

The Teaching Of English As A Subject In Bengali Medium Schools Of West Bengal –A Deep Rooted Dilemma For The Students And The Teachers

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Abstract: The present study is an endeavor to discuss all the problems regarding the teaching of English as a subject in the Bengali medium schools of West Bengal. English being the language of the modern world has gained optimum importance in all sections of our life. It is now the Lingua Franca all across the globe making the whole world a complete unit. So, for a good adaptation to the present life and a successful existence in the modern time ,The English language needs to be tight- gripped. The present article is a good coverage of all the areas where the teaching and learning of English as a subject and as a language has proved a great difficulty and a bitter dilemma.

Key words: English learning, British Rulers, International language.

Introduction: English occupies a place of enormous significance in our country almost in every sphere of life. English as a language for communication ,a medium of instruction came to India during the British period. British East India Company ruled India for almost two hundred years leaving their impact almost in every section of Indian life –from socio-cultural, socio-political, socio-economical to the then education system. English as a language of communication has acquired a dominant position in many sections of society-be it any department ,government offices and the medium of instruction in educational institutions. British had a life-long impact on the Indian administration system ,Indian education system, socio-economic condition of India , as they have been in the supreme situation in terms of governing India and her people the way they wished to do so. After their departure from India even after more than six decades ,their presence is still felt in our education system as they gave us their language –English, which we have blindly received and made it something deep in our life. In our modern life, English is now the global language in terms of being spoken and used by most number of people in most of the countries. English may not be the most spoken language in the world ,but it is the official language of 53 countries and spoken by around 400 million people across the globe. Today, we live in the world of globalization, being the whole world a big market with minimum restriction in case of international business and trade. In today's world, life of a modern man is very much hectic and complicated with workload ,this is where entertainment plays its crucial part in every modern man's life. Here, in this regard also, competence over the English language is a necessity. English has become the language of entertainment like T.V., Cinema and great piece of literary works all around the world usually come in English. So, without knowing English to read ,write and speak, the world of entertainment would remain something unknown and untasted to us. English has now become the

medium of instruction in schools and colleges in most of the developed countries all across the globe. Most of the non-native English speaking countries like China, Germany, Russia, France, Italy etc also have started giving prior importance to have minimum competence over the English language, because they have understood that being ignorant and incapable of expressing themselves in English, they can get cut off from the outside world which would ultimately affect their overall development as a country. **Dave Barry** once rightly said 'Americans who travel abroad for the first time are often shocked to discover that despite all the progress that has been made in the past thirty years, many foreign people still speak foreign language. English being the international language, gained the utmost importance in education system of India. In our country where English is not our native language, the importance of learning English is on the higher side just looking at the enormous popularity the language of English has gained. Hence with the ever increasing demand of English language, many Non-English speaking countries all around the world shake off their anti-English feeling so that they can embrace the modern development in the field of science and technology which ultimately proves beneficial for the betterment of their own country. Now the question comes – in our country where English is considered very indispensable part as a medium of instruction, and the subject of English is regarded with prime importance starting from upper primary level up to higher secondary level, what the problems are there for the teachers in teaching English in Secondary level in Bengali medium schools of West Bengal. This article will be an ardent effort to throw light on all those problems which teachers find in teaching the subject of English in Bengali medium schools of West Bengal.

The arrival of English Language in India: English as a language came to India with the arrival of British East India Company in India. Though British came to India with an intention of making India a colony for their business just to expand area of their land. With the progress of time, they not only enlarged their desire but started doing every possible thing to have a tight grip over administration, to lay a strong foundation for achieving supremacy over Indian agriculture, economy and Indian socio-political system. When British East India Company made India their colony and their political supremacy was established, they started spreading of their dominance almost in every sphere of Indian life. British understood it very well that India would be a land from where they could make maximum profit not only economically, but they could get benefit also if they wanted to spread their colonial dominance all over the world. From that very thought, they were not just happy to use India as their good market for business and trade, they wanted to rule India for as many time they would be able to do, so it was for the fulfillment of their own motive, they required to create a class of Indian people who would be Indian by birth and color, but would be English by taste and culture. For smooth running of their offices and for making it easier to work as a medium between the British and the other Indians, they would want to create a class who with their working knowledge of English would prove themselves very much worthy to their masters called English. With a view to serving this purpose British Govt. first introduced English as the language of instruction and a medium of

communication in the then Indian schools and colleges. From then on by the end of eighteenth century, English was introduced in India for two motives. The first was to create a class of natives through the English as a mode of instruction just to work for them in Govt. offices and other departments. The second reason behind the introduction of English into India and Indian education system was to create a demand for the European institutes. Although both the objectives were designed to serve the interest of the masters, not of the ruled, but it paved the ways for the framework of English education to India which to a large extent is followed even today. British Govt. in a very intelligent way spread their educational institutes in the form of Christian missionaries all over India and this was how the English language became the medium of instruction in the then Indian schools and colleges. Though British introduced English for their own interest the then upper middle class Indian people started educating themselves in English language to equip themselves to achieve few important posts in British run administration, when people from upper middle class took active part in Indian national movement, they used their proficiency in English language to mark their protest in the language which British Govt. understand very well; English also played a critical role in India's struggle for independence as it became the language of political awakening and resurgence.

