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RESEARCH ARTICLE

DETERIORATION OF ENGLISH STANDARDS: A CASE STUDY

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ABSTRACT

English is playing an important role of communication among the multilingual states of India. Students come to study English with a strong convention that they can withstand the global competition. Accordingly the courses of English should be remodeled at school and college level recognizing that it is not an end in itself but an instrument for communication and for acquiring knowledge. Even a skilled and brilliant student is underestimated in the present system because of his inability of using the target language i.e. English. For, the students are not exposed to it outside the classroom. They do not get an opportunity either to listen or to speak. Therefore, in schools, English teachers must create an atmosphere conducive to learning with limited distractions and unlimited opportunities to figure out things and also need to tap into the learners' prior knowledge as a base for lesson planning and teaching. If the teacher introduces the lesson in an exciting manner, the learners will be highly motivated. Due to vast syllabus to be covered in stipulated time, lack of efficient teachers, changed evaluation pattern, inadequate infrastructure, improper administration are some of the factors responsible for the deterioration of standards in education in general. Particularly optional subjects are given more preference neglecting the languages, especially English to a great extent which is essential for their future career

Key words: Education standards, Deterioration, Language skills, Post-method pedagogy, Corporate schools

INTRODUCTION

Education is the best foundation for the growth and progress of any society. The purpose of standard education is not just making a learner literate but preparing him/her to think rationally, gain knowledge and achieve self sufficiency. English, the global language and the window to higher education and employment, is not given as much importance as it is supposed to be given.

In spite of not showing their originality and creativity, the students are able to manage to secure 99% marks at every stage. Unlike in scoring subjects, even in languages high scoring is not an exceptional in these days. Memorizing the content ensures good grades and corporate schools and colleges with special tags -

'English medium', 'Model', 'Convent', 'Techno', 'Digi' and 'International'- are en-cashing this opportunity rather than caring for the real sense of providing good educational standards with special focus on the target language, English. If the adverse effect of this type of teaching is not checked, there is a danger of producing talking parrots rather than efficient language users.

FACTORS RESPONSIBLE FOR LOW STANDARDS

Classroom teaching has undergone a sea change from chalk and talk to computer aided teaching with animated and simulated modules. This ensures the concept formation, grasping and retention to a greatest extent. Moreover, the advanced technology brought many changes in the field of language teaching and learning process. Multimedia, the combination of various digital media types such as text, images, audio and video, has come into an integrated multi-sensory interactive application or presentation to convey information to the learners in the most effective manner. Though the advanced technology is incorporated in the education system, it is not implemented to the extent needed. The appropriate practical usage of the language is neglected. Modern education is often criticized for being based on rote learning rather than developing problem solving ability. English, being the communicative language the learners are not able to make use of it practically for their day-to-day needs. As a result, English language teaching standards suffer the severe criticism.

Many academicians have expressed the opinion that the curriculum revolves around the rote learning and the students are pressurized in reproducing the knowledge gained from the prescribed syllabi. When compared to the international standards of teaching and evaluation, an average graduate of any Indian University is not very much superior to a Matriculate of a British University, for following the rote learning, devoid of concept based learning. It may be an exaggeration, but it is true that many of our universities do not compare their curriculum with the best of the British and the American universities in respect of their teaching and evaluation patterns. Unless we ensure the highest standards of teaching in our schools and universities, we may not prepare our students to compete in the global placements. For, our degrees may not have any significance if standards are not maintained.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- (i) To define standards of Education
- (ii) To identify and analyze the views and opinions of teachers on the deterioration of the standards of English language teaching and learning
- (iii) To give suggestions and recommendations to improve language skills of. English

Standards of education may be defined as, what students should know and be able to do in the core academic subjects at each grade level. Content standards describe basic knowledge of the text that all students should know. Performance standards describe what level of performance is good enough for students to be described as advanced, proficient, below average, or by some other performance parameter. All this constitutes educational standards including languages, particularly English which is an integral part of modern man's life.

Although, every government tried its best to raise the standards of education, their efforts are mainly limited to draft educational policies on papers but failing miserably at implementation.

To assess this, an investigation is carried out to identify the main reasons for the low standards of English language teaching and learning at secondary level.

