
ENGLISH FROM CLASSES TO MASSES: A 21st CENTURY PROSPECTIVE

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Abstract: Is English language learning essential for the making of a healthy society? This question is of course debatable. When we look at to the Non-English but developed countries like China, Japan and a few others, the role of English language in enabling the intellectual human resource to escalate and scale the height for development is apparently insignificant. On the contrary it has been evidenced that the integration of English language with other languages give birth to a global-society, by means of cultural, linguistic, literary, scientific, technological exchange. Despite the linguistic diversity, people of the world are tied as a unit due to the language, 'English'. This language acts as a lingua-franca in a multilingual country like India. English language has created a niche in the world which binds all the people in one string. Indeed, this paper will chat out this interesting journey of English from corporate to vendor and elite to ordinary.

Keywords: multilingual, global-society, escalate, lingua-franca, privileged.

Introduction: A lot of energy has been utilized by a number of progressive people to bring English from classes to masses. This initiative of course transforms teaching-learning English beyond colonial hegemony. Indeed, a campaign has started to bring English to the last child of the street. Lots of English medium schools are escalating in India these days. But the teaching- learning English language has not witnessed a substantial improvement. The National Knowledge Commission (NKC 2007) of India rightly says, "There is an irony in the situation. English has been part of our education system for more than a century. Yet English is beyond the reach of most of our young people, which make for highly unequal access. Indeed, even now, more than one percent of our people use it as a second language, let alone a first language But NKC believes that the time has come for us to teach our people, ordinary people, English as a language in schools. Early action in this sphere would help us build an inclusive society and transform India into a knowledge society." (P.47)

A large section of India's population lives in rural areas. Many of the children are still underprivileged of getting formal education in schools and colleges. In Odisha too, the similar situation prevails. There are districts like Koraput, Kalahandi, Malkanagiri, Nabarangapur, Sambalpur, Balangiri, mayurbhanja, Sundargarh, in Odisha which are thickly populated with tribal population. Their socio-economic condition is not encouraging. The literacy rate is also a concerning feature. 40% tribal population of Odisha is literate which 30% is less than the overall literacy rate of Odisha. Besides the tribes, the total percentage of rural population is very high compared to the urban population. 2011 census report says that out of 41974218, 34970562 people live in rural areas where as only 7003656 people live in urban areas of Odisha. The rural children get less scope for education than the children of urban areas. Lack of

physical infrastructure, human resource, poor economic condition and awareness for education are probably the reasons that make our children deprived of getting formal education in schools.

Further, teaching English to the rural children is a big challenge. More than 75% villages are there in Odisha. So penetrating into the villages with a mission "English for all" is the call of the day. But how to venture into the expedition is a formidable task. There are nearly 60,000 preprimary and upper primary schools and 10,000 high schools and 3000 colleges in Odisha. Out of which 5% pre-primary and upper primary schools and 2 % high schools are English medium schools. All most all the schools in rural areas have regional language as their medium of instruction. English is used as the second language and very often the third language. In all the Odia medium schools, English is introduced in class IV in their syllabus. English is taught as a subject not as a language. On the contrary, the teachers teach English in these schools are the products of the Odia medium schools and therefore, possess low proficiency in teaching English.

So to undertake the task of teaching English is a big challenge for our teachers. Even in colleges, more than 90% students are seen very weak in speaking and writing English primarily because English is their 2nd language, secondly, the weak foundation and poor learning in primary and secondary level. It is found that the students in colleges are unable to express in English. They express their inability to structure sentences while speaking and writing because of poor vocabulary, faulty pronunciation and spelling mistake.

They do not have requisite word stock. They do not even know the proper spelling, meaning of words, pronunciation, grammatical rules and usages of all such in appropriate places. Above all they do not show much interest in learning English. They treat

English as a subject. The teachers in colleges too teach English as a subject. The target of the students and teachers remain the same i.e. how to score marks in examination. Neither the teachers teach English as a language nor do the students learn it as a language. This practice will never help the teaching-learning English as a language. Therefore, addressing the real issues and needs can help both the students and the teachers in acquisition of English language learning and teaching to transport an exposition.

