



IMPACT OF ENGLISH AS THE MEDIUM OF INSTRUCTION ON SEMI-URBAN AND RURAL SCHOOLS IN TELUGU STATES INTRIGUING ISSUES AND EVIDENCE BASED REMEDIES

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Abstract

Our education system has a number of issues that have not been dealt with properly by the authorities, policy makers, teachers and parents for decades – leaving children to their fate who undergo tons and tons what we all know as STRESS! (Proof? News states that one student is committing suicide every hour because their inability to cope with demands of education.)

We (grown-ups) have been designing everything for them from our point of view – never considering the basic, natural, obvious characteristics and learning capabilities of children.

Introduction

Recent video from NASA too says so.

In my 40 years of service of as a teacher/trainer in institutions from Preprimary Schools to Engineering Colleges across the country, I had come across the following issues and overcame these to train my orphan, tribal, thanda living children from Agency Area in Telangana State whose parents haven't had any education or had only basic education:

1. English as medium of instruction: In rural areas of 31 districts of Telangana and 10 of Andhra Pradesh most of the people opt for English Medium Schools for their children in spite of the fact that the very introduction of this happened without any kind of preparation by any of the stakeholders in the field. These parents opt for English Medium without even thinking of whether they can afford it; whether they understand or know what is involved in going for this; whether they can help their children in their studies at home; whether their children can cope with the alien medium of instruction; whether their children can compete with the children of English Medium educated parents. They forget that their children need a lot of English Language Skills in order to listen, understand, interact, discuss, read, analyse, synthesize, absorb, retain, present, recollect their subjects – science, social studies and math.

English language itself has been a very big issue since the time we got independence. People got out of touch with the 'sound' part of the English language with the disappearance of the English people from this country. After they came to realize the kind of loss they were incurring in terms of the younger generation of post independent India not in a position to 'use' English in their day to day chores, studies and facing interviews, (while the less educated senior citizens who had had the opportunity to get exposed to the 'sound' part of English were better than the highly educated junior citizens) they started their search for a



recourse. In the process, unfortunately, everybody developed their own methods of teaching English their students without giving any serious thought on how people learn their mother tongue even without going to school. Let us quickly examine a few of these methods – a. teaching grammar: a vast majority of people believed for about half a century that learning the nuances of English grammar would make them expert users of that language. After experimenting with millions of people, conducting tens of tests and examinations in each academic year, they found out that this method was not working out. Students were good at writing correct sentences in grammar test using the previously mugged up ‘rules’ of the language. But when it came to ‘using’ the language for their own personal purposes, they failed miserably. b. asking people to read good books. Then teachers started making students in schools and colleges to read a lot of literary pieces of English and then asked students to write ‘essays’ and ‘paragraph’ answers to questions. The answers almost always had to be in the past tense and so students could not pick up their English. c. Later they thought that it was in ‘pronunciation’ that the students are falling short and they introduced ‘phonetics’ with phonetic script printed in textbooks. For students who found learning English itself was an issue, studying phonetics was like ‘from pan to fire’ experience. d. Then they thought they should increase “the number of years of studying English” and extended the study of English both at the beginning of school education (Class 1) to the end of college education to (Degree III year). e. Even then the results have been very poor. So they started post-degree Skill Development Classes for these graduates and post-graduates who could not pick up enough English to talk about themselves in 20 lines. The end result is very encouraging to those who somehow picked up good English (from their parents, relatives, some good tuition teachers, friends circle....but not from school) who started the lucrative business of starting Finishing Schools!

When children get low grades, teachers, parents, managements, government officers, policy makers – everybody goes through stress which percolates to the ultimate receiver, the student. The reason is crystal clear – change in medium of instruction without thinking twice about the impact of this on the child (for no fault of his/hers).

2. Languages:

My research results tell me that all languages in our states are taught in a very shabby manner. One simple statement proves it right – we all say languages should follow this rule – “Oracy before Literacy”. But unfortunately children face a lot of problem in improving their Listening and Speaking Skills because we don’t give them sufficient time for mastering each of these skills and simply add the two other skills – Reading and Writing just like that without even making sure that the first two skills are sufficiently mastered by children which is against nature. Blind children in the remotest forests of any part of the world that is not exposed to ‘civilization’ are in a comfortable position in using their language for their communication. What does this mean? It simply means that if the child is exposed to a language in listening, the child picks up the skill of speaking that language without any



intervention – call it a teacher, a book, a class, a computer or any other technical gadget. We don't allow students to listen to English so much so the students start using this language confidently.

We are not serious about conducting any tests on Listening and Speaking Skills. One reason I have collected from a lot of teachers of English is that these tests need a lot of costly equipment. Well, that might have been true till we started using the smart phones. But not from then onwards. It has become so simple to learn and conduct tests on a smart phone – the lessons are on the audio or video files, the questions are played, the answers are recorded – all on a smart phone at no extra cost. In spite of a lot of teachers and students in possession of these wonderful gadgets and the availability of high speed, low cost data on the Internet, teachers and parents have not started making use of this wonderful learning tool. On the other hand we are very enthusiastic about conducting all written tests, all on schedule, from the beginning to the end of the academic year – just to please parents and officers. Nobody cares about the tremendous amount of stress that a child goes through in preparing for these ill-planned examinations.

It is all the more unscientific to start English Language Skill Training with writing A, B, Cs! Most of the rural schools invariably think that this is the most accepted way of learning English! They don't even think that A doesn't mean anything to a 3 year old kid. When a teacher writes on the blackboard a word like 'banana' and asks the kindergarten students to repeat and write in their books, they all think that the teacher is mad. Why? Because the students 'know' what a banana is...A very similar situation prevails in teaching Hindi, our national language, and even our mother tongue Telugu and the result is our rural students are not very good at reading their own mother tongue!

