

**Understanding the Problematics of Pedagogy of English Language Teaching to Rural Students of Punjab (India): Issues and Implications**

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**Abstract**

*Language is so significant that it is the part and parcel of human existence. The perception about the world is constructed and shaped through language. In this context, language is not only medium of expressing our thoughts rather it is the process to experience them. In the process of globalization, among other languages, particularly, English, after passing through various stages, has emerged as a language of global market. It is a fact that English is more required in global labour market especially in white collar jobs. The paper is an attempt to understand English language teaching and learning in higher education but it will also argue the overall language learning environment in Punjab.*

**Keywords:** Creativity, Language, Pedagogy, Rural Students, Teachers

Language is so significant that it is the part and parcel of human existence. The perception about the world is constructed and shaped through language. In this context, language is not only medium of expressing our thoughts rather it is the process to experience them. William O'Grady in his book *Contemporary Linguistics* quotes Lewis Thomas, "The gift of language is the single human trait that marks us all genetically, setting us apart from the rest of life" (1). With the advent of information technology in the contemporary scenario, the social interaction is intensified and one needs the proficiency in more than one languages. Specifically, in the heterogeneous and multilingual country like India, it is prerequisite to have competence in various languages. Besides, language is essential for the whole process of education. It is very significant to fulfill the constitutional commitment of India in Article 45 to provide free and compulsory education for children until they complete the age of fourteen years.

In the era of late capitalism, the rapid changing in the economic structure of the country not only affects the whole education system but also changes the circumstances for the language learning. In such scenario, language is reduced to be an economic commodity like oil and sim card/ micro chip and this commodification changes the preference and motivation for language learning of the individuals as well as the institutions. But at the same time, the competence in communication skills in foreign languages attains new significance. This situation creates certain kind of ambivalence, confusion and contradiction in language learning. Besides, language is related with the thinking process of human beings but contemporary Indian education system is not generating thinking human beings rather its main focus is on producing skilled workers or managers for the corporate houses and multinational companies.

In the process of globalization, among other languages, particularly, English, after passing through various stages, has emerged as a language of global market. Hence, it has acquired the position of the most powerful medium of communication in the business world. English is considerably used as a second language in almost whole world, which means the language that most people use beside their mother tongue. Similarly, it is the associate official language of India. Besides, in the colonial era, English had remained as a hegemonic language of the state and the aim of giving English such a status in the past was to establish the colonial superiority and to legitimize and justify their exploitation under the civilizational mission. The major factor in favour of English language and Western literature was the economic factor –Indians wanted a system of education which could help them to earn their livelihood. Progressive Indian scholars and reformers also accelerated the spread of English education and Western learning. Raja Ram Mohan Roy protested against the government's proposal to strengthen the Calcutta, Madras, the Banaras Sanskrit College and establishment of more Oriental Colleges in Bengal. He wrote to Lord Amherst in 1823, that "Sanskrit education could only be expected to load the minds of youth with grammatical niceties and metaphysical distinction of life which are of little or no practical use to their possessors or to society" (Quoted by N. Jayapalan 81-82). Besides, the "Macaulayan System" was a systematic effort on the part of the British government to educate the upper class of India through the medium of English language. The colonizer wanted that natives to learn English so that they can work in government departments. Besides, the Christian missionaries also played a significant role in teaching learning process of English language. Simultaneously, they inculcate the knowledge of European culture and literature with the help of English Language Teaching (ELT). Keeping this in mind, after the independence, there are some politicians and scholars who regards English is the symbol of eternal slavery and endless

degradation. The dominance of English language can be termed as cultural colonialism and linguistic imperialism and it is a major tool in building new empires.

In the postindependence era, the goal was spelt out as that of using it as a tool to keep in touch with up-to-date knowledge. There was a debate over Native vs English language after the independence because later has been considered as the language of the colonizers but after 1991 when the policies of globalization have been accepted by Govt of India and almost whole world, English emerges as a common language of the global market. In such condition, there is a shift in the attitudes towards English. In the present scenario, it is difficult to succeed in most of the jobs without sufficient confidence in using English. English has become the passport to attractive jobs. Overall, it is the language of business and industry, a *lingua franca* within and outside the country. In general, it enjoys an elitist bias, meaning one is considered educated and sophisticated only if one speaks in English. English is also the language of the media and communication industry. A number of newspapers, magazines, television shows and films use English, so does most of the new media, i.e. computers and the Internet. Even in Agriculture Universities the medium of instruction is English, the courses are supposed to intervene in Agriculture in rural area because the knowledge about agriculture is available only in English.