METHODOLOGY

This study depended on quantitative research, based on survey. It is a comprehensive analysis of academic performance of 20 (10+10) government and private secondary schools. The purpose is to ascertain the overall performance of the government and private secondary schools regarding English language teaching. The geographical areas of study were 10 towns. From each town one government and one private high school were selected for data collection. The sample consists of one hundred teachers.

The research method adopted was by distributing a questionnaire to teachers. The questionnaire has focused on different independent variables such as - defective administration, rigid curriculum, ineffective evaluation

system, lack of co-curricular activities, outdated teaching methods and tools, inadequate infrastructure that affect the dependant variable i.e. the low standard of teaching and learning of English at school level.

Questionnaires were distributed to the teachers and they were asked to mention the causes for low educational standards in teaching and learning English. They are asked to give their order of priority by filling the blanks with ordinal numbers. The collected data was analyzed and tabulated in Table-1. The percentage of agreement and disagreement by the teachers is shown in Table-2. Their opinion was analyzed in the order of priority in Table-3.

Table1. *Number of government and private teachers who agreed (A) and disagreed (D) to the cause that is responsible for low educational standard*

Causes for low educational standards of English language teaching and learning	Govt. School Teachers				Private School Teachers			
	Male-25		Female-25		Male-25		Female-25	
	A	D	A	D	A	D	A	D
Defective Administration	18	7	21	4	15	10	13	12
Rigid curriculum	6	19	7	18	4	21	6	19
Ineffective evaluation system	17	8	20	5	19	6	22	3
Lack of co-curricular activities	9	16	8	17	5	20	6	19
Outdated teaching methods	21	4	23	2	17	8	14	11
Inadequate infrastructure	19	6	17	8	13	12	15	10

Table 2 *Percentage of teachers who showed their agreement and disagreement*

Causes for low educational standards of English language teaching and learning	Govt. School Teachers		Private School Teachers	
	Agreed%	Disagreed %	Agreed%	Disagreed %
Defective Administration	78	22	56	44
Rigid curriculum	26	74	20	80
Ineffective evaluation system	74	26	82	18
Lack of co-curricular activities	34	66	22	78
Outdated teaching methods	88	12	62	38
Inadequate infra structure	72	28	56	44

Table 3 *Order of priority given by the government and private teachers for the deterioration of English standard (Descending order)*

Order of Priority			
Government Teachers Agreed %		Private Teachers Agreed %	
Outdated teaching methods	88	Ineffective evaluation system	82
Defective Administration	78	Outdated teaching methods	62
Ineffective evaluation system	74	Inadequate infra structure	56
Inadequate infra structure	72	Defective Administration	56
Lack of co-curricular activities	34	Lack of co-curricular activities	22
Rigid curriculum	26	Rigid curriculum	20

According to the data obtained, the highest number i.e. 84% of male teachers and 92% of female teachers of government secondary schools agreed that the outdated teaching methods was the main reason for the deterioration of the English language educational standards at secondary school level. Private school teachers differ from this idea. 76% of the male teachers and 88% of the female teachers opined that the

ineffective evaluation system was the reason. At the same time 76% of the male and 72% of the female government teachers, as well as, 84% of male and 76% of female private schools' teachers disagreed that rigid curriculum as the cause for the deterioration of the standard.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Considering various factors analyzed in the previous paragraphs it may be stated that a great deal of reforms have to be brought about at the secondary level school education, especially for the improvement of English language standards. As secondary school level is the connecting link between primary and university education, utmost care must be taken and appropriate steps should be taken to bridge the gaps. Secondary school is a place where learners undergo a lot of physical, mental and emotional changes. Thus, keeping in view the changes in learner's attitude and personality the teachers should be able to deal with complex interaction meticulously which ultimately leaves a significant impact on the identity formation of young learners and the consequent success in adult life.

Skillful use of English language by the learners is the direct consequence and outcome of the quality of teachers and teaching methods used by them. They are also expected to have a thorough understanding of the developmental levels of their students and the content they teach. To maintain and extend this high level of skills, teachers are supposed to be informed of exemplary practices and to demonstrate a device for professional development by updating themselves with the latest technologies from time to time.