3. Subjects:

As children don't have Basic English Language Skills, their ability to follow subjects namely – math, science and social studies becomes all the more stressful just because of language problem not because they cannot understand and enjoy the different concepts. If only we focus more on English language development first and then teach them these concepts, children would simply excel! If only teachers teach these subjects in the same way like they should do with English i.e. listening, speaking, reading and then writing notes or answers to questions! All students would enjoy listening to and participating in discussions like additions or subtractions, germination of seeds or how a bird flies in the sky or how shadows are formed. Now this English Issue has become so big and widespread that it is becoming difficult for schools to find teachers who are good at speaking English fluently let alone tell students stories. Every lesson should be dealt orally to such an extent that students feel very comfortable venturing into the reading part of the lesson and feel happy to write examinations.

Another big reason for their backwardness in these subjects is the lack of math and science laboratories. Children understand best when concepts are explained with experiments.



Hands-on Activities are the best learning experiences for children but even after 150 years of Dr. Maria Montessori telling us about this, we are still way behind in taking advantage of her concept!

4. Examinations:

As mentioned before, we, adults, are very keen on keeping the records of children's performance in written tests! I feel that all children must be trained to be very good at basic skills – listening, speaking, reading and writing the language in which they study the concepts and then, only then should be asked to enjoy writing any kind of examination. Examinations can be conducted from September and when children start enjoying 'the game of examinations', they will play it 'n' number of times.

5. Syllabus:

a. Languages: In spite of the fact that the authors of textbooks know that Literacy depends on Oracy, no audiovisual material is given to students. When small children start enjoying English lessons at home, they would read tons of books even without teachers or parents asking them to do so. Though most of the books come with audio/video/digital support, that material is kept out of reach of students for reasons only adults know. Students who can sing hundreds of movie songs find it difficult to recite a dozen poems in languages – how very strange!

b. Subjects: Most of the time we focus on the history of different concepts without talking about the application side. Whatever is there in Telugu Medium books has been translated into English for English Medium students without thinking how a student who is not good at English is going to fare well in math, science and social studies.

6. Teachers:

There are four types of teachers – government teachers who are from Telugu Medium background; government teachers who are from English Medium background; private teachers from TM and private teachers from EM. As recruitment of teachers in government schools has not taken place for quite some time, most of the government school teachers belong to the first category and find it very difficult to cope with teaching children in English Medium. Reading the lesson keeping the textbook open in the classroom doesn't amount to teaching. Private teachers from Telugu Medium too feel the same. Even when some teachers from English Medium teach their subjects to a satisfactory level, the other subjects dealt by teachers from TM (or some times teachers from EM who are not good at English) would dilute the child's learning experience at school.

7. Publishers:



I have gone through a lot of material prepared by different publishers like Oxford, Cambridge, Thomson Learning, Orient Longman, and many others in terms of textbooks, workbooks, CDs, DVDs, CDROMs, Interactive Packages and a few of the packages they now call Learning Systems. The issue here is that publishers have not thought of involving parents in their mission to take quality education to children. They are happy giving schools their digital content. Schools find it difficult to use this digital content effectively in the classroom for varied reasons such as teachers apathy, constraints on time, lack of electricity, casual nature of the students etc. If publishers can convince and help parents in taking the digital content to the child at home, things would change drastically on the positive side.

8. Parents:

There are broadly three types of parents whose children study in Rural English Medium Schools – a. Illiterate parents b. Literate but not in English Medium c. Literate parents from English Medium background. The first category of parents cannot help their children but feel proud in admitting them in English Medium Schools and expect miracles to happen knowing clearly well that their ward is not prepared to study in an English Medium school. They try to find someone who they believe would help the child and arrange for a tuition which doesn't give any good result. Among the second category only a small percentage have the skills to help their children in their studies at home and the rest of them don't even understand that they themselves can become very good teachers for their tiny tots just by taking some Spoken English training from some good trainer. They think that their duty is to continually to motivate the child giving pep talks on how a good student can become a great person. They don't even think of hold a book in their hands when the child is doing his/her homework; they don't turn down the volume of the TV and expect the child to focus on the lessons more that Arjuna did when Dronacharya asked him to focus on the bird! The third category can help but mostly don't have time for their children's studies. Most of the parents who can afford engage some tuition teacher who may or may not be skilful enough to help children in the right way. In any case most of the parents of these children studying in English Medium Schools in rural areas are not in a position to make use of the digital content that is available on the net.

9. Media:

Most of the media people in the print and electronic don't even try to understand the education system. They don't try to cover stories of superb teachers till it is almost late for anybody's benefit. If media takes up the challenge of creating awareness among people on how to help students become responsible citizens and great leaders, miracles can happen in a short time!

10. Government:

Ministers, officers and all in government mostly focus on the administrative aspects of education and as such don't find time to pay attention on the academic aspects. Even when



they come across an 'out of the box thinking' academician, they generally don't bother to change the system which is going on 'smoothly' for grown-ups (not for children).

Some of the videos of my work at B.S.S.H. School, Garla are on my YouTube Channel – Kiron Satyamurthy. These are Evidence Based Solutions for the issues faced by students, teachers, parents and government to be covered by the media...

Conclusion:

I developed a TEACHER COMPETENCY INDEPENDENT LEARNING SYSTEM to make our students INDEPENDENT LEARNERS. (There is nothing wrong in taking a few steps back from the marked line a long jump competition, I suppose...)

I believe that my research work on English and English Medium can bring in a paradigm shift in Responsive Teacher Education.

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