



Methods And Approaches Adopted In Teaching English And Learning Outcome In Lower Primary Vernacular Schools With Special Reference To Dhemaji District In Assam

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Abstract:

In the present age of post globalization era with advanced technology at work in almost every sphere of human life, there is no denying of the importance of English as language of - information technology, language of social intercourse both at national as well as international level, language of higher studies especially in technical and professional education and as a language of job opportunity. Nevertheless, majority of students of vernacular medium schools are found to possess poor knowledge of English as language for communication and their academic performance in English as a course in curriculum is dismaying. This dismal state of affair continues to persist right from lower primary schools to even at college level.

Being a foreign language obviously we don't have spontaneous learning exposure as in the case of mother tongue acquisition. Many a research studies have been made on methods of teaching-learning of English. Varied innovative techniques and approaches have been evolved and employed in classroom teaching now a day. Language learning is a process of learning four language skills viz-listening, speaking, reading and writing. Effectiveness of teaching English largely depends on teachers' proficiency and efficiency in English and their knowledge of the varied methods and techniques of teaching English and also their endeavour and dedication. Role of English teachers in classroom situation is crucial in teaching English because students do not have opportunity for social exposure to English except classroom teaching and text books.

The present paper attempts to highlight the methods and techniques used in teaching English at lower primary vernacular schools as well as students' performance in English based on the case study made in the district of Dhemaji.

Keywords – knowledge of English, vernacular medium schools, language skills, methods and techniques of teaching, and students' learning outcome.

Introduction:

Role of English has increased manifold in the present era of information technology and globalization. It is imperative for teachers of English to know role of English in general and to teach English not only as a subject but also as a life skill, which our students need to develop in today's global context. In the present global world English has gained such

a pivotal role in international politics, science and technology, press advertising, education, internet and communication and much more. In the present day context importance of English is felt as 'library language', 'language of opportunity' and language of higher and technical education and also a 'link language' in a multilingual country like ours. With the introduction of English from class I onward from academic year 2011, text books of CBSC course have been introduced in English subject in lower primary vernacular schools in Assam. Text books and syllabus are prepared on the basis of National Curriculum Framework (NCF). The main objective of the course is to develop pupils' creativity and imagination. The English text books named Marigold Book- I, II, III, IV and V are designed to link contents with life outside. The text adopts situational approach for developing pupils' language skills. Such approach requires a good communication skill and basic knowledge of grammar, structure and pronunciation on the part of the English teachers for developing pupils' fluency and accuracy. The teachers should be resourceful enough to engage pupils in meaningful learning activities.

English is to be taught in our schools primarily as 'language of comprehension'¹ as suggested by the Official Language Commission appointed by the Government of India. At schools pupils get to know English for a limited period through text books and teachers. The natural way by which a child acquires his/her mother tongue is- listening, speaking, reading and writing and there cannot be exception to this process for teaching English to our pupils. The objectives of teaching English at the school stage should be developing pupils' language skills: "To understand English with ease when spoken at normal conversational speed, to read English with comprehension and at a reasonable speed, to write neatly and correctly at a reasonable speed, to speak English correctly and fluently, to develop interest in English", and, in our course content "...we must define the framework of life situation and language content (lexical items, sentence patterns etc.) within which language skills are to operate."² The present paper makes a pragmatic study of methods and approaches adopted in teaching English in vernacular schools with especial reference to Dhemaji district.

Need of the study:

It is acknowledged fact that pupils of vernacular schools are poor in English as a subject of curriculum as well as a language. Pupils are unable to perform minimum of language skills- listening, speaking, reading and writing in English. This state of affair cannot solely be imputed to pupils' inability alone. Students' learning is invariably affected by the teaching-learning atmosphere provided by teachers in schools. It is often alleged that methods adopted by the teachers for teaching English in these schools are mechanical and ineffective. As such, an in-depth study of teaching English in lower primary vernacular schools is required because the foundation of learning starts from here and the knowledge of the prevalent system will enable to take necessary remedies for the improvement of teaching-learning of English in these schools.

