



ENGLISH SPEAKING SKILLS IN THE HIGHER SECONDARY STUDENTS OF SEMI ENGLISH MEDIUM SCHOOLS IN BEED AND LATUR DISTRICT OF MARATHWADA REGION

KANCHAN R. BAHETI

Ph. D. Research Scholar

Department of English

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Marathwada University

Aurangabad (MS) INDIA

ABSTRACT

The objective of the present research paper is to investigate and find out the English speaking levels of the semi English medium students of Beed and Latur District of Marathwada region in Maharashtra. In order to chalk out the complexities and hurdles of such students the paper also tries to bring to light the factors affecting the language acquisition in spoken form in the secondary schools of the region. The researcher has gone through the major reports on the ways English has been taught in the schools in the country and the achievements in the language skills of the students of these schools. The study have conducted random interviews with open ended questions with the Parents of the two districts regarding the speaking levels of the students of higher secondary students of Semi English Medium schools. The results of the discussions concluded 'low' speaking proficiency level of these students. The paper further suggests few practical solutions for the students to apply and motivate themselves to and develop their English speaking skills.

Key Words: SSA (Sarva Siksha Abhiyan), ICT(Information and Communication Technology), ELIPS(English Language Initiative for Primary School), IELTS (International English Language Testing System)

INTRODUCTION:

Introduction of English Language in Maharashtra:

English Language is considered as a medium of communication with the world so it is a – Global Language. According to the data available on Wikipedia there are 370 millions people who speak English as their first language and around 1.3 billion people who use it as a second

KANCHAN R BAHETI

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language or as a foreign language. For most of the branches of knowledge like Sciences, Economics English is a universally accepted medium. As India is the fastest growing economy English plays a very important role in mode of communication with the world. Besides this, being a country with many regional languages, English serve as the medium of communications in many internal affairs related to scientific advancements, global economic issues. English language have being used to bring an intellectual and cultural unification for the Indians living in north, south, east and west. Seeing all these factors the Maharashtra State government has adopted various policies of implementing English in the curriculum of State Primary education system. At the national level the policy proposing body is the NCERT. In a policy proposal document released in the last week of January 2000 it proposes that English be introduced in the primary school curriculum. The Maharashtra state education ministry revised the syllabus in 2000 and English as a language was prescribed in curriculum from 1st std. The Government also directed to introduce subjects like science and mathematics in English as a medium of instruction. Some schools opted to introduce these subjects in English from 5th std onwards and thus came the concept of semi English schools. All these initiatives were taken under the consideration that the exposure to English language at a young age will make students competent English Language users. Thus the Marathi medium schools run by Government and aided schools were transformed into semi English schools. After a decade of implementation of this policy an analysis was made by the government in 2013 in collaboration with British Council to study the achievements of the introduction of English in primary level. According to the survey reports given by the British Council the speaking level of the students studying English for 8 to 9 years was below level. The reports suggested that the approach of English teaching and learning commonly used in Government and Government aided schools have not succeeded in giving students anything more than the ability to produce basic spoken utterances related to familiar situations.

Achievement after 10 years of implementation of English in Primary education:

According to the reports of SSA (Sarva Siksha Abhiyan) 2012-13 it was found that the Government initiative had following lacunas:

- At level 1 (classes I and II) children knew only a few English words and phrases. They were not able to speak complete sentences in English.
- Children were able to recite and sing poems, songs, rhymes and enact small plays. They enjoyed stories and poems. But they were not able to narrate experiences, exchange ideas and carry out brief conversation in English.
- Teachers in all the states/UT have fallen into what is called “The Textbook Trap.” The teachers and students were entirely dependent on the books; they adhere only to the written words and printed instructions and do not move beyond the textbook. As they do not teach any other words/sentence patterns, the students do not achieve mastery in



the four skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing). Treating the textbook just as a tool is not visualized by the teachers.

- Making children listen. Reading books to children for motivation, reading pictures with words, story reading to develop reading habits were the textbook is used in more than 90% of classrooms for being read by the teacher and seen to be missing.
- After going through primary classrooms in 8 states/UT, four practices were mainly observed through which a teacher develops reading skill amongst the students. These are: silent reading, choral reading, pair reading, and reading aloud. Amongst these practices, reading aloud is preferred by nearly 80% of teachers whereas choral reading is being practiced in about 10% of the cases and silent reading and pair reading in about 5% of cases each.
- Teaching of writing skills presents a dismal picture in most of the states. The methodology adopted by primary teachers in 6 states was found to be monotonous. Students in Maharashtra, Odisha, Jammu and Kashmir, Gujarat, Nagaland and Uttar Pradesh simply copy the text written by teachers on the blackboard. It was found that only in Chandigarh and Tamil Nadu teachers gave some visual inputs before assigning writing tasks. Sentence writing, short paragraph writing, dictation of words was the main activities in writing.
- In all the states it was observed that poems were being taught line by line or word by word. After the model reading, children should ideally be reading along with the teacher to enjoy the rhythm and music of the words and also enjoy the poem. It was observed that poetry teaching was not being done in this manner. The emphasis was more on explaining the meaning of words, rather than understanding/enjoying poetry. Teachers paid less attention to pronunciation, intonation and appropriate use of pauses.
- Almost all the teachers taught grammar by making students memorize the rules and work on exercises. None of the teachers said that contextualizing grammar teaching was the best method. Participation of students in the learning process was less in all the states.

