

## INTENSIVE ENGLISH PROGRAMME FOR INDIAN LEARNERS IN INDIA - WHY NOT?

**DR. (SR.) EUGINI FATIMA MARY,**  
Auxilium College (Autonomous)  
Vellore, Vellore Dt., TN (INDIA)

**MARIA AROKIA RAJ K. A.**  
Sacred Heart College (Autonomous)  
Tirupattur, Vellore Dt., TN, (India)

### ABSTRACT

*Twelve years of English at school does not prepare Indian learners with adequate English language proficiency to pursue tertiary education, where instructions are mostly in English. One solution, which could prepare these students for their higher education is Intensive English Programme (IEP). All Western universities make it mandatory for non-native speakers of English to complete IEP successfully, before admitting them to any course in the university. These IEPs equip learners with sufficient English language skills and prepare them for university studies and they have been highly successful. The question is 'Why can't we do it for our Indian learners in Indian institutes? This paper presents insights from existing IEPs to develop IEP programmes in our own institutions.*

#### **I. Quality of English Language at Higher Education in India**

Yes, English in India has come a very long way, not without challenges, from being a library language and language of higher education to a language of empowerment. The growth of English in education in India is very impressive. Enrollment in private (English) schools in rural India increased from 19 per cent in 2006 to 29 per cent in 2013. In urban India, it was about 58 per cent in 2005 and likely to be much higher now. (Bhowmick 2014)

Growth of institutions of higher education and enrollment of students have grown phenomenally.

**Table 1** Growth of Higher Education in India

### ON THE RIGHT TRACK

Year	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15
<b>No. of universities</b>	667	723	757
<b>No. of colleges</b>	35,525	36,634	38,056
<b>No. of standalone institutions</b>	11,565	11,664	11,922
<b>Enrolment in higher education (total in million)</b>	30.1	32.3	33.3
<b>Men</b>	16.7	17.5	17.9
<b>Women</b>	13.5	14.8	15.4
<b>Gross enrolment ratio (total)</b>	21.5	23.0	23.6
<b>Men</b>	22.7	23.9	24.5
<b>Women</b>	20.1	22.0	22.7

Source: Ministry of Human Resource Development

When it comes to quality of our graduates, it is another story. "... 75 per cent of technical graduates and more than 85 per cent of general graduates are unemployable by India's high-growth global industries, including information technology and call centers." Why are our graduates so pathetic? The reason is that India has gone for quantity and not focused on quality. One of the very important reasons of this lack of quality is, the average graduate's "ability to comprehend and converse is very low," says Satya Sai Sylada, 24/7 Customer's head of hiring for India. According to her, many high school and college graduates lack effective English communication and grasp of educational basics such as reading comprehension, that the company can hire just three out of every 100 applicants. (Geetha 2011)

The policy makers of our country, National Knowledge Commission (NKC) focuses its attention on the learners in rural India where the problem is acute, "While the demand increases on the one hand, the quality of English language education in our state-run schools, more particularly in rural schools, presents an abysmal picture" (GOI 2007). The problem starts at school and gets worse at college level. English language proficiency in higher education is of paramount importance especially, for the rural students.

Even at professional colleges and universities in India, rural Indian students face enormous language related problems. The prestigious Anna University in Chennai is one of the top universities in India, but when it comes to English standards, it is another story. Ganesh, a first year Anna university student hailing from a rural area says,

*"I had 87 per cent in class XII but I joined B.E., in Tamil medium because I didn't want to fail. I am scared of reading English. Professors have already warned us that companies might not take us, because of our language. While some work really hard, to learn English others fail to realise that they cannot avoid a subject they have to learn their entire course in. Also, they memorise everything possible without understanding. And so, they don't relate to the subject at all."* (Venugopal and Kumar 2012)

The scenario is no different when it comes to medical education. Aravind Santosh, a first-year student of the Madras Medical College, feels the problem lies in the school system in the State that encourages rote learning and never bothers to teach students any concepts. Most Tamil medium students find it difficult to cope with the English language as the textbooks prescribed for medical education are usually of very high standards, he says. (Ibid.)

If this is the kind of problem faced by rural Indian students from vernacular medium of schooling in professional courses, where normally bright students get enrolled, what about Arts and Science colleges, where a good number of average students throng? This highlights the seriousness and complexity of challenges faced by rural Indian learners at the undergraduate level. What is obvious is that the Indian school system has not prepared the learners with adequate language proficiency to take on tertiary level studies.

The natural questions on our minds are “What is the solution?”, “How to prepare the Indian students for tertiary level studies?”