English was introduced from class I w.e.f. the year 2011 in Assam. Since then no empirical study has been done on teaching-learning of English on a scientific basis. A detail review of the studies conducted by earlier researchers on teaching-learning of English in primary and secondary level in the country has revealed some important facts. The studies conducted by Alavandar (1992),³ Aparaj (1991),⁴ Bhaskaran (1989),⁵ Chandra (1988),⁶ Grover (1991),⁷ Jayashree (1989),⁸ Mohire (1989),⁹ Pradhan (1990),¹⁰ Ram (1989),¹¹ Ramamoorthy (1992),¹² Sahni (1988),¹³ Shasi (1991)¹⁴ and Yadav (1989)¹⁵ reveals their attempt to study reading competency, auditory abilities, aptitude, remedial teaching, methods and means of teaching, common errors, motivation, etc. in teaching English and in content analysis of syllabus and text-book of English. However, these studies were conducted elsewhere in India, but not in Assam. No such study has been conducted in Dhemaji District of Assam to find out the methods and approaches employed in teaching English at primary level and the learning outcome. So the need for the present study was felt to find out the existing systems of teaching-learning of English in primary schools in Dhemaji district.

Objectives of the present study:

The study attempts find out answer to certain broad questions as:

- What is the nature of teaching English in vernacular medium lower primary schools?
- Do the English teachers adopt a communicative approach to teach English?
- What are the problems faced by teachers as well as students as regards to teaching and learning English?

The above broad questions were spelt out in terms of the following specific objectives that the study intended to achieve:

- i. To study the nature of teaching English in lower primary vernacular medium schools.
- ii. To find out methods and approaches adopted in teaching English in lower primary vernacular medium schools and the learning outcome.
- iii. To provide viable suggestions for the future improvement of teaching English in lower primary vernacular medium schools.

Method and procedure:

The present study was made to find out the methods and approaches adopted in teaching English in the existing lower primary vernacular schools of Dhemaji district in Assam. The study was basically concerned with two things: - “what is?” and “what should be?” of teaching English at lower primary level. It was mainly concerned with the tasks of: (a) survey of the existing systems of teaching English in the lower primary vernacular schools, and (b) the evaluation of teaching English to judge their suitability and effectiveness. As it is related to surveying and fact finding of the state of affairs as it exists

at present, the descriptive and empirical methods were found suitable for the present study.

Population:

The population for this study was defined as all the teachers working and all the students enrolled in existing 1551 (provincialized 1305 + Financial Aid obtained 246) lower primary vernacular schools under Dhemaji District in Assam in the year 2014. The simple cluster sampling technique was used to collect data for the study. The list of all provincialised and FA obtained lower primary schools was collected from the office of the District Elementary Education Officer, Dhemaji District and Sarba Shikshya Mission, Dhemaji District. It is found that Dhemaji District has been divided in to three elementary Educational Blocks viz- Bardaloni , Dhemaji and Murkong Selek Educational Block by the office of District Elementary Education for the convenience of management and administration. The Table No.3.1 below shows Educational Block wise number of panchayats and number L. P. schools in Dhemaji district:

Table No-3.1 Educational Block wise number of panchayats and number L. P. schools

Name of the Block	Nos. of the panchayat	Nos. of provincialised L. P. schools	Nos. of F. A. obtained L.P. schools
Bordoloni	13	248	49
Dhemaji	37	706	136
Murkungselek	15	351	61
Total	65	1305	246

Source-SSA, Dhemaji, 2014-15

Out of these three Educational Blocks of Dhemaji district, Dhemaji Educational Block was selected for the present study by using cluster sampling method. Dhemaji Educational Block has 37(Thirty Seven) panchayats and total 842 provincialized and F.A. obtained lower primary schools. Out of these 37 panchayats, 12 panchayats were selected by using sampling method for collection of information and in these 12 panchayats there were 232 L. P schools of which 60 schools were selected randomly taking 5 schools from each panchayat for the present study. Total 600 pupils were selected taking 10 pupils from each selected school through purposive sampling for collection of information. The total numbers of teachers working in these 60 schools were 143, of which 131 teachers were actually found at the time of collection of information for study and all of them were taken as respondents. All these pupils including boys and girls were taken from class I to class V.

