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A Survey on the Annual Progress Report of English during 2008-2010 in the Degree Colleges of Nagaon Town, Assam

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Abstract

This study is conducted to interpret the Annual Progress Report of English in the Degree Colleges of Nagaon Town, Arts faculty during 2008-2010. The reason behind this study is to enquire the development of English in this town as well in Assam, and the motivation of its people towards the learning of English, when English gets the priority all over the world. Assam is comparatively a backward state of India in the field of education, where English is no doubt a difficult subject for many. This is an adequate reason for a critical study and minute observation for the sake of its development.

I tried to explore a small area of my native town to bring some desirable changes in the application of English, and collected the opinionnaire of the selected people to know what they think is needed for developing English in our place as well as in our country.

Introduction

English enjoys an immense popularity and world-wide distribution which has the legitimate claim of being the medium of International communication. A person who knows English is understood anywhere in the world. Today, rapid progress in transport and communication system Language in India www.languageinindia.com

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has been making the world a smaller place. Similarly, we need a common medium of communication to express our views on international platforms. A common language is a great commenting force and bond. There is no other language except English which can serve this purpose.

A Glance at the History of English Teaching in Assam

Assam is one of the states of north-east India. English was introduced in Assam under the East India Company's rule in 1826 according to the treaty of Yandabo. The American Baptist Mission Foreign Society sent a mission under Reverend Nathan Brown and Oliver Cutter to Assam to spread education, especially Christianity through English. The Christian Missionaries were the pioneer in the field of modern English education in Assam. However, formal English language teaching was started in Assam since 1858 in a slow pace (Devi, 1978). After the independence, the scenario of ELT in Assam has changed drastically. The syllabus design and material production were given more importance than the class-room practices. After the 1960s, the communicative approach to language teaching has been felt more vigorous than the any other approaches in the class-room practices (Richards & Rodger, 1985). It is also a content of the present syllabus of the schools but seems very forcefully carried out.

Language and Literature in the Context of Indian English

The development of Indian English is marked by Indian English literature. Language is essentially a skill. It is not a content subject. There are four fundamental skills of language. Those are listening, speaking, reading and writing. Of these, speaking and writing are active or productive skills, while listening and reading are passive or receptive skills. Similarly, listening and reading are oral skills. Reading and writing are written skills (Sarma & Mohapatra, 2009). Without these skills, literary development is impossible. Literature is an art of writing. It is a creative art, written by creative literary artists.

“What purpose does English literature serve in our teaching programme?” is the question frequently asked by the Indian people. We are not alone in raising objection to the inclusion of English literature in our curriculum. The protest is also heard from all the developing countries in the world that they need English language for economic development but what could they do with the literature. The answer is that they have to swallow a dose of English literature to learn the language better.

The University curriculum had changed but very little after Indian independence. It is considered that English literature is a window to the Western thought and culture. In the 1950s and 1960s, various forms of literature were prescribed for various under graduate classes. The study of English literature is strengthened as a result of satisfactory cultural orientation on the student. Such an orientation becomes easier through the reading of the English literature. English was the first language of many people then and the official language for many years. But soon regional

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languages like Assamese, Bengali, Marathi, Hindi, etc. became the first language in the states of India. Now, Hindi becomes the National language and English is regarded as L2, L3, as FL (Foreign Language) or as a library language in India (Kachru, 1983).

No Alternative to English

Though English has not been enriched with the higher standard in India, yet there cannot be any alternative other than to English in the fields of medical, engineering, technology, business, and so on (Sood, 1995). So, the importance of English cannot be neglected. On the contrary, it is seriously needed for various purposes:

1. Today, the world has become a smaller place. We have to come in contact with other countries for social, political and cultural affairs. So we must know English, otherwise we may not be able to communicate with the people of other countries of the world.
2. This is the age of science and technology. Only English can keep us stable in the torrent of scientific knowledge coming from the developed countries of the world. Therefore, to cut off ourselves from English means to get rid of the sources of knowledge.
3. The treasure of knowledge is stored in English. We cannot get that knowledge unless we know English.
4. Most of the good literature of the world is stored in English. We cannot get that knowledge unless we know English.
5. To translate the knowledge that is stored in English into our regional languages, we must know English. Only the English knowing person can do it better.
6. India is a multi-lingual country. Hindi as national language has failed to establish a balance among the different native languages of India. Today, English plays a significant role as a link language in India. It links the various states and without it communication among the people would be impossible.

The above discussion explores that India needs to develop English at higher proliferation. To meet the needs of the world, communication and technology has given much emphasis on English which becomes a must for us.

