

EFFECTIVE TRAINING FOR PRIMARY ENGLISH TEACHERS: NEED OF THE HOUR

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ABSTRACT

The English language education today in Andhra Pradesh has been criticized for its inability to come up with a successful outcome. Most of the parents in rural areas are withdrawing their children from government regional medium schools due to lack of English teaching in Andhra Pradesh. The English language curriculum at the school level includes materials production, teaching methods, learner roles, evaluation processes, assessment criteria etc, but most of the teachers are from regional medium background. For these regional medium background teachers, it is very difficult to teach in English as the syllabus from the 1st to 5th classes is beyond their standard and the concepts are complex to understand. Sometimes some words are very difficult to pronounce for regional medium teachers. The purpose of this article is to explore teacher training practices for the teaching of English at the primary level.

KEYWORDS: Teaching English, Primary level, Training.

INTRODUCTION

India is a very big country; we have castes, religions, ethnic groups and many languages. This diversity also causes different problems and in different areas of studies. In our country, English is important for a number of reasons. India is a land of diversity. Different people speak different languages. So English is a link language. Different people can communicate with one another with the help of English. Secondly, all advanced knowledge in science, technology and medicine is available in English. The results of the latest researches come to India through the medium of English. If we give up English, we will lag behind in the higher fields of study.

English is an international language. English is the language of the Constitution, the Supreme Court,

the High Courts and official departments. English is now firmly rooted in the soil of India. It has become a part of Indian life. Thus English has great importance for the integrity of India. It has to be the second language in our country for the better development of the country. English language in India draws profound attention of people as it provides identity, power and job opportunities. This language has become a source of knowledge and wisdom across the country. Our national leader Pt. Nehru also emphasized on English education and treated it as a window to reach out world. English today serves as a link language in the multicultural and multilingual India as it is seen as the main means of exchange of information, ideas and experiences.

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Mukalel (1998) states, "English has become a status symbol and a student without a reasonable command over English is perhaps not very comfortable with attainment of any educational goal. Similarly, teaching of English holds the key position in the entire curriculum of education. Teachers of English, in this context, owe the responsibility to enable the learners to achieve the educational goals in general and language aim in particular."

As English language is very useful for the future generation, children should be taught in a right way. But the present situation in Andhra Pradesh schools is different. Many students are not able to speak, write and understand English. Their communication levels are very low. Some students do not know letters. Main reason for these problems is the teachers who are not proficient. They are very weak. They do not know how to communicate in English. They too have many problems. They have not been given proper training. Let's discuss and come to the conclusion. Here we are going to discuss 'Effective Training for Primary English Teachers: Need of the hour'.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. Is the present-day training for primary English teachers effective?
2. What is the reason of priority given by parents to English medium schools?

METHODOLOGY

I went to the primary schools to enquire teachers whether they have taken any training before teaching English in primary schools. I also observed the classes and prepared a questionnaire to ask teachers about whether the training is helpful and whether it should be given more time. I took interviews of teachers and analyzed their responses to the questionnaire.

INTRODUCTION OF ENGLISH AS A SUBJECT AT THE PRIMARY LEVEL

The primary education is considered essential in India. Its importance is supported by the constitution, many educationists, documentaries and policies. But in reality irrespective of a number of measures having been taken, still there are certain problems that question the quality of primary education. Especially, teaching English as a language in the state of Andhra Pradesh is facing many challenges and requires immediate attention.

In the state, English as a second language has been introduced to the primary level students over a period of time gradually. English language was introduced for the classes 3rd and 4th in non-English Medium schools in Andhra Pradesh in 2010. However, English language was introduced for the first time in AP for the classes 1st and 2nd in 2011-2012 in non-English Medium schools.

RIE (Bangalore) has recommended introduction of English from class I without making it a burden for the children to learn it most effectively in the early years. The Andhra Pradesh government hopes that the introduction of English from class I will help in increasing the enrolment of students and helping them at a later stage of their education. The State Council of Educational Research and Training had also proposed the introduction of English as a second language from class 1st in government schools and recommended development of effective textbooks from class 1st to 5th reflecting constructive pedagogy as recommended by National Curriculum Framework 2005. However, imparting of the language to the students at the primary level has not reached the expected level due to the following reason which is regarded to be one of the major components of every educational program.

LACK OF TRAINING AMONG PRIMARY LEVEL TEACHERS

English education in the present day Andhra Pradesh has been criticized for its inability to come up with a successful outcome. In Andhra Pradesh, the English language curriculum at the school level includes materials production, teaching methods, learner roles, evaluation process, and assessment criteria.

