



## CHALLENGES IN TEACHING COMMUNICATION SKILLS (ENGLISH) TO UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS IN HIMACHAL PRADESH (INDIA)

**Vandana Sharma**

Former Assistant Professor in English Maharaja Agrasen University Baddi, Himachal Pradesh (India)

**ABSTRACT** Communication skills are considered as an important criterion in the selection of job professionals. In this age of globalization having excellent fluency in oratory skills is an extra advantage for young graduates. The aim of this research article is to highlight the ever increasing demand of English language along with the difficulties faced by English language teachers in teaching English to undergraduate students in Himachal Pradesh. This research article not only marked the problems encountered by English language teachers but also provide some suggestions such as establishment of language lab, special remedial classes, revision of curriculum and organizing guest lectures from eminent language professionals which can help the teachers to raise the English language proficiency of under graduate students.

**KEYWORDS :** English Language, proficiency, teaching problems, language lab, curriculum.

### INTRODUCTION

The role of English language in connecting nations to nations and people to people is remarkable these days. English language has gained popularity across the world as one of the most common language used by the individuals (Steven, 2005). It is undeniable fact that communication skills are in great demand at every work place (Stevens, 2005, p. 2). Having good communication skills especially both oral and written become more viable core competencies for a successful career. English is regarded as the, "main mode of language between two people who belong to different cultures where English is not the native tongue" (Riemer, 2007, p. 89).

Every employer nowadays, wants to hire an employee who has excellent communication skills (Moslehifar & Ibrahim, 2012). In order to prepare proficient English language speakers, every educational institute is now focusing on inculcating good communication skills among the undergraduate students so that they can compete in corporate world and secure a successful position in their career life.

In Himachal Pradesh, every private university, who is offering undergraduate programs such as BBA, B.Com, B.Sc., B.Tech and B.Pharm has included a compulsory subject based on communication skills into their curriculum. This inclusion is required to prepare young graduates to establish their future career in the global market. For example, if a young graduate has a good knowledge of his subject/field but he is not even speak up to demonstrate his abilities and achievements in an interview then most probably he will not be able to secure a job in the market where employer is seeking a fluent English speaking candidate (Riemer, 2012; Steven, 2005). It may be noted that, however, learning of communication skills has become compulsory for all undergraduate courses but there are various challenges present into the accomplishment of this aim. English language teachers face numerous challenges in teaching communication skills especially when they teach students who belong to rural areas of India. Apart from well-structured objective based curriculum, language teachers in private universities face various issues during their teaching. Here I am mentioning few of those challenges:

### 1. LACK OF BASIC ENGLISH KNOWLEDGE

Most of the students studying in private universities in Himachal Pradesh are from rural areas. As a result, their initial elementary education is not so much strong that enable them to compete in international market. Majority of students studied from governments schools where English subject is introduced from Ist standard whereas in private schools, students has an access of English language from nursery class. If we carefully examine the syllabus of English from class I to VIII then we find that 'Tenses' introduced in 7<sup>th</sup> standard which is very late. Whereas in private schools, students learn tenses in II-III standard. As a result, the students coming from rural background have poor basic knowledge of English language which hinders their path to become an English language proficient.

### 2. FEAR TO LEARN ENGLISH LANGUAGE

The second main challenge is the fear in the mind of students regarding English language. Mostly students belong to rural areas and they are not always willing to learn English language due to their lack of interest towards the learning of a foreign language. Their basic knowledge is not strong hence the always have perception that English language is difficult to learn (Shah, 2018). Willingness on the part of students is necessary and a pre-requisite to have a successful teaching-learning process. In the absence of lack of interest, university teachers face problems in teaching English to such students.

### 3. RURAL STUDENTS FEEL INFERIOR TO CONVENT STUDENTS

In a class consist of both rural and convent school passed out students, a language teacher always encounter problems in teaching. Due to the sound basic knowledge of English grammar, convent school students always excel in almost every class activity. On the other side, students having rural background even don't want to participate. They always have a feeling that they are inferior to convent background classmates. This feeling of inferiority stops them to take part in language learning activities.

