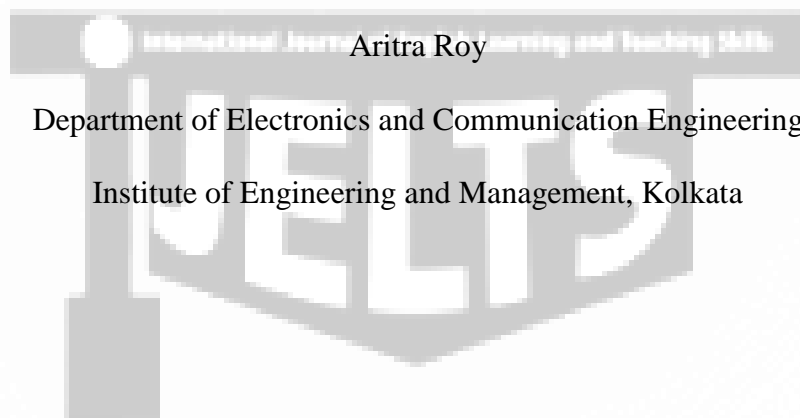


A Study on English Education in Primary School Level of West Bengal and Scope of Using
Technology To Improve the Scenario



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ABSTRACT

In the era of globalisation, English Language has become necessary for all of us. English education in India came to picture after the historical Macaulay's Minutes of Indian Education (1835). After that, several years passed, but the situation is still not good, especially in West Bengal. According to the statistics, 45 per cent of class V students cannot write their names properly in English, 67 % of the class V students cannot give answer to the simple questions in English.

This adverse condition is making the situation tougher for the teachers of secondary level to give them proper training in speaking and writing English for day-to-day activities. In this article, I have tried to look into the matter deeply to find the root of the problem and tried to design some measures using modern technologies to improve the scenario.

Keywords: English Education, West Bengal, Use of technology, Primary Education

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Introduction and Literary Review

India is a land of diversity and the same applies for language and dialect also. According to the 8th schedule of the Constitution of India, there are 22 scheduled languages mentioned. Among those, only 47 are used as the media of instruction in education system and English is one major language of them. It has been achieved the status of associate official language at the national level. English has been used in India for more than a century, but even now, very few can speak English. In spite of English being spoken and used as the mode of communication and instructions in offices, business, industry, preparation of professionals like Doctors and Engineers and in the field of research and especially in science and technologies. So teaching and acquiring knowledge of English has gained importance in the Education system of our country. According to census 2011 statistics, only 2,59,678¹ people have stated English as their primary language, in West Bengal, the number is only 14945². So, the situation is indeed challenging.

An Insight to the History of English Education in India

If we look deep in the history of English education in India, English language came into the picture with the entry of East India Company and expanded with the expansion of the above mentioned company. In earliest 19th century, Christian schools, with the help of the

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missionaries started functioning. Macaulay's Minutes of Indian Education (1835) stated the necessity of the use of the language as it stated, 'Indians cannot be educated by means of their mother Tongue. English is the language'. He also advised that English would be the language of commerce, politics, judiciary.

Macaulay's minutes on education dated 2 nd Feb, 1835- got approval by the then Governor General of India, William Bentick on March 7,1835, which is the founding stone of British Education system of India. Due to the policy, soon English became the language of elite, intelligentsia and educated middle class. The education policy saw various changes before and after independence.

During World War-I, Gandhi, alongwith Gopal Krishna Gokhale demanded the use of mother tongue as the medium of education. Sadler Commission was set up for looking into the dispute between English and other vernacular languages. After Independence, several states adopted the policy of discontinuing English education at the primary level. West Bengal govt. Decided to introduce English from Class V as per the recommendation made by the Ashok Mitra Committee in 1983. Though in 2003, the suggestion by The Pabitra Sarkar Committee and the change in public opinion brought English back in class III. Various factors like, growth of the middle class, rapid urbanization, changing employment trends, outsourcing of jobs to India in the IT sector, privatization of higher education institutions, widespread use of internet in daily life, popularity of India as a tourism destination, growth of hospitality sector, popularity of English TV channels and films increased the use of English language in India and also resulted in increasing the pressure to get the children admitted into English medium schools.

