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Teaching of English in College Classrooms: Challenges and Solutions

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Abstract:

Language is a unique gift of God to human beings. It enables us to evolve, think and decipher the entangled web of life. It provides an opportunity to observe the universe with conscious outlook. Moreover it allows us to ponder over the mysteries of human existence itself. However, language itself is a part of that mystery.

English in India owns its inception to India's contact with the English. The unprecedented awakening transformed the general outlook and resulted in the Renaissance. Though English has already been well established in the country and has acquired its own independent identity, it has certainly brought some challenges too. One the one hand, there are numerous foreign investors flocking to India resulting in the growth of outsourcing, English has come to play a key role in professional relationship between foreign and Indian companies. This has posed a new challenge for adequate teaching of English in classrooms. Further, the varied variants of English have added misery to the affair.

The paper aims at evaluating the problems of English language teaching in college classrooms. It also strives providing more familiarity with subject matter for exploring further avenues of contemplation. The paper also presents an intensive discussion with suggesting ways and measures to resolve the problems of teaching English as second language.

Keywords: English language, pronunciation, higher education, syllabus, India.

Language is a unique gift of God to human beings. It enables us to evolve, think and decipher the entangled web of life. It provides an opportunity to observe the universe with conscious outlook. Moreover it allows us to ponder over the mysteries of human existence itself. However, language itself is a part of that mystery as when we are not interacting, we are thinking in language or contriving monologues or dialogues inside our minds. In a way this is language that telecast the world. At present more than 5000 languages are considered to exist in the world.

They say the country having economic power, enjoys the supremacy of culture. India as the 'golden sparrow of the world' enjoyed this privilege for a long time but with the passage of time things changed. With the advent of the Britishers, India subdued herself and lost her glory including language. The English drafted their suitable education policy and imposed it on the

Indians with the British resolution of Lord William Bentinck where all funds appropriated for the purpose of education was best employed on English education alone. This process of Anglicization of Indians and their language was accelerated by Lord Macaulay's efforts to create a class of persons through English education who would be "Indian in blood and colour but English in taste, in opinion, in morals and intellect." Gradually English became the first preference of learning no matter by chance or compulsion. Hence as A.K. Sharma says, "The position of English in Indian educational system throughout the British rule was enviable," (30)

After independence, when the necessity for reorientation of our educational policy felt, the place of English was very controversial. Some states were strongly in favour of retaining English as people sensed that giving up English would mean cutting ourselves off from the rest of the world and thus remaining just like a closed box at the global level. V. K. Gokak very pertinently states, "The English language has lined India with the world. It has conducted sparks of inspiration from the world outside to India and from India to the rest of the world. We are blessed with the two way traffic that English has afforded us." (178) On the other hand, there were states strongly in favour of eliminating it. During such controversies English flourished surprisingly and even after almost six decades since Britishers left India, it occupies a pivotal place of prestige in our society. English has already been well established in the country and has acquired its own independent identity. W. A. Gatherer asserts, "It is the preferred second language learned in vast majority of countries, only in one or two European countries being secondary to French and German. It has been estimated that 600 million people can use English competently." (2) Acquaintance and knowledge of English will enable us to establish intellectual, cultural, economic, commercial and political relations with the rest of the world. As our Prime Minister Modi says India is a country of the highest number of youngsters, who can become a huge human resource asset. It is possible only when we equip them with proper skill and English can play a major role in it. However, English is not our mother tongue and obviously it is difficult to learn and teach it. Raja Rao articulates in the Foreword of *Kanthapura*:

One has to convey in a language that is not one's own the spirit that is one's own. One has to convey the various shades and omissions of a certain thought-movement that looks maltreated in an alien language...we cannot write like the English. We should not.