### 4. MEDIUM OF INSTRUCTION

Medium of instruction also plays an important role in English language learning. The students especially from rural background in Himachal Pradesh taken their elementary and secondary education in Hindi medium hence they always feel comfortable in studying into the mode of instruction which they have studied earlier. When they reach at university level where every medium of instruction is English for every subject then they feel nervous and face difficulties in understanding. English is being taught in government schools just as a compulsory subject not as a language while all other subjects taught into mother tongue Hindi. Hence every student wants to get rid off from this foreign language learning. This mode of instruction and inappropriate syllabus of English discourage students (Varghese and Nagaraj, 2012).

### 5. LACK OF MOTIVATION

Motivation can play an important role in teaching-learning process. The study of Shah (2018) stated that there is a lack of motivation among undergraduate students towards the learning of English language. English taught in government schools up to secondary level is just to provide basic subject knowledge. School teachers rather need to motivate students to acquire the linguistic skills than to mere gain bookish knowledge. "English is taught as a subject in present school education system and not as a language" (Shah, 2018, P.343).

### Suggestions to improve English proficiency of undergraduate students

- Special remedial classes can be organized to improve the proficiency level of under graduate students in which stress should be given to clear the basic concepts of English language and grammar.

- b. Universities can revise their curriculum and include the basic concepts of English language. However, the current curriculum is only focused on language proficiency aspect only but there is a need to make the foundation strong so that students can easily grasp the fundamental concepts of English language.
- c. The best way to boost up the confidence of students is through rewards and motivation. Teacher's can motivate weak students by giving them proper motivation. Small prizes on achievement can raise the confidence of weak students.
- d. Teacher's should organize group discussion sessions regularly and encourage weak students to participate. This will not only remove their fear of speaking but also enhance their confidence level too which will enable them to become English language proficient.
- e. Universities should invite speakers of English language and organize lectures on topics like how to overcome fear towards English language and how to improve English language proficiency. These special guest lectures can be proved very helpful for the undergraduate students.
- f. In order to increase the participation of weaker students, teachers can organize inter-class debate and speech competition. Active participation is an essential to raise confidence level of the students which will certainly help them to become language proficient.
- g. There is an urgent need to change the teaching methodology of English language. Language is being taught to the students as a compulsory subject with old lecture based pedagogy. Rather to focus on old methodology teachers should try learning by doing techniques into the classrooms and other interactive measures through which students can learn easily.
- h. Teacher's should update their current knowledge by attending teacher refresher courses and use their updated knowledge into devising new techniques of teaching-learning which can appeal to even least motivated students also.
- i. The use of dictionary can also be very effective in enhancing English language skills. Students should encourage using the dictionary. There are various versions available in the market which provides clear meaning to the thousand of words from Hindi to English and English to Hindi with correct pronunciation too. This will not increase their vocabulary but also enable them to learn the correct pronunciation of the words.
- j. In order to increase the vocabulary, teachers should introduce at least 5 new words of daily use life into the classroom along with their meanings and asked the students to memorize those new words. Students should be encouraged to use the learned new vocabulary into daily conversations which will definitely improve their English proficiency level.
- k. There are plenty of English language software's available in the market which are only designed to improve the English language in terms of vocabulary, pronunciation, stress and intonation etc. the establishment of language lab in the universities can be proved as a boon for the students.

## CONCLUSION

From the above detailed discussion it is evident that English language teachers face various problems during their teaching-learning process. It is a matter of pity that majority of rural students studying in private universities in Himachal Pradesh are struggling to become English language proficient due to the faulty Elementary and Secondary education system, inappropriate curriculum distribution and the use of old teaching pedagogies where English is being taught mere as a compulsory subject rather than a language. These faults present in Himachal Pradesh school education give problems to the English language teachers when they try to teach professional English to undergraduate students at university level. However, these problems can be overcome by applying certain measures such as establishment of language lab, providing motivation to the weak students and by using student-centered teaching approach in which teaching pedagogy is decided on the basis of student needs. English language proficiency is a key essential criterion in the selection of job opportunities and other competitive exams. In this situation, universities and English language teachers have a great responsibility to prepare such English language proficient graduates who not only can compete in present world but also able to achieve heights in their career (Riemer, 2007).

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