

Addressing the Needs of Primary English Teachers of U. P. State Board Schools

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Abstract

The need for imparting training to teachers cannot be denied irrespective of their level of teaching. But, when it comes to primary education, it is like laying the foundation of a building as the child's formative years are the most critical ones in his life. In the present time, professional education has become accessible to all. A great number of students in professional colleges are from the rural and remote sectors. Engineering and Management students from these sectors have little command of English, which comes up as a threat and hampers their growth. An insight into the teaching methodologies and the level of primary teachers' awareness show that they need to revitalize their knowledge and skill to adapt themselves to the socio-psychological requirements of students. They also need to be guided on their role in relation to the development of the primary language learners to help them grow as professional students. This paper is an attempt to study the reasons of the failure of students at the secondary or undergraduate level, to communicate effectively using English though the government is running many ambitious programs for students' and teachers' education the status of English at the primary level.

Key words: Primary School English teachers, Uttar Pradesh Government Schools, training needs.

Introduction

The spread of English has been more rapid in recent years as a consequence of decisions and actions taken by the government, institutions and individuals (David Graddol 2000). This applies to the UP government decision to implement English from class I. This is a welcome change. Earlier, in UP government schools, English was taught from Class VI onwards. Later, it

was implemented from class III and presently it is being taught from class I onwards. Introducing English at an early age has enabled the children even in the remote areas to learn English words. As a result, English has reached the children of less privileged walks of society. A child living in rural/remote area where English was not accessible has received an opportunity to be acquainted with the most popular language of the world. But, a close observation of various schools has shown that this welcome move is not as welcome as it could have been, because it has not shown any visible impact upon children studying in these schools.

Not to mention that Primary education serves as a foundation in the life of a child. The quality of primary education decides the future of rest of the child's education. How good a child performs in his later years of secondary and higher education has a direct relationship with the primary education he/she receives. In these early years in school, the important factor which plays a prominent role in building the foundation is the role of the teacher. The teacher functions not only as a teacher but also as a caretaker, mentor and a guide. Primary school is the place where a child spends considerable amount of time being away from parents. The parents send their wards to school in the direct care of teachers, and therefore, a teacher is expected to take care of the child more than the parents do. This requires great sense of responsibility towards the child, the institution and the society as well.

Literature Review

A report entitled 'Inside Primary Schools:A Study of Teaching and Learning in Rural India' (Suman Bhattacharjea 2011) states that learning outcomes depend fundamentally on what happens inside the classroom, and major policy documents such as the National Curriculum Framework (2005) and the National Curriculum Framework for Teacher education (2009) emphasize this fact. It is also mentioned in a report entitled 'Teaching English as A second language' by Centre for Learning Resources that in India, the medium of instruction in the vast majority of government rural and urban schools is the regional language. English is now introduced as a second language in Class 1 in most of these schools. However, even after many years of its compulsory study, vast numbers of students completing high school are unable to speak, read or write simple English. The principal cause for the inadequate command of English

of high school leavers is that their teachers themselves have a very limited knowledge of English. Consequently, little English is spoken or transacted in the classroom. (Web. March 2013)

On teacher absenteeism and lack of motivation, Krishna Narayan and Jos Mooij (2010) find that the high level of unauthorized teacher absenteeism, several scholars have emphasised the lack of motivation on the part of the teachers. This has been ascribed to overcrowded classrooms, poor infrastructural facilities, unfilled vacancies, burden of non-academic tasks, lack of adequate training to deal with multi-lingual and multi-ability classes, declining social status of the teaching profession and increasing social class differences between teachers and the clientele of government schools.

The web portal of Serv Shiksha Abhiyaan also highlights the present status of English in Uttar Pradesh primary schools and measures taken for improvement. It also states the problems related to teacher absenteeism and lack of motivation.

Ashok Ganguly, Former Chairman of the Central Board of Secondary Education, said that only 2-2.5% teachers (primary and secondary) across the state can teach or communicate in English. According to him, the state is already grappling with an acute shortage of teachers, leading to a situation where a science teacher is teaching Hindi and a mathematics teacher is taking social science classes, said Ganguly (TOI) It is important at this stage to try and understand the way in which English is being taught in government schools across the country. Teacher development in the form of pre service and in-service teacher training programme is an important input to enable teachers to transact curriculum through a student centred, participatory approach to ensure quality elementary education (Web. March 2013).

The Social Scenario

The high expectations of the parents and the government put the teacher under great pressure of work. They are accountable for their duties and responsibilities but no step is taken to review the conditions under which these teachers are working. They not only teach to their students but train the parents as well. They counsel the parents to regularly to send their wards to schools.

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 15:12 December 2015

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Observations

A close and discerning look at the working conditions of primary English teachers in U.P. Board schools brings home some pieces of stark reality:

- At the primary level, teachers are expected to teach all subjects, i.e. English, Hindi, and Mathematics. No specialization is either expected or provided. A graduate who qualifies 'Teacher Eligibility Test' is appointed as a primary teacher.
- These qualified teachers are trained at DIET offices.
- They are assigned multiple jobs as different in nature as distributing mid-day meal to coordinating with the gram-pradhan (village head) to inform if the child remains absent for a number of days or for other problems.
- They run short of staff as teachers are appointed on the basis of number of students admitted in the school.
- These schools are short of infrastructure which put the teacher to conduct multiple levels of classes in one room, i.e. I, II and III std. students are clubbed in one room and IV and V Std. students in another room.
- They are deprived of even the basic amenities, i.e. wash rooms etc. required for their stay in school during duty hours
- In the absence of adequate staff these wash rooms are not cleaned and have to be locked, thus depriving them of the basic facilities of life.
- A lot of paper work is assigned to the teachers which they have to complete on daily basis.
- The teachers are posted in schools in far off or rural areas which are not properly connected with the public transport and posing trouble for them to reach their workplace. This is one of the factors which may be responsible for their long absenteeism.
- Their trainers are from among themselves and do not possess specialized training required for being a teachers' trainer.