Objectives of the Study

The following objectives are formulated for the study to find out:

1. To what extend our students know English?
2. Whose achievement in English is better between boys and girls?
3. What percentage of marks is achieved in English by the students at degree level?
4. What percentage of students secured first class/first division (60%) marks in English?
5. How many students secured the second class/second division (40-45%) marks in English?
6. How many students got less than 30% marks or failed in English?
7. What is the motivation of people towards the learning English?

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8. How English is treated by the people of our society?

Research Design for the Proposed Study

The District Nagaon covers the central part of Assam which is famous for housing the people of all the community. Students from all these communities are equally facilitate to attend in all the Schools and Colleges of Nagaon Town. It has many established colleges. For the proposed study, the investigator has selected only Arts faculty of the four Degree colleges of Nagaon town:

1. Nowgong College.
2. Nagaon Girls' College.
3. A.D.P. College.
4. Khagarijan College.

For this proposed problem, a 'Proforma' for the collection of basic data was made which was used to collect information on educational status especially on the achievement of English of the degree appeared students. A set of questionnaire was prepared with 15 basic questions on different aspects of English and its importance. At the time of administrating a questionnaire, a set of opinionnaire was also used to make it more reliable which also contained 15 simple yes/no questions. The investigator has conducted an interview with various persons from the society (literate person, illiterate person, social workers and officials) to know the interest, attitude and desires of the people regarding the development of English education in our society. And finally, as an investigator I made an observation to all the records and collected data to make the study more reliable.

Findings

The study is confined to the arts faculties of Degree level only. No doubt, this study has represented a large number of mediocre students. In the degree level, it is seen that out of total number of students three fourth remain in the arts faculty and other one fourth in science and commerce faculties. So, the results and findings of this study may be considered the results and findings of the mediocre/average/large number of students:

1. The study shows that the standard of English even in the degree level is very poor. This backwardness in English is started from the Primary level onwards.
2. There is no significant difference between the boys and the girls in respect of achievement in English. Both boys and girls show almost equal standard in English.
3. The study reveals that the performance in English major courses by the girls' is slightly better than the boys.
4. The study reveals that more than 50% students, who appear in the English examination, get less than 40% marks every year.
5. The study shows that there are dropouts of students in English. However, the rate of dropout is not so high.

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6. The study indicates that some of the students of English get zero marks. Some students in English major-course appear in one or two paper(s) while in others remain absent.
7. The study reveals that a large number of students in English get less than 30% marks are considered fail. Thus a large number of students in English fail every year.
8. The study finds that about 20% of the students in English get grace marks to be passed. The grace marks may vary from 5 to 10.
9. The study indicates that some of the students show better results in English General Courses than the English Major Courses. They secure more than 60% marks.
10. The study shows that none of the students who appeared in English major/special courses during the period 2008-2010 at Nagaon Town got first class. It shows as a dismal picture of English especially in the major courses.
11. The study reveals that girl students' performance in English has been improving year after year. This improvement is seen not only in the English General courses but also in the English major courses.
12. The study reveals that the Basic English is not properly taught at the primary and the secondary level for which the student cannot show better result even in the degree level.
13. The study finds that there is a lack of skillful and efficient teacher for teaching English in the primary and the secondary level.
14. The study finds that the prevailing or existing educational system of our country itself is defective for English learning. There is a lack of conducive environment for English learning.
15. The study shows that the needful material facilities are also not available for English learning.

Information (Based on Opinionnaire, Questionnaire and Interview)

Additional information based on Opinionnaire, Questionnaire and Personal interviews can be summarized as follows:

1. More than 90% respondents of the Opinionnaire agreed that "English is a Universal language of International Communication".
2. 80% respondents are of the opinion that "English should not be considered a world language".
3. More than 60% respondents opined that if English is made a 'link language' in a multi-lingual country like India, it would be good for all.
4. 75% respondents are of the opinion that in the age of globalization, English should become a compulsory language for us.
5. Only 50% respondents agreed that students with the background of English medium, who appear in the degree major examinations in any discipline display better results than the students who studied through the medium of regional languages like Assamese, Bengali, Bodo, etc.
6. Majority believe that there are many reasons for the lack of English knowledge are due to the unsatisfied environment, lack of worthy English teachers, defective educational

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system, unawareness about the importance of English, dearth of needful materials for English and so on.

