Challenges of Teaching English at Elementary Level with Reference to Aizawl City

Dr. Lalsangpuii, M.A. (English), B.Ed., Ph.D.
Assistant Professor
ICFAI University, Mizoram
lalsangpuii.fanai0@gmail.com
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Abstract

This paper attempts to bring issues related to the problems of teaching English at elementary schools in Mizoram. The researcher has confined the study within the Aizawl city. Aizawl is the capital of Mizoram and the people living n Mizoram are known as Mizo and the language use by them is also known as Mizo. As Mizo language is a tonal language and the state itself is monolingual, the learner faces a lot of problem in learning the language. They lack exposure which could enhance their learning environment. Most of the schools do not have the facilities of language labs and visual aids which further hinder the learning problem. Most of the teachers lack proficiency and competency in teaching the language as they are not aware of the four skills of language and the phonetics. The classroom environment itself does not help the students to communicate in English freely and confidently. There is a very less interaction between the teacher and the students and also among the students themselves. The classroom environment needs a thorough investigation which could help the learners learn the language with motivation and encouragement.

Introduction

The learning of language is an important programme in the life of man. Whatever language we learn we should be able to communicate well in that language. One who communicates well is said to have learned the language well.

Teaching of English at the primary level is a worldwide phenomenon. In today's time, the teaching of English and its introduction have received great attention. Many states in India have introduced or want to introduce English as a subject in primary classes, often from class I. English language and the teaching of it occupy a very important place today throughout the world. As it is a global language, the teaching and learning of English is a must everywhere. English is a one of the dominant languages of wider communication (LWC) in the world.

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English was only one of a number of European languages that reached the shores of India along with the commercial activities of western nation. The most important of these were English, French, Portuguese and Dutch. The English today is more widely used than ever before. More and more people are using it in business, industry, policies, education and the various professions. The more widely English is used, the greater is the need to teach it as a foreign language; and the greater the need to teach it, the greater is the need to train teachers to teach it. While teaching English as means of communication, we should also understand that the essence of communication is meaningful interaction between participants, be it in the context of speaking, listening, reading or writing. Teaching English should be seen as an opportunity to explore and understand, to question and argue, to learn and to retain something new. Today, English has been a dominating language, the language of power, utility and international communication. Not only has the number of English- speakers doubled in the past three decades, English has invariably been the first choice for second learners in many countries.

The role of English in administration, banking, commerce and industry, and higher education leads to increasing demand for English education. Besides, English is associated with social prestige and power. Moreover, being a world language, English is a window on the world for all professionals.

Input- rich communicational environments are needed for language learning since languages are learnt by understanding and communicating messages, through listening or reading for meaning. A comprehensible input-rich curriculum lays the foundation for spontaneous language growth, and different language skills develop simultaneously in communicative socio-cultural contexts rather than in any linear order as reflected in the traditional LSRW approaches

Statement of the Problem

There are various problems in the teaching and learning of English as a second language in Mizoram. The English Language Teaching (ELT) in Mizoram is in a state of flux and confusion. There is a tremendous increase in the desire and demand for learning English and corresponding increase in the number of English medium schools. At present, sending children to a good English medium school is a status symbol in Mizo society. Knowing English or speaking correct English has become synonymous with being educated. If one speaks correct English, he is highly esteemed and valued by the people in a society. Even though English is taught right from elementary stage up to university level, the communicative ability or the proficiency level is still very poor.

1. Mizoram is a homogeneous, unilingual society. So, if one can speak Mizo language, there is no problem in communication. And no other language like Hindi or English is needed to communicate with each other. In fact, spoken English does not take place

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within the State, which hindered the progress of the learners learning English language.

2. English learners are very much in awe and are very afraid of making mistakes which poses as threat to learning the language.