It is a fact that English is more required in global labour market especially in white collar jobs. And quality teaching of English is available only to reputed private institutes where the children of the elite and upper middle class are getting education. At the same time, most of the government schools' children who are poor and disadvantaged marginalized people are excluded from getting quality education. The non-existence of English can increase the gap between rich and poor. It is said that because of the knowledge of English, Indian youth has emerged as most successful contesters of Information Technology Service. English language knowledge is a significant component of human capital, Chiswick and Miller explain that "Language skills are an important form of human capital. They satisfy the three basic requirements for human capital. These skills are embodied in the person, they are productive in the labor market and/or in consumption, and they are created at a sacrifice of time and out-of-pocket resources" (314). Similarly, in the case of West Bengal, when under the changed language policy of the state by the Communist government, English was prescribed from class iv instead of class I in the government schools, "the results indicate a significant negative impact of the language transition policy on future returns in the labor market for any specific level of education. Individuals who went to school in West Bengal after the introduction of the language policy in districts with a higher probability of attending public schools earned relatively lower wages. The estimates suggest that a decrease in the probability of learning English by 1% lowered weekly wages, in 2004, by approximately

1.6%” (Chakrabortya, 12). Choosing a local language might generate cultural benefits, but it is generally at the cost of attaining higher economic benefits from liberalization. Moreover, discouraging global languages in public schools could aggravate inequality within developing countries by widening the gap between the elites and the poor who are unable to respond to global opportunities (Chakraborty). Diasporic community can get economic gain and well settle in foreign lands with the help of English language.

However, some language scholars in Punjab strongly recommend for the use of mother tongue as a medium of instruction at the same time some Dalit scholars take lead from Chandra Bhan Prasad from Uttar Pradesh and Kancha Ilahi from Hyderabad who considered English as an instrument of social change. They argue that English is a key to Dalit emancipation- not just because of the opportunities for social mobility it provides, but because it allows escape from the traditional caste positioning which is encoded into the regional languages themselves. There is a growing feeling among some under privileged sections of society that one important reason of their being underprivileged is their lack of English. Some even go to the extent of a conspiracy theory behind keeping them away from English. English can keep them away from the exploitative Brahmanical culture (Hindustan Times 5 Jan 2017). In short, English is viewed as a panacea for all problems. In present world access to English can certainly and significantly contribute to the uplift and growth of the disadvantage sections. According to David Crystal English is "playing a central role in empowering the subjugated and marginalized, and eroding the division between the 'haves' and the 'have nots'"(24).

According to a survey carried out by Indian television channel CNN-IBN in August 2009, 87% people feel that knowledge of English is important to succeed in life (CNN\_IBN Survey, 09). The National Knowledge Commission (NKC 2006-09), of India brings it out rightly, “There is an irony in the situation. English has been part of our education system for more than a century. Yet English is beyond the reach of most of our young people, which make for highly unequal access. Indeed, even now, more than one percent of our people use it as a second language, let alone a first language .... But NKC believes that the time has come for us to teach our people, ordinary people, English as a language in schools. Early action in this sphere would help us build an inclusive society and transform India into a knowledge society” ( 27). That’s why, English language teaching and learning is the prominent part of Indian education system. Punjab government recently announced (2017) to provide education through English medium in the government schools. It may be noted that almost all the private schools are providing education in English medium. In this context, although English is not our mother tongue but it is indeed necessary to compete and interact to the whole India and broad world.

Though, the brain biology of all humans is normally capable to learn any language, even then, most of the rural students fail and leave the school/ college in Punjab because of not having adequate proficiency in English language. The recent results of 10<sup>th</sup> and 10+2 of Punjab School Education Board Mohali 2017 (in 10<sup>th</sup> class 70,436 students failed in English, in XII results, over 77,000 students failed in English) endorse the poor performance by the students in English. The paper is an attempt to understand English language teaching and learning in higher education but it will also argue the overall language learning environment in Punjab. Most importantly, English is the special attraction for students, teachers and parents. Moreover, students and teachers are doing hard work in teaching learning process but in reality, the outcome of this gesture is far from satisfaction. Even after hard and sincere efforts, the barriers and hurdles are not being breached.