7. Majority believe that there are many reasons for the lack of English knowledge such as unsatisfied environment for application, lack of worthy English teachers, defective educational system, unawareness about the importance of English, dearth of needful materials and so on.
8. Majority believe that lack of communicative skills, lack of sufficient conversational environment etc. are also responsible for which students show poor result in English.
9. Cent percent respondents to opinionnaire stated that it is an established fact that the knowledge of science, technology, medicine, literature etc. are highly stored in English and in order to translate these English books into mother tongue or regional language, “experts” in English language must be produced. Vigorous training and other necessary facilities should be provided to increase the number of “English experts”.
10. Most of the respondents are agreed that the government of Assam does not want to injure the sentiment of people. Therefore, the Assam government is neither giving due priority to in English learning nor is it trying to regulate the growth of private English medium schools in Assam.
11. Most of the respondents have stated that some organizations like Asom Sahitya Sabha rightly want to raise the standard of Assamese language giving stress on the official use of it and at the same time, they wanted to raise the standard of English through private English medium schools. Therefore, they remain silent on the growth of private English medium schools.
12. Cent percent respondents to opinionnaire admitted that proper guidance and counseling are essential for learning English.

Conclusion

It is apparent from the findings mentioned above that the achievement in English of the degree level students of Assam in general and Nagaon Town in particular is very slow and in poor condition. They neither able to become a proficient language speaker of English nor can write it correctly. There are very few pupils who have properly understood the prescribed text for them if not explained by the teacher. So, students are highly dependent on others to learn it. In our place, especially in the regional medium schools, it is seen that emphasis is always given to the learning from grammar to the construction level but it is not seen that emphasis is given on the application of it in practical situation. Therefore standard of English they cannot maintain and the negligence of the society they suffer.

In Assam, especially in the Nagaon district, people are highly ambitious to learn English, want to speak English, but they are unable to perform while trying to do it. From the responses of the opinionnaire, it is found that the disqualification behind this lack is mainly due to the poor quality of primary education and the lack of skillful learning. If basic education is not improved, the higher education will not proliferate. At the higher level it is not possible to impart basic knowledge of English.

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In the age of Globalization, the English pursues the highest position in the world. So, keeping aside all the obstacles and interferences that are arisen from the native languages, English should be given higher importance for its development in our country. Hence, it needs some suggestions for further improvement.

Suggestions

1. Many parents both literate and illiterate are unaware about the demand and international importance of English. They should be made aware of the importance of English through instruction, guidance, meeting, conference, posters and so on.
2. English words on domestic things and utensils can be used. And conversation in simple English should be practiced if possible.
3. Necessary cares should be taken to learn English books and other materials. Students should be encouraged to participate in meetings, seminars, debating etc. in English.
4. Primary school stage is the foundation of education. Learning English should be started from this stage, and grammar composition etc. in the simple form should be taught by the skilled/trained teachers. Teachers should also be a good conversant in English.
5. Audio-visual aids especially models, pictures, metronome etc. can be used to teach the children of primary stage.
6. Secondary school stage is the best and important stage of language learning. So grammar, composition, comprehension, phrases and idioms etc. in higher form should be taught by special trained teachers. Audio-visual aids may also be used in this stage.
7. At the college level, especially in the graduate level writing answers in English should be made compulsory. In Assam, students are allowed to write answers in the examinations either in Assamese or in English in the subjects other than the English. As a result, most of the students write their answers in Assamese instead of English. It is also seen that students who have passed from the Assamese/any other regional language medium scares to go for further study, because higher studies or advance studies are generally confined in English. So, English should be developed from the basic level to remove the scare for it.
8. Growing private schools of English medium may be encouraged but should be regulated by the government especially in the case of appointment of the teachers, salary of teachers, collection of tuition fees from the students, provision of co-curricular activities and so on.
9. Recognition of English should be given by the government (state/central).
10. Rewards, prizes and scholarships may be granted to the students, who show brilliant results in English.
11. Both boys and girls should receive equal status from the parents. There should not be any discrimination in taking care, in spending money and in supplying learning materials.
12. Residential facilities for girls should be provided from the secondary school onwards.

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From the above discussion, we may wrap up the study by saying that English being the reservoir of all scientific, commercial, industrial and cultural ideas, we should learn it to gather the important knowledge existed in the depth of it. Many colleges and universities have taken the bold steps to make it compulsory. Students are also showing interest in it. They not only change their motive but also want to develop the culture of western civilization in their life. This affects our society, our culture, our ego for the nationality and etc. to some extent. But, the mode of learning through English has been so deep-rooted that to discard it at this stage will amount to national suicide. So, it is necessary to adopt effective methods of teaching for the sake of country's development. Pupil should acquire English only to beat the world but they should not forget the responsibility for their country and culture. The learning of English language is not a lifeless or monotonous process. Different training institutions should be established for the training of English teachers to teach in different stages of schools from primary onwards. Government as well as Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) should take initiatives in this respect.

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