# LITERARY QUEST

## Challenges in Teaching English in the Government Schools of Bihar, India

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**Abstract**

The worldwide spread of the English language is a significant phenomenon. No other language has been used by more people in more places. According to Crystal, India has the largest English speaking population in the world (Kirkpatrick and Sussex 19). He also points out that 'English Rules' the world, suggesting thereby the universality of the English language and its spread and the likelihood of its continuation. However, the present paper deals with the power of the English language; attitude of the people towards English language in India; English language teaching/learning situation in India; the problems faced by the next generation learners with conventional teaching methods; and the employment of technology to overcome their problems and ensure effective teaching/learning process.

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**Introduction**

Undoubtedly, English language has become a global language where almost all the official dealings whether national or International are carried out in English only. From Politics to Academics, it is used everywhere. It is the sole medium of instruction for fields such as science and technology, medicine and most of the linguistic researches and highly paid jobs. Apart from certain political disputes regarding language policy during independence, English has always enjoyed a prestigious and a powerful status in India. There was a time when only a few elitist had the privilege to study English. But today more and more people are getting interested in learning English because it is the need of the time. May be that is the reason the famous linguist David Crystal talks about the significance of English language. He says that ""English Rules" is an actual example presenting to the world an uncomplicated scenario suggesting the universality of the language's spread and the likelihood of its continuation" (1). Certainly a language does not become a global language by the number of speakers it has. Had it been the case the language Mandarin Chinese which has the highest number of speakers would occupy the number one position. As a matter of fact it is all about who speaks the language? It is about Power relationships.

**English –A Powerful language**

According to Michel Foucault, the notable French Philosopher, power is interspersed with knowledge and it flows like a capillary throughout the system with different consequences and repercussions. Both have an effect on each other and they originate from each other. It is quite evident how the knowledge of English language provides authority, status and influence to the few Powerful groups.

Power comes from the privileged access to social resources such as education, knowledge and wealth. Access to these resources provides authority, status and influence, which is an enabling mechanism for the domination,

coercion and control of subordinate groups. (Simpson 20). He says that there are two kinds of Power. "Power through dominance" and "Power by consent".

Talking about the Indian context, English satisfies both the conditions. India was once a colony of the British therefore English language had become powerful because it was the language of the people in power. That was the "Power through dominance". In the contemporary scenario English has become the powerful language out of the choice of people. This is so because today, it has a functional role to play. English is the language of the media and entertainment, science and technology, politics, education and so on. That is how it has gained "Power by consent".

**Attitude towards English language in India**

Today English is everywhere. People hailing from all the strata of Indian society use a large number of English words in their everyday life. English language learning and teaching in India serves a functional purpose i.e. primarily it is learnt to meet the job requirements.

There are some who can speak English very well and others who cannot. But obviously those who speak English are respected in Indian society. Those students who come from Hindi medium schools consider English to be a very difficult subject. Sometimes learner's personal beliefs play a very important role in the failure of the language learning process. Some may believe that they cannot learn a second language without studying the grammar and acquiring a vast vocabulary. For others language learning just means being able to translate sentences from their mother tongue to English. Hosenfeld defines such beliefs as "mini theories."

Till date, the study of literature is considered to be the major approach to learn English. The text books that are being followed are concerned with literature rather than the functional English. English is taught to the students by the grammar-translation method where the spoken part of the language is not taken care of. They keep looking for English equivalents for the words from their mother tongue.

As far as the assessment of the learners is concerned, the only thing that matters is the year-end examinations which are conducted by a governing body. The students study for it by mugging up answers to the questions that are likely to appear in the question papers. One can easily find such likely questions in the "guide books" which are available in the local markets. The answers can also be extracted from the "class notes" which are dictated by the teachers.

In fact in a country like India the learners can never acquire native speakers-like speech unless they are reborn. Neither can one facilitate them with the cultural familiarity of the language. But, still in order to meet the functional purpose of learning and teaching English one can be interpretable and intelligible.

**Challenges in teaching/learning English language**

We are confronted with a number of problems which act as a hindrance in effective teaching/learning situation. When we talk of teaching and learning, we are not only concerned with the wealthy elites rather we are concerned about those who are inefficient in getting proper education, we are concerned about the uniformity of the distribution of education. Our concern is the government schools of India. The schools where the socially and economically deprived students of India learn. Are their language skills same as that of English medium students? Do they get all the teaching assistance and aids as the students of privately run schools get. What are the other factors that make these students lag behind?

