanding of phonetics

and rules of grammar. They must relate the patterns of intonation, weak forms of sounds and rhythm of connected speech.

In speaking, it is found that in the process of learning to speak, the students followed certain strategies in their communication to conceal their linguistic inadequacy. The learners follow the word-for-word translation from the native language to L₂, and use the fillers in their communication whenever they encounter gap and linguistic inadequacy. The students avoided to talk with the researcher in English and to speak on given topic due to the anxiety, language shock, cultural shock and the linguistic inadequacy.

In reading, the students assume that the conjunctions merely link the sentences and words. The poor performance may be because of the failure of the understanding of the meaning of the conjunctions. So, it is evident that the failure of understanding meaning of the 'conjunction' whether it contrasts or compares or adds the idea or information in a compound sentence will lead to the failure of understanding not only the sentence but also discourse. Another reason of their failure is the inability of understanding these words; they could not perceive the intersentential relationship existing within the given discourse. Lack of it leads to the misunderstanding of the discourse. This sorry state of affairs may be because of the failure on the part of students in understanding the words like 'both.... and' 'so' 'in spite of being' and 'excepted'.

It is identified that in writing, the students under study have used the articles 'an' before words beginning with vowels, and 'a' before words beginning with consonant without considering the quality of letter or phoneme which begins in a word. Further, both definite and indefinite articles are indiscriminately used before noun/noun phrase and are unnecessarily omitted where required. Bengali learners commit morphological errors by omitting one or more morphemes from a word and such omission results in semantically deviant utterances. For instance, the learners have the tendency to omit third person and plural marker '-s', past tense marker '*-ed*', perfective marker '*-ed*' or '*-en*' which leads to morphological error. The errors in the use of pronouns and adjectives are also identified. Moreover, errors have also been identified in the grammatical items like adverbs and auxiliaries.

The most important practical problem related to the teaching of English in India is the presence of large number of learners. All the learners don't come from the same socio-linguistic and socio-cultural backgrounds. Generally, teachers are reluctant to divide the class into groups or teams. Some care has to be taken over the allocation of students to groups to make things better. It is essential that the members of each group have to be naturally congenial. The teachers may find that they have to make a few changes before the groups are all happily settled. It is practically impossible in Indian class rooms that the groups are approximately equal in ability. There are many varieties of group and tutorial methods.

“Peer teaching”, “role play”, “group activities” are rare in Indian classrooms. In India, teachers speak and students simply play a passive role. The learners don't take part actively in the teaching learning process by asking questions and interacting with the teacher. Many lectures given by the teacher are ineffective due to problem of delivery, pace and production. To overcome this problem, the teachers must involve their students to work in pairs, groups and teams and prepare term papers, projects, etc. In the mother tongue medium schools, students are not generally encouraged to go for projects, seminars and conferences. Therefore, in spite of being taught English in school and college for several years, learners fail to learn the language: they cannot write in acceptable English of their own, cannot use English appropriately and fluently in speech and often cannot understand conversations in English.

The teaching of English in India has been text-oriented since the beginning (colonial times) because the British Government's policy was to create a class of Indians who would act as a buffer between the British and the Indians. Therefore, elementary knowledge of English was needed for a class of Indians. Objectives of teaching and learning English have undergone a drastic change in the years after Independence. But English education in India is still text-oriented and the same continues even after sixty or seventy years of independence. But the bookish knowledge of English that is provided in the schools does not help the learners at all. The prescribed syllabus doesn't develop the communicative skill among the students as the literature part in the text is taught for the sake of aesthetic purpose only. The grammar

included in the syllabus is also not taught for communication purpose but for the examination need of the students.

The basic pattern of educational evaluations in India is “summative”. Summative evaluation is designed to assess the total achievement of the learners during the end of a course. The learners go for “guessing questions” and “suggestion bank” theory. They cut short their syllabus accordingly and begin preparation only a few months before the examination. One test and that is at the end of the course may fail to judge the competence of the learners. The learners carry their anxiety to the examination hall because they know that the examination is “do or die” situation for them which is not a mark of progressive growth of education. On the country, “formative evaluation” i.e. the process of giving/taking regular feedback to both the teachers and learners is more reliable and valid which is not at all used in the schools of India.

Teachers always play the most significant role in the teaching of English in bilingual patterns of contemporary India. Decision makers should make things flexible for the teacher. The success of teaching /learning depends on the performance (and the willingness to perform) of the teachers and the availability of teaching/learning climate. It should be free from politics and other issues of distraction. Teachers should be upgraded and trained to meet the changing needs of the learners. Teacher training institutions need to be a platform for exchange of ideas. Most of the states in India have adopted functional communicative approach to teach English at the secondary level. Interaction in English is the motif of this approach. There is a big gulf between the desired goal and the present practice in Indian classrooms. Only a creative mind, free from all prejudices can change things for a better tomorrow. Teaching English in Indian classroom situation is not an easy task where most of the circumstances instead of favoring the teaching –learning process, stand as a barrier making the whole process a tiresome one. Gokak’s remark in this regard is quite apt as he says, “Teaching of English in India is in chaotic state today”. English teaching in Assam and especially in mother tongue medium schools had to face lot of difficulties. This study examined the factors responsible for the poor quality of the teaching of English as a second language in mother tongue medium schools in Assam with special reference to the Bengali medium schools of Silchar subdivision, Assam.

