

Problems and Remedies of Teaching English as a Second Language

Introduction

English holds a place of status in our country, even after more than six decades since Britishers left India. No indigenous language however has come up to replace English, either as a medium of communication or as an official language in India under the influence of nationalistic feeling and emotional hostility English began to reassert its position. The subject of the present paper is an overview of main problems connected with teaching English as second language. Now a day it is still urgent to discuss, what to teach and how to teach a foreign language taking into account the objective, social and professional needs of future specialists in our country. Besides businessmen, tradesmen, engineers, scientists and scholars all over the world must know English because it is the international means of exchange of information and experience. The students have to learn foreign language because students of any subject, any discipline must learn a foreign language teaching it is necessary to formulate its actual and realistic aims and tasks. Whenever we come across any result we see the crucial role of English in decreasing the result.

The way English is taught in our colleges today is to a great extent responsible for the failure. The aims of English education and teaching are certainly very lofty and there are inadequate means to realize them. The policy makers have forgotten that English is not the mother-tongue of Indians. We must accept that the standard of its teaching has fallen vastly and that is why it is essential to know the problems of teaching English in India at undergraduate level in the colleges.

This paper is an attempt to trace the problems faced by both the teacher and the student in the English teaching and learning process at undergraduate level. The paper aims at presenting the contemporary situations in India with regard to English and suggesting remedies where these are called for. The intensity grows as we go from metro cities to rural areas. Here is an effort to search the problems in learning English in rural areas and some suggestions to overcome the same.

Problems of Teaching English as a Second Language

- **Psychological Problems:** - It is a widespread misunderstanding amongst students that English the most difficult of all subjects. The result and the failure candidates act as evidence to prove this fact.

Hence most of the students look at this subject with a prejudiced vision and bear the fear through the year. The psychological depression results in poor performance at the end of the year.

- **Learning Methods:** - The primary aim of teaching English at this stage should be to concentrate on the fundamental skills of the language ability of the student namely listening, speaking, reading and writing. It is of paramount importance that the teacher should know what he is trying to achieve by teaching English. They go on with their job of teaching without knowing the difficulties of the learner. The teacher should be fully aware of the fact that his student's proficiency in English is not up to mark owing to the deteriorating standard of teaching in schools. Our objectives of teaching English should be practical and in keeping with the standard of proficiency achieved by our students. We should emphasize on the main aims of teaching English to develop the ability of students to read and understand. It is an overall practice to use Artificial or Indirect Method instead of Natural or Direct Method of teaching English. We all learn our mother tongue very easily because we use Natural or Direct Method of learning. We follow this sequence 1. Listening. 2. Speaking. 3. Reading. 4. Writing. i.e. from the easiest skill to a difficult one. But in learning English as a foreign language we follow this sequence. 1. Writing. 2. Reading. 3. Speaking. 4. Listening. i.e. from the difficult skill to an easy one. When we start anything with difficulty obviously there are greater chances of failure.

One of the reasons for the declining standards of teaching English is the inability of teachers to understand the difference between the teaching of literature and the teaching of language skills. Everybody knows that the study of a language is not an end in itself, it is a means to develop one's power of expression and comprehension can be achieved by mastering stylistic elements of the language. According to A. K. Sharma: "English language teaching in India, you will agree with me, 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 correct English, may be because the emphasis in our schools and colleges has always been on the conceptual content and the stylistic content has been neglected so far." (66)

- **Problem of Concretizing the Abstract Idea:** - The teacher faces a serious problem of concretizing the abstractness of the novel, poem, passage, words etc. they face difficulty in creating live pictures. The students find it difficult to understand the abstract idea and so they are unable to comprehend the lectures given by their teachers in English. If a poem on sadness is going on in the class the teacher

should teach it so effectively that the students get tears in their eyes. This type of experience is hardly found in classroom teaching at present. In fact the teacher is always in a hurry to complete the portion and feels that it is waste of time to arouse emotions and interact with the students.

- **Translation Method:** - Translation method is widely used in rural areas. It helps the learner to understand the content of the text but bars from learning the language. The main purpose of teaching the language is kept aside and the teaching of content and theme is given importance. Translation method is thus a great problem in learning English.
- **Mother Tongue Interference:** - Most of the problems arise due to the interference of mother tongue in speaking English. Both the teachers and the students are very fluent in talking their own mother-tongue. But they forget the essence of pure language. When they speak in their mother-tongue they sometimes use English words in the midst of the sentences. They forget that every language differs in stress, intonation and pronunciation.
- **Difference in English:** - English is pronounced in a very different way from almost all other languages of the world. Every region of the world where English is spoken has a different accent. When you are teaching English as second language, you must bear in mind that your students will not know the difference between US English, Queen's English and the entire sundry English's of the world. This could lead to confusions.
- **Lack of Practice:** - Language could be mastered by practicing all the four skills viz. Listening, Speaking, Reading, Writing. The rural surrounding does not allow the learner to practice any of these skills. The lack of audio tools also adds in the problem of lack of practice. Many teachers are unable to teach English effectively because they face lot of problems due to the lack of teaching aids. There are very few audio-visual aids available and it is insufficient for the teachers to use it effectively. Some are so costly that the colleges can only afford to buy few.
- **Lack of Interest:** - Learning English being compelled has merely become a hurdle in passing. Students only concentrate on passing marks. They do not care language as a tool of communication. Teacher and the taught both look at this subject as an unavoidable hurdle and try their level best to