The role of Christian Missionaries in bringing English in India: English education in India was carried out from two different sources of different characters, one being the Christian Missionaries and the other being the Semi-Rationalist movement. The Christian Missionaries had started educational activities as early as 1542, when St. Francis Xavier arrived in India. The Missionaries set up systematic education in India. Class room education system was established by the missionaries. They encouraged the regional language along with the western subjects in the English medium of instruction.

The place of English in School Curriculum in India: After our independence, English as a language, started gaining importance in many sections of Indian life. First, after few considerations and practical thinking, English was retained and not removed from our country. Then it became the official language of our country. India is a multilingual country, where many regional language exist in many regions, so with English becoming the official language and the language of the courts and administration, united the whole India with one language when it comes to Indian school education. English became the medium of instruction in schools and colleges beside their regional language considering its ever growing importance all over the world in every respect. Place of English in school Curriculum in India is an important issue in modern utilitarian principles. English in 21st century is no more a colonial curse, but a real necessity and thing of high demand in the present scenario of the world. It works as a bridge to higher studies. It occupies a very important place in Indian school curriculum because policy makers in Education know that with good knowledge in English in Secondary level will always help the students in their higher studies. As per Indian Education Commission (Kothari

Commission-1964-66) English works as a bridge between mother tongues or other regional languages and Hindi. In our 21st century ,technology and scientific innovation advance to a place of utmost importance. English is the language of science and technology, so to move with the time ,the learning of English becomes the hour of the need .From utilitarian perspective also, English is given optimum importance in Indian school curriculum at secondary level.

Place of English in West Bengal: In the initial days after India's independence , in West Bengal school education ,English as a subject was considered with prime importance . West Bengal has always been regarded as one of the leading states producing many famous patriots, poets, and scientists etc. West Bengal has always been known for its rich cultural heritage , its love for music , drama and obviously for its literature .After independence , when English language saw the danger of being removed from India, it was the state of Bengal along with the southern states who protested against the removal of English language from India on the ground that the removal of English would establish the dominance of Hindi over the other languages in India. Since then , after the retention of English language in India , and English becoming the official language of India ,it became an urgent need for our administration and educational policy makers to give its due importance to English education in Indian school curriculum . In comparison with other Indian states where literacy rate is quite high and people are mostly educated ,our state West Bengal is far behind when it comes to being quite fluent in English language. In West Bengal, most of the schools are run by West Bengal Board of Secondary Education where Bengali is the only medium of instruction. In the last quarter of the twentieth century ,when few other Indian states like Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka etc gave proper importance to the learning of English language along with their regional language , but West Bengal lagged behind just not being able to give due importance to English language learning. The reason behind the poor condition of English in West Bengal was that the education policy makers thought that the emphasis of English language in our school curriculum would hamper the growth of our own culture ,own tradition and own language also. They thought that the over emphasis on the learning of English would disturb the preservation of our culture. But in this way ,they just misjudged the overall importance of English all across the world ,the globalization was already started by that time. In 1992, during the rule of left front Govt. the learning of English language took a serious jolt in the form of Ashok Mitra Committee. It said English as a subject should be introduced from class v, which would help the preservation and inculcation of our culture in our mother tongue from the primary level. Thus ,when all other few states advanced towards modernization ,to the modern need ,our state West Bengal took a retreating step in terms of English education. This Ashok Mitra Commission played the role of the root of the problem, a serious setback from which we have not fully recovered even today. At present times, when English is the mode of instruction for higher studies everywhere in India , it is for their acute weakness in English, Bengali medium school

students are suffering a lot at the time of doing their higher study, ultimately they perform poorly in their higher study despite having good sound knowledge in their respective subject, only because of not having proper fluency in English for both speaking and writing in English. This situation is getting worse and worse day by day. Now the question comes- in our country where English is considered very indispensable part as a medium of instruction and the subject of English is regarded with prime importance starting from upper primary level up to higher secondary level, what the problems are there for the teachers in teaching English in secondary level in Bengali medium schools. This present study has been made in a bid to find out all the lacunas which act as obstacles in the overall development of the process of learning English language.

