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PRESENT POSITION OF TEACHING ENGLISH IN THE SECONDARY LEVEL SCHOOLS
(CLASS-IX & X) OF ASSAM: A CASE STUDY

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Abstract

This paper attempts to highlight the teaching learning condition of English in the Secondary Level Schools of Assam and provide effective suggestions to improve it. In these days, the Assam Government has taken several measures to improve the quality of English teaching, though with little satisfactory result. This paper therefore aims at throwing light on the existing practices of teaching English in the Secondary Level Schools (Class-IX & X) of Assam and at the same time making the teachers alert about their role in upgrading the quality of English teaching so much, so that instead of blaming the students for their inability to learn, they should take teaching English as a great challenge in front of them. This study was carried out in Jorhat District of Assam (India).

Keywords: Teaching learning process, teaching English, English teachers, classroom.

Introduction

For almost two centuries now, English has been playing an important role in our educational system as well as in our national life. It is generally held that the British introduced English in our educational system in order to produce cheap clerks for their colonial administration and to produce what Lord Macaulay called “a class of people, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals and in intellect”.(1)

The English language is the window which opens up the vast prospect of human achievement and beckons to new horizons beyond. The more effective our grasp of English in all its diversities of speech, vocabulary, structure and meaning, the more will we benefit individually and contribute to the growth of our country as a modern nation on the threshold of the 21st century.

F.G. French said, “It is only through this language we have distilled the essence of modern knowledge in all fields of human activity. Anyone who can read English can keep in touch with the whole world without leaving his own house.”(2)

According to the constitution of India, English is a second language.

“Educators define a ‘foreign’ language as one which is studied for the insight it affords into the life of another nation, and a ‘second’ language, as one which is studied for more utilitarian purposes, because of its direct value to the speaker or writer as a citizen of his own country. This is by no means an absolute distinction”. (Pride, 1971, 22-23)(3)

The Position Paper of the National Focus Group On Teaching of English for NCF (National Curriculum Framework)-2005 makes it clear when it addresses the 'English language question'-

"English is in India today a symbol of people's aspirations for quality in education and a fuller participation in national and international life. Its colonial origins now forgotten or irrelevant, its initial role in independent India, tailored to higher education (as a "library language", a "window on the world"), now felt to be insufficiently inclusive socially and linguistically, the current status of English stems from its overwhelming presence on the world stage and the reflection of this in the national arena....."(1.1 Why English?)(4)

Regarding the status of English in India, The National Knowledge Commission (NKC-2007) points out, "There is an irony in the situation. English has been part of our education system for more than a century. Yet English is beyond the reach of most of our young people, which makes for highly unequal access. Indeed, even now, no more than one per cent of our people use it as a second language, let alone a first language.But NKC believes that the time has come for us to teach our people, ordinary people, English as a language in schools. Early action in this sphere, would help us build an inclusive society and transform India into a knowledge society. In just 12 years, it would provide the country's school-leavers with far more equal access to higher education and, three to five years thereafter, much more equal access to employment opportunities."(5) Unfortunately enough, the present status or position of English in India is not very much satisfactory.

English has become the language of science, commerce, trade and international negotiations. We must benefit ourselves by this language. Without English we will cut ourselves off from the world knowledge. Most of the people of India do not have a strong hold over the English language even after seven decades since Britishers left our country (India).

Assam is one of the states of North-East India. Three Language Formula is there in its Educational system. In the Assamese medium schools English is introduced at class V; recently it is being introduced in standard I. Up to the Matriculation (H.S.L.C.) level English is studied as a compulsory subject. Thereafter, English is studied for two years in the +2 stage and three years at the under-graduate level. In other words, English is studied as a core subject for eleven years. The time allotted for English class is the same as to other subjects, i.e. five/six periods of forty/fifty five minute's duration per week.

The Board of Secondary Education (SEBA) in our state Assam is the academic authority of the Secondary Schools of Assam. It also conducts the Final Examination (H.S.L.C.) of class X. The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) of Assam too prepares text books and these are prescribed for use up to class VIII since the introduction of the Bill of Compulsory Education for all children up to fourteen years of age.

