

TEACHING ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE IN WEST BENGAL

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Abstract

Before independence English was the language of the rulers and it enjoyed a very important and prestigious place in the life of the Indians. During this period it became the official language and the court language. English opened the doors of employment. The knowledge of English was must to climb the social ladder. After independence the demand for the knowledge of English is increasing day by day. English serves the work of a link language. English with its rich literature may give us pleasure and relive us from tension. So English is a very useful language. We need to know English for our own sake. Therefore English is given the status of Second Language in India. Use of English words in our daily conversation shows the growing importance of English language. But teaching and learning English as a second language is not an easy task. This paper aims to investigate into some of the relevant issues of teaching English as a second language in West Bengal.

Key words: English, Teaching, Learning, Second Language

INTRODUCTION

With the advent of the British, the English language came to India in the 17th century. The British established the East India Company and their main focus was on trade. They knew very well that English knowing Indians would help them in commercial activities. So the British people took initiative in spreading education in India even though it was for their own need. English opened the doors of employment and the person who did not know English in that time was not considered educated in the true sense of the term. After independence there was rethinking on the position of English in India. Many Indians out of their scornful attitude demanded that English should be banished from their life. They have the notion that the retention of English would dampen their National spirit and perpetuate their slave mentality. It would stand in the way of the development of their own regional languages and their development in other subjects as the study of English would demand much of the time and energy of the Indian students. However most of the eminent educationists were in favour of retaining English as its total abolition would tell upon the standard of our education. In fact still now the demand for the knowledge of English is increasing day by day in India. English serves the work of a link language and international language. English is must for higher studies in India. English with its rich literature may give us pleasure and relief from tension. All these reasons stated above make English a very useful language in India. We need to know English for our own sake. Therefore English is given the status of the second language in India.

FIRST LANGUAGE AND SECOND LANGUAGE

Language is a structured system of communication. Through Language people can express their feelings, ideas, wishes and so on. Actually it is a tool of knowledge through which one can acquire and preserve the worldly knowledge. Language is also the indicators of cultural identity of a community. Each language has its own culture and customs.

'Language is the medium through which the child acquires the cultural, moral, religious and other values of society'

(Klein)

First Language (L1) which is also called native language or mother tongue, is the language which a person learns from his/her birth. So one can say first language is the basis for sociolinguistic identity. In West Bengal majority of the pupils take up Bengali as First Language because they belong to that specific linguistic family.

Second Language (L2) is a language which is not the mother tongue, but which is used by the person in relation to administration, culture, social or national interest. In this context the term second can refer to any language

which is learnt subsequent to the First Language. The second language is introduced compulsorily either at the end of primary stage or in the beginning of the lower secondary stage after the attainment of sufficient proficiency in the first Language. In India, more specifically in West Bengal, English has been given the status of Second Language.

POSITION OF ENGLISH IN WEST BENGAL

Kothari Commission (1964-66) has recommended treating English as an important subject in school. The proposal of three language formula was first given by Kothari Commission and was accepted by the Government of India in 1968 (NPE-1968). According to the formula children of Hindi speaking states are to be taught three languages namely Hindi (L₁), English (L₂) and one of the local languages (L₃). The children of non Hindi speaking states are to be taught the local language (L₁), English (L₂) and Hindi (L₃). The policy makers of education in West Bengal give the importance to English as a school subject. In order to prepare children for high school the decided that English should be taught right from the primary stage. In West Bengal during 1950 to 1960, English was abolished completely from the primary stage. In 1964 it was again reintroduced from class III and it was taught as a compulsory second language from class III up to 1983. In 1984 the state government again decided to eliminate English from the primary stage and introduced it from class VI. This decision gave rise to a widespread movement in West Bengal. This movement simply demanded to reintroduce English at the primary stage. In the circumstance in 1992 the Ashok Mitra Commission was set up to discuss over the problem. It recommended that the teaching of English in government and government aided institution may commence from class VI but the state government simply denied this recommendation. After 14 years west Bengal government realized the mistake and set up a one man committee named Pabitra Sarkar Committee to decide the class at which English should be introduced. As per its recommendation from 1999 English was introduced from class II. But in 2003 the Mukhopadhyay Committee again recommended to introduce English from class V. In 2004 realizing the ever increasing demand of English the West Bengal government reintroduced English from class I in all schools of West Bengal. And the good news is that the present government has decided to set up English medium primary schools to make an initiative to change the existing scenario of English education in West Bengal. Now, in West Bengal, the teaching of English as a second language continuous up to class XII.