3. Another problem is the inappropriate method of teaching. Most of the teachers are ignorant of the objectives of language teaching; they teach the prescribed books, read out the content of textbooks and translate them in Mizo language. Their main task is to prepare notes and dictate them to the students.
    As most of the teaching methods is lecturing or dictating notes in the classroom at elementary level, the learners become passive and do not contribute much or take active part in the classroom. This kind of teaching is one sided performance and becomes a monologue. Lecturing is a good method of teaching but certainly does not help much in teaching a language. Interaction between teachers and students, students and students does not take place at all inside or outside the class.

4. Another problem would be lack of adequate teaching on the part of the teachers to handle classes effectively. Although lots of researches have been done on methods, approaches and techniques for teaching English in our country and abroad, the teachers in Mizoram are largely not familiar with them. Their knowledge of their researches on method approaches or techniques cannot be use practically.

5. The difference between the two languages (English and Mizo) which are entirely different from one another with regards to syntax, phonology, lexicon, morphology etc. poses a great problem for the learners. The difference between the two languages regarding structure often creates a learning problem for the learners.

6. The English phonology is another factor which creates a problem for the learners. The English alphabet does not always indicate the real sound of the letter. The real sound can be learnt from the teacher and the teacher must acquaint himself with the phonology. So, there's comes a situation where the students keep on mispronouncing the words and hinders his fluency in the language.

7. Another problem face by the students is the English spelling system. The English spelling and the Mizo spelling differ a lot in the sense that the Mizo spellings are pronounced as they are spelt. But the English spelling, as mentioned earlier, does not always produce the sound of the letters. This confuses the learners especially on the silent letters as in psychology, receipt, debt etc.

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8. Mizo language is a tonal language where variations in tone and intonation pattern can change the meaning of words and utterances. In most Indian languages tone is an indicator of mood and change of tone rarely alters the meaning of a word or utterances. In Mizo, however, there are four distinct tones, namely, rising, falling, mid-low and high. There is hardly any relation between the mood and the tone. In English one may easy "waist" in different tones, but the meaning still remains the same. But in Mizo, the change of tone changes the meaning to, "waist", "road" and "bald". So, tonal languages employ variations in pitch to distinguish the meaning of otherwise identical words. And, it becomes especially difficult for average learners to acquire a good command in English. The Mizo language has rather limited vocabulary

9. Another factor which hinders the learner's ability to learn English is the environment at home. It's important that the parents are educated so that they could speak with their children in English. But the home environment does not permit the child to learn the language and become a fluent speaker.

Therefore, in order to solve the teaching- learning problems in Mizoram, some sort of change or modification is needed. A careful and critical study of the learners' social background, environment, social value, practice, status, communities and teaching-learning situation also may be of great help in solving the teaching- learning problem in Mizoram.

Objectives
1. To observe whether the students build familiarity with the language primarily through spoken input in meaningful situations (teacher talk, listening to recorded material etc.)
2. To observe whether the students listen, speak, read and write with proper understanding
3. To identify whether the students can speak English correctly and audibly. It means producing sounds with the proper stress and intonation
4. To examine whether the students write English correctly and meaningfully
5. To observe whether the schools have facilities of language labs, audio visuals etc.
6. To examine if the English teachers are well acquainted with the four skills of language
7. To test the proficiency and competency of the teachers
8. To observe if the students are given freedom to express themselves freely in English inside the classroom

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9. To observe whether the students develop interest in English
10. To observe whether the students express themselves creatively and imaginatively
11. To observe whether the students are enthusiastic and reflective readers through contact with challenging and text knowledge

Scope of the Study

The scope of the study is confined to elementary schools (class v – viii) within Aizawl city. According to *Annual Publication of 2016- 2017 (list of schools with number of teachers and enrolment of students) prepared by Statistical Cell Directorate of School education,* the number of middle schools in Aizawl District is 358 schools. The researcher visited 80 schools to observe the teaching styles and the learning ability of the students particularly in English.