## **II. English Programme that Prepares Learners for Tertiary Level Studies**

After the Second World War, a number of practical concerns like the need to prepare growing numbers of non-English background students for study at American and British universities from the 1950s. Many of these students required training in English before they could begin their studies. “Language courses and materials developed at the University of Michigan, in the early 1950s, served as the basis for courses for foreign students entering all American universities” (Richards 2001: 28). It offers short term Intensive English Programmes (IEPs). So, these were the first English language programmes designed for learners to take on tertiary level education. These programmes which prepared the learners intensively to study in English-medium courses are called IEPs.

### **A. Intensive English Programme (IEP)**

Any course that meets more than the conventional one period a day can be labeled intensive. The concept presupposes neither a particular method or linguistic theory nor special materials or facilities. (Schulz, 1979). These programmes which prepare the learners intensively to take on tertiary level education in English-medium courses are called IEPs.

### **B. Understanding IEP**

*The Macmillan Dictionary* (2015) defines ‘Intensive’ as ‘involving a lot of effort, energy, or attention’, involving a lot of teaching or training in a short time.

In a report on Welsh immersion and intensive language teaching pilot projects in schools, in 2006, a clear picture is presented about immersion and intensive programmes. The report

claims that the results of earlier studies, which indicate that students who are exposed to a period of intensive study of a second language show greater progress than students exposed to the same number of hours of instruction but spread over a longer period of time (the so called “drip-feed” method). Studies indicate that using the second language as a means of communication led to considerably enhanced communication skills in comparison with situations in which the second language was an object of study. (Estyn 2006: 9)

An Intensive language programme has the following characteristics:

- *An intensive period of study;*
- *Use of the target language as a means of communication; and*
- *A focus on language learning rather than on the learning of subject matter in the second language.*

A number of restructuring efforts are required to create the optimum conditions for an Intensive language programme. Three aspects are important: a reorientation of instructional time, a reorientation of the curriculum, and the adoption of an interactive pedagogy.

***Reorganisation of instructional time:*** It is necessary in order to create the intensive exposure to L2. It is achieved by creating a concentrated block of time in one semester of the school year devoted primarily to the learning of L2.

***Reorientation of the curriculum:*** Teachers need a sequence of activities, which would last several hours a day and keep learners actively using L2 in authentic communicative situations, the regular L2 texts are not considered to be suitable. So, a new curriculum need to be developed around areas of interest to particular pupils, or groups of pupils.

***Adoption of an interactive pedagogy:*** Strategies such as co-operative learning (working in pairs or small groups) and project work are considered as essential feature of the programme. Thus, the learners are enabled to use the second language in many different contexts and gradually develop more complex language structures. (Ibid.: 10)

Presenting a report on study carried out in three countries, Finland, Netherland and South Korea David Hayes makes the following observation,

*Evidence indicates that if instruction is organized in small periods of time over an extended period (the usual school ‘drip-feed’ approach) it takes learners much longer to achieve target levels than if instruction is organized in more concentrated period of time. Further, there are inevitable challenges for teachers in sustaining students’ motivation over longer periods when progression is so limited. Research evidence indicates that students learn a language best when instructional time is concentrated. (2014: 25)*

Lightbown observes that the intensity of the exposure and the opportunity to continue using the language over a long period of time is as important as the starting age in the effectiveness of classroom instruction. (2000: 449)

### **C. Existing Intensive English Programmes (IEP)**

A survey of the existing Intensive English Programmes (IEPs), that prepare the students to take on tertiary level education, in other countries and in India, is undertaken to understand the various components and strategies followed in IEPs.

#### **1. IEPs in Foreign Universities and Institutes**

All Western universities have IEPs. However, IEPs in few of these universities are presented here. Objectives and beneficiaries of IEP in all the Western universities are same; to prepare non-native speakers of English to take on university studies in USA, by enhancing their basic language skills of LSRW in English. Similarly, the duration of the courses ranges from 4 weeks to 6 months. The course fee ranges from Rs. 1.5 lakh to 5 lakh. These common features are not repeated in the summary report below:

#### **University of San Francisco, CA, USA:**

About 82 short term courses on Pronunciation, Vocabulary and Idioms, Academic Reading and Writing, Oral Communication Skills, Grammar, Business English are organised for a duration of 20-26 hours of instruction per week. Instructions are in LSRW, grammar, U.S. vocabulary and idioms. The strategies followed are: elective courses are offered during each semester such as Business English and Computers, English through Photography, and U.S. Culture through Film. There is progression in courses and the courses are broken into smaller modules.