These observations have been consolidated on the basis of personal interviews with teachers, visits to schools, DIET office, BSA office and meeting with children studying in these schools and parents.

It is an observation that the older 12th pass generation had better English proficiency than the 12th pass students of today. The standard of English teaching/learning has declined considerably over the years. It is only a recent late decision to start the teaching of English from Class 1 and may have effective results after a few years. But presently, with the current lot, the condition is grim. There may be various factors responsible for this serious condition of students', and teachers' long absenteeism and irresponsible attitude may be one of them. But the conditions in which the teachers are teaching in these schools are always neglected. For effective teaching/working, it must be taken care of that they be provided certain basic facilities required for survival. This leads to an ineffective teaching-learning environment in these schools.

Findings

The decision to teach English either from Class I or from Class III is a welcome move but it seems that it has been implemented without inadequate preparation. This is an obvious reason that students of the previous generation who have studied English from class VI have better command over English than the lot which is studying English from Class III/I. It means that before implementing this decision in the classrooms, strenuous training was required for the teachers. In the present scenario, in spite of pre-service and in-service training to teachers, a great number of teachers lack command over English language, hence they fail to teach effectively. Teachers are teaching English using bilingual material as also bilingual method but they are unable to help their students develop proficiency in the language usage. Cramming of English words and knowing their meanings in Hindi does not prepare the student for using English for communication purpose.

Project English of British Council has been implemented in many states, but what stops such project to be initiated in Uttar Pradesh is to be looked into. Kerala is doing experiments in its schools. It has been seen that they are developing tasks and activities for their teachers and students. This has led the state to set examples for others. Such initiatives are required to be

taken seriously in a state much larger than Kerala not only in terms of its population but also in terms of producing employable graduates.

Teachers need to understand the objective of teaching English and they also need training to teach English for communication. Most of the state board schools have either the rural children or children from the under-privileged classes of society. This is the biggest reason for lack of exposure to these children. This results in their learning English faster. Not only English, it is obvious that they face problem even in use of Hindi which is their mother tongue. Basically, they require training in communication skills – verbal as well as written.

It was also found during the visits to schools that students elope from school on pretext of health issues, family functions and family occupation. Their irregularity is one of the problems which makes it difficult for the teachers to give them required drill and practice which is a prerequisite for language learning. Student absenteeism further results in teacher absenteeism. The habit of long absenteeism on the part of students as well as teachers is to be discouraged. Teachers need to spend more time with their students to motivate them. Schools must have audio-visual aids so that teachers can show jingles, poems, stories and movies etc. which will make the classroom more interesting and appealing and will be helpful to fetch the students to classes.

Deputation of teachers in other than teaching jobs, such as, election duties and duties in polio campaigns and other such state sponsored/run programs, must be stopped as this takes them away from their basic duty to educate the children. For being a dedicated teacher, one must have a particular mind frame with which he/she can think what could be done to improve the status of students. Teachers must be given privilege to initiate different activities in their classes. Children's enhanced proficiency may be the teachers' responsibility for which the teacher could be accountable, whereas the present conditions are so pathetic that the IV std. child does not know the name of his/her country or state in which he/she is living. To answer a question is a herculean task not only for the child but for the teacher as well in these schools, but the worst is that the child cannot even answer this question in Hindi, if you ask – 'Aap kis desh mein rehte hai?' (In which country do you live?). In most cases, the child answers the name of the city. We

cannot say that these children do not have aptitude for learning. What they know, they tell. It means knowing is important, and for this teachers are responsible to a certain extent. Nobody teaches them to operate a mobile phone to play games. These children are equally good at that in comparison to children studying in public schools. It means given an opportunity they would do equally good in language learning.

Conclusion

Government is spending lakhs of rupees on various schemes. The biggest of which is ‘Sarv Shiksha Abhiyaan’ or ‘Education to All’. It is an ambitious scheme and hopefully will have good results in the years to come, if not today. This is a scheme in which government has taken responsibility to educate children between 6-14 years. If crores can be spent on such ambitious projects, a few lakhs can also be spent on developing the infrastructure and appointing adequate staff required for running an institution so that survival becomes comfortable and teaching becomes enjoyable so that teachers and students feel motivated to rush to the schools. In today’s world of globalization, to achieve professional excellence, knowledge of English serves as a tool. To sustain in the world market, we would need to produce more number of employable youth with proficiency in English language. Unless, the facilitators at the primary level in Uttar Pradesh are equipped with academic excellence and teaching pedagogy, better and more employable graduates will remain a dream. So, serious and immediate attention is needed to raise the level of primary teachers’ proficiency in English language to prepare them for effective teaching and be recognized for their roles. If given adequate working environment and training, they will surely be able to produce good results and the society will see a revolutionary change.

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