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ENGLISH LANGUAGE EDUCATION IN BIHAR

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Abstract:

English is a widely spoken language today and it is in a great demand in the state of Bihar like any other states of India. It has often been referred to as 'international language' and as 'lingua franca' of today and at present English language is often taught as a second language around the state of Bihar. English in India as well as in Bihar is used not only for communicating with the outside world, but also for inter-state communication. Because of the great ethnic and linguistic diversity found within our nation, English acts as an effective 'link' language after Hindi and people from Bihar do not want to be left behind just because of the lack of the knowledge of English language and its communicating skill. With the economic and the Information Technology revolution and most software and operating systems being developed in the English language, a new application of written and oral communication in the English language has emerged and Bihar has felt the heat of the importance of this language. Government and public have realized the importance of English language but it has been constantly observed that there is a serious gap in the goal and efforts and approach of the government in providing English language education to its people. This Paper will try to present a picture of that gap visible in the policy of English language education of Bihar.

Keywords: *ELE in Bihar, ELE in Government School, Conflict in Goal and Effort, Social and Linguistic Conflicts, etc.*

Since a long time back, it has been argued and advocated by some national and state level educationists and politicians that it is an utmost need of the time that with Hindi, English too need to be used as a link language in India at national stage or at global stage as India is a multilingual society and there is no common agreement on Hindi as a national language and which is another suitable candidate to serve the purpose of a link language at national stage but not at global stage. Apart from that it has also been argued that to understand the rest part of the world, to communicate with International community and to compete in national and International market, English must be used as a link language in India.

Government as well as public felt a sincere responsibility to provide a better knowledge and communicative skill of English language to the children of the state of Bihar and for that Government has been giving a special emphasis on English education at school level as well as at college and university level as one can observe looking at the syllabus of the schools and the language which is preferred to use a medium of instruction in the classroom at college and university level. But there is a serious problem which we encounter in the goal and the approach of getting that goal of the government regarding English language education as there is an emphasis on teaching English literature rather than English language at school level as there is no proper syllabus, no proper teaching and learning materials as well as teaching and learning facilities for English language education are available in most of the government schools of the state of Bihar and probably the same

situation prevails in the government schools of the rest part of the country. It is not very clear that which English the government wants to teach to the students as again there is a serious conflict between the English of the government schools and the English of the public schools and it becomes a matter of great concern as it leads the students towards an inferiority complex when they enter into either in universities or in colleges.

A Global Language in the State and in the Country:

Why English?

English in Bihar today is a symbol of public desire for standard and quality in English language education and a fuller participation in the activities of national and international life. Both government and public have almost forgotten its colonial origin or it has become irrelevant for them. In place of going back to its colonial origin root both public and government have taken a different path and looked at English with different eyes. They look at English as a language of library or as a language of international library, as a link language, as a language of national and international market and finally as a window through which their people can peep into the world. The emergence of liberalization in Indian economy in the last decade of last century has coincided with an explosion in the demand for English in almost every nook and corner of the country because English is perceived to open up opportunities in every walk of life inside the nation or outside the nation.

The level of introduction of English:

The utmost reflected impact of the presence of English is that it is today being preferred by every school going children and their parents as well as by government at the very initial stage of schooling. The government has given a proper space for English language education in one hand and kept its eyes completely closed on the mushrooming of English coaching centers on the other hand. Though the English teaching profession has consistently recommended a relatively late, preferably at middle school, introduction of English and this is reflected in spirit in policy documents. The dissatisfaction with this recommendation is evident in the mushrooming of private English-medium schools and the early introduction of English in state school systems.

The level of introduction of English has now become a matter of government's responsibility response to public desire, rendering almost irrelevant an academic debate on the merits of a very early introduction.

The variety and range of English teaching in Bihar:

The teaching and learning of English today is characterised by, on the one hand, a diversity of schools and linguistic environments supportive of English acquisition. In Bihar, English education has always been the top priority of the guardians who want their children to be well-versed and well-conversant in this global language. And because of that Parents of different linguistic background moved towards sending their children in private schools and towards private English coaching centers and which gave birth of various varieties of English. So, today we have a clear cut distinction in a private school English and a government school English which further may be divided in many varieties based on the influence of individual's mother tongue. It is commonly known that Bihari students are good at English grammar and to some extent English writing. However, when it comes to speaking out, they feel tongue tied and can't communicate properly in the absence of exposure to English communication. The simple reason for this is that in classrooms more emphasis is attached to improving writing skills than to speaking ones. Consequently, they keep lagging behind in spite of good knowledge of all grammatical and syntactical rules.