TEACHING ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE

• Aims of Teaching English:

In the present scenario English has a very important role in the communicative sphere. The teaching of English is highly desirable for the English teacher. In order to teach English correctly and properly the teachers should fix up aims and objectives before starting his teaching. The aims of teaching English in India in general and in West Bengal in Particular may be divided into three categories-

- ❖ Linguistic aim
- ❖ Literary aim and
- ❖ Cultural aim

Linguistic aim:

The linguistic aim is of chief concern throughout the secondary school level. Through this aim the teacher will help the students to acquire a practical command over the language both in its spoken and written form. The linguistic aim in the schools may be defined as the aim of enabling the students is to

- ✓ understand English when it is spoken
- ✓ speak English
- ✓ understand English when it is written
- ✓ writing English

The understanding of English whether spoken or written is easier to the students than the speaking or writing of it. It is for the fact that in the first case only if passive knowledge is needed whereas in the second case an active knowledge of the language is required. So the linguistic aim of teaching English is to develop the following four skills:

- ✓ listening
- ✓ speaking
- ✓ reading and
- ✓ writing

Literary aim:

the literary aim of teaching English is to give the students a taste for reading English and some appreciation of the beauty of expression. In the beginning the literary aim predominates the field of teaching English but from the middle stage some attempts may be made to cultivate taste for reading English literature. At the higher

stage the teacher may precede a step to prepare a background in the mind of the students for further appreciation of literature.

Cultural aim:

the cultural aim of teaching English is to enable the students to appreciate and understand the cultural values of the life of the people whose language and literature they are studying. This is not practiced in West Bengal much today. English is mainly taught for its practical use.

So the main aim of teaching English in West Bengal is confined in its linguistic value although it is obvious that literally a m cannot be fully denied

OBJECTIVES OF TEACHING ENGLISH

Before independence the objectives of teaching English were 'revival and improvement of literature' and the 'promotion of the knowledge of sciences.' (Lord Macaulay) At present the general objective of teaching English in India, more specifically in West Bengal is to develop an all round communicative competence with a mastery over the four language skills- listening, speaking, reading and writing.

Objectives of Teaching English as a Second Language in Elementary Level in West Bengal

The objectives of teaching English at the Elementary level in West Bengal are:

- ✓ to enable learners to understand simple situational English when spoken to
- ✓ to enable learn to speak words. Phrases, sentences etc for communication and interaction in an alien situation
- ✓ to enable learners to read letters, simple words, phrases and sentences in contexts and transfer information from that to other forms.
- ✓ to enable learners to write plain and simple letters, words, phrases and sentences to communicate ideas and thoughts etc.
- ✓ to enable learners to understand the simple word-order and functions of the target language, i.e. English.

Objectives of Teaching English as a Second Language at Secondary Level in West Bengal

The West Bengal Board of Secondary Education has specified the following objectives of teaching English:

- ✓ First objective is to enable the students to attend the working knowledge of English from utilitarian point of view
- ✓ Second objective is to develop the capacity of learners to express themselves in English freely, correctly and with proper pronunciation in takes or conversation on ordinary topics.
- ✓ Third objective is to enable learners to express their ideas of non-technical nature in simple correct English.
- ✓ Fourth objective is to generate in the students a love for the English language and a desire to cultivate it at leisure for pleasure and profit.
- ✓ Fifth objective is to teach English Language as an auxiliary language to communicate with other parts of India and outside.
- ✓ Sixth objective is to enable learners to acquire knowledge of fundamental concepts of English grammar.

PROBLEMS OF TEACHING ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE IN WEST BENGAL

There are many problems of teaching English as a Second Language in West Bengal. They are:

- The schools of West Bengal do not give much importance to English as it is taught as a second language. The teachers are also not competent enough to teach English properly.
- In most of the schools of West Bengal only reading and writing skills get due importance but the other two important skills - listening and speaking skills are neglected and the teaching learning situation is teacher centric and the students are only the passive listeners.
- Most of the teachers are not equipped with the latest technology and they do not have mastery over the target language, i.e. English.
- During the teaching of English as a second language the teachers in most of the times overlook the errors made by the students.
- Most of the schools in India do not have the facilities and proficient teachers to fulfill the demand.
- In the classroom students have minimum score for exposure to English language.
- Most of the teachers in the schools do not have adequate knowledge of teaching methodologies of teaching English.

- Most of the schools do not use any modern teaching aids like audio visual aids and projector, only the traditional aids such as blackboard and white chalk are used.

Besides these old method of teaching English, low standard of Text books, condition of classes, traditional examination system, lack of resources, lack of proper teacher education, indifference of the teachers have badly affected the teaching of English as a second language in West Bengal.

CONCLUSION

Form the above discussion it is clear that there is much to be done to improve the standard of teaching English as a second language in West Bengal. Experienced and well qualified teachers should be appointed to fulfill the learning needs of the students. There should be enough scope for the exposure to the language both inside and outside of the classroom. Teaching-learning atmosphere should be fearless and student friendly so that the students can freely and actively participate in the teaching learning process. Extra attention must be given for the development of listening and speaking skills of the students. The theory of Constructivism should be implemented in the classroom do develop the power of imagination and creativity among the students. Lastly, the teachers are needed to equip themselves with the latest teaching learning materials and they should have enough knowledge about the use of proper English methodology in the classroom.

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