English since its inception with the Britishers has walked a long way. During this journey the standard of English in the present is stirring towards the most declining phase. Before college scenario, let's have a glimpse of English at school level as this is the stuff, colleges are to handle in future. Though the students are made to learn English at the primary level even in the Government schools, the results are not so encouraging. Most of the schools boasting of high standards with English medium, present dismaying picture. The students are unable to converse at ease in common situation. The image of written English is more alarming. The reasons accountable for this gloomy situation are many and this poses huge challenge for English

teaching. Although there has been a remarkable progress in the number of enrolment in higher education yet there has been deterioration in the quality. Students are awarded with high percentile in exams belying the actuality. This has increased the crisis of English teaching.

The problems of English teaching are the problems of teaching in general. The students after passing from colleges find themselves in no man's land when they are asked to write a few lines in English. Let the matter of English be laid aside, they are unable to express themselves in Hindi too. The picture of rural colleges is even more shocking. This phenomenon brings out the fact that there is something wrong with our system of higher education. No doubt teacher is expected to mould the taught with the help of his effective teaching but what about those who never enter into the classroom. Most of the students in rural colleges are enrolled with their re-appear in English. This majority of students constitute a major part of the class adding a new group of re-appear in the subsequent year. The university has no objection for promoting a student to the next class even though he hasn't clear even a single paper during his previous year. Such students are unable to handle even their roll slips as they possess so many same slips at the same time because of many re-appears. They take exam in the morning session as well as in the evening. Just like a farmer who finds no solution of his overburdened debt except suicide, a student having so many re-appears in previous exams, surrenders completely and leaves the college without obtaining a degree. Some students who take so many exams at the same time do not take exam or study as a serious affair and they enter into the exam hall just after the beginning of the exam and even later in some cases. The students prefer to glance at mobile phones instead of texts. They always excuse for forgetting texts at home but never forget the inevitable 'cell phone' rather some innocent are so mindful that they possess double.

The remaining void is refined by the syllabi which are just like third party insurance where no suggestion or involvement is invited from the teacher and learner especially in undergraduate courses. There is a mistaken idea that the standard of English is elevated by the prescription of complex texts. The standard of learning English can be achieved only through the provision of books which students can read with comprehension. R. K. Sharma very fittingly remarks, "Where books are beyond the ready comprehension of students, distaste for reading is created. This unfortunate attitude is one of the obstacles which the college teacher has to overcome." (80) Hence syllabi do not fully satisfy the present objectives of the teaching of English. Books are often prescribed with socio-cultural background of the West. Books consisting common and indigenous theme would have been more effective. As the problem of teaching English is associated with the problem of teaching in general and the problems involved therein varies from college to college.

It is observed that English, being a foreign language is not easy to teach at college level. Information technology provides infinite avenues to teachers particularly in teaching English. An effective teaching situation consists of five elements - teacher, learners or students, subject

matter, teaching aids and available facilities. Out of these five elements, learner or student is considered the focal point. An innovative teacher manipulates subject matter, teaching aids and available facilities for better teaching on the part of the students. Conscious teaching involves putting students in situations which compel them to read, speak, listen, think deeply and write.

In any teaching situation, the process of teaching may be active or passive. In passive situations, students work on a closely defined routine task or merely listening to a lecture. Active teaching is a multidimensional process whereby learners are actively engaged in learning process that leads to lasting and thorough modification in behaviour. Active teaching prepares students for self directed learning that promotes integration of ideas and development of new constructs. Research shows that students learn, more but doing. While instructions in the classroom are one way where teacher lecturers and students listen may or may not learn. Learning is enhanced if rich environment with variety of stimuli is given to the students.

An English teacher is supposed to apply a wide variety of strategies to involve students in teaching actively while catering to their major expectations. A variety of teaching techniques including information & communication technology can effectively be applied along with traditional on way instruction / lecture method to create optimal environment for active teaching. With the use of audio- visual aids and proper education the different 'forms' of English in vogue can be understood. Since many may perceive the accent, terminology, and conversational style of Indian English as 'funny' yet the uses of the language are familiar with both types of English. This reduces the complexity of English teaching in classes.

