

Current trends and challenges in the teaching and learning of English as a second language

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Abstract: *English language has created a great impact in the modern era. It has been proved as a functional language in many fields. This article is an attempt to bring out various reasons for slow growth among the students in their proficiency levels of English language in terms of Listening, Speaking, Reading, and writing (LSRW) skills. It highlights the demerits of current teaching trends in English as a second language at schools and the problems faced by the students' community. It also raises many issues pertaining to teaching practice, teacher training and the recruitment process of teachers which exists in most of the schools and thus emphasises the need of intervention by education department to eradicate these issues and find a better solution to the issues raised for the welfare of students' community.*

English language has been in India for more than a century. English nowadays has become an official language at the national level. It has also become a link language at international level, and now commonly used in all the corporate sectors, business, Industries and almost in all the professions like medicine, engineering and research. English has become important in almost every part of the world, therefore proficiency in English language has become the basic requirement for success in all fields, Though the language has acquired great importance, majority of people could not afford quality English Language . There are many people who still do not know English and consider it to be a foreign language. Eventually these ignorant people are not in a position to inculcate their children and impart the necessity of English language; instead they trust the schools and teachers to educate their wards. Here obviously a question arises, how effective is the role of teachers, in educating the children from illiterate background? The major focus of this article is to find out the problems of these children.

The first point to be analysed is, the current teaching scenario in the middle school level in both private and government schools. Earlier the teaching methodology was only black board, chalk and talk method but now this method need to be suitably modified to cater the needs of the children. The technology has developed so much that the teacher is expected to use the modern technologies like LCD projector and computers in order to play videos pertaining to language, they should also be multi-talented and switch on to new techniques like role-plays, dialogue writing, conducting debates, and give them brain-storming topics for classroom discussion. Apart from all these the teacher should play different roles, as a facilitator, mentor and instructor rather than being just a teacher, above all the teacher should be a role model for the children to draw inspiration among the students. Now these questions are posed, are the teachers trained adequately so that they possess prerequisite skills? Are they well equipped with the required knowledge to meet the student's expectation? Are they trained in such a way that they have all these attributes in them before they enter teaching? Are they given special training programmes on a regular basis?

Next step to be analysed is the syllabus designed for the middle school level by the Government of Tamil Nadu. The main aim of the English syllabus prescribed for the learners of classes from first to tenth in general is to train them in Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing (LSRW) skills. The aim is to make the students proficient over the language, to have a good command over the language and to develop good communication skills, these qualities are the need of the hour for the modern world. If the syllabus is thoroughly examined in depth there are three divisions namely prose, poetry, supplementary reading and apart from these grammar is also prescribed for them. This is common for all the classes, but the content of the lessons which vary from class to class.

The objective of the syllabus is to achieve the target of acquiring LSRW skills through the aim mentioned above , the lessons in the prose prescribed help the students to develop their writing skills, first the lesson is taught by the teacher and then the students are expected to write grammatically, syntactically and semantically appropriate sentences in English .They also learn to write , organise the content cogently and learn to use the correct spelling all these ultimately help them to improve their writing skills.

The poem prescribed helps in developing the students' speaking and reading skills. They are made to read the poem aloud in the class, they memorise it and are asked to recite the poem while reciting they are trained to use proper stress, intonation, and pronunciation which in turn tune their speaking skills, When the

teacher asks questions the students are expected to answer in complete sentences thereby they develop their speaking skills too.

The supplementary lessons prescribed help them to develop their listening skills. The teacher reads out the story in the class aloud, and the students are expected to listen to it carefully and answer the questions posed by the teacher.

To synthesis the above explanation of the syllabus, the aim and objective of the syllabus as mentioned above, very clearly indicates that it is designed for the students to acquire good communication skills and good command over the language then, where does the problem originate from? Why the problem of student's low proficiency still persists? Where exactly the problem lies?

There are many more factors pertaining to the academic progress of the students, one such is the teaching methodology which plays a vital role in students' life. Teaching methodology implies the techniques deployed by the teacher and the skills adopted for effective teaching. The classroom comprises students of high and low proficiency in English Language therefore the teacher's role is crucial here. The teacher should possess requisite skills to ensure good performance of the students in their academics also improve their language skills, identify the talents hidden in them and bring them out by motivating them in a right manner and manage the heterogeneous group. The class is a mixture of students' high, average and below average. The high proficiency students tend to learn faster than the low proficient students therefore, the teacher has to pay extra care and attention towards the slow learners, at the same time engage the fast learners with extra exercises, for which the teacher should be innovative, creative, flexible to meet the needs of these students. Do the teachers follow these strategies? What kind of teaching strategies the teachers adopt in schools? Does the schools emphasise on a set of teaching strategies to be followed by the teachers?