cross this hurdle any how. The report of the Secondary Education Commission says: “Many eminent educationalists and scientists have, therefore, expressed the opinion that under no circumstances should we sacrifice the many advantages that we have gained by the study of English. They hold that in matters pertaining to education sentiment should not be the ruling factor and that what was most urgently needed was that our youth acquire knowledge from all sources and contribute their share to its expansion and development. In the attainment of this objective, the study of English was bound to play an important part.” (64)

- **Lack of Motivation:** - in learning a second or a foreign language, motivation 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 perseveres. It is known as a complex phenomenon and includes many components, such as, the individual's drive, need for achievement and success, curiosity, desire for stimulation and new experience, and so on.
- **Malpractices in Exam:** - One of the factors responsible for the deterioration is the pattern of question setting. It is easy to predict what questions would be asked on what books in which examinations. The students simply have to memorize. The teacher also teaches only those aspects which are important for the examinations. In most of rural areas we see that malpractice at the time of exam is a common practice. It is on its peak at the exam of English. Students, Teachers, non-teaching staff, parents, relatives, principal, officer in charge of exam, co-officer in charge of exam and many others are involved in this custom of malpractice. They all intensify the problem of learning English in rural areas.
- **Mistakes in English:** - Most of the mistakes are made unknowingly i.e. when making a mistake becomes habitual; we keep making the same mistake even without realizing it. If we study this problem in a scientific manner by trying to know what is the actual cause behind making the mistake we would be able to avoid it.
- **Crowded Classes:** - The size of the classes everywhere is considerably large and thus student's participation in the class work is quite impossible. The ratio of students in relation to teachers is not proportional. This is one of the reasons why individual attention is not possible to the students. For

individual attention, there is a provision of Tutorial classes but the number of students in Tutorials is also very large, because most of the college can afford neither so many rooms for this purpose nor so many teachers to conduct effective teaching of English. It should also be recognized that the practical work in the teaching of English demands that the number of students in the class be limited.

Solutions or Remedies:

- **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. 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. **Place of English Should be 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.
- **Applying Different Methods of Teaching:** - The teacher while teaching English should use the different methods of teaching English to the students. 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. Directed practice.
 9. Learning by teaching.

Use of appropriate method for teaching various topics accordingly helps to enhance the effect of teaching language.

- **Building Confidence Among 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. The teacher should emphasize more on the language learning skills than the portion completion at the undergraduate level.

- **Keeping in Mind Aims of Teaching English:** - the teacher should always emphasize on the aims of teaching English. It will help to teach effectively. These aims are:
 1. To enable the students to understand English when spoken.
 2. To enable the students to speak in English.
 3. To enable the students to read English.
 4. To enable the students to write in English.

These are the primary aims of teaching English instead of enabling the student to pass in the upper class.

- **Improvement in 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.
- **Make Students Think in English:** - make it a very firm rule but subtly implied that there will be no other language spoken in your class other than English. Exhort them to think in English. This a mammoth task, and can be achieved only after some weeks or probably months of teaching.
- **End the Socio-Psychological Problems:** - Many think English as the most difficult language and many call it unnecessary to learn it. The efforts of the teacher should be in eradicating the Socio-Psychological problems of the students, by motivating them and giving them some responsibility.
- **Building Communication Skills:** - 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. As long as the students attempts to talk in English make it a point to listen.

- **Internal Tests:** - As recommended by UGC the colleges have 4 lectures for English per week for theory. In tutorials we have approximately 30 students per batch. Here we teach them presentations, group discussions and conduct mock interviews to overcome the stage fear of the student. Provide them a platform to express their thoughtful views and opinions in front of the audiences. We have certain internal marks reserved for the tutorial sessions but still many students feel it is waste of time and they remain absent. These internal tests and tutorials should be made compulsory to every student.
- **Handling Mistakes with Care:** - 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.
- **Matching Level with Your Students:** - Being a teacher you know the language and might have got accolades for it but your student cannot even frame three sentences in English properly. Only your Perseverance will help them do it. Remember that your students speakers they will not be able to even ask you their doubts. Be patient with them and encourage them to express themselves.

Conclusions

Teaching English as second language is really a fun if you do it in the right sporting way. You have to make it fun for your students too that's the way they will learn better.

Reference

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