

Problems and Challenges of English Language Teaching and Learning in the Colleges of Arunachal Pradesh

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Abstract

This paper attempts to examine the issues related to the problems and challenges of teaching and learning English language as a second language in the colleges of Arunachal Pradesh. The quality of English language teaching and learning in these colleges is apparently disappointing. Students just managed to get through their examinations without trying to understand the language and appreciate their value. Poor language proficiency, inadequate language learning, lack of language teachers at foundation level, lack of communicative environment, traditional teaching methods, dearth of infrastructures, etc. are some of major concerns that deter the teaching and learning of quality English language in the state. If all these problems discussed hereunder are addressed to and proper measures are taken teaching as well as learning process of English language in the colleges may improve significantly.

Keywords: English Language Teaching; Language-learning; Methodology; Phonology.

Introduction

This article proposes to provide a profile of teaching and learning process of English language status and situation, problems and challenges, the remedial measures and needs of English language learners or students studying in the colleges of Arunachal Pradesh. It also explored and examined the whys, whats and wherefores of the English as a language of potential in the multicultural, multi-ethnic and multi-lingual social context existing in the state.

English language in Arunachal Pradesh is used as a second language.

But it is also the contact and official language in the state. It is the language which is commonly used in schools, colleges, universities and other institutes of learning. Moreover, in academic discussions or meetings such as seminars, conferences, workshops and trainings, it is widely used. The communications in radio, TV and print media, English is extensively used.

Objectives

- To study and understand the problems and challenges of English language and existing teaching and learning process in government colleges of Arunachal Pradesh.
- To suggest measures to solve the identified problems and challenges of ELT.

Methodology

This paper is an outcome of a qualitative study carried out among the English learners and English teachers. The universe of study for this research work is the assessment of the problems and challenges of English and its teaching and learning process in the colleges of Arunachal Pradesh. In order to overcome certain limitations and provide a comprehensive outcome, the study was restricted to two government colleges located in the Itanagar Capital complex. It covers the study of attributes, qualities and understanding of the students of English and English teachers towards understanding, learning and application of English. The tools used to collect the data from the respondents included – (i) questionnaire and (ii) interview schedule. The data had been collected on random basis. Since it is the study of ground reality, the assessment is based mainly on primary data collected from the students and teachers which was supplemented by available secondary sources. In order to assess variability of perceptions based on class factors, the responses have been divided into four categories: (i) BA I Semester, English Compulsory students, (ii) BA III Semester, English Elective students, (iii) BA V Semester, English Major students and (iv) English teachers. In addition to the tools mentioned above, personal interviews and informal discussion were also done to supplement and check on the validity of the data collected. Students from each semester and English teachers from two colleges were randomly selected for purpose of this-study.

Problems of English Language Teaching & Learning

People inhabiting this easternmost part of Himalayan state of India are thinly populated multi-ethnic hill tribes. Linguistically, they speak

different dialects and languages and come under the Tibeto-Burman family. Compared to other states of India, education has started very late in Arunachal Pradesh. And it started with English as a medium of instruction right from the primary level onwards. Hence, students know well the functional value of English for its employability and for all day-to-day activities. They know it well that having a better command of English language will give them an edge on any competitive examinations and interviews in future. Therefore, one who chooses teaching, medical, IT, salesmanship, legal, banking professions, etc. as their career, obviously need to have a better command over English language. Further, those students who wish to go outside the state or abroad for Higher Studies or for jobs understand the value and significance of spoken English. The pertinent question that needs urgent attention is "Does the present English language teaching and learning provide enough opportunities to the students of Arunachal Pradesh to equip themselves for all these needs?"