➢     English learning starts from class 6th onwards (critical period issue).

➢     English is taught as a subject.

➢     Use of grammar translation method in teaching English.

➢     Lack of English speaking surrounding.

➢     Peer pressure to earn bread.

➢     Lack of will power.

➢     Lack of Infrastructure.

➢     Lack of trained and efficient teachers.

➢     The pressure on teacher for the performance of the student.

➢     Teachers use the old-age teaching techniques and methods.

Last year when the researcher had visited some of the government schools of Bihar for a field survey as a part of her M.A. research, she had conversations with some of the teachers. She was surprised after talking to them. According to them there is so much pressure from the authorities for better performance of a child. The pressue is too much that during exams sometimes they even erase the incorrect answers and write the correct answers in order to pass the student and escape from the churning of the authorities.

In a competency test held in February, 2011 over 8000 Bihar teachers failed class 5 test. The teachers were asked simple questions such as which planet is closest to sun. On which day does Raksha Bandhan fall? Needless to say the condition of English teachers is more pathetic. When I talked to some of the English teachers majority of them preferred to speak in Hindi. Is not it a matter of irony when in spite of  some of the schemes for teacher education such as District Institute of Education and Training (DIETs), Selected Secondary Teacher Education (STETIs), Colleges of Teacher Education (CTEs) and Institutes of Advanced Study in Education (IASEs) etc.
Certainly it is the faulty and ineffective implementation policies of the government that is not letting the marginalized students to come to the forefront.

**Using Innovative Teaching Techniques**

Just as the spread of English language is spreading and growing faster so is the science and technology. A number of user friendly electronic devices are developed everyday which makes human life easy. The diffusion of technology into peoples' lives has made it comfortable and easy. Starting from the invention of the printing press in the 14th century, typewriter and computers in the 18th and 19th century consecutively technology has changed the language. Later, when the web technology came the language expression has changed life even more. Moreover, with every new technology people are able to express themselves in a better way. Whether they are sending messages through "SMS text" or

commenting on a social media status update. The language changes with different technologies. When we talk about the teaching and learning of a language, it should also be used in such a manner to make it interesting and easy.

It is true that one can learn easily only when one enjoys learning rather than finding it a troublesome job where one studies just to fetch a degree. A number of technologies are being developed which make unconventional teaching methods easier.

Today, the young brains are exposed to so many technologies such as i-pad, i-pod, i-phone, and other electronic gadgets. They are much more ahead of us, when we were learners. But the problem is not with the urban students. It is the rural students who rarely get the chance to see such gadgets. But at the end of the day children are children across the world. Every child gets fascinated with a moving and talking toy. No matter if it is a urban child or a rural child. Similarly if we provide interactive computers, children would love to learn things. We need to think and come up with ideas to make their learning easy.

Under the Digital Education Revolution (DER) scheme, the government of India in order to promote higher education is also distributing tablets (computers) to the school students. The use of CALT (computer assisted language teaching) program is used on a large scale in foreign countries and even in the major cities of India. It is true that it cannot come into force all of a sudden and it might take years but if implemented it will cater to the education domain effectively. The CALT technology facilitates the students to work on their own and thus inculcates a critical thinking approach among the students.

The Central government's educational broadcasts through television and radio such as Gyandarshan and Gyanvani are commendable efforts to promote education through mass media. Various programs related to Mathematics, Science, English and other fields are telecasted for the betterment of the viewers. But unfortunately not everybody has access to the digital world. The government should ensure every rural house with digital access. This is to say that they

should be provided with at least television and radio sets because mere broadcasting the programs will not let them learn.

**Conclusion**

The educated volunteers and researchers should come forward to hold English teaching classes for the underprivileged children. They should be made realize that they are no less than others and they can also speak fluently. The parents of such wards should be made aware of the significance of English language learning so that they put no pressure on the children to earn bread. And they will also encourage their children to go to school. Thus a positive attitude towards learning English shall be developed. The government and educational institutions should also encourage the researchers to bring innovative ideas for the improvement of the English language teaching and learning.

Transformation is an ongoing process and it can never be complete. Similarly, technology keeps on developing and it never comes to an end. We should also move with the flow. That is the need of the hour. Though there are certain constraints which obstruct our way. But still we should move on and on. This challenge needs the combined effort of the authorities as well as the educationists. Both groups should work together for bridging the gap.

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