#### **Xavier University, Cincinnati, Ohio, USA:**

The approach is rigorous, and academic English is emphasized. Full-time students have 20-23 hours per week. The Course components are LSRW and grammar, their weightage is:  
Grammar, Reading and Writing – 170 minutes per day – 50.75 percent of the total time  
Listening and Speaking – 105 minutes per day – 31.3 percent of the total time  
Optional Electives – 60 minutes per day – 17.9 percent of the total time

The following strategies are followed: students could also qualify for optional, rotating electives. These courses vary each semester, and may include Oral Fluency, Career English, Pronunciation, and TOEFL preparation. Each course in the intensive English program has specific curricular goals, which lead to student learning outcomes. Students are tested when

they arrive and are placed in their level(s) according to the results. At the end of each term, students are tested again. Promotion to the next level is based on a combination of three factors: grades, ability to meet learning outcomes, and test score.

#### **University of Colorado Boulder, USA :**

Eight-week sessions of full-time English language study (20 hours per week). Course components are Language structure, vocabulary, LSRW, and elective courses. Higher-level courses focus on more complex and sophisticated uses of English in terms of essays, interactions, presentations, and projects.

The Weightage of the components in the course:

Writing skills – 6 hours per week – 30 percent of the class-hours

Listening and Speaking skills – 6 hours per week – 30 percent of the class-hours

Reading skills – 4 hours per week – 20 percent of the class-hours

Weekly enrichment activities like culture hour, reading club, tutoring centre, socialize, - 20 percent of the class-hours.

The strategies followed are: computerized placement tests are conducted to determine the entry-level capacity of the students; classes are interactive and allow students to develop their language skills while practicing English in real situations; class size is 12-15 students on average; teachers provide students extensive feedback, which helps students to improve their English and build their confidence; teachers provide short lectures on new language points; students engage in individual, pair, and small group activities to practice, review, apply, and expand on skills; textbooks, adapted texts, authentic materials, and student projects are incorporated throughout; a number of field visits are organized in and around the university; students communicate with native speakers of English while gaining hands-on experience with local customs and US culture.

**University of Connecticut, USA:** The course is for 21 hours per week, 5 days a week in the morning or afternoon. Listening/Speaking classes focus on listening comprehension and spoken communication skills including pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar. Reading/Writing classes focus on reading comprehension and written communication skills including grammatical structure, idea development and sentence, paragraph and essay formats.

The following strategies are followed: Class size is small with 10 students in a class: classes are student-centered and learning-centered; students get individual feedback and support; teachers work with each group of students according to their specific needs and help students develop strategies for learning English independently; interactive activities include working with a partner and/or small group work, discussions, role-plays, debates, and student

presentations; native English speakers join a weekly Communication Skills class as conversation partners; readings of authentic texts from literature, academic sources, and the media generated topics are given for written and oral response; to support learning by doing, classes provide students with opportunities to create and share their work through video, websites, journals, research papers, or dramatic performances.

**University of Delaware, ELI, Newark, Delaware, USA:** There are three types of programmes, of one, two and three months' duration with approximately 28 hours per week. The weightage of language components and related activities: Listening/Speaking - 35 per cent, Reading/Writing - 35 per cent, Self-access learning centre - 14 per cent, Private tutoring - 7 per cent, Cultural trips & Activities - 3 per cent, and Listening Laboratory - 6 per cent. Strategies followed are: students are made to use English in meaningful ways to communicate and the curriculum is challenging and progressive from beginning to advanced levels; students can choose private tutoring (2 hours per week), in which they work with one tutor alone or cluster tutoring (3 hours per week), in which three or four students meet with one tutor on a special topic, such as pronunciation or grammar for two hours and with a private tutor for one hour (2-3 hours per week); the student and tutor together make an instructional plan, which might include assistance with class assignments, work on individual problems with or questions about English or American culture, or to conversation skills practice. Students can access computers, reading materials, captioned television programs, and tape/CD and video recorders. Students may use email, Internet, specialized ESL software programs and on-line language games that teach pronunciation, grammar, reading, writing and listening skills.

## **2. IEPs in Indian Universities and Institutes**

IEPs are available in just three universities in India. Out of these three university, only one university (Bharati Vidyapeeth Deemed University, Pune), admits Indian learners in this intensive course and other two are for foreign students wanting to study in India.