Some of the problems related to English language teaching and learning in the government colleges are discussed below:

Phonological Problems

One of the problems of English learners is in phonology. There is difference in the correct sound of a word and the sound represented by its letters. So learners have to know the actual sounds from English teacher. Unfortunately, most of the English teachers do not have ELT qualifications or trained in phonetics. Many words are misspelt by the students as they are unaware of the English sound systems and International Phonetic Alphabets (IPA) of various English words such as *ache, aisle, alumni, amateur, blackguard, bough, buffet, bury, colonel, conch, cough, coup, cupboard, debris, debt, debut, epitome, fugue, heir, impugn, imprimatur, invitation, island, mortgage, rapport, receipt, solder, tough, viscount, victuals*, etc. English spoken by them is not in accordance with International Phonetic Alphabets or Received Pronunciation (RP). Mispronunciation of English words, substitution of English sounds with corresponding mother tongues, faulty accents, omission of main words unstressed in connected speech, incorrect stress and intonation, etc. are some reasons that led to their unintelligibility to others.

Some English sounds which are difficult for them are:

- (i) Majority of students do not maintain the distinction between /I/ or /i:/. So they use /I/ for /i:/ or /i:/ for /I/. Such substitution results in their inability to make a distinction between Fit /fIt/ & Feat /fi:t/ and Filled /fIld/ & Field /fi:ld/, etc.

- (ii) Again many of them replace /æ/ with /e/. This substitution creates confusion in pairs of words like Man /mæn/ & Men /men/ and Sand /sænd/ & Send /send/, etc.
- (iii) Many use /ɔ/ instead of /ɒ/. Thus, All /ɔ:l/ is pronounced as /ɔ/ and Ball /bɔ:l/ is pronounced as /bɒl/.
- (iv) Phoneme /ʒ/ as a consonant is pronounced differently with difficulty. It is generally substituted by /s/ or /z/ as in words such as *measure*, *pleasure*, *treasure*, *garage* and *mirage*, etc.
- (v) Fricatives such as /θ/ and /ð/ cannot be articulated properly. These phonemes are substituted with [th] and [d]. Hence, word *themselves* is mispronounced as *damsels* and *they* is mispronounced as *day*.
- (vi) Usually students use unaspirated [p], [t] and [k] for aspirated [p^h], [t^h] and [k^h] respectively at the beginning of accented syllable. Thus, the word *paper* whose correct pronunciation is [p^heɪpər] according to native English speakers is wrongly pronounced [pepr] by majority of students.
- (vii) In Received Pronunciation (R.P.), /r/ is pronounced only before a vowel, that is, /r/ is not pronounced if a consonant comes after it. But students pronounced it in their articulation even if a consonant comes after it.

Grammatical / Syntactical Problems

- (i) ‘-s’ or ‘-es’ are always used for verbs which come after the third person singular numbers.
e.g. (i) Harry plays football, (ii) He does not like to play football.
- (ii) Main verbs that come after ‘be’ verbs such as ‘do’, ‘does’ and ‘did’ in the interrogative sentences are written in past form.
- (iii) Infinitive ‘to’ and preposition ‘to’ and their difference are often confused and misunderstood.
- (iv) Many prepositions are used at wrong place in the sentence. Often it is omitted where necessary and used where unnecessary leading to errors in sentence.
e.g. (a) We should pray God everyday.
(b) The boy resembles to his father.
- (v) There are words without their plural forms such as *administration*,

advice, furniture, hair, help, information, knowledge, scenery, water, weather, etc. but many students wrongly write them in plurals.

(vi) Adverbs are inserted where unnecessary.

e.g. (a) He briefly glanced at his mobile phone.

(b) I am completely exhausted.

(c) I hate you! she screamed angrily.

(vii) Repeating same ideas using different words in a sentence.

e.g. The board at last came to a final conclusion.

(viii) Rules of transformation of sentences is also a difficult area for many Arunachal students. They commit a lot of mistakes here too.

Lack of Proper Steps to Augment Spoken English

In the whole academic curriculum at the undergraduate levels, no proper steps have been made to augment spoken English as a distinct language skill necessary to be taught to the students. Unfortunately, syllabus design utterly neglects the spoken part of English. It has stressed more on written and reading skills relegating the other two skills especially speaking skill of the students. There is no 'connection' or 'horizontal integration' of different language skills namely listening, speaking, reading and writing in the syllabus. Non-inclusion of spoken English in the college curriculum and their resultant absence in the textbooks or study materials is a big disadvantage that has created barrier in the entire process of teaching and learning of spoken English. As a result of such shortcoming, no effort is given to test the student's proficiency in this area. Consequently, both teacher and the pupils are not obliged to seriously consider spoken English as an essential part of teaching or learning of English language in Arunachal Pradesh.