Teaching and Learning Materials:

If we look the space given for English language in the syllabus of middle school and high school of Bihar Board, we find that it is almost cipher as on the name of English language teaching two books which consist of few English short stories, few plays and few English poems and book of Grammar and composition are prescribed. These may serve the purpose of writing and reading but not

of speaking and listening which are major skills of communication. Materials for Speaking and listening are almost missing. In first sight itself it seems that these books are prescribed for imparting the knowledge of English Literature rather than English Language. Teaching foreign literature at middle school and high school level may be good effort and an admirable approach but teaching only English literature gives a sense of colonial mind set. It does not give a sense at all that government is any way serious to impart the knowledge of English language which will be used as an instrumental language for national or international communication.

No period is specified for speaking and listening and there is no place for testing speaking and listening skill of the students as it is very much clear from the syllabus where there is 20 marks for reading, 20 marks for writing, 20 marks for Grammar and translation and 40 marks for literature. How English language education plan or strategy can provide a better tool of communication to its learner without enhancing speaking and listening skill of a language? This is how the Bihar government has been continuously promising its people to hand over an International instrument of communication or in other words a lingua franca since more than five decades.

Even the materials which prescribed for reading, writing and understanding are out dated as there is no place for current discourse in study materials.

Crisis of English Language Educators:

Apart from crisis in teaching and learning materials and passive attitude of government towards providing an adequate atmosphere for getting a proper communicating skill of English Language, there is a serious crisis of Proficient English language educators in Government schools of the state of Bihar one can easily observe. It has also been observed in the classrooms of the government schools of the state of Bihar that rarely teachers and students converse in English during English language class as there is space for communication is reflected in the curriculum. It can be easily questioned that without providing proper study material, proper English Education policy and proper trained English language educator how can government reach to its goal. How can it provide a platform to its people to compete at inter-state level, national level or at international level?

Social Realities:

Apart from government faulty efforts, there is another area which bothers a lot for that too directly or indirectly Bihar government is responsible. One of the principal factors, perpetuating the social segmentation of English education, is the availability of English learning inputs at home for young children. It is found from the sources (Status of Elementary Education in Bihar, A Study by Pratiche (India) Trust, Kolkata and Asian Development Research Institute (ADRI), Patna) that 61.1 percent of the children did not receive any help at home: of them 30.1 percent, however, were "fortunate" to have received help from a private tutor. Combining the above observations, it emerges that nearly 40 percent of all the school-going children are in need of some teaching help at home, but are not able to receive it – either from parents or relatives or from private tutors. Such deficiencies for the disadvantaged social groups are most likely to widen the social segmentation of education. Unfortunately, the present elementary education system in Bihar does not allow for learning inputs at schools which are so adequate that it compensates for absence of similar inputs at home.

Efforts to Patch up the Gap:

In recent years some efforts have been observed as British Council has started working with the department of education, government of Bihar on a teacher education project which aims to improve the teaching of English at secondary level in all government schools in Bihar. The project, Bihar Language Initiative for Secondary Schools, (BLISS) funded by the Department for International Development of the UK (DFID) was initiated in January 2012 and ran till March 2014. It aimed to produce a comprehensive but accessible profile of the state which will be a core reference document for educational product development, project interventions, and reform. It will be of use to state planners, administrators, professionals and educationalists, as well as external agencies such as educational NGOs and businesses.

Conclusion:

To sum up we would like to say that it is a high time for the government of the state of Bihar to rethink over its goal and its efforts to reach to that goal as far as English language education is concerned at middle school and at high school level. The focus should be laid on English language education rather than English Literature Education. A link language is in need not a link literature. Therefore, government should wake up and provide adequate curriculum, adequate study materials and proper trained English language educators so that the real goal of the government could be achieved.

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