It proposes to improve proficiency of the students in English. It also declares some objectives to be reflected, carried out and fulfilled at the end of the course. However when we look at the actual scenario of teaching English, we find that at the end of the course, many students fail in English and those who pass actually are not able to use it properly. This situation is not only limited to non-English medium students, many students who studied English right from their childhood are not able to use English effectively in the secondary level as well.

Therefore, most of the parents in rural areas are withdrawing their children from government regional medium schools due to lack of English language. Children prefer to join private schools owing to the lack of sufficient English language training to the teachers who are dealing with the primary level students, the educational background, misunderstanding of the student's parents, the level of interest and enthusiasm of the teachers and the students.

These are still causing backwardness of the primary school education. In this context, there is an emergency to address the needs and problems of the primary education in the state. They are not properly trained to teach English and few teachers even complain that the government had given only one week of training which was not sufficient for all teachers. Some teachers are not capable of teaching English at primary level in rural areas due to low skills.

Teachers should understand students' viewpoints of learning English and they should try to overcome this situation showing the role English plays nowadays. Teachers should plan their classes according to students' needs and ages. They must know where their students come from and understand their specific situations. When teachers are in the classroom, they should speak English as much as possible; however, this almost does not happen in rural areas.

Moreover, this is the biggest problem of primary schools in the rural areas in Andhra Pradesh. Since 70% of India lives in villages, majority of the work force comes from rural areas. It becomes imperative that students of such areas are given equal opportunities to learn English.

In the rural areas, the learners have less skills, lack of school facilities, lack of classrooms, lack of trained teachers and almost no exposure to English. The English teachers are also facing problems in teaching in the rural areas nowadays. The learners learn the mother tongue easily and they learn it from the environment around them but the same children face many difficulties in the learning of L2 (second language) in towns and rural areas. They find that learning English is a very difficult task and even graduate level students are unable to learn and use it properly for their communicative purposes. Due to the lack of training, the results in the board exams conducted by the higher education department of the government also go down. The rural children speak in their local dialects and do not receive sufficient exposure to English.

QUALITIES TO BE POSSESSED BY ENGLISH TEACHERS

Teaching is an important task. A teacher is a nation builder. He plays a role model for his pupils. A teacher is like a lamp that spreads its light everywhere. So a teacher has many responsibilities. A good teacher should have following qualities and responsibilities:

- He must have command on his subject and must be ambitious as well as a positive thinker.
- His personality should be flexible.
- He should have interest in the subject which he teaches.
- He should have sufficient and updated subject knowledge.
- His teaching should be effective and suitable to his class.
- He should have the knowledge of using proper teaching methods.
- He should have the capacity to handle different aspects.
- His pronunciation should be correct and his vocabulary should be good.
- He should have an audible voice.
- He should be very fluent in English.
- He should refer to English reference books.
- He should have good hand writing and should have the ability of correcting mistakes of students.
- He should be able to recognize the faulty aspects of children in learning.
- He should have proper knowledge of grammar rules.
- He should have the knowledge of language skills and the knowledge of phonetics.
- He should respect others' opinions, suggestions and views.
- He should be able to change his mind set according to the needs of society.
- He should be a friend, philosopher and guide to his students.

He should convey his knowledge in such a way that he can see a glimpse of his ideas in the minds of the students. This would be successful teaching. If a teacher fails to convey his ideas and concepts to his students then his knowledge will become a stagnant pool. So, teaching is a process which continuously needs vibration in the knowledge pool of a teacher. He must try to learn more and more at every step of life.

REGIONAL LANGUAGE PROBLEMS FACED BY THE TEACHERS

In teaching English at primary level, the teachers face many difficulties especially in rural areas. The reason is that in rural areas learning environment does not match English learning. Students consider English a difficult subject because it is not their mother tongue. They have to learn it as a second language. To set their minds, they learn second language learning complexity in their minds. They are unable to understand its rules because their mental level is not enough to understand or learn it easily. Thus, classroom interaction in English enables the learners to acquire the language by themselves and so the teachers do not have to deliberately teach primary level English.

When I went for data collection, there I conducted a semi-structured interview through 'phone recording' from all district government primary teachers but all teachers chose to give interview in Telugu and did not prefer to use English. I requested them to use English but they did not wish to and were afraid. Not even one teacher was interviewed in English, so I understood the level of English being taught to the students. In view of the situation, it is strongly recommended to train the teachers on how to teach the subject in a communicative manner.

INSUFFICIENT TRAINING OF SENIOR TEACHERS

Before 2010, English was not introduced in government primary schools in 1st to 4th classes. English as a subject was only introduced in the 5th class at the primary level. Now it is introduced from 1st to 4th classes. Therefore they didn't have training in teaching English. The government conducted a training program for primary teachers but it was not sufficient.