It is witnessed that most of the students from Assamese medium schools are afraid of the English language. Their performance in English is very poor. Every year, a good number of students from Assamese medium schools pass the H.S.L.C. Examination at the mercy of the policy holders in the form of 'grace marks'. Due to lack of communicating power in English, the students are found unable to crack the competitive examinations. So, the English teachers' role is above all to motivate the students towards English and provide quality education. In this present scenario teaching English has become a great challenge in front of the English teachers. The English teachers should consider it to be a great opportunity and try to do their best to achieve the ultimate goal of success.

In a vast and heterogeneous society like ours, the needs of the learners for learning English will not be uniform.

"As teachers we should be able to identify the requirements of various groups of students related to the English language precisely and try to provide for each such group the pattern of courses which will be relevant to the needs of the learners".(6)

The key figure in any education is the teacher. Knowing the perceptions and beliefs of teachers enables one to make predictions about teaching and assessment practices in classrooms. "Teachers' beliefs about their

own effectiveness, known as teacher efficacy, underline many important instructional decisions which ultimately shape students' educational experiences".(7) Teacher efficacy is believed to be strongly linked to teaching practices and student learning outcomes.

Pedagogy of English – 1 (Bachelor of Education - B.Ed. Book) puts forward some specific objectives of teaching English at primary and secondary levels. At the secondary level the learner should:

1. speak English fluently and accurately;
2. speak freely. They should think in English and speak it with ease and frequently;
3. express their ideas in English in the classroom at school, at home and in society;
4. respond and react to situations actively and not remain only a passive listener;
5. acquire the ability to understand the native speakers and also be able to respond to them;
6. compose freely and independently in speech and writing;
7. read books, newspapers and periodicals with understanding;
8. develop sufficient command over vocabulary that should include frequent and choicest English phrases and idioms; and
9. use reference material like encyclopedia, dictionaries, reference books, etc.(8)

The teaching learning condition of English in the Assamese medium schools are not yet up to the level of satisfaction. The teachers are often seen to put the blame entirely on the students for their failure to acquire the knowledge of the language. Unfortunately however, improper and defective teaching is at the root of the problem. Teaching a foreign language requires proper knowledge, training, experience and devotion on the part of the teacher.

The school teachers engaged in teaching English should also try to equip themselves to accept the challenge before them to improve the situation. Teachers must know or decide what the learners must learn as well as how to lead them to it. Therefore this study attempts to find out the challenges faced by the English teachers at the Secondary Level Classes (IX & X). This study will also help us to find out the actual practices of teaching English in the class.

Objectives

The main objectives of this paper are:

- To find out the existing teaching learning process (condition) of English at the Secondary Level Classes.
- To provide some satisfactory suggestions/remedies to improve the quality of teaching English on the basis of the findings of the study.

Methodology

This paper is mainly an outcome of field study. Documents such as seminar papers, proceedings and minutes related to workshops and meetings have also been studied.

- One thousand, five hundred and six (1506) students, both boys and girls studying in class IX & X from Assamese medium schools have been taken as sample for the study.
- Thirty teachers (30) were randomly selected from Secondary Level Assamese medium schools (IX & X) to examine the role played by the teachers in the teaching learning of English.
- Fifteen (15) Heads of Institutions were interviewed to know some facts related to English teaching learning process.
- Fifteen (15) schools situated in greater Jorhat area were selected on purposive sampling basis.

Parameters used

The following parameters were used for the purpose of this study and data collection-

- A self prepared questionnaire for students.

- A self prepared questionnaire for the English teachers.
- An interview schedule for interviewing the Heads of the Institutions.

Data Collection and Analysis

Qualitative research techniques were adopted for classroom observation related to effectiveness of bi-lingual classroom situations. Data related to training of teachers, availability of teaching learning materials etc. were collected during the visits to the schools. Simple percentage calculations were used for analysis as and when necessary. The interview technique was adopted for gathering relevant information from students, teachers and Heads of the Institutions to know the teaching learning process of English.