### **University of Pune, Pune, Maharashtra:**

The course prepares the foreign students from Non-English speaking backgrounds to cope with the education system at the Indian Universities. There are five levels of in the course; each level is for sixteen weeks, four hours a day, six days a week. The course components are LSRW with emphasis on grammar and vocabulary. At the beginning of the course, a placement test is conducted to determine the English proficiency level of the student and placed at appropriate level of course. The course fee is Rs. 16, 900 per each level and \$ 150 for other expenses, this amount does not include food and accommodation.

### **Bharati Vidyapeeth Deemed University, Pune:**

The course is for students coming from non-English speaking countries who need to upgrade their skills in English language. If learners' English proficiency does not meet the required standards of the University, the learners (both foreign and Indian students) are asked to take up the *IEP* during their study or before taking their main programme. The course duration is one semester. The course focuses on LSRW. The course improves learners' performance in reading and listening to information, making them to take an active part in discussions, express complex ideas and facts through speech and writing, and become an independent learner of English.

#### **Jawaharlal Nehru Technological University, Hyderabad:**

The *IEP* course is for foreign students, whose medium of instruction has not been English and want to improve their proficiency in English. The duration of the programmes is 3 months and 6 months. The course components are LSRW, with grammar, vocabulary and English etiquette. The following strategies are followed: fluency in English speaking is given importance to boost the confidence of the learners and to help them to communicate with their peers, friends and teachers; English grammar and vocabulary build knowledge and aptitude; English etiquette enables the learners to learn the apt accent and pronunciation; Reading, and Listening and Writing skills make the learners eligible for advanced education and career advancement. Right and required attitude helps the learners to manage themselves around, in all walks of life. These certificate courses are not mandatory and do not form part of the main course.

#### **IEPs in Private Institutes in India**

These organizations do not mention that these courses are *IEPs* but course components, number of hours per day and duration of the courses resemble *IEPs*. Most of these programmes are for the general consumption of the public. Following are few samples of the private institutions offering such courses:

#### **British Council, India:**

The courses offered have range of levels and are structured to improve the learners' overall English competency across the four skills of LSRW. Courses are for anyone desiring to enhance English language skills and to be proficient in English. The duration of the courses ranges from one month to three months. The course components are LSRW along with English grammar, pronunciation and vocabulary. The strategies followed are: the courses employ communicative approach. The class size is limited. The latest course books and digital resources are used. Quality feedback is given by expert teachers. The *IEPs* raise awareness of common errors, which influence learners' communication and increase the ability of the learners to learn independently during and after the course. Continuous





assessment is done to measure one's progress. The placement of learners at a suitable level is determined based on the results of a placement test, which includes a written test and a speaking test. The course fee ranges from Rs. 7,000 to Rs. 21,000.

#### **Change Institute, Bangalore:**

Offers English language courses at four levels to improve basic ability to communicate and exchange in a simple way. The course is for anyone wishing to improve one's English either to pursue higher education or aspiring for a rewarding career. The course focuses on LSRW, vocabulary, functional grammar, presentation skills, interview skills, group discussion skills and corporate etiquette. The course tries to boost the confidence level of the learners by increasing the vocabulary level and use functional grammar to improve the basic ability to communicate and exchange information in a simple way. For advanced level learners, intense English pronunciation training is given to neutralize mother tongue influence.

#### **ILSC – Language Schools, New Delhi:**

Offers short-term English courses, for learners at different levels. Academic Preparation Courses and University Preparation Courses are also available. Courses are generally for 4 weeks and number of classes per day varies from 1 hour to 3 hours. Focuses on the skills needed to succeed in college or university like, essay writing, lecture comprehension, note taking, research and academic discussion skills. These courses provide an intensive language immersion to improve the speaking skills quickly.

At the lower level, the learners learn to use the right words and phrases for everyday life by interacting with the classmates in different social circumstances; both real and role played situations. At the intermediate level, it is to improve English speaking and listening skills through small group activities and lively classroom discussions. Learners learn to express ideas in diverse social situations and build vocabulary in a wide range of subjects. Focus is on developing fluency rather than on grammar correction or pronunciation difficulties. At the advanced level, development of fluent and comprehensible speech is achieved through identification and correction of specific pronunciation weaknesses through diagnostic testing, teacher feedback, peer evaluation and self-monitoring.

In the academic preparation courses, aimed at preparing learners to take on studies in English speaking countries, the strategies are to improve reading and writing skills and to strengthen vocabulary by improving grammar usage and build vocabulary by exploring academic topics. The learners learn to effectively skim and scan business and academic documents and also develop an understanding of plot, theme and character.