In India, English is a medium of instruction as well as a subject of study in most schools and a means of official and informal communication. But typical instructional techniques used in the classroom are rote learning and pattern drillings. Rote learning, i.e., the teaching the rules of the language, was especially applicable to the learning of grammar, which is an important component of the prevalent syllabi. Grammar is still taught , explained , memorized and used in sentences for examination purposes, contextualized learning is thoroughly ignored Pattern drillings similarly, propel the pupils towards the examination. Familiarity of the examination questions is the centre of the technique, pupils are drilled with past examination questions. Repetitions are common as most teachers think that their pupils easily forget what they learnt previously. The ELT curriculum explicitly states that the oracy (listening and speaking) skills should be focused, especially in the early years. The pupils would be able to pick up and learn the language in a meaningful way, and later they could be able to use that in reading and writing. It is important therefore that pupils should be provided with the language before they are expected to produce it. Gradually control can be released as they are given the opportunity to use the language freely. However, as oracy skills (listening and speaking) are not tested in the examinations, the skills are practically neglected in the schools. The school and education authorities do not bother with the development of oracy skills in the schools. What counted are the literary skills. Which constitute major components in the English language question papers.

This present study entitled "A STUDY OF PROBLEMS OF TEACHING ENGLISH AT SECONDARY LEVEL BENGALI MEDIUM SCHOOLS IN SILCHAR SUBDIVISION, ASSAM " contains the following chapters.

Chapter 1: The introductory chapter of this study begins with a general introduction on language, and then it talks about statement of the problem, aim and objectives of the study, and plan of the study.

Chapter 2: The second chapter deals with the existing literature of various works related with English language teaching which has been collected during library works from different places of India.

Chapter 3: This chapter deals with the “English Language Teaching: An Overview” where the researcher gave a brief description of English Language Teaching Methods in India, Position of English in India, Language Policy in India: three-Language Formula, The emergence of modern education system in Assam, Rise and spread of English Education in Assam under British patronage. The Prevailing Education System in Cachar, Assam, Present position of teaching English language in the high schools of Silchar Cachar.

Chapter 4: Chapter four deals with the “Curriculum and Syllabus Design” where an attempt has been taken to describe the curriculum and syllabus designed by SEBA; and examines how far the syllabus is applicable and suitable for the 10th standard Bengali Medium students of Silchar subdivision, Assam. The place of English in School Curriculum: The Curriculum and the syllabus of English language Education, Problem of teaching English in Assam,

Chapter 5: The fifth chapter deals with the “Methods of teaching English as a Second Language” in the classroom. Here an attempt has been taken to describe the various methods of language learning such as Grammar Translation Method, The Direct Method, The Audio-lingual Method, The Structural Approach, The Bilingual Method and Communicative Language Teaching specifying their salient features.; the method applied by the teachers in the classroom of Bengali medium schools and examines how far the method is suitable for language learning considering the need of Bengali Medium students of Silchar subdivision, Assam.. In this chapter, the researcher tries to find out the area of difficulty of the Bengali medium students in acquiring the four skills i.e. listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

Chapter 6: The sixth chapter is a study about the “Techniques, Aids and Modern Educational Technology in language Teaching” In the recent year the technology has provided education with a range of teaching aids that have been great help in modern language teaching. Digital Tape-recorder, filmstrips, film projector, radio and TV are playing important in language teaching in the different parts of the world. Linked with growing age of these technological aids has been the development of programme learning, which has, in recent year, made considerable impact on language teaching. The study will highlight the techniques, aids used

by the teachers in the ESL classroom. The study will also highlight the “Common factors affecting in teaching learning process of English in Bengali medium students in Silchar subdivision”. Here the researcher discusses in detail the factors that create hindrances in learning English.

Chapter 7: This chapter is about “Data Analysis.” In this chapter the researcher describes the field survey method used in secondary schools. Classroom observation, discussion with teachers, procuring responds in questionnaires , personal interviews with the students and most importantly recording the students’ performance is carried out to find the areas of problem of the Bengali medium students and it has been discussed in detail in this chapter with possible bar diagram, charts etc.

Chapter 8: This chapter is on “Findings and suggestions”. This chapter presents the findings of the present study It also advocates suggestions for those problems and the areas to be explored further in this field.

Chapter 9: the last chapter is “Conclusions”. The concluding chapter presents the overall generalizations of entire work followed by Bibliography and Appendix.

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