

**Problems in Teaching Reading Skill at Intermediate level at UP
Madrasas**

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Abstract

Although English as an international language has spread its roots throughout the globe and is frequently and widely used for a variety of purposes such as trades, socio political affairs, educational and religious concerns, but a large population of non-native countries are facing the problem of communication because of lack of proficiency in English, leaving them distant from each other in many ways. The situation becomes worse when this gap is extensively found intra nationally, making its people handicapped. English in India, a country of diverse languages, deserves more attention to be taught and learnt in order to bridge the communication gap within the country.

In India, the status of English language teaching and language program in government schools and specifically in Madrasas (Islamic seminaries) spreading over the nation is pathetic. Therefore, the researcher intended to examine the problems faced by Madrasa teachers in the teaching of reading skill, the only skill mainly focused on, as it has been notified while surveying in some of the leading Madrasas of Uttar Pradesh in 2012, a very important part of the researcher's thesis on "Teaching of English in select Madrasas of India: A Program Evaluation" for the fulfillment of doctoral degree in the department of English, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh.

Introduction

India is a country of varied linguistic patterns, where several languages exist, but twenty three languages are recognized spoken over the nation. Hindi is the language which is officially implemented after India got independence and English has been declared sub-official or as an assistant language of the country. However, with the rapid growth of its economy and political power across the globe and with the advancement in technology, in educational and business sectors, India frequently has to use English language to communicate worldwide for various affairs. This way English as a preferred mode of communication is getting special attention not only by the incumbents of the

government, but by the common people as well with the aim of addressing their distinct needs and affairs.

Although there are many training institutions, colleges and universities in India to guide learners to learn English as a second language of the country, still inefficiency and lack of proficiency in English is the matter that has become an important concern and has to be seriously addressed. English, though it should be taught as a language, is now dealt as a content subject like others in Madrasas. The teaching focus is examination oriented rather than skill centered. Addressing the problems noticed in the teaching of English in schools, colleges and even in universities Sardarni Balbir Kaur and Dr. Jaspal Singh Randhawa speaks about some of the problems in their report on “English Language Teaching in India: Problems and Strategies”,

“In almost all the cases at the school or college level English is taught as a content subject like History or Philosophy wherein students are told the meaning of a particular poem, a story or a novel in Punjabi or some other regional language, and afterwards they are left to cram certain stuff out of the so-called help books, appear in exams and vomit that crammed stuff out on the answer sheets. And when grammar is taught, it remains more or less a theoretical exercise and seldom smuggle in the practical life of the

learners. Even the so-called subject 'Communication Skills in English' taught in some professional courses where there is a provision for viva-voce has remained a failure because herein also the students are not taught how to write English in general but only in particular in some letter or a resume or a memo, and speaking skill is only in papers". (Kaur and Randhawa, p. 3, 2011)

These are some of the highlighting problems and issues relating to teaching methods and strategies noticed in the ESL (English as a second language) system of many schools, colleges and universities in India. Apart from this, a plenty of work has already been done on the problems and strategies of teaching. The researcher here narrowed this issue in Madrasa (Islamic seminary) context and targeted six leading Madrasas of Uttar Pradesh, including Darul Uloom Nadwatula Ulema (Lucknow), Maahad, a branch of the same institution (Lucknow), Jamea tul Falah, Jamea tul Ashrafiya and Madrasa tul Islah (Azamgarh), and Ahsanul Banat (a Madrasa established only for girls, Moradabad).

The work becomes easier for the researcher since he has already collected data while surveying in seven leading Madrasas of India as it was an essential part of his ongoing research on "Teaching of English in Select Madrasas of India: A Program Evaluation" for the fulfillment of the doctoral

degree at the Department of English, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh. Some essential information obtained from the surveys related to issues and challenges faced by Madrasa English teachers is used here to supplement this paper.

In general, the present paper aims at highlighting the problems and challenges faced by teachers who are teaching English in these Madrasas. Following some particular objectives of the study are enlisted:

Objectives

1. To assess the syllabus and teaching material used in Madrasas;
2. To investigate the problems and challenges faced by teachers of Madrasas to teach English language;
3. To examine the causes which lie behind the inefficient teaching practices at Madrasas.

The present study attempts to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the nature of the syllabus and material used in Madrasas?
2. Which language skill is mainly focused on?
3. What are the problems and challenges Madrasa English teachers are faced with?
4. What are the reasons of insufficient teaching practices in Madrasas?

In order to know the nature of the ongoing syllabus and the material of the targeted Madrasas, a brief analysis of the syllabus and the material is presented here.