A Review on Process of Teaching

From the very beginning, various commissions and committees were set up to give their suggestion on teaching the language. The Official Language Commission under B. G. Kher recommended seven years of English teaching in school (Kher, 1957). In this context, **The Kunzru Committee (1959) can be remembered** which recommended English as second language. IN the conference of Chief Ministers held in 1961, it was decided to include English as one of the three language in upper primary level. Though, later all the states decided to introduce the English at primary level. Learning a language is not all about the ability of reading, writing or speaking. It requires an in depth knowledge and application level knowledge to integrate with various other modes of communications. Knowing English has become an indication of social status and good lifestyle. Increasing number of English medium schools in India, as well as in West Bengal clearly supports that.

Present Scenario of English Education

Along with the introduction of Sarva Sikshsha Abhijaan, the quality of education in India got a huge boost up. After that, National Knowledge Commission proposed to introduce English at class 1, so that after 12 years of learning, he can have the necessary knowledge. Right to Education Act(2009) ensured the guarantee of quality education in India, which included the learning of three language at upper primary level.

Fig1.1: An Comparative study about Class at which English is introduced in the States/Uts³

Class	States
Class I	Delhi, Goa, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Andaman & Nicobar, Arunachal Pradesh, Chandigarh, Chhattisgarh, Lakshadweep, Maharashtra, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Madhya Pradesh, Nagaland, Puducherry, Punjab, Rajasthan, Sikkim, Tamil Nadu, Tripura, Assam and Bihar.
Class II	Andhra Pradesh, Odisha. In West Bengal Uttarakhand, Chhattisgarh, Kerala and Uttar Pradesh (Class I & II oral, Class – III written).
Class III	Gujarat, Dadra & Nagar Haveli, Daman & Diu.

English is the mode of Education in places like Nagaland, Jammu Kashmir etc. While teaching, teachers must teach English in a multilingual way, so that the gap between English and other vernacular language can be bridged. West Bengal govt has decided to emphasize on the English education, as this year, it has introduced various English medium government school throughout the state.

A Look into the Acquired Knowledge of English of the students of class IV

- According to the study conducted in several schools, only 47 per cent of class IV student can write their names in English.
- Only 35 per cent student of the class could read out sentences.
- Only 17 per cent of the students could give reply the simple questions asked in English.

Analysing the Problems of Learning English in Primary Schools

If we want to look deeper inside and find the roots of problems, we need to interact with the persons who are directly connected with the primary education. In this context, I have talked with some teachers as well as the students. I asked them what was the hindrance behind the lack in learning English language. If we summarise the problems, it is as follow-

1st Generation Learner: In the schools of West Bengal, almost 23% of the students are 1st generation learner (FGL) ⁴. As a result of this, they are lacking the guidance and environment of learning at their home. In most of the cases, they are the prey to poverty and implicit discriminations. Fig 1.2 indicates the difference in test scores of Bengali and Mathematics between FGL and non-FGL in a study by Jyotsna Jalan with Jharna Panda⁵.

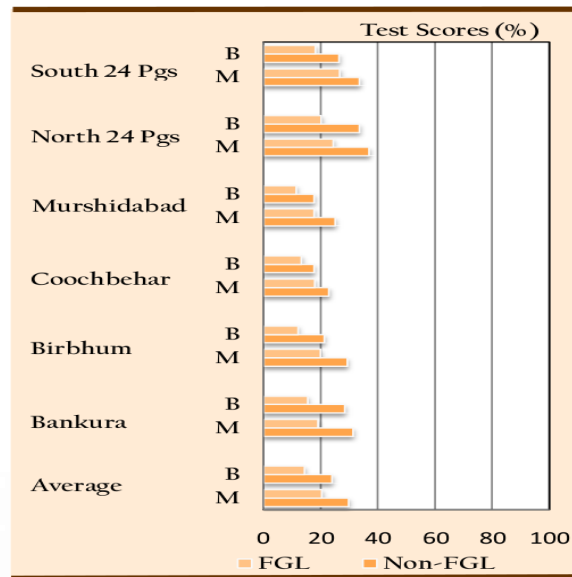


Fig. 1.2: Test Scores across First Generation Learners ⁴

Poor Teacher to Student Ratio: In spite of clear mentioning of Pupil to Teacher Ratio at RTE Act 2009, most of the schools in West Bengal are suffering from the poor teacher to student ratio. As a result of that, teachers are unable to give personal care and attention to each of the students. Fig 1.3 indicates the Student to Teacher ratio in primary schools of West Bengal.