It is essential to understand what characterizes a rural context. As if you want to teach Joan English you need to know Joan, English and How to teach. Punjab is one of the leading states of the country, even though, the major part of rural population of Punjab can be considered among the disadvantaged of our country due to the overall poverty, lack of development, lack of access to modern amenities, low standards of education and health and peripheral status in the socio-political-economic structure. Punjabi in Gurmukhi script is the official language of Punjab and their contribution to Urdu, Hindi and English literature is significant. But in spite of great contribution to literature, the reality is that most of the rural Punjabi does not afford to spend on education. As a result, rural areas of Punjab are educationally backward in many respects. According to a report on “Rural Students in Universities of Punjab” by Ranjit Singh Ghuman During the academic session 2005-06, “the total number of students in all the universities of state was 22,360 the rural students at the universities and their regional centres constituted a meager proportion of 4.07 per cent (911 students). The proportion of rural students in the universities of Punjab is, thus, far below than that of the proportion of rural population in the state (66.05 per cent as per Population Census of 2001). Further, proportion of the girl students from the rural areas is rather dismal. The Exclusion is wastage of human recourses (38). The federal system of India brings the balloon type exclusive development of Punjab that is why the rural part of state lags behind in education. Besides, there is no heavy industry in Punjab. For jobs, the students have to go to South India or Delhi or other places in search of employment. This also dents the motivation of the students for higher studies.

The rural students have limited sources of entertainment and because of low awareness they prefer to spend more time on the celebration of marriages and festivals. The domestic background and cultural practices of these children constitute a source of disadvantage. There are different varieties of teachers in Punjab in higher education like part

time teacher, para teachers, contract teachers, Guest faculty etc. Bureaucratization of the authorities does not motivate or even allow the teachers for research and further education. The teachers are forced to do nonacademic works, it reduced their interest in teaching. It is the cause of Lower self-esteem in them.

As English is not our mother tongue, the skill of English cannot be acquired through instinct; it needs to be taught. Teaching methods like The Grammar-Translation method, The Direct Method etc. are considerably significant in the teaching learning process of English language. However, a particular method cannot be imposed on the teachers but the knowledge of methods can help them to pick and choose a particular method according to the situation. Various English Language Teaching approaches, methods and techniques are prevalent in Punjab including Grammar Translation method, Structural-oral-situational approach and Direct Method, activity based learning, communicative, competency based, task based language teaching and Experiential Learning Method.

There are certain hurdles related to infrastructural as well as pedagogical in teaching learning process. There is a huge shortage of both human and infrastructural resources. We need skilled & committed teachers of English at all levels. The students in rural area are completely dependent on their teachers. A teacher's role in rural areas is immense as compared to urban areas because in an urban setting a learner has other models like family, peers, society, technology etc to imitate. A rural student has only a teacher to imitate and learn from. The focus must be on the teachers, "That in order to better understand language teaching, we need to know more about language teachers, what they do, how they think, what they know, and how they learn. Specifically, we need to understand more about how language teacher conceive of what they do: what they know about language teaching, how they think about their classroom practice, and how that knowledge and those thinking processes are learned through formal teacher education and informal experience on the job" (Freeman and Richards 1996: 1).

In this way, the teacher can minimize the problems of lack of educational atmosphere and understand their interest, socio economical background, gender difference, shyness, and lack of confidence. Teachers, teacher educators, students and other stake holders in education must learn how to question, reflect and participate in this meaning-making and problem – solving process of education. The teacher can encourage learners to talk about themselves and their experience in English. The teacher can involve the rural students in the process as according to Chinese proverb tell me and I will remember, teach me I will understand involve me I will learn, share my concern I will change. If a teacher recognizes what is good in students only then s/he will accept what a teacher think is bad about him for example Ram



your spelling is excellent. Why don't you improve your handwriting next time? This can be an effective way to encourage the students.