These were the observations made by the SSA, and as the satisfaction in implementation of English language lacked a major shift was seen in these years towards English medium schools.

Under the light of the above reports a random interview of the parents of semi English medium schools were conducted in Beed District and Latur District regarding the speaking levels of the their children as they have studied English Language since a decade. The Parents showed concern over the 'low' speaking levels of their children and mentioned few observations:



1. Teacher goes for a direct approach for teaching a new word by giving the meaning in Marathi, instead of using multiple sentences for students to infer the meaning of the words.
2. Grammar teaching was limited to teaching rules instead of content and pattern practice.
3. Teaching poetry didn't have emphasis of pronunciation, intonation patterns and rhythm.
4. The children have scored good marks in Sciences and Mathematics and are doing too good in colleges but lack the skill to express themselves in English
5. As the students are shy they are not self motivated to learn to speak in English.

From all these observations it could be inferred that the Semi English curriculum aimed at making a student with Marathi background, adept enough to grasp the concepts of Science and Mathematics in English. English was taught at all levels as a subject not as a language or medium of communication for developing and expressing ideas. On contrary to this according to the British Council analysis of the performance of the students taking International English Language Testing System (IELTS), an English Proficiency test like TOEFL, shows that those who have Marathi as their mother tongue do better in English than those who have others. The IELTS tests candidates in their listening, writing, reading and speaking skills. The mean scores of the candidate with Marathi as their first language is much better in academic version and general training version but lacked in presentation version.

The probable reasons for lacunas in acquiring English in spoken form:

1. The languages flourish amidst the surroundings. Beed and Latur Districts have predominant population of Marathi and Hindi speaking people, so there is no need to speak in English for communication.
2. The spoken form of English is different from written English, it aims at conveying the message, and so it need not be grammatically correct. But the over emphasis on grammar at basic level underestimates the speaking in English.
3. Writing in English is easy compared to speaking, as speaking is extempore it requires quick response of mind without much thinking.
4. The use of bilingual method of learning also creates hurdle in acquisition of English in spoken form.
5. The shy and reserved attitude of students in using English language for speaking further demotivates them.

As the language learning is not up to the mark the Government of Maharashtra in collaboration with British Council decided to digitalise the education system. The education system was to be developed as more student centric. Languages and science can be best learnt



by real life situations, where Information and Communication Technology can play a very vital role. In 2011 British Council designed a sustainable training program which would develop proficiency and methodological skills in teachers. The ELIPS projects planned to train 67,200 Maharashtra primary level teachers and 20,000 English subject teachers according to the British Council Analysis Reports 2013. The most important feature highlighted in this training was the implementation of ICT as an aid in teaching-learning system.

It is more than half a decade since ICT is implemented in the Government and Government aided schools. There are survey and report on the so far results of implementation of ICT in education in these schools. The fact varies from that on papers.

The contradictory observations marked it reveals few facts:

- Some places they have the system which is rarely used.
- In English Language teaching it was mostly used in listening skills for rhymes and stories.
- It was used in explaining grammar rules.
- There were schools with no electricity supply.
- The teachers lacked motivation to use ICT in Language teaching even if the tools were available.

There are multiple initiatives taken by the Government to meet the need of the students, but are not able to meet the goals of learning English in spoken form. The student can't always depend on external factors for learning language he needs to develop alternative ways to adapt himself to changing environment.

Here are few easy and practical ways that can be habituated by the students to acquire English speaking skills:

1. The habit of reading should be cultivated, children's books and story books have easier words so can start with them.
2. Every word can't be understood so can go for general meaning first guess the meaning from the context and then look up for the meaning of new words.
3. English movies can be seen on famous novels and then the text can be read it becomes easier to understand.
4. Conjugations of verbs can be learnt it develops better understanding of verbs in multiple contexts.
5. Speaking in English with oneself can be practiced.
6. Think in English (Krashen's Theory) is a very good practice for starters as it overcomes the hesitation of speaking English.
7. Focus should be on fluency then on grammar.
8. English songs can be heard and sung with the help of the lyrics of the songs.
9. Situational vocabulary should be learnt.



10. Developing a positive attitude can help in overcoming the fear of speaking English. One can speak in the English he knows and accept the mistakes pointed out and try to overcome the lacunas.

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