Lack of Training Facility for the English Teacher

Teachers of Arunachal Pradesh as a whole do not have better chance and accessibility to undergo proper training courses necessary to boost their language proficiency. Their English is based on their own individual academic backgrounds and tastes, and their students learn to imitate the same English from them and eventually develop the same variety of English. Majority of English teachers in the colleges of Arunachal Pradesh are not trained teachers with ELT specialisation. Moreover, there is no training

institute either like the Regional Institute of Education (RIE) or capacity building or training centres like the Central Institute of English and Foreign Language (CIEFL) in the state. Further, there is no specific provision or facility for English teachers to undergo training in such centres and institutes located in other parts of India. Thus, only few English teachers could avail the opportunity to train themselves in CIEFL through their personal initiatives and interest.

Lack of English Teachers in Schools

One of the biggest problems and challenges of teaching and learning of English language in the state is due to lack of English teachers in most schools in rural primary schools. Any teacher without English subject background teaches English to the students. Without proper base on English in their school years, these students confront enormous difficulty while learning English in colleges and universities.

Dearth of Teaching Equipment

Teaching of spoken English requires certain teaching equipment such as language laboratory, voice recorder, smart board, etc. and use of ICT in the classroom. Teacher is supposed to be facilitated with minimum equipment like pen drives, disks, etc. which can be used in the classroom. But there is acute dearth of such equipment in almost all institutions of the state. As a result, the English teachers become helpless not only in terms of their overall teaching plan but are bound to sideline the spoken aspect of the language in the process. These teachers confined mostly to teaching literature and grammar in their day-to-day classroom teachings.

Distinct Socio-cultural Milieu

Arunachal Pradesh is one such state in India where there is diversity of ethnic groups having their own dialects. The students of the colleges belong to diverse tribal groups having different social and cultural backgrounds. There is minimum opportunity to use English in their interaction and communications as all students do not understand the English and almost every student speak their own mother tongues or the Hindi language for better understanding. There is apparent lack of favourable milieu for English speaking students. As a result, the opportunity to speak English is very limited for the students. Moreover, there is a wrong treatment towards the students who speak English as majority of students consider

it irrelevant to use spoken English in their usual communications. Such behavioural attitude towards English speaking students is also one of the hindrances that create difficulty in learning the language.

Use of Hindi as the Lingua Franca

Unlike other northeastern states, Hindi is widely spoken by almost all tribes in Arunachal Pradesh although it is not the correct Hindi spoken by the people of northern Indian states. And obviously, it is true in case of college students as well. One of the reasons is the lack of one common regional language in the state. Since the state has a heterogeneous multilingual society, all people both old and young converse in Hindi whether it is in the offices, markets, etc. Even in schools and colleges, Hindi is predominantly used as medium of communication by the students and teachers. As such Hindi has become a kind of lingua franca in the state. Such a use of Hindi as a common communicative language among all tribes has relegated the use of spoken English to the background.

Traditional and Inappropriate Teaching Methods

The method of teaching English in the colleges has been the stereotyped and commonplace translation method, and its efficacy in increasing the proficiency of students' language is being questioned nowadays. Language teaching aimed not just to enable the students learn the four language skills, i.e. listening, speaking, reading and writing, but also to allow them to speak the language effectively and meaningfully. Many teachers are unaware of basic purpose of teaching a language. They teach the recommended books and edify the knowledge and information included in the textbooks only without giving the students language skills. Though Hindi is used as a lingua franca, English language plays a significant role as it is the official language used in all written mode of communications. Therefore, proficiency in English language becomes very useful and the proficient ones are well appreciated by all. Nevertheless, the language skills achieved by the students of English in colleges are still very low and much more is required to be done for its improvement.