Research Methodology

In order to achieve the objective of the study "Survey Method" has been adopted. The study includes the gathering of data regarding the identification of the problems faced both by the teachers and students in teaching and learning of English at the elementary level. It includes the nature of the study and the methods of investigation to be employed. An Interview Schedule was developed which was used by the investigator. Interview of the teachers and students, and observation of the classroom-teaching were adopted in collecting the data. 80 recognized private English Medium schools within Aizawl city were served as sample for the study. Prior to commencement of the investigation, permission was sought from the Principals of all the schools visited to observe the classroom and also to interview the teachers to enable to freely give information and answers to the questions put up b the researcher.

Several books on Teaching of English, Second Language Pedagogy, Aspects of Language Teaching etc. were studied and observed for better outcome of language teaching. The researcher observed classroom setting and interacted with the students. After which many information were collected through interview of both the teachers and students. The teachers answered and completed the questionnaire and students were interviewed and observed in the class to test their level of understanding and their ability to communicate in English.

Data Analysis

There are 358 private schools in Aizawl district. The researcher visited 80 recognized private unaided schools within Aizawl city. The results from the analysis of data out of the 80 schools are as follows:

1. **Details of Teachers' Qualification out of 80 schools**

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Qualification	No. of Teachers
Class – XII	4
B.A	75
Bed	10
M.A	45
Med	8
M.Phil	2

2. Teaching Experience of Teachers in years

Class	Less than 1	6-10	11-15	15 and above
V	60	30	15	6
VI	70	40	18	13
VII	76	34	12	8
VIII	80	41	13	10

3. Trained and Untrained Teachers

Class	Trained Teachers	Untrained Teachers
V	20	85
VI	14	81
VII	15	85
VIII	12	86

4. Teaching Learning Activities

Class	No. of commercial teaching aids		No. of teacher made teaching aids		
	1-3	4-6	1-3	4-6	5 and above
V	1	1	1	-	-

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VI	-	-	-	-	-
VII	-	-	-	-	-
VIII	-	-	-	-	-

5. Used of Textbooks

Class	Whole Content	Selected
V	62	43
VI	60	54
VII	55	50
VIII	56	52

6. Cognitive Development

Activities for Listening Skill in Class V

Activities	Out of 80 Schools
Sound Discrimination	20
Visual Discrimination	15
Audio- Visual Discrimination	11

7. Activities for Listening Skill in Class VI

Activities	Out of 80 Schools
Sound Discrimination	13
Visual Discrimination	11
Audio- Visual Discrimination	8

8. Activities for Listening Skill in Class VII

Activities	Out of 80 Schools

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Sound Discrimination	11
Visual Discrimination	9
Audio- Visual Discrimination	6

9. Activities for Listening Skill in Class VIII

Activities	Out of 80 Schools
Sound Discrimination	10
Visual Discrimination	12
Audio- Visual Discrimination	10

10. Activities for Speaking Skills in Class V

Activities	Out of 80 Schools
Free Conversation	20
Story Telling	16
Riddle	10
Group Discussion	12

11. Activities for Speaking Skills in Class VI

Activities	Out of 80 Schools
Free Conversation	21
Story Telling	17
Riddle	14
Group Discussion	13

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12. Activities for Speaking Skills in Class VII

Activities	Out of 80 Schools
Free Conversation	19
Story Telling	20
Riddle	17
Group Discussion	18

13. Activities for Speaking Skills in Class VIII

Activities	Out of 80 Schools
Free Conversation	24
Story Telling	23
Riddle	24
Group Discussion	27

14. Activities for Listening Skills in Class V

Activities	Out of 80 Schools
Reciting poems	30
Reading the text out loud	40
Summarization of the text	20
Comprehension	22

15. Activities for Reading Skills in Class VI

Activities	Out of 80 Schools
Reciting poems	42

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Reading the text out loud	45
Summarization of the text	30
Comprehension	25