Tools & techniques:

The data for the present study were collected with the help of a Questionnaire and an Interview Schedule for teacher respondents and oral interview for pupil respondents. Also the following tools were used in the present study for the collection of data from the respondents:

- (a) Questionnaire: was used for collection of information from the teacher respondents.
- (b) Oral Interview: Interview was taken to pupils to find out the suitability of teaching English.
- (c) Interview Schedule: was used to collect information from the teacher respondents.
- (d) Computer: was used for DTP and tabulation of the report.
- (e) Digital camera: was used for still photography related to the present study.

Procedure of data collection;

In the present study both the Primary and Secondary data were collected to answer the research questions.

(a) Primary data:

With due permission from the District Elementary Education Officer (DEEO), schools were visited and collected the list of the teachers teaching English from the Headmaster/Headmistress for obtaining the required data. The teachers teaching English were administered the Questionnaire which was self-explanatory in nature, yet explained the purpose of the study and requested them to fill-up the Questionnaire in complete form and return the same on a date fixed. Accordingly a second visit was made to the schools and collected the completely filled-in questionnaire from the teachers.

Similarly, data were collected from the students by way of free interview (unstructured). For this purpose, 10 pupils from each selected school covering pupils from class-I to class-V were interviewed on random basis in the class. The pupils were asked questions and tested of different aspects to know their learning level of English.

Moreover, all the 131 teachers who responded to the Questionnaire were interviewed separately with a view to make a cross verification of data revealed in the questionnaire. These apart, some informal discussions with the Heads of the Schools were made on various related aspects of the present issue and made observations in real situation which enabled to collect some of the significant information related to the problem.

(b) Secondary Data:

The secondary data for the study were collected from the Office of the District Elementary Education and the Office of Sarba Sikshya Abhiyan, Dhemaji District; and the Head masters of the selected schools. The secondary data were also collected from different books, journals and unpublished Ph. D Thesis, and for this purpose visited Moridhal college library, library of Dibrugarh university, library of Gauhati university and Omeo Kumar Das Institute of Social Science and Development, Guwahati.

Statistical Techniques:

The statistical techniques used for analyzing the data of the present study were mostly frequency and percentage. On the basis of these frequencies and percentages, the results were interpreted and the findings and implications of the study were highlighted.

Analysis and Findings:

The present study was an attempt to delve out the existing state of affair in terms of efforts being made, strategies applied and methods adopted for teaching English in lower primary vernacular medium schools. Nature of teaching is invariably related to the nature of the language taught. "It is very important for all those connected with the teaching of language to know its nature and the way it is taught and learnt." ¹⁶ An attempt is also made to find out the suitability of teaching English which is gauged from the effectiveness of the employed strategies and techniques of teaching and pupils' level of academic achievement. Effectiveness of teaching-learning is also affected by the availability or non-availability of requisite infrastructure in school.

So, opinions were collected from the teacher respondents through structured Questionnaire with closed and opened questions on various components of nature of teaching English followed by interview for collecting information from pupils on their level of performance in English to find out the suitability of the existing nature of teaching English in lower primary vernacular medium schools. The components on which information was collected from teacher respondents in order to find out the existing nature of teaching English are:

Objectives of teaching English:

Objectives of teaching determine the appropriate techniques and approaches to be adopted to achieve the said objectives. Thompson and Wyatt put forward four objectives of teaching English at school level viz- "(a) to understand English when written (b) to understand English when spoken (c) to speak English (d) to write English".¹⁷ Dr. Prabha S Chiniwar stated the objectives of teaching English in school as-"to understand spoken English, to acquire ability to read the material in English, to acquire vocabulary, to be able to make simple statement through English, to respond to short conversational questions and to write English legibly and coherently".¹⁸ The teachers opined the objectives of teaching English as- developing pupils four language skills, developing of pupils' vocabulary and spelling in English, motivating pupils for learning English and securing good marks in English subject. However, during interview greater number of the pupils was found unable to give minimum performance in the four language skills, viz- listening, speaking, reading and writing. Almost all the pupil respondents (528 (88%) out of total 600) from class I to class V could not give simple reply in English; could not read out lessons from their English text; could not copy down legibly letters, words and sentences from text; could not write correct spelling when taken dictation from text; and could not combine alphabet for word formation. Pupils' knowledge of English is indicative that the general objective of teaching English is not fulfilled. Difference was observed in case of