The teacher-student ratio as per the Right to Education should be 1:30 in primary and middle schools. Likewise, for 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> classes, the ratio is fixed as 1:40 but virtually this ratio in most of the schools is 1:60. According to Education Department, against the 1:55 teacher-student ratio, it is working as 1:90. The large size of the class creates a distance between teacher and student. The classroom is overcrowded and the facilities are inadequate. Class consists of heterogeneous learners, belonging to different social economic and educational backgrounds.

To make classroom a place of interest, there is a need to organize class in an effective way. The talk time ratio of the teacher and the student is almost 80: 20 in the classroom. To make classroom interaction lively, interesting and purposeful, such as group work, team work, pair work, role plays, icebreaking activities and poster presentation and active games. Keeping in mind that some students may dominate others so close monitoring is required. The practical significance of the study might involve the students to study English without being anxious and fearful, and develop a more positive attitude in language learning. English Language learning must be taken up as a practical subject. Language learning is possible by practicing and practically making students learn to understand what they hear by listening. Ear training exercises must be given to the rural students and they must be accustomed right from the beginning to hearing and understanding normal English speech. So more and more practice in reading, writing, speaking and listening must be made a part of the syllabus. Even the syllabus must be rooted in the local context where it is to be taught. Even the tests and examination style can be changed and made more creative. Language labs can be established in schools and colleges and interesting and creative teaching methods should be adopted by teachers to teach English language. A friendly and cooperative atmosphere in the class is required so that students don't feel shyness or fear in the class and can become expert in this skill. A glossary of words in various profession fields, event of life. Weekly film shows, facelift to the general ambience in schools, etc should be put in place to arrest the dwindling standards of teaching/ learning of English in rural areas. The said measures may appear farfetched but will certainly help in better teaching and learning of English language in rural areas. Measures, such as higher levels of financial incentives for poor parents to send their children to school, making classroom activities are more experimental and enjoyable.

It is not difficult to see that the urban and rural situations in our countries are pole apart. In urban areas parents are educated and they also help their wards to get through the intricacies of various subjects especially English but in rural areas parents are generally daily wagers as well as uneducated who cannot contribute towards the improvement of English language for

their children. For them the teacher is the only mentor available to steer their way for learning the second language. The role of teacher in rural area, thus, becomes more important than in the urban area.

On the basis of the personal experience of living and working in rural areas, the informal feedback collected from numerous teachers, parents and students from rural area it can be said that there is no proper in-service training of English teachers: there are no refresher/orientation courses on English language teaching to rural students. There are some NGOs and agencies who are giving training to teachers but most of them are not experts and merely trained, moreover, their approach is mechanical. Majority of the teachers have not received this type of high level training or research experience. With the orientation in research, the teacher can observe, document and evaluate one's own practice. However, they need training for pedagogical expertise, and understanding of curriculum and materials. Focus of the training should not merely focused on subject up gradation rather than emphasize on the teacher in the class room. But reality is that since long teachers-learners have been facing multiple complex problems in the teaching learning process. Most of the time, this problem is explained by the experts, professionals or social scientists who are alien to socio-economic-lingual environment of rural students. Sometimes this is understood and explained by politicians and bureaucrats. The western linguists explore this problem from a monolingual perspective and they ignore the heterogeneous and multilingual character of India. In order to achieve desired results, the teacher as well students have to rethink the whole pedagogical system of English language.

The English teachers in the rural areas can be given special incentives and trainings. In the Govt. primary schools of Punjab like other states, we do not have special teachers for English. Even for the middle and high schools, only Social Studies teacher was teaching English but recently Punjab Government creates the posts of English Teacher. There is a need of English Teacher Resource Centers (TRC). It can be established at every state University. There is no effective implementation of technological schemes like EDUSAT. Similarly, there is no provision of minimum technological aids like TV, Tabs, Computers, Stereos, and Projectors. With the introduction of teaching through EDUSAT (Educational Satellite) in 2008 in the government schools of Punjab it was thought that the educational standards in general and teaching of English in particular will become easier and interesting but this attempt also proved a dumb squab. The fault lies with the implementation of the things as the working of EDUSAT requires certain technology as well electricity. In most villages either there is either lack of electricity or limited access to electricity which resulted in non-working ROTs or SOTs. Moreover the teachers using the EDUSAT need to be well versed with the nuances of technology which was a major shortcoming. Ultimately it was just reduced to a



practice of taking the whole class to EDUSAT room and bringing it back. Now these are used as a tool for holding online meetings or video conferencing. The actual purpose is defeated.