16. Activities for Reading Skills in Class VII

Activities	Out of 80 Schools
Reciting poems	34
Reading the text out loud	41
Summarization of the text	35
Comprehension	19

17. Activities for Reading Skills in Class VIII

Activities	Out of 80 Schools
Reciting poems	35
Reading the text out loud	42
Summarization of the text	29
Comprehension	20

18. Activities for Writing Skills in Class V

Activities	Out of 80 Schools
Review a story/ movie	4
Creative Writing	38

19. Activities for Writing Skills in Class VI

Activities	Out of 80 Schools

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Review a story/ movie	6
Creative Writing	40

20. Activities for Writing Skills in Class VI

Activities	Out of 80 Schools
Review a story/ movie	5
Creative Writing	45

21. Activities for Writing Skills in Class VII

Activities	Out of 80 Schools
Review a story/ movie	9
Creative Writing	48

22. Teachers' Awareness on LSRW Skills

Class	Out of 80 Schools
V	20
VI	15
VII	17
VIII	19

Major Findings
1. Most English teachers are not trained and thus do not have the proficiency and competency of teaching the four skills
2. Most teachers are not aware of the four language skills – Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing.
3. Most teachers are not aware of phonetics and thus cannot transfer the knowledge of pronouncing the words correctly.
4. There is very less interaction between the teacher and the students and thus remains a one sided affair
5. Most teachers are preoccupied with the text alone and on finishing the syllabus within the allotted time

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6. Learners are not interested in learning the language rather they are more engaged in learning the notes and getting good marks alone.
7. Most learners are not able to comprehend the text taught in the classroom.
8. The classroom environment does not permit the learners to express themselves in English freely.
9. Even though the learners are from Class V – VIII, they still lack the confidence to express themselves in English.
10. Lack of exposure in the use of English in Mizo society is another problem faced by the Mizo young learners.
11. Many English films and serials are translated in Mizo which hinders the learning of English by the young Mizo learners
12. Most students could speak or write in English fluently
13. The teaching method adopted by the learners do not have much scope in the language development of the learners
14. Many parents are not able to speak or write English and thus could not help their children in acquiring a better English learning environment at home.

Suggestions for Improving Teaching English at the Elementary Level
    In light of data analysis and major findings carried out by the researcher, the following suggestions have been recommended to improve the challenges of teaching English at elementary level:

1. Young learners should be encouraged to recite poems and not memorize them
2. Schools should provide better facilities for learning English language. They need to have a language lab where teachers and students alike can utilize it for learning the target language
3. Teachers should create an environment where there is maximum interaction between the teacher and the students and also between the students and their peers
4. Learners should be allotted a period for watching movies once or twice a month. They should be asked to narrate the story, summarize or review the movie in their own words and expressions.
5. Learners should be allowed to interpret the text in their own understanding. They should not be judged or scolded if they do not wrong.
6. Learners should communicate in maximum English both in the classroom and campus alike.
7. Teachers should create interest in the students to taste poems; they should be given task of writing their own poems.
8. Teachers should find ways of helping the learners to enjoy their language activities and of building their confidence.

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9. The English teacher needs to have the wide ranging enthusiasm and imagination
10. Groups Discussion must be organized once or twice a month to help the learners build their vocabularies and their communication skills
11. The students should practice reading the texts aloud
12. English must be used as a medium of expressions and instructions both in the classroom and campus alike
13. Teachers should motivate the learners to think in English
14. Students should be encouraged to speak in English confidently. They should not be corrected on the spot even if they make grammatical errors.

Conclusion

English language teaching at elementary level needs to be examined thoroughly. The teachers need to keep in mind the students' capability and their willingness to learn the language. They need to provide an atmosphere where learners are not distracted and scared in learning the language. It depends on the teacher to make his class interesting and fun so that the learners are *motivated and inspired to learn the target language. The teachers' competency and proficiency* play a very crucial role in the teaching of English language at the elementary level.

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