Teacher-Centred Classes

A very common problem noticed in the teaching of English language in the state is related to the teacher themselves who are highly active while students are highly passive in the classes. One of the reasons is because many

teachers do not create interactive classes. They do not interact with students to facilitate improvement and enhancement of their communication skills. They just teach them what is given in the syllabus, share notes and study materials on the topics of the syllabus and wrapped up their teaching. Such type of classes compelled students to solely rely on teachers for their studies which thereby restricted their understanding and retarded their interactive and language learning ability.

Condition of the Classrooms

The size of the classrooms in the colleges is by far very large, so proper participation in different class works like interaction, discussion and other class activities are nearly impracticable. The student-teacher ratio is not proportionate in the colleges. Overcrowded classrooms do not permit the teachers to give individual attention to the students which again is also one of the hurdles in teaching-learning process of English language in Arunachal Pradesh.

Flawed Examination System

The kind of examinations conducted to assess students' knowledge and understanding of English is flawed one and it needs proper reorientation in consistent with the changing times. Examinations are conducted not to test the knowledge acquired, analytical ability and creative skills of the students but it is done just to test their capacity to memorise the answers or to judge their parrot-like knowledge. As a result, they just memorise some important concepts and topics and reproduce them in their examinations. Thus, their answers are devoid of any originality and creativity.

Suggestions & Conclusion

Considering the significant roles played by the English as official language in Arunachal Pradesh, greater and consistent endeavours may be put into practice in order to develop the teaching-learning process of the language. Whatever minimum teaching methods, teaching materials and other facilities given for ELT, if any in the colleges are negligible and utterly unsatisfactory. These need to be looked into, revised and improved as per the needs and requirements of the learners. People at university and college who plan and frame the course curriculum need to take into consideration the ground reality of the college classrooms before coming out with the curriculum meant for their

students. The identification and recognition of the students' needs in learning English language should be a significant consideration while designing the course curriculum. In view of the multi-linguistic situation of Arunachal Pradesh, proper opportunity to use spoken English in day to day communications may be created along with the use of vernacular dialects and Hindi. Since English language is essential and considered very effective to get lucrative jobs and to pursue higher studies in any part of the world, English language teaching and learning should be focused upon enhancing language skills in English and also to secure better marks in competitive job examinations. Hence, it is well suggested that the students in colleges should be taught language skills for correct and effective communication. The English course may be framed in such a way as to allow students to use the rules of the language in day-to-day communications and situations and thereafter to permit them to face any kind of communicative situation in their lives with courage and confidence. It is a fact that despite having introduced English language since primary level itself in the state, the students continue to confront difficulty in the language which is clearly manifested in low level of fluency in spoken English and poor grammatical or syntactical knowledge in terms of sentence constructions.

The teacher, the students, the books and the physical surroundings are the four discernible and tangible factors involved and required in classroom teaching and learning process. So while framing the course curriculum, the designers should seriously emphasize these four factors for purpose of achieving desirable goal which is to allow the students to communicate fluently in English and write correctly. For this a teacher having specialisation in ELT may be recruited for all colleges and the prevailing system of allowing any English literature teacher without ELT specialisation to teach English language may be changed. In addition to these, a wiser step would be to appoint English teachers against all government primary schools of rural areas where foundation of learners start and developed.

The main aim of teaching English language is to bring about a shift from exercise level of language learning in the classroom to experimental level in world outside. Accordingly, proper language learning need to be initiated inside the classroom and the teachers should produce real world situations in the classroom by inviting experts of English language to freely communicate with the students in the classroom from time to time. Students should also be genuinely motivated to keep themselves abreast of the real world through various academic programmes shown in TV and other means. Further, English teachers should motivate their English students to be interactive and communicate in English especially

ly among themselves both inside and outside their classrooms. With extra care and diligence, English teachers should transmit various subtle qualities of spoken English at least intermittently in a week as a remedial class. In fact, this kind of spoken English class may be created in student-friendly or learner-centric environment. Students should be motivated to engage themselves in participative learning and make the whole teaching-learning process a two-way or multi-way process. It will not only ensure learner-friendly atmosphere for students but will let them participate more and learn more.

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