#### **Stanford English Academy, Institute of Intensive English, Kharghar, Navi Mumbai:**

Certificate Course are offered in Intensive General English, Academic English, English for Professional Communication; there are IELTS/TOEFL preparation courses, and Summer Programs. The courses are 20 hours per week, 5 days a week, and 4 – 52 weeks. The language components taught are LSRW skills. Full time - 5 hours/day or 100 hours/month intensive English course costs Rs. 8,000. Part time - 3 hours/day or 60 hours/month intensive English course costs Rs. 4,500.

### **III. Developing IEP in Indian Universities and Colleges**

The researcher would like to draw on from the rich experience of existing time-tested IEPs in foreign and Indian universities, and other private institutes and suggests that IEPs to be developed in our Indian Institutes of higher education for the Indian learners.

Following are the insights gained, which could used to develop an IEP:

- Maximum exposure to the target language
- Focus on LSRW, grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation
- Importance to oral communication to build confidence in the learners
- Target language as the language of instruction
- Learners expected to speak in English from day 1
- Use of English in real life situations
- Interactive and activity oriented classes with pair work, group work, discussions, etc.
- Smaller class size
- Continuous assessment done and feedback given
- Outdoor activities and field trips to interact with native speakers
- Lessons and themes to be familiar and interesting
- Use of technology and authentic materials
- English etiquette and cultural elements to be integrated
- Personal attention paid
- Optional classes to cater to individual needs
- From the information collected from various universities and institutes above, a typical daily schedule for the intensive English programme is given below:

Typical Daily Schedule for the Intensive English Program					
	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
8:30 AM to 10:10 AM	Listening/Speaking	Listening/Speaking	Listening/Speaking	Listening/Speaking	Listening/Speaking
10:30 AM to 12:15 PM	Reading/Writing	Reading/Writing	Reading/Writing	Reading/Writing	Reading/Writing
Lunch					
2:00 PM to 2:50 PM	Self-Access Learning Center*	Private Tutoring	Self-Access Learning Center*	Private Tutoring	Cultural Trips & Activities
3:00 PM to 3:50 PM	Listening Laboratory**	Self-Access Learning Center*	Listening Laboratory**	Self-Access Learning Center*	↓
4:00 PM to 4:50 PM		↓		↓	↓

\*Self-Access Learning Center hours are non-scheduled. Students may use the centers during any hour in which they are open.  
 All university scheduled hours are 50 minutes in actual length.  
 \*\* For Levels I-IV only

**Figure 1** Typical Daily Schedule for the Intensive English Program

#### IV. IEPs for Indians Learners in India – Why not?

Almost all the Western universities offer IEPs for the non-native English speakers to prepare them to study in American universities. In India, some of the very bright Indian learners go outside the country to study; but even for them IEP is compulsory in the Western universities. Part of the success achieved by Indian students studying in foreign universities is because of their English language proficiency. If IEP is compulsory for these bright and highly motivated students, what about the rural Indian students, whose level of proficiency in English are generally low? Why not make IEPs mandatory for all Indian students in our Indian universities and colleges? Other than the three universities mentioned earlier, no other Indian colleges or universities have IEPs; even of the three only one is open for Indian students. More than 70 percent of undergraduate Indian students are from rural areas. They are inadequately prepared for higher education. The colleges and universities they go to do not have IEPs. Hence, IEPs must be offered in all Indian universities and colleges for all Indian students especially from the rural areas.

Besides, all the existing IEPs are organized outside the class hours and outside the curriculum, as extra or add on programmes. In the Indian context, generally, Indian students are reluctant to join optional programmes, that too to learn English language. IEPs offered by private institutions in India are located only in urban or semi-urban areas and they are not specifically designed for preparing learners for tertiary level education. Paying huge money (from Rs. 2,000 a month to Rs. 8,000) to join these IEPs run by private institutions in urban or semi-urban areas voluntarily is unrealistic and wishful thinking for the rural Indian learners. Hence, IEPs must be made part of the core curriculum and must be organized during the beginning of the first year of under graduation studies so that learners are well

prepared with adequate language skills that will enhance their performance in their subjects of specialization.

An IEP at school will be an ideal solution to learn L2; unfortunately, given our vote-bank politics and narrow-minded politicians, this is not going to be easy. Hence, at least at the tertiary level, an IEP could be adopted. Such a programme will enhance English language proficiency in learners especially, among the most disadvantaged learners namely the rural learners. This will definitely prepare them to take on tertiary level studies, which is predominantly in English.

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