Further, diagnosis to the problems that students face is due to the recruitment of untrained teachers, most of the private schools for that matter do recruit untrained teachers, except for a few schools who recruit trained teachers. These teachers are not competent enough and not able to be at par with the student's demands in this fast moving world. They are recruited in schools because they can be paid low, due to which the students' community suffer, day to day we see the increase in information technology, the students should be trained to be at par with these modern standards, but the pathetic part is that these untrained teachers do not have the requisite skills that a teacher should possess, when they themselves are not trained, how will they train the students? This point should be viewed seriously because there is a vast breach between the trained and the untrained teachers. They make a big difference in the students' performance and that is why the question arises, Are the teachers given proper training? Are they given periodical training? If so what is the duration of the training? Are they monitored regularly even after the training?

The next point to be pondered on is the recruitment process in the Government schools. The teachers who teach English in the middle school level are not specialised in English language, teachers who are specialised in other subjects too teach English which brings down the standard of the students and thereby they bring our education system down in India. The current scenario of the students' standard in the middle school level or the higher secondary for that matter is, more than fifty percent of students in a class are not even able to read a sentence completely without any mistake, even if they manage to read they do not understand the meaning of that sentence, consequently the students lack the fluency over the language in terms of speaking, reading and writing, they are not able to comprehend the content. In spite of all these issues they are just made to pass in the examination through other means, they are given marks for practical session were it is purely teachers discretion to evaluate and they in turn award them marks .So the teacher's motto would be to make them pass for name's sake, no matter the student's eligibility level is, if this condition prevails in the middle school level then what would be the standard of the high school in English language? The standard remains the same therefore this issue has to be contemplated over and a solution should be found out.

These issues raised will surely provoke us to raise many more questions like, How can a teacher teach English who is not specialised in language? Then how do we expect the students to have a good command over the language? How the communication skill of the students can be at par with the modern era? How can a teacher meet the demands of the students when their area of specialisation is different? These teachers would not have undergone training to teach English language, when the students tend to learn from them, imagine the students' standard of level, hence the students lag behind in all aspects and they are not able to compete as English Language has become prominent in all the fields as discussed above. Another factor pertaining to the low proficiency among students is due to the in experienced teachers in schools, those teachers who are not experienced will neither have the capability to manage the students, nor can they teach the students in a way the experienced teacher teaches, therefore the higher authorities and the department of education should take keen interest in all these factors which pertain to the low standard of the students. It is the duty of the government to take necessary steps to recruit experienced and proficient teachers and teachers specialised in English language only, to teach English. This norm should be strictly emphasised to bring up the standard of the schools and fulfil the demands of the budding students and meet their requirements to the modern era.

To add on to the issues there is another major issue, for the low standard of the students in the Government schools is due to the deployment of insufficient teachers in the Government schools. There is a mismatch between the ratios of the teachers with the students. The ratio should be one is to thirty five or forty at the maximum instead the ratio is one is to sixty in many schools where the teacher cannot concentrate nor pay individual attention to the students. The teacher cannot focus the attention towards the low proficiency students because of the high strength of students in the class, the class especially in a Government school, the rate of slow learners are more compared to the rate of fast learners, the reason is many children come from a poor background and from family whose parents are illiterate, so the calibre of the students would be low as they would not get proper coaching nor attention from their parents, the major part should be from the teacher's side to train them individually and personally, because of the lack of teachers they cannot do justice to their profession. If this is the condition prevailing in most of the Government schools today, how is it possible to eliminate this problem of low standard in schools? How can children acquire good communication skills? How can they be trained to be successful students? How will they be able to meet the demands of the modern world?

To synthesis the above discussion, the study on the recent trends of teaching English Language in schools, may it be in a Private or Government school, there are certain issues still which cannot be solved as discussed above, due to which the standard of the English language has drastically come down in India for the past few years. Students do have the interest to learn language but they are handicapped by various factors such as bad teaching, lack of motivation and interest from the part of teachers specialised in other subjects rather than language, inexperienced teachers, inadequate teachers posted in many schools and improper training given to the teachers. These are the factors which revolve around in schools, so it is the duty of the education department to take these issues into consideration for the welfare of the country. This research would raise many more issues as discussed above and find better ways to solve these problems.

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