Kumaravadivelu in his analysis on Post method pedagogy, proposed a Macro-strategic framework which includes 10 different macro-strategies. One of the macro-strategies is 'Minimizing Perceptual Mismatch', which identifies sources of potential mismatches between teacher's intention and learner's interpretation by exploring learners' and teachers' perceptions of the nature, goals and demands. Any post method pedagogy "must be sensitive to a particular group of teachers teaching a particular group of learners pursuing a particular set of goals within a particular institutional context embedded in a particular sociocultural milieu". This is more apt in the context of teaching and learning of a foreign language. Unfortunately, teaching as well as evaluating the language skills LSRW (Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing), is ignored to an alarming extent. This is primarily due to under qualified and untrained teachers, the strength of the class and the time allotted for language classes. As a result, it becomes difficult for a language teacher to pay required focus and attention on checking and monitoring the learners' language skills. Very few teachers have a call for or take pride in their profession and are able to do justice to some extent but not hundred percent, while a majority of teachers being a common core, are not able to perform their duties as desired for various factors discussed above. If measures are taken at this level, by attracting large number of first-rate trained graduates to become school teachers, the quality of teaching in schools and intermediate colleges improves and thereby the learners will be able to meet the universities standards. It is in turn the responsibility of the universities to provide highly trained and efficient English language teachers for these institutions. Reform should, therefore, begin at both ends. Further, any university reforms will remain largely ineffective unless and until the reformation begins at the level of secondary education. It should be implemented and raised in order to furnish the necessary foundation for a sound university system.

Another important factor is a good evaluation system. Evaluation is the systematic assessment of the worth or merit of teaching learning process and plays a crucial role in the achievement level. Especially, it can be helpful for teachers to analyze, assess themselves to improve their classroom procedures and methods of teaching in the light of feedback. Unfortunately, biased evaluation system also devalues the standards. If a student is thorough with five to ten years board examination question papers, he or she is sure to secure first class in the board exam. This repetition of questions guarantee in yielding good results and schools concentrate on this technique and the maximum class hours are spent on in making the learners to solve the previous years' examination papers. Lack of oral examination, non detention policy, awarding 90% and above marks in languages in the examinations also play a vital role in the deterioration of English language standards.

"Students are supposed to be tested through multiple formats - presentations, projects, public performances etc," - explains Mr. Cherukuri. Comprehensive Curriculum Evaluation (CCE) ensures that tests are not the only singular measure of a child's progress during an academic year. As a result children are

constantly promoted to higher grade levels, regardless of whether they are prepared or not to go to higher level of study. "Most schools use CCE as a medium to excuse themselves from pursuing rigorous work with their children. Most children glide through the system without achieving any significant learning outcomes," says Mr. Cherukuri, a staunch believer of CCE, at least in principle. (Setalvad Ariha *Is right to Education a reality for India's children?* Business Standard)

Educationists of international distinction have suggested that developing suitable curriculum and applying educational technologies make the teaching learning process more effective and the schools more efficient. Curriculum planning should be done periodically according to the changing needs of the society. It should be based on the findings of curriculum research and be enriched by interdisciplinary collaboration among experts on different subjects. All this would contribute to the design of a total curriculum that is complementary as well as comprehensive. Co-curricular activities like, debates, role-plays, group discussions, JAM (Just A Minute) sessions, ensure the exposure of the students' talents and lead to a better achievements in using the target language.

Along with the curricular activities the school must develop and test the intellectual discipline and aptitude of its pupils. Unfortunately at present in most of our schools this area is neglected and that is why many students leave the school psychologically ill-developed, socially ill-adjusted and unwilling to work in a team, even though they may secure good marks in their examination. The administration of school should be effective and efficient in providing them ample opportunities for their all round development.

CONCLUSION

After analyzing the results it is concluded that out dated methods of teaching and the imperfect evaluation system are the main reasons for the deterioration of the English standards at secondary level. It is agreed that to some extent non flexible curriculum, lack of co-curricular activities and inefficient administration also have their share for this deterioration. It is of no exaggeration to say that English becomes a lifeline for any professional growth. Hence utmost care and attention must be paid in preserving and enhancing the standards of English, a language of opportunities, right from the school level.

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