Findings of the Study

After the classroom observations and the analysis of the data, the following facts have been found:

- 100% students understand Assamese (Mother tongue) better than English.
- 95.88% students consider English as difficult or very difficult. Among them 80.61% students do not find interest in English as they have an existing fear or belief that English is very difficult.
- 92.36% students have stated that their English teachers teach them by translating the lessons into their Mother tongue (Assamese) and 90.31% students have stated that their English teachers use question answer method in teaching English.
- No conversation in English is found between the teachers and the students inside the school campus.
- English teachers do not organize co-curricular activities for the students to improve their English i.e. Extempore speech competition, Essay writing competition, Elocution contest etc.
- 70.05% parents do not understand English language and 94.49% parents cannot speak in English.
- 48.65% classes are found overcrowded with students and thus students' 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.
- Teachers do not organize group discussions, pair works and group activities among students to improve English.
- Teachers do not use audio-visual aids in order to supplement learning.
- 43.33% English teachers do not have B.Ed. degree.
- Teachers do not have any special training in case of curriculum change.
- Only 10% English teachers have been found teaching English grammar by creating real life (practical) situations.
- Most of the English teachers are found incompetent to realize the need and significance of English in the new perspective. They fail to revise their aims in the new setting and also to teach English most effectively within a short time. 80% English teachers do not know how to operate over-head projectors and other modern teaching aids for effective English teaching. Some of them even do not know how to use internet.
- 80% English teachers cannot speak English fluently. Their sentence construction capacity is also not up to the satisfactory level.
- No classroom inspection system is found available in all the schools.
- 40% Institutional Heads believe that they are not good administrators and 80% Institutional Heads do not have good command over the English language.

Suggestions

- Standard criteria must be followed by the authority concerned on appointment of the English teachers. Simply B.Ed. degree with English as method paper along with TET (Teacher Eligibility Test) qualified should not be considered to be the ultimate requisite qualification for an English Secondary teacher. After their (English teachers) recruitment proper training in English teaching must be offered to them by subject specialists of English.

- The English teachers should try their best to convince the students that without English they cannot move one step ahead in this vast world and hence their education will be incomplete or meaningless in this era of globalization. They should be made aware of the importance of English through instruction, guidance, meeting, conference, poster and so on. The policy regarding the place of English in our education system should be well defined to the students. Teachers should try to motivate the students to this language learning by showing them lots of opportunities in their future through English in the field of science and technology, social-sciences, philosophy, journalism, international trade and diplomacy and so on.
- English teachers must possess the quality of good fluency in English. They should make it compulsory for the students to speak only in English inside the English classroom. In this regard motivation is essential enough and the English teachers should put this belief into the students' heads that without expression (through conversation) their education will have no meaning as the prime objective of language is to interchange our feelings with one another.
- English teachers should have basic proficiency in English. They should possess the language skills to teach English effectively in ways appropriate to their situation and levels based on knowledge how languages are to be learnt. For this, first of all the teacher must have to build up the confidence level of the students for the English language. Hence in the Primary level, the teachers should not begin directly with the alphabets. Instead for few days they should ask simple questions to the students in English like-What is your name?, Where do you live?, Who is your best friend ? etc. The students no doubt do not understand the meanings of these questions, then the teacher for two to three times should try to make them understand the meaning. This way the students will be interested to the language. When the confidence level grows within themselves, definitely they will be much more interested to the language learning game and will come to the teacher the next day to learn new things. This episode being over, then only the teacher should go to formal teaching of English with alphabets.
- English teachers can organize group discussions, pair works, group activities etc. among the students and can also arrange co-curricular activities like extempore speech competition, essay writing competition, elocution contest etc. to create their interest towards English language and also to improve their communicating and writing capabilities.
- A grammar teacher should teach grammar to the students by creating different types of communicative situations inside the classroom. Normally after knowing the rules of grammar, one is expected to be able to speak English fluently but that is not the common experience. On the other hand, through communicative situations, one will be capable of using the grammatical items in real life situations. Through the use of these communicative situations, a learner can also avail the chance of developing the communicative skill.
- English teachers should use audio-visual aids for better teaching learning process. Audio-visual aids will help to generate many language activities in the class and will create realistic situation for teaching English.
- Tutorial classes should be arranged by the school management for the students who are poor/weak in English. This will somehow help the teachers to provide individual attention to those students.
- School libraries should have English language learning books, magazines, journals, teachers' resource books etc. for better teaching learning process.
- Provision of strict supervision (inspection) or evaluation method must be there in the schools at regular intervals to measure the quality of teaching learning process.
- Curriculum at the Secondary level should be less burdensome and more useful. It should be overhauled and due stress should be laid on testing of oral work and pronunciation. There should be questions on the texts to test speaking ability and reading comprehension and appreciation. Teachers can make practice of these activities through extensive reading texts provided to the students. Curriculum should be child centered and activity based which could promote English as a language