There are different policies, programmes, planning and implementations in the domains of politics and governance. But we have uniform syllabus, course structures, materials, evaluation systems and policies for entire state, common to both rural and urban. Many educationists argue that the courses, materials, etc. designed for urban learners will not be appropriate for the rural learners and vice versa. We often find that the needs and interests of the learners, the objectives of teaching and learning English, the content of the course materials, and even recommended methods and evaluation patterns tend to be decided with urban learners in mind. Because of this urban focus of our educational design is an important reason why rural learners do not get benefit from education. The content of our curriculum and the construction of the tasks and activities in class need to be emergent and local – emergent in the sense that these have to emerge from the learner’s personal and cultural needs, to be negotiated between teacher and students –local in the sense that the content should be built around the learner’s life experience, his knowledge and socio-cultural practices so that the content becomes meaningful and hence easily accessible to the learner. Curriculum needs to become a process of helping learners become critically aware of themselves. We can say that Students are under invested. Curzon wished to apply some innovative ideas like the curriculum in the schools of rural areas would be different from the schools of urban areas. He suggested including subject of Agriculture right from the beginning in the schools of rural areas. Students need special training especially in recognition of sounds and difficulties in production and expression of these sounds. To improve pronunciation of students, teachers should be themselves aware of their weakness and strength regarding English pronunciation Moreover, our examination system does not have any oral skill test. The student of Punjab found problems in spelling, vocabulary, and in grammar. So cramming is increasing day by day. It is a common problem that students have organizational problems in writing essays. The students are not motivated but forced to memorize. Writing with organization had relation to semantics and coherence in lines and thought. Writing personal journals and diaries by both teachers and students can be helpful in this sense. It can break the inertia in the writing skills. Students can be motivated to write autobiographies.

Paulo Freire in his seminal work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* calls traditional pedagogy the “banking model” because it treats the student as an empty vessel to be filled with knowledge, like a piggy bank. In the traditional teacher-centered classroom, he condemns the godly presence of the teacher. He argues for pedagogy to treat the learner as a co-creator of knowledge. The students do not participate in the process. Some teachers

belong to different class and location from the students, moreover, they are biased that rural students are intellectually poor. MA course is predominately inclined toward literature in comparison to language teaching. The rural students are first generation in education that is why they get less support from families in social, financial and emotional terms. Moreover, they have to assist their families in the agricultural and domestic works. Due to the limited economic resources they are less exposed to broad world

There is a Lack of English speaking environment, discouragement of society. The classroom environment increases the students' language anxiety. No innovative schools, agencies and persons who are trying to adapt or redesign main stream English teaching and learning to rural students. There are no experiments in teaching learning English.

The above mentioned difficulties create problems to students not only in their academic success but also to their professional progress. They are more interested in passing the examination instead of learning the language as tool. Students possess low vocabulary bank, poor listening facilities, etc is a major cause for their weakness in English and academics.

It is quite clear that the teaching of English at college level needs to be made realistic and relevant in terms of the needs, difficulties and expectations of the students.

Another important factor which is to be taken into account is the use of mother tongue. Generally a student learning English as a second language finds it difficult to cope up with the differences between his mother tongue and English language. He gets confused on various grounds of pronunciation, grammar, syntax, etc. Moreover in order to form a sentence in English a student initially constructs the sentence in his mother tongue and then translates it into English. That is why he commits certain errors which are due to the interference of his mother tongue. Here comes the role of a teacher. The teacher needs to be aware about this process and there should be justified use of mother tongue in the classroom.

The role of the English teachers is becoming highly complex and challenging because they are expected to perform a variety of roles, such as those of a soft skills trainer and communication skills trainer besides being a teacher of English language. To conclude, one can say that an innovative teacher can play a very flexible, experimental and ultimately more rewarding role in teaching English to students. Giroux (1988) challenged teachers to become "transformative intellectuals" devoted to changing students' lives and society. In recent decades, the research on language learning has been quite dynamic and constructive, but so far as the teaching learning language to the rural students is concerned, a lot of research is required to reach on a unified and comprehensive viewpoint.

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