There is scope of intermittent creative exercises in the classroom in English teaching. Modern communication technology can help a lot in this direction. An English teacher can introduce imaginative classroom or simulation technique, thinking exercise, interesting story telling, humour ability, recreation games such as palindrome, kangaroo word and tongue twister etc. with the help of audio visual aids, project and LCD. Stories enacted in local language and then switching over to English can be very effective. Two things or incidents can be presented simultaneously before the students and then can be correlated to each other to provide a comparative and better understanding. Self - created or self developed clippings, while teaching poetry, story, and grammatical compositions. Self recorded cassettes and familiar videos, should be given preference. These activities help the students to think in diverse ways and enable them active learners. Teacher should strive for these innovative techniques to make their students serious and attentive during lectures.

Quiz Competitions and discussions should be organized in English in the classrooms after completing a unit to take feedback and to make students dynamic, Students should not be made to go for readymade conclusions or the morals of the texts rather they should go freely in the process to make their own conclusions, There can be a recording of the whole discussion in the

classroom. It creates a sense of seriousness amongst the students. It also provides the students a huge scope of improvement in their performance. It makes the whole activity very entertaining and stress free. Students are encouraged to form their own groups for group discussions and quiz competitions but these groups should not be of permanent nature. After viewing the performance of each group, the teacher can pay special attention towards slow students to make them active learners too. Very good results can be expected in problem free and stress free academic environment. Continuous encouragement is the key factor of improvement and development of overall personality of the learners. Poetry recitation, storytelling, language games and essay writing can also be organized to motivate the students of English. With the help of modern technological devices such as newspaper clippings, recorded cassettes and model poetry recitation can be of great help in this direction.

Survey or Field visits enables students to observe and study many things practically and live situation in their daily life. Consequently, students learn many grammatical exercises such as essay writing, notice writing, letter writing and report writing in a funny way. The teacher may take students to green houses, rearing ponds/ farms, fairs and historical places. Notes and photographs of the topic/ place under discussion can be taken. Video recording of such fairs/scenes can be very helpful for the students to know the things/ incidents to which upto now they were unacquainted. Students are asked to note down the names/ incidents of the topic / place in chronological order. A student who has never seen a daffodil flower cannot appreciate it till he really recognizes it or a student who has never seen 'Birches' can never enjoy its 'Swing'. This can be made possible only by visiting the place. But it costs money, time and energy. Video recording is the best possible option, which is a boon of modern communicational technology. It makes teaching not only interesting but also the impression remains more lasting on the minds of the students.

Teachers can make use of LCD, Slide Projector and Over Head Projector to teach complex topics in English along with traditional teaching aids. Recorded cassettes can be taken to the classes for phonetic transcription and English teachers can show film version of play/ novel. Watching a particular scene and then enacting helps a lot in any language. The study of regional languages related TV programmes is useful for understanding and linking importance to the local communication. A student who has once seen Macbeth on screen can never forget throughout his whole life that Macbeth was 'he' not 'she'. Questions such as character sketch will be easier for him than earlier. Dramatization can be used by English teacher to make the students enact the roles of play under study. Spoken English also gets improved while rehearsing the dialogues of characters. Students can be asked to know each other and then tell others about each other. This is the first and the simplest way of making students good communicator and self-confident.

There was a time when laboratories were limited to science subjects only. Now-a-days language labs are established for English also. These labs are loaded with spoken words having instruments, records etc. Almost equal time is devoted for practical to make students understand the concepts deeply in English too. All the four skills of English such as listening, reading, writing and speaking can easily be taught through language labs. Video clips are played on the screen to watch the scene with dialogue then asked the relevant questions from the video. This improves the listening and spoken skill of an individual. Writing and reading skill can also be improved by displaying some missing information on the screen, followed by questions to fill the missing information. Hence labs' role is considered very important for learners as well as teachers of English in present times. Latest knowledge of subject can be given to students by consulting Internet and encouraging students for Internet surfing.

To conclude we can say that English teaching has become a challenging job. To keep pace with their counterparts, English teachers must acquaint themselves with the latest trend and development in the field of English language teaching. It is also equally imperative that competent and dedicated teachers are appointed for the purpose. Those already in the profession should strive for betterment in the academic arena.

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