In this cutting edge education system English language plays a significant role having communication and educative value. Most of the good books are written and printed in English. The medium of instruction in higher education too is English. Thus the usefulness of English in all walks of life is very much witnessed in the fast changing world.

However, English is no more an alien language. It is very much used in our day today communication. There are many English words which are unconsciously used even by the illiterate people. Words like table, fan, bed sheet, phone, chair, shirt, pant, tailor, school, college and so on are the commonly used English words. Of course there are certain terms and concepts which are very difficult to explain in mother tongue. In spite of such a good stock of English words, our students and teachers face a lot of intricacy in communicating in English.

Factors obstruct English learning: Delving deep into the causes and possible solutions of such issues is the focal aspect of my study. The study reveals the fact that the students of rural Odisha are weak in English due to the following factors:

- Lack of adequate English medium instructions
- English is the third language for a large chunk of pupil of Odisha
- Hostile socio-cultural factors
- Poor infrastructure
- Inappropriate student- teacher ratio
- Lack of proficient English teachers in schools and colleges
- Conventional school and college curriculums
- Lack of intervention of modern technology in teaching – learning process
- Unavailability of advanced teaching materials
- Emphasis on theoretical teaching and with a reduction of practice

If the aforesaid issues are addressed with care and concern then we can hope for a considerable improvement in catering the needs of our learners and teachers as well. Meanwhile, teacher as a major stakeholder of this teaching-learning process can contribute immensely for the cause. As a step towards teaching-learning, a teacher should go on

orientation programmes, refresher courses, attending workshops, seminars and conferences to emulate the practices of real language teacher. The teacher should design session plan keeping in view with the needs and standards of the students. Making fun, telling stories, giving examples of real life situation at the time of teaching make the class interesting. Providing self-designed and self-prepared study materials, aids that can promote interest among the students. Teaching through couple/group activities can provide better result in opening up the mouths of non-speaker. "Group work helps the students to improve their grammatical competence, pronunciation, vocabulary and sentence structures. In the beginning students may be reluctant to do group work and participate in group discussion. But the teacher should divide the class into small groups and motivate them to participate in discussion." (Fearon, Mc Laughlin and Eng, 2012) The teacher should give more time, space and scope to the students in class room to speak and write instead of lecturing the topic throughout the period.

Rural-Urban Combination: The English teachers encounter challenges when they deal with both the rural and urban students together in a single class room. This is generally seen in tertiary level of education. The rural students are relatively less smart and less vocal than the urban students. Handling the students of mixed standard, needs unique approach to teaching. Indeed, the teachers often experiment Diagnostic Testing method so as to address the needs of all categories separately. Segregating students in to different sections as per their standard and merit and then going with their paces probably could make them learn better. This appears to be practical in tutorial and remedial classes. But in general classes this experimentation does not work. Often we find that our teachers give importance to the good students and ask questions to them only expecting correct answers. The weak students feel neglected when they are not given the same attention in the class. Again it is found that our teachers discourage the wrong answers attempted by some of the students. This is very dangerous and embarrassing too. This behavior disheartens the students so much that they bunk the classes of those teachers in many instances. This type of dealing with the students results in utter frustration and helplessness in them. Therefore, managing the situation softly and encouraging them to speak even though they speak erratic English at ease is the right approach to open up their mouths. In addition to teaching in class room the teachers need to involve themselves in this teaching-learning process beyond the class room.

Conclusion: A teacher should always steer and motivate the students to improve their

communication skills. Developing humane mechanism to bridge the gap between different categories of students on and off the class should be given due attention. To strengthen the foundation of rural students and bring them at par with the urban students, introduction of English is required at the rudimentary level of learning i.e. class one. Basic infrastructural facilities, engaging skilled human resources, participation of teachers in quality teachers' training programmes, provision of minimum technical aids like computer, TV, stereos, facelift to the general ambience in schools and

colleges, provision of tutorial/remedial classes, changes in teaching-learning methodology, adoption of residential system of education where both the students and teachers can spend more time engaging themselves in interaction beyond class room. Besides these measures, the teachers need to adopt their own strategies to reach out the students of all levels so that the last student of the class can be given due importance. Thus, dynamic approaches of teaching-learning English language should be experimented till the mission is accomplished.

References:

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