School enrollment	RTE Teacher Norms	2010	2011
		% Schools that do not meet PTR norms	
1-60	2	25.8	25.0
61-90	3	69.6	57.1
91-120	4	77.5	66.7
121-150	5	87.7	73.6
151-200	5 + HM	66.7	74.6
> 200	see note	90.0	85.5
TOTAL		73.9	65.7

Note : For schools with enrollment above 200 children the PTR shall not exceed 40 excluding the Head Teacher

Fig. 1.3: RTE norms: Pupil-teacher ratio 2010 and 2011 ⁶

Lack of Discipline and Concentration during Studies: In most of the primary schools of West Bengal, discipline is the least concern. As a result of this, study process in a continuous manner gets hampered. As most of the schools have very high PTR, in such scenarios, it becomes difficult to control the class and give them required education simultaneously.

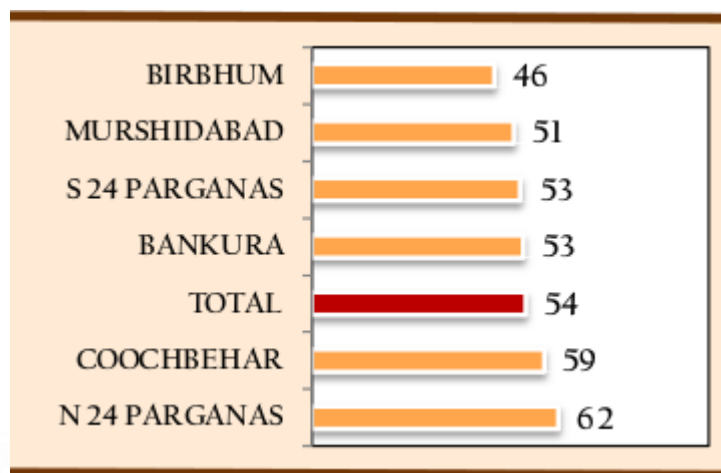
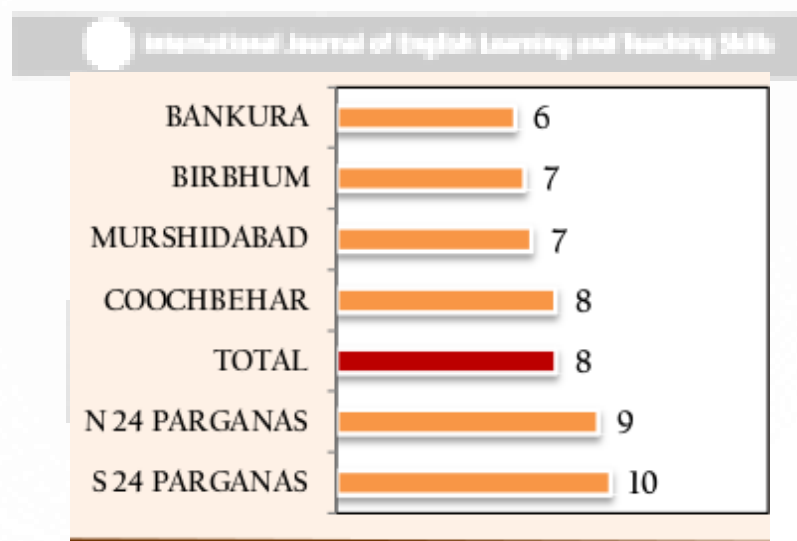
Abolition of Pass-Fail System in Primary Level: The abolition of pass-fail system is still a controversial topic. Lot of research are still going on the topic. But according to the feedback received from the teachers, with the abolition of pass-fail system, a sharp decrease in the seriousness of students was observed, which acted as the hindrances behind the proper evaluation and education system.

Planning the Correct Textbook for the Toddlers: The text books must be designed in a lucid manner. As per the feedback, in present system of Text Books, students are told to read out various big sentences without gaining the knowledge of simple word and sentence formation. This is diverting the students from the sequential study process.

Attendance and Dropout rates: Though dropout rates and attendance are dependent on various factors, but these two factors clearly indicates the status of education. Low attendance clearly portray that students are not getting interest in the particular teaching styles. Fig 1.4 and Fig 1.5 indicates attendance and Dropout rates in various districts of state.