I went to rural areas of Kurnool district in Andhra Pradesh and visited some Govt. primary schools. I observed that a few teachers were using the common tongue i.e. Telugu (L1) to teach English in 1st to 5th classes. They read out lessons in English and explained in Telugu. When I asked them, they said, "Children do not understand properly so we explain sometimes in Telugu." But teachers directly taught lessons in Telugu and there was no motivation in the classroom. I saw children felt bored. They did not concentrate in the lesson as and did not interact in the classroom.

Some of the teachers said that learning L2 vocabulary was very difficult for them. They had no idea about the way these words were pronounced along with the teaching of these items. Normally they used to search for each difficult word in the Dictionary which was time consuming and they had to deal with all the subjects (English, Telugu, Social, Science and Mathematics).

I spent two days in a rural primary school. I went to an MPP School near Rajahmundry in East Godavari district. The school atmosphere was good and there was a playground. The enrollment of students was 50 with four teachers. The class teacher of 4th taught the lesson "Superstitions around the world". She adopted a bilingual method and translated everything into Telugu. As she was teaching in between she asked for the meaning of the word 'expensive'. Sometimes she could not explain vocabulary properly making some mistakes in pronouncing them.

I went to Ongole district near Mynampadu. The total strength of the school was 50. I observed the 1st and 2nd standard classes to see the way English was being taught. The teacher mixed both the classes and taught about "Electronics". She made them repeat the word by themselves. She couldn't utter the words properly and was making mistake in pronouncing the word 'Iron'. If

she learnt the vocabularies wrong, she taught the lesson also wrong. In childhood children have more grasping power. If she continues to teach wrong, children will also learn incorrect things. Therefore, teacher training at the primary level should be promoted in the present context.

Curriculum is the heart of education system which indicates the educational aims, objectives and learning outcomes (Hasan, n.p). It helps teachers to conduct their teaching in classrooms. To implement English language curriculum at primary and higher level, teachers' knowledge about the aims and objectives of English curriculum is very essential (Rahman, n.p). But it is found that most of the teachers are not aware of these aims and objectives.

When most of the teachers do not know the aims and objectives and especially in primary level, it is tough to achieve expected curriculum goals, which is one of the main hindrances for implementing the curriculum.

But before government introduced any changes in the learners' curriculum, the teachers need to be oriented towards the curriculum. It is heartening to note that the policy-makers such as the ministry of education and ELT experts want to introduce effective training for primary English teachers in Andhra Pradesh state. As English is a tough subject teachers should have compulsory training.

Recently the Telangana State started a pilot project with 400 English medium schools by adding them with government primary schools. The initial phase of the project started in Warangal district. This is the first step of Telangana government in order to achieve English teaching proficiency among teaches in English medium schools. In this project, the Telangana Government is giving training to 2,500 teachers in the initial phase. The department of the school education special secretary has been endowed with the responsibility of providing

English training to 2500 teachers which is coordinated by English Teachers Association (ELTA). As it is a good project, it should be implemented at the primary education level in Andhra Pradesh as well. It is one of right methods which can be followed in all Andhra Pradesh rural primary schools. Without training, we can't make the students learn English.

The more we train the teachers, the better results we can expect from the students. As most of the schools in Andhra Pradesh are in rural areas, teachers are generally not exposed to English language. They are not proficient in English language. The project followed in Telangana state is perfectly suitable to train the teachers in Andhra Pradesh government primary schools.

CONCLUSION

English language education is a subject which should be dealt with care. As it is a language, teacher who teaches English should be proficient. Here in this context we can remember one famous quote "Better teacher can make a better student". Previously teachers were not given proper training in those days. Proper facilities to train the teachers were not there. Moreover, most of the schools in Andhra Pradesh are from rural areas, hence teachers are not fluent in English language. As the previous selection boards that selected teachers did not follow the right measures to select teachers hence there is an urgent need to reform the training to be given to primary teachers.

I suggest some measures which can be taken in this regard. The minimum duration of training should of three months which should be provided to primary school teachers like the pilot project implement by the Telangana state government. New courses should be introduced such as 'Diploma in English Communication' (DIEC), which is in Bangalore RIE, to the teachers who want to become English teachers. Introduction of this

course can make teachers proficient in communication skills, enable them to practice the use of English in different situations, help in developing vocabulary and in achieving fluency in listening and writing. If these suggestions are implemented, we can expect good results from teachers. Then only we can improve the language proficiency of students.

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