Syllabus and Material for the students of Intermediate (Aliya Saniya)

In all the six Madrasas, syllabus and material of Uttar Pradesh Board designed for the learners of the senior secondary level are used that includes the following books:

Senior Secondary Board, Uttar Pradesh

Intermediate English Poetry for the class XI-XII

Intermediate English Short Story for the class XI-XII

Intermediate The Merchant of Venice for the class XI-XII

Intermediate English Short Story for the class XI-XII

Published by Kaila Devi Publication, Shikohabad, Edition 2011-2012

Syllabus of English Prose for the class XI-XII

- a. Explain with reference to context (one passage)
- b. One passage, for testing comprehension-factual as well as interpretive and evaluative type
- c. Two short answer type questions (answer not to exceed 30 words)
- d. One long answer type question from the text given in the book (answer not to exceed 150 words)
- e. Vocabulary (based on text)

Syllabus of English Short Stories for the class XI-XII

- a. One long answer type question (answer not to exceed) 150 words
- b. One short answer type question (30 words)

This is the syllabus printed at the beginning of each book that indicates that the main aim of the syllabus is to enhance the learners' reading ability with little attention on writing and vocabulary. Learners are expected to comprehend the text and then answer some of the comprehension types of questions given in the exercises.

The syllabus aims to develop learners' linguistic competence as it has been mentioned in the preface of the book. There is no point in the syllabus that would guide the teachers how to teach the textbooks. This becomes a big problem for the teachers, because they have no guidelines to handle with the prescribed texts.

The Format and content of the Lessons of the mentioned text books

Each lesson is almost has the following format:

- a. About the Author
- b. About the lesson following with the main text
- c. Glossary
- d. Understanding the Text
- e. Short Answer Type Questions
- f. Long Answer Type Questions
- g. Language Study (Intermediate English Prose and short stories)¹

The above format of the textbooks is obsolete and it has been followed from the secondary level up to the senior secondary level, more or less in the same manner. This reduces the interest of the learners that becomes another problem for the teachers in the classroom, since they find their students unenthusiastic and de-motivated. It does not encourage the learners to find and study something new and exciting. However, if there is a language skill in the books, it is reading skill with a very little coverage of writing skill.

¹ Intermediate English Prose and short stories prescribed by the Madhyamic Shiksh Parishad, U. P.

The content and the presentation of the textbooks prove the researcher's claim that these books are only dominating with reading skill, with a few writing skill that is again a part of reading comprehension exercises. No other exercises are available, providing the learners with the opportunities to improve their other language skills. Even reading skill itself is not taught very well. Comprehension based exercises are not well designed. Exercises do not include the questions of inferences, rhetorical based questions, and coherence based questions, that are essential for the development of reading skill.

This is clearly evident from the discussion of the condition of the syllabus and material that teachers should not be blamed all the time for their poor knowledge with regards to the subject and teaching methodologies. The obsolescence of the syllabus and material are also equally responsible for the failure of the ESL system in the institutions.

Findings of the data collected through the Teachers' Questionnaire

1. Teachers are using mother tongue in classrooms as they believe that their learners will not understand a text if it is not translated into their mother tongue. This shows teachers' flawed approach to teaching English and a misperception towards their learners' knowledge in English. Moreover, it also implies that teachers are not motivating their students to understand and explore things on their own.
2. The majority of the teachers agree that their students are not good at reading comprehension. This is a matter of concern that reading the only skill taught at Madras as is not sincerely taken into consideration and not

taught as it is expected to be. The teachers are not using reading strategies to improve their reading skill.

3. The majority of the students are not comfortable at comprehending newspapers and magazines. This again shows a failure in the system.
4. A large number of the teachers are not teaching English using a variety of live situations. Teachers are only concerned with the completion of the course and they do not want to spend their time in finding the authentic teaching material in order to create students' interest and make the teaching and learning interesting and successful.
5. Data received illustrates that hundred percent (100%) teachers agree that resources are very limited in Madrasa. The only resources here for the teachers to be utilized are chalk, blackboard and classrooms. Lack of resources is one of the biggest problems Madrasa teachers are faced with.
6. One of the pressing problem is mostly the teachers have poor background in English. Most of them, neither they are bachelors in English nor they have a certificate in English.

To conclude the paper, teaching in Madrasa is basically text oriented. It is taken as a content subject like other subjects. Reading is the skill that is primarily emphasized with a small space for writing practice. Teachers had

never got any training for the improvement of their teaching skills. They are unaware of the modern trends of English language teaching approach. This is why this causes of failure of the ESL program because teachers are untrained. They are unable to effectively teach prose, poetry and drama and how to teach grammar and vocabulary in context. There is no facility of information communication technology with the help which teaching and learning program at Madrasa could be uplifted.

It is suggested that the policy makers, syllabus designers and material producers should look into the matter and redesign the syllabus and reproduce the material on the basis of needs and analysis of the Madrasas learners. This is the government that should take some quick initiatives to arrange for some training sessions at Madrasas to train the teachers of Madrasa in English.

References:

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3. <http://www.csun.edu/science/ref/language/teaching-ell.html> (last updated on [12/03/2013](#))