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Fig 1.4: Attendance Rates (Per cent)⁷Fig 1.5: Dropout Rates (Percent)⁸

Lack of Encouragement From Teachers' End: In most of the cases, the teachers associated with the teaching English, are also not acquainted with the modern teaching techniques and themselves are not fluent in speaking English. As a result of that, they are incapable of encouraging students to use English on a daily basis through daily conversations.

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Leaves Taken by Teachers: Due to various occasions and emergencies, teachers are often compelled to take leaves from schools. But as in most of the schools, the number of teachers are very less, this absence leads to discontinuous studies, which lags behind the scenario of English Education in West Bengal. Fig 1.6 and 1.7 indicates the no of leaves taken and effect of leaves in attendance and dropout rates.

Fig. 1.6: Average Number of Leave Taken by the Head Teacher and Class IV Teacher

Type of leave	Personal	Training	School-related meetings	Make complaints and/or requests on behalf of school	Salary	Non-school related official work	Total number of days
Head Teacher	7	7	7	2	5	3	31
Teacher	7	6	2	1	3.5	3	22.5

Fig 1.7: Impact of Different Types of Leave Taken by Class IV Teacher on Attendance & Dropouts¹⁰

Type of leave	Total		Personal		Training		School-related meetings		To make school specific complaints and/or requests		Non-school related official work	
	D	A	D	A	D	A	D	A	D	A	D	A
No	5.98	56.50	7.80	54.15	6.73	57.75	7.07	53.77	7.33	54.46	7.45	52.29
Yes	7.73	53.74	7.57	53.81	7.92	52.67	8.77	54.15	9.43	50.62	7.90	56.48

D: Dropout rates A: Attendance Rates

Engagement of Teachers in Various non-educational Works: With the inclusion of various policies, teachers are compelled to do various no-academic works, like data entry, management of mid-day-meal and other official works. As a result, the time allotted for teaching is getting less day by day. This is affecting the educational backbone of our state.

Lack of Proper Training to the Teachers: For teaching a foreign language like English, teachers need special verbal and mental training apart from the conventional educational training offered to them. Various workshops by the eminent experts of the field should be conducted in a periodic basis.

All of these problems lead us to the three basic questions:

- Do policy planners have clear about the policy of when and how to introduce English?
- Are the teachers trained properly?
- Are the materials made by the states adequate for English learning?

Scope of Using Technology to Improve the Situation of English Learning

Using modern technology indeed can be helpful to improve the scenario. But we have to keep in mind that in most of the schools of West Bengal, Digital Education is still a concept of million miles ahead. Fig 1.9 indicates the percentage of schools of West Bengal having various stages of computer availability for the students.

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% Schools with:	2010	2011
	Std I-IV/V	
No computer	99.0	96.4
Computers but no children using them on day of visit	0.5	2.3
Computers & children using them on day of visit	0.5	1.3
Total	100	100

Fig 1.9: Computer availability for students¹¹

Under such scenarios, it is very tough to implement any kind of technical assistance in a large scale. Still, following measures can be taken-

Using various slides: Various concepts of grammars can be easily taught using various interactive kind of slides. Animations can be used in a better way to increase the power of logical reasoning and sequential thinking amongst them.

Using Audio Visual Aids: on a particular day of the week, teaching can be done using audio-visual techniques. Easy English Films can be shown to them to prepare their listening and Visualisation power. English commentary can also be helpful for them.

Developing Mobile Applications: Mobile application can be more useful as it can be more interactive in nature. Unlike slide show, mobile application have two way communications with the students, but still, the problem remains same on the basis of availability of smartphones and having a place in higher strata.

Training of Teachers with modern techniques: Teachers are the backbone of our society, so if we can teach the teachers about the usage of modern day technologies, in a bounce back process it

can return the growth of primary Education.

Conclusion

Various studies has indicated that the root of the problem is deep enough. The situation is alarming for the education system of West Bengal. Primary level education can be considered as the founding stone of future, so introduction and teaching English in proper way is very much important. In this study I have tried to figure out the problems and provide some solution using modern technologies. In future, I want to extend this work more. This paper has a limitation that all our data are secondary type. I have planned to get some primary data and analyse them for getting a clearer picture. I have also planned to make a android app for testing purpose. I hope, soon West Bengal will overcome the adverse situations.

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