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**ELT in India - Need for New Thrust**

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**Abstract**

The conditions under which English is taught and learnt and the reasons for low standard of English in Indian schools, have always been a matter of concern to all language learners and teachers. In fact, there exist many problems that confront Indian linguistic scenario and the present article enlists the major problems and perspectives in the field of teaching English in contemporary India. The article also highlights some of the crucial factors which demand great attention in order to bring about a new thrust in the current linguistic scenario in the country.

**Introduction**

English is included in school curriculum as a second language or as a foreign language for practical utility. But there are certain problems related to the conditions under which English is taught in our country, which need to be tackled tactfully. According to V.K.Gokak, "Teaching of English is in a chaotic state today" [1]. The conditions under which English is taught and learnt remain a source of dissatisfaction to all. The natural corollary is the poor standard of learning English in our schools.

As Michael points out "a language is not a subject which can be taught. It is a subject which

must be learnt” [2]. Pupils are taught English for about six periods a week for six years. But it has been estimated that they hardly know 1500 words by the time they join a university. It means that they have been able to learn English words at the rate of one word per period.

Long periods of exposure to English enable the students to have a certain degree of familiarity with sentence patterns, words and phrases in the language that strengthens their ability in writing skill though not in skill of speaking. The conditions under which English is taught and learnt and the reasons for low standards of English in our schools have always been a matter of concern to all language learners and teachers. In fact, there are many problems that confront Indian linguistic scenario and the following is the list of the major problems in the field of teaching English in contemporary India.

### **Need for New Thrust**

The following are some of the crucial factors which demand great attention in order to bring about a new thrust in the current linguistic scenario in the country:

- **Population:** The pressure of population and the craze for English has resulted in the commercialization of English teaching in India and it is market driven, and not welfare driven. Ronald Mackin has listed the problems of teaching English in India as follows: “The old fashioned type of benches and desks which restrict movement; the bad light; the noise from neighboring classes which may be separated from them by nothing more than a bamboo screen, insufficient provision for their subject in the time-table, lack of aids of all kinds; interference from parents or a dominating, conservative Headmaster and finally the requirements of an examination system which places a premium on the written language seem to favor the grammar-grinder of the old school” [3].
- **Pluralism:** Although some estimates say that there are about 300 languages and dialects in India, the English Schedule of the constitution of India recognizes 18 languages as official languages. Not only in terms of languages, but also in culture, religion and ethnicity, India is highly pluralistic; it is multilingual, multicultural, multi-religious and multiethnic with large rural areas. This makes language planning a highly complex and emotional issue. That is why the problem of a compulsory official language in India continues to be a puzzle, because of non-existence of a language planning commission.
- **Colonial Mindset:** The colonial legacy continues in the field of education. The colonial mindset has made the nation dependent on other countries and agencies for all innovative ideas even in the field of education. All the committees and commissions have only tried to adopt and adapt the colonial model, though Indians could evolve their own strategies of instruction.

- **Political Compulsions:** Language, particularly the English language, has become not only a means for power and exploitation; but has also become a site for struggle. As a result, there is no proper planning or political will or coordination among various agencies, the central government, state governments, and universities in the implementation of suitable policies. The aimless drift continues without any direction, clear-cut policies, goals, aims and objectives.
- **Dearth of Trained Teachers:** Many teachers who teach English in schools lack the technique of foreign language teaching. They remain largely ignorant of the changes taking place in English teaching and learning across the globe. In the current scenario teachers are being appointed on the basis of their qualification and after their recruitment in the institutions they evince very little interest and opportunity to attend in-service programmes. Though certain seminars, conferences and workshops are conducted by ELTAI and other professional bodies, they cease to help the teachers in changing their age old method of teaching overnight.
- **Imported Methods:** Imported methods of teaching English have been used in a country like India. Most of the methods advocated were developed in monolingual countries like the United Kingdom or the United States of America. They prove to be ineffective in a multilingual context. The language professionals in India have not yet evolved appropriate methods and techniques of teaching English in India, based on local wisdom and classroom experience. The Indians have lived on 'received knowledge' and imported theories and methods - Structural Approach, Direct Method, and Communicative Language Teaching and so on.
- **Ineffective Text books:** The textbooks, which are prescribed for the students are not suitable and attractive. The text books mostly do not contain tasks where learners can draw samples from the local, every day experiences. Most of the tasks are designed to find answers from the text book itself. Students read it only to get through the examination. The English text books need improvement in the selection and gradation of vocabulary, good printing, suitable subject matter, genuine illustrations, language and style, exercises and glossary, relevance and abridgement of English stories to suit Indian condition.

