

STATUS OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN VERNACULAR MEDIUM SCHOOLS – A CASE STUDY OF RURAL SCHOOLS OF BOKAKHAT SUB-DIVISION OF ASSAM

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Abstract:

Language is indispensable for communication in the sense that one can disseminate ideas, thoughts, and feelings effectively through it. Due to unprecedented development in the field of communication and optimum use of information technology, the world has become a global village in which hassle free communication is the need of hour. Hence, English, which is one of the most widely used languages in the world, has gained much more significance. English is the second most spoken language in India and as such, learning this language has become an obvious choice for one and all. However, the vernacular medium schools in India are still grappling with the issue of ineffective learning of English. Different states of India introduce English for students at various stages. Though they are given ample opportunities to learn English in schools, most of them learn English only to pass their examinations and not for effective communication. The state of Assam is no exception in this regard and the status of English language in the Assamese medium schools and especially in those of Bokakhat sub division is far from being satisfactory.

Key words:

Rural, vernacular, global, receptive, productive skills, ICT,

Introduction:

The world is facing tremendous challenges today and the concepts of global village and global citizen are picking up momentum. In this changing scenario, the role of teachers assumes much importance as they will have to prepare their students for an unimaginably competitive future. Lord Macaulay said, “English stands prominent among the language of the west. Whoever knows that language has ready access to all the vast intellectual wealth, which all the wisest nations of the earth have created”. In India, English language has become the lingua franca of the socio-culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

If we look into the present status of English language teaching in our classrooms, we have to confess that it is really discouraging. On the one hand, we have highly motivated students, who have got their education through English medium institutions and on the other, we have vernacular medium students, and especially, the students of rural schools who are either not interested to learn English or deprived of proper learning environment. The duty of language teachers is to develop receptive as well as productive skills among the students. In our schools, neither teaching nor evaluation is designed to make the language classes student-oriented. As a result, most of the students and particularly those who study in their mother languages, fail to acquire even the basic skills of English language. The present paper contains the findings of a survey in the rural schools of Bokakhat sub division of Golaghat district of Assam undertaken to investigate into the status of English language in these schools.

Objective:

An effort has been made in this paper to discuss the following objectives:

- To investigate into the status of English in the rural, vernacular medium school on the basis of certain criteria such as: students’ performance in school examinations, methods and materials of teaching, academic environment of the schools, dedication on the part of the teachers and the sincerity of the students.
- To study whether the basic four skills of language learning namely, listening, speaking, reading and writing have been rightly cultivated in the schools.

Hypothesis:

- The status of English language in rural, vernacular medium schools is average and in some cases below average.

- b. The schools lack proper academic facilities, environment, and method and materials for learning English.
- c. Communicative and functional English is not given much importance in the vernacular medium schools and especially in the rural schools.

Research Methodology:

For this study, the data-oriented approach was adopted. The students were classified according to their merit and from each group 10% sample of total students were selected by using random sampling.

Analysis:

Parameters of status of English is manifold, having various aspects. The status of English includes- the Methods and Materials of English teachings, socio-economic condition of the teachers and the taught, cultural and family background of students etc. The present study is based on the survey of twenty vernacular medium rural school of Bokakhat Sub-division. Mostly, the high schools were taken into consideration for this project. As part of the field work 60 teachers and 200 students were approached for collecting the necessary data.

Method and material of teaching:

It has been found that among the teachers who teach English in the schools, only 25% of them are trained in English Language Teaching (ELT). The remaining 75% teachers are neither trained in ELT nor have any special training in that field. On the basis of the findings the teacher using various teaching methods can be categorized as follows:

- a. 51% teachers use traditional method of teaching like reading and translation.
- b. 15% teachers use both traditional and modern methods.
- c. 23% teachers use modern ICT tools.
- d. 11% teachers are not sure of their teaching method.

The study reveals that 80% teachers use Chalk Pencil, Duster, Black Board etc. and 20% teachers use computer and projectors as teaching aids in the class rooms. Moreover, 45% teachers stated that they use Oxford Advance Learners Dictionary, while the remaining 55% teachers use other Anglo Assamese dictionary. As their level of knowledge of the four skills of language is concerned, only 20% teachers have sound knowledge whereas 60% of them have average knowledge, and remaining 20% have poor knowledge.