Major findings of the study: The article focuses upon the learning of English and its usages as well as its contribution to one's life. Learning English is the need of the hour and its prominent place and position in the international milieu craves everyone's attention towards learning English. English language is the goods of international market which attracts any lay person as well as our school students to speak, read and write in English. Whatever would be the regional dialects, something about the English language in the present stage children are also very much interested in learning English, if 54% is for their mother tongue, then 46% is for learning English language. The sample schools where the study was conducted are not located not even in urban area of West Bengal, it comes under the panchayet area, even though children are very much aware of the price of English language. There are number of important findings which have come out from the field research through the questionnaires, discussion with the teachers and the class observation. These findings are stated below-

- (i) The majority of the students have difficulty in reading English with proper pronunciation.
- (ii) From the very beginning of the upper primary level, students find it really difficult to read and English with the correct spelling.
- (iii) In West Bengal Ashok Mitra Commission (1992) recommended that English as a subject should be introduced from class v, so from the beginning of the upper primary level, students found difficulty to read and write English with the correct spelling, later with the emergence of Pabitra Sarkar Commission, children started learning English from the beginning of their formal schooling (class i)
- (iv) Students are found very low in confidence when it comes to have mastery over the subject of English. So, they end up scoring very poor marks in English.
- (v) It is also found that most of the students do not get proper environment at their home to improve their learning of English.

(vi)Most of the students come from the background where they are the first generation learners .So, the ambience they usually get at their home is not conducive at all for their study. So ,it becomes very difficult for them to have proper learning of English.

(vii)Language is always a problem in terms of learning English properly, the schools where the study was conducted ,almost all the students speak in Rajbangshi language at their home and Rajbangshi is their medium of communication with each other ,so they face great difficulty in schools where teachers use Bengali language as the medium of instruction .Hence, students find themselves in great trouble for the reason that they need to make adjustments to have the better understanding of any subject. So, students at first have to adjust from their regional language to the Bengali dialect which their teachers use and then they have to learn English language. This is how students need to make double effort in the region where the sample schools are located.

(viii)It is seen that grammar remains neglected in the upper primary level in Bengali medium schools, grammar being the foundation or base, without the proper knowledge of grammar ,students find themselves back-footed in terms of having a good command over the English language. They neither write anything in English nor do they speak in English.

(ix)Most of the students know the importance of English in modern times ,still they feel disinterested in learning English because of their baseless fear.

(x)Students do not have the habit of reading English newspaper daily, so they do not develop the good habit of English reading.

(xi)In most of the cases, students do not have the necessary amount of vocabulary to communicate in English, yet they do not grow the habit of using English dictionary for increasing their vocabulary . So, students are found lacking when it comes to expressing themselves in English. It is also a big obstacle for the students in their English learning.

Few effective measures for the improvement of the situation: The present study focuses upon the difficulty of learning English and the areas of incompetence as compared to regional dialect and mother tongue. English being the link language ,the present study highlights number of areas which can be taken as few important measures for the improvement of the situation.

(i)To fight with the difficulty of learning English, students can read English newspaper daily and make it a good habit as it would increase their English vocabulary.

(ii) Modern teaching aids such as audio-visual aids can be used as an effective medium of classroom teaching, it would further increase their motivation and interest level to learn English.

(iii) In Bengali medium schools, teachers should help the students for the use of proper grammar so that students are exposed in English speaking atmosphere in their class, it would encourage them to speak English and remove their hesitation to speak in English.

(iv) Students should be taught functional approach of grammar more because it would improve their ability to communicate in English.

(v) Sometimes teachers should take the back seat in the class just to make the class more learner-centered, methodology like story telling should always be followed in the class.

(vi) Translation method i.e. English from mother tongue should be avoided by the teachers during the teaching of English, it always makes the task more difficult on the part of the students in learning English.

(vii) Classes should be made more interactive with the help of different learning aids, group activities such as group discussion, arranging debates in English, saying something on relevant topics, solving grammatical issues etc should be done in the classes in a play way method.

(viii) Students should be encouraged to watch educational value based English movies and listen to English commentary during a football or cricket game, it would help them find the right words in the right place and would improve their English pronunciation.

Overall English teachers need to be little more careful in teaching English considering its enormous importance in our modern life.

Conclusion: English has now acquired a place of enormous importance in today's world. A man in the modern world can not even imagine his life without English language. As we all know, English is the global language and has got the status of international language, from international business to the world of entertainment, everything is being regulated with the use of English language. So, in the present world, lack of knowledge in English means a complete separation from the outside world. The present study has revealed that children are very weak in the subject English as compared to the other subjects, right from the school level difficulties get multiplied. Through the entire study, it has been found that most of the students are negligent towards the learning of English language. They are in touch with the English language only during the school hours not anywhere else, that is the reason behind their poor marks in English year after year. It is found through the study that the present situation can be improved with the needful initiatives taken by the respective authorities. The conventional method of

teaching needs to be combined with the advanced method by using modern technology and teaching aids. Use of technology and modern gadgets would modify the definition of teaching. With reference to learning English ,orientation programs or summer schools, workshops should be arranged for English teachers. These workshop programs would equip the teachers with the understanding of content of instructional techniques and of critical issues in English education that is needed in the classroom teaching. Above all, the mindset of the students needs to be changed and the main duty of the teachers lies in making them realize that English is one of the easiest subjects and simplest of languages to learn.

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