Until recently, majority of the schools used the text books which contained prose texts, stories and poems written by native speakers of English. They were linguistically difficult and culturally alien. Textbooks prepared by government agencies appeared to be dull and unattractive with no proper illustrations or exercise material. They often contained errors – factual as well as linguistic. Quite often textbooks were prescribed not on the basis of quality or merit but on other considerations given to the management or the head of the institution.

- **Examination Oriented Teaching Pattern:** The examination oriented teaching pattern does not produce any practical impact upon the learners for various reasons. The teachers complete the text in a hurry to give the impression that portions are covered. Then it is left to the students to prepare and face the examination. The comprehension questions are also not designed to help the learners to critically analyze the text. More than making the students comprehend the text and assisting them in preparing the essays of their own, teachers advocate the learners to depend on the sub-standard material prepared by non-professionals. Thus, the students' cognitive ability and creative faculty are not fully utilized. Learners merely learn by rote, a fact one tends to ignore. The purpose of acquiring the skill by the learners is not attained. Thus, the learners lack the ability to learn other subjects in English.

The present examination system is based on memorization and reproduction. It does not test the competence of learners in English. The examination in English puts a lot of emphasis on rote learning rather than language mastery. At the time of examination more importance is given to written English, ignoring other skills. However, very few attempts have been made to realize the aims of teaching English through proper assessment.

- **Over Crowded Classrooms:** The physical condition of the classrooms poses a serious problem. Accommodating a huge number of students in a small room does not in any way motivate the students to learn. Often, they are huddled up together with very little space to sit and write. Learning in such situations is highly demotivating to the students, and it is equally frustrating to the teachers. Although students manifest mixed ability in a large classroom, the teachers find it difficult to bestow individual attention on learners.

In addition, the teachers do not adopt innovative methods like activity method, project method etc. in the schools due to lack of proper facilities in schools and also due to the heavy strength of the class. As they mechanically resort to lecture method, the young learners feel deprived of real motivation from teachers.

- **Lack of Infrastructure and Facilities:** The infrastructure of the classrooms is inadequate. Some schools do not have enough pieces of furniture to accommodate all learners. Majority of the schools, Primary and Secondary, are all ill-equipped so far as teaching aids are concerned. There is a dearth of even simple visual aids like flash cards, charts, black-board, pictures etc. in the schools leave alone tape recorder, linguaphone, film strips etc. which are minimum aids required if one has to learn English worth the name. The non-availability of right type of teaching materials and audio-visual aids make the teaching of English in India quite ineffective. Also the teachers show least enthusiasm towards the

preparation of teaching aids in their regular classrooms, and fail to make the language class lively and interactive.

- **Socio-economic Factors:** The quantitative expansion in education and English teaching has resulted in lack of quality. Those who have the necessary resources and the money send their children to the best Convents, best English medium schools and Public Schools in the country and those who do not have the means are forced to be satisfied with what they get in the name of English.
- **Variation in Curriculum:** The English curriculum varies from State to State; from one school system to another. While variety should help generate innovations to take care of the varying needs of the audience of learners, we only notice deterioration of the standards of materials, and teaching and evaluation strategies. The variation in syllabus brings variation in achievement. The right way to face this problem is to design the syllabus with clearly stated objectives right from the level at which English begins, to the level where English ceases to be a compulsory subject in curriculum.
- **Lack of a Uniform Policy:** There is no uniform policy with the Government of India to introduce English at the school level. At present there are different ages in which English is introduced at the school level.

All the aforesaid aspects prove to be great challenges in the field of English language teaching in the country and one can add many more to the list of difficult circumstances under which English is taught and learnt. This situation emphasizes the need for a new thrust in teaching English.

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