not as a subject. English teachers' involvement is must in curriculum development. Curriculum should be based on modern teaching methodologies. At the same time curriculum should be reviewed after some specific time. The question paper setting by the concerned Board should change the pattern altogether. It should be designed in a manner that it helps students to have an authority over English language rather it makes the students to take it for granted. Stress should be given not only on reading and writing but also on listening and speaking. Twenty to thirty marks must be allotted in the question paper to test these two language skills and at the same time evaluation should be done by experts not by the teachers of the same school where scope of manipulation is open.

- In-service training by subject experts should be provided to the teachers. Teachers should be trained by subject experts keeping in view the changes made in the curriculum. Government should provide special trainings and refresher courses to the teachers at regular intervals.
- Teachers' orientation programme should be organized for the Secondary teachers. These programmes will provide the teachers latest information on teaching learning process. Above all through these programmes the teachers will have a new platform to interact with new and experienced teachers, that will help them (teachers) utilizing new methodologies of teaching.
- The system of grace marks especially in English should be withdrawn at the H.S.L.C. Examination as it degrades the importance or status of English in H.S.L.C. syllabus. Because of the availability of the grace marks system some students do not want to labour hard as they think with the help of the grace marks they will pass the H.S.L.C. Examination easily.
- The Government should provide adequate teaching aids or equipments (audio-visual aids especially models, pictures, metronome etc.) to provide quality education. It will also help to motivate the students to create their interest in learning English.
- Proper guidance at home should be given. Guardians should be made aware of their responsibilities through parent-teacher meeting. Teachers should advise the guardians to provide their children different English books and magazines especially English newspapers and making sure that children read them regularly. Guardians also should have close contact with the teachers.

Conclusion

From the overall analysis, it can be summed up that there are lots of problems in the teaching learning process of English language in the Assamese medium Secondary schools of Assam, especially in Jorhat District. If the above mentioned suggestions can be implemented the quality of English teaching may improve to a great extent.

Table: 1 Findings (From the questionnaire to the students, to the English teachers and to the Heads of the Institutions)

Sl. no	Area of Interest	Results in percentage (%)
1	Students understand Assamese (Mother tongue) better than English.	100%
2	English as a language.	0.0%
3	Students find English difficult or very difficult.	95.88%
4	Students do not find interest in English classroom.	80.61%
5	English teaching by translating the lessons into Mother tongue Assamese.	92.36%
6	English teaching through question answer method.	90.31%
7	English conversation between teachers and students inside the English classroom.	0.0%
8	Libraries in schools.	86.67%
9	Facility of English newspapers, magazines etc.	13.33%
10	Use of co-curricular activities by the English teachers i.e. Extempore speech competition, Essay writing competition, Elocution contest etc.	0.0%
11	Parents understand English.	29.95%

12	Parents' ability to speak in English.	5.51%
13	Over-crowded classes.	48.65%
14	Group discussions, pair work and group activities.	2.12%
15	Use of Audio-visual aids.	0.0%
16	Loud reading inside classroom.	93.36%
17	Students living in Village.	75.17%
18	Students watch English programmes/News in T.V.	2.19%
19	Teachers having B.Ed. degree.	56.67%
20	Special training in case of curriculum change.	0.0%
21	Use of grammar translation method.	60%
22	Grammar teaching through situational approach.	10%
23	Lesson planning.	46.67%
24	Teachers know how to use over-head projectors and other modern teaching aids.	20%
25	Teachers know how to use internet.	46.67%
26	Computer trained English teachers.	33.33%
27	English teachers having fluency in English.	20%
28	Arrangement of classroom inspection by Heads of Institutions.	6.67%
29	Heads of the Institutions consider themselves to be good administrators.	60%
30	Heads of the Institutions fluent in English.	20%

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