Although the students are desirous to learn English language in order to get access to higher education and job opportunities, the right pedagogical approach and to make the students skillful is found missing in the institutions. The English language class is treated on par with other subject classes where English is simply read and memorized. The size of the class and examination requirements also stand as major constraints. However, the need of hour for the language teachers, especially in rural vernacular medium schools is to adopt modern methods of teaching backed by information technology instead of continue with age-old traditional lecture method.

It is observed that with the introduction of the structural syllabuses, it became necessary to have graded textbooks. This sudden demand for new textbook gave rise to a huge racket in text book production. A group of textbook writers emerged overnight producers of books which were unrelated to the objectives of the modern methods of teaching. Most of the books contain inordinately long passages and innumerable new words and structures. This has resulted in serious problems for dividing or organizing the lessons into units. Moreover, it has been observed in the survey that only few schools and specific classes use material beyond the prescribed text any other innovative teaching aids other than black board, chalk, paper, pen and pencil. There is very little use of digital materials like OHP, LCD, TV etc and Internet facility through Wi-fi is not available in the schools, which, if used, can dispel the monotony of practice in classroom transaction by creating variety.

Socio-economic background:

It has been found that 85% schools are situated in rural areas and a vast number of them are located in tribal areas. Being situated in isolated and flood affected areas, many of such schools have poor infrastructure facilities. Among the students, 20% use their mother tongue 'Mising' language and 80% students use their mother tongue Assamese. It has been observed that the occupation of parents of the surveyed schools is mostly cultivation. Among the 200 students interviewed, 60 of them were found poor as far as their language ability is concerned. 40 of them have shown the ability to read and write in English, 70 of them are able to read and understand English, and the remaining 30 students appear to be capable of reading only.

Use of mass media:

Regular reading of newspapers, magazines and other journals, listening to English news and other programmes in radio, and watching English programmes in television are good habits which can enhance language skills of students. It is found in the survey that 50% students read English newspapers namely The Assam Tribune occasionally. The other 50% of the students surveyed have shown no interest in English newspapers. Moreover, 85% students have responded positively about learning Spoken English while remaining 15% of them appeared quite confused about ELT and Spoken English. It is also revealed that 45% students occasionally listen to English news and programmes broadcast in radio and watch and watch similar programmes in TV.

Role of teachers:

Teachers' role is of vital importance as they have to teach English in an effective manner which will enhance the communication skill of the students., It is observed from the study that to improve the standard of English language in the vernacular medium schools, the teachers should:

- a. Undergo proper training.
- b. Facilitate learning by encouraging the students.
- c. Adopt suitable motivational techniques to teach four language skills namely listening, reading, speaking, and writing.
- d. Assume a role where they never have the final word as authority over the class.
- e. Avoid interference with the process of learning
- f. Train the learners in strategies to comprehend and acquire the knowledge which also should ensure the participation of the students.
- g. Develop mutual relationship with the learners.
- h. Develop a theory that suits a particular set of students and a particular classroom environment.

The present study has shown that the present education system in our country poses a few problems in implementing effective methods and task based learning in the schools. At the same time, lack of competent teachers appears to be one of the crucial factors for students' inability to learn English properly in vernacular medium schools. The teachers should be resourceful enough to engage the students in meaningful and effective learning activities.

Student teacher ratio:

It has been observed that the teachers are sometimes overburdened with unmanageable number of students in the class. To motivate the students, individual attention is very much needed. In the big classes, the teacher's voice fail to reach the students sitting in the back benches. Hence, in some of our rural schools, the teacher finds it very difficult to draw the attention of the students and therefore, the methods and materials used by the teachers do not yield desired result.

Conclusion:

Language learning plays an influential role in the learners' educational and social development. Language is a thinking process that allows students to learn grow. In our schools and especially the vernacular medium schools, language is taught as a subject without reference to its social applicability as a tool for communication. This results in the miserable failure of language teachers as the students resort to rote learning rather than using language as a tool for communication. Although, the present study is a case study of the rural schools of Bokakhat sub division of Golaghat district of Assam, the findings of the study is applicable to all other rural schools of the state. However, the findings of the present study is not absolute ones and the issues need more serious and systematic study. It is hoped that this study will throw some light on the reality of the status of English in all the rural, vernacular medium schools of Assam in general.

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