72 (12%) pupils from class I to class V who were found to be satisfactory in their respective levels in reading the lesson from the text, in writing legibly, in giving the meaning of English words in Assamese from the lessons already taught and in pronunciation and spelling. Of these 72 pupils 49 replied that their fathers taught them and 23 said that their mothers taught them English at home. They did not give credit to their teachers in this regard.

Methods and Approaches of Teaching:

According to W. F. Mackey, "A method determines what and how much is taught (selection), the order in which it is taught (gradation), how the meaning and form conveyed (presentation) and what is done to make the use of the language unconscious (repetition)." ¹⁹ Pupils learning largely depends on the methods and approaches adopted for teaching and sincerity with which they are employed. It is imperative on the part of the teachers teaching English to have the knowledge of the methods to be adopted and techniques to be used in teaching English effectively to the young kids in L. P. schools. Out of 131 teacher respondents 110 (83.97%) opined to have adopted age-old Grammar Translation method in classroom teaching, 16 (12.21%) respondents opined that they used bi-lingual method, i.e. used English and Assamese language in teaching, only 5 (3.82%) respondents opined to have adopted situational teaching method. Not a single response was found on the use of Direct method of teaching. Out of 131 teacher respondents as many as 110 (83.97%) respondents' use of Grammar Translation method is a clear indication that teaching conversation in English to pupils is neglected and in interview with pupils it was found that almost all pupil respondents were utterly unable to understand whatever is spoken to in English or to speak in English.

English Exposure Provided to Pupils:

Language learning is a process of habit formation through constant exposure to the language enabling a child for spontaneous acquisition. "Learning a language is a habit formation. An individual can form such habits through adequate practice of speaking and writing. He is supposed to master both the sounds and the scripts...In language learning much depends upon the amount of language to which the child is exposed to. This exposure makes the habit formation much easier, convenient and automatic." ²⁰ In response to a query on the teachers' effort to provide English exposure to pupils, they revealed to have adopted such practices as - simple conversation in English, explain lessons in English and Assamese, and encourage pupils to learn English. During interview, it was seen that most of the teachers 115 (87.79%) out of total 131 had limitation of oral communication in English and almost all pupils i.e. 528 (88%) out of 600 from class I to V could not show expected performance in - speaking, reading, writing, pronunciation, spelling, vocabulary etc. in their respective class level, which constitute the basic foundation for language learning. There is difference between learning a foreign language and mother tongue. Learning mother tongue is a natural and spontaneous process right from birth. "Learning a foreign language is a painful process and requires a lot of practice.

Constant and sustained practice is the key to language learning. The learner has to keep at bay the habits of speaking his mother tongue and has to cultivate a fresh set of habits.”²¹ Teachers of English should focus attention on- scripts, pronunciation, sound-meaning relation and basic structure and conversation skill while teaching to the pupils of vernacular schools. Teachers’ subject efficiency as well as knowledge and use of teaching methods are of paramount importance for motivating pupils for learning. But existing performance scenario of pupils reveals a contrary picture. Pupils do not have the idea of English being a language. It is taught and learnt just as one of the subjects of the curriculum.

Use of teaching aids:

Teaching aid is an important element in teaching-learning process. While teaching English language skills to pupils, teachers need to adopt effective strategies and use appropriate teaching aids to draw pupils’ interest in learning. Development of listening and speaking skills can be more effective by use of Tape Recorder and computer aided teaching. “It is desirable that affordable ICT tools and techniques should be integrated into classroom instructions right from primary stage so as to enable students develop their requisite skills.”²² All 131 teachers used blackboard in teaching, 86 of them revealed to have used charts and maps. None of them used tape recorder or computer aided device. Most of the modern teaching aids require electric power for functioning. During field visit it was found that out of 60 selected schools for the study, 56 (93.33%) did not have electricity connectivity. Some of the teachers were even unaware of the ICT enabled teaching aids.

Teachers’ academic qualification:

More often than not question mark put on requisite academic qualification of teachers teaching English to the young pupils in vernacular L. P. schools. Long back in 1965 the English Review Committee appointed by UGC reported “There is a shortage of teachers. Those available have passed the school final examination, having themselves studied English in village school for 4 or 5 or 6 years. They have little idea of correct usage, and not at all of correct pronunciation. Their vocabulary is limited as is their reading.” It was found that out of total 131 teachers teaching English, 51 (38.93%) are metric passed, 64 (48.85%) P.U & H.S (Pre-University & Higher Secondary) passed, 14 (10.69%) graduates and 02 (1.53%) post graduates. Among them 11 (8.40%) hailed from English medium back ground. Most of the teachers are found to have passed either 10th standard and/or 12th standard, which in itself speak of teachers’ limitation in English.

Training attended and/or courses done:

It is essential for teachers to refresh and update subject related knowledge and undergo training and/or course work to equip themselves with the methods and techniques of teaching English and develop their efficiency. It was found that out of 131 teachers, 11 (8.40%) have done Normal Training Course, 04 (3.05%) have done D. El. Ed. Course, 05

(3.81%) have done B. Ed. Course and 02 (1.53%) have done short term course under IGNOU. Greater chunk of 109 (83.21%) teachers have not done any such courses. However 124 (94.66%) teachers participated in training programmes and/or workshops organised under Sarba shikshya Aviyan (SSA) and only 07 (5.34%) teachers revealed that they did not participate in such programmes. It was also found that there was no separate teacher specifically allotted for the subject of English nor was there any policy or provision found giving preference to proficiency in English at the time of appointment in lower primary vernacular medium schools. Conversation with the teachers revealed that only 16 (12.21%) teacher were able to communicate in English, though with some limitation. The rest 115 (87.79%) were found too poor in communication in English.

SUGGESTIONS:

Based on the above analysis and findings a few suggestions have been put forward for improvement of English teaching-learning at lower primary vernacular schools, which are enumerated as follows:

1. There should be infrastructure development having provision for separate classrooms for each class from class I to class V with adequate number of teachers for each class.
2. While teaching English texts teachers should focus attention on developing pupils' language skills viz. listening, speaking, reading and writing.
3. Use of Bilingual method (Assamese and English) should be given more emphasis in class-room teaching than in the use of Grammar Translation method so as to develop habit formation in the practical use of English language.
4. Teachers should pay more attention on giving practice in listening and speaking to remove English phobia from the pupils' mind as a hard subject and instil in them a sense through conversational practice that English is a language like any other and meant for communication.
5. Electricity connectivity should be provided in all L. P. schools to facilitate the use of modern teaching aids.
6. Teacher accountability system should be strengthened and maintained regularly.
7. There should be strict criteria for appointment of separate teacher in the subject of English with minimum requisite qualification of B.A with English Major/Honours having sound English communication ability.
8. Apart from general training courses and programmes, other specific training programmes and/or refresher courses on methods and techniques of teaching English should be conducted from time to time for the teachers of English.
9. D. El. Ed. and/or such other training courses should be made mandatory for becoming a teacher in L. P.school.

CONCLUSION

It is an acknowledged fact that leaving aside a negligible number, greater chunk of pupils are poor in English both as a subject of curriculum and as a language for communication.

Pupils' performance in the four language skills in English- listening, speaking, reading and writing is much below expectation. The present dismal state of affair cannot be allowed to continue to exist. English has its importance in playing pivotal role as "language of comprehension" and communication in the present day world of globalization and information technology. Nevertheless, pupils alone cannot be blamed for their inability to perform in English. Teachers' responsibility in this respect cannot be connived at. Present study shows that teachers have big limitation in academic qualification, English communication ability and knowledge and use of methodology for teaching English. Even Govt. policy shows little provision for separate criteria of appointment in case of English teacher. If the given suggestions implemented in letter and spirit by all concern, pupils' English is expected to improve in lower primer vernacular schools.

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