

## Influence of English Language on Underprivileged Children: A Critical Study

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### Abstract

The word 'Underprivileged' speaks of the deprived and exploited persons culturally, economically and socially. The underprivileged children have been suffering from crisis in food, shelter, money as well as their backward location. These people are deprived of the benefits normally enjoyed by the higher classes. Education is one of the accepted way to improve the poor condition of underprivileged people. But it is seen that their children have been failing to enjoy the benefits of the present education system as the upper class students do. It is necessary to learn this language on the part of each student, specially for underprivileged children and for its international importance. But for various reasons the deprived sections of people are not in a position to learn English as expected. So they have a great lacuna in English learning skills in schools and higher institutions which restrain them to refine their knowledge in English and indirectly it effects their development in life. In such a situation an attempt has been made to review the matter- the influence of English language on Underprivileged children as the learners of this Standard language and how they can upgrade themselves.

**Keywords:** Underprivileged, Deprived, Learner, Weaker, Status, Backward.

### Objectives

Now-a- days English language has been considered as an Integral part of daily life in many respects. English language may not be the most used spoken language in the world but it has the importance of official language in many countries and it is favourable language for business communication and other factors. Hence it is regarded as international language, it cannot be denied that English language is a global language. Specially after colonization in India English language got the dignity as a medium of communication of powerful class. In this way this becomes a symbol of power in our society. And this second language appears as a special subject language which helps them to enjoy prestigious and reputed jobs in Govt. as well as private sectors.

As a result, to learn English is very much necessary to the children belonging to the lower class society. Because traditionally this language is related to a high class mentality and culture. It indicates also a high level in the social strata. In this way if the children of the poor section of the society can acquire the skill of the language, they will be able to upgrade their social position which at the same time may provide them scope for equalization with high class society. But there are many reasons left behind for learning English by the deprived section of people. Their adeptness in getting the perception of English is found to be very low comparing to the other sections of people, because of some specific reasons like fear of English language learning load, poor reading skills, unscientific and improper study materials, methods and procedures of giving lessons in favour of rich benefited class of people in institutions, lack of trained English teachers, poor background of their family, less motivation, undeveloped mindset of people of their society. So, the object of framing this research paper is to discuss the problems faced by deprived section of people and find solutions of those specific problems so that underprivileged children can overcome their difficulty of learning English and develop their social position.

**INTRODUCTION** : Disadvantaged people are those who are economically, socially and geographically disadvantaged compared to other communities. They are in a backward condition compared to the middle or upper classes of society. Due to poverty and low social status, this section of society is denied from almost all privileges. These section of people who are marked as SC, ST, OBC, immigrants, refugees are from socio economically disadvantaged backgrounds. One of the most important ways to turn the underprivileged into a privileged class is through education. Although English is widely accepted as the language of opportunity in India, but rural communities are not yet aware of the importance of English as a resource. As **Partha Roy** said in his paper on “Effect of Poverty on Education in India” that “Education is a powerful tool for reducing poverty and unemployment, improving health and nutritional standard, and achieving sustainable development”. It Means education is the only key to increase economic efficiency and social consistency, by increasing the value and efficiency of the labour force and consequently raises the poor from poverty.

In spite of knowing the fact that learning English language can give them new life, level of English proficiency is very low in case of underprivileged people compared to students from privileged backgrounds. They have to face many difficulties in learning and practicing the second language. Ideologically it is believed that men can overcome their social backwardness through proper education but one cannot ignore the influence of their socio cultural background when they are learning a second language. As **Prithviraj Singh Chauhan** said in his paper that English language was once the language of colonizers so rural community is yet to develop positive attitude towards English language. Rural community views English language learning process as an interference in their mother tongue. He means to say that their approach to English

language is based on the practices of the cultural community ; they prefer to communicate in their first language, and second language learning in school is limited to classrooms and private spaces. We have further noticed in another paper of **T.P.Himadri et al.** that English is not only considered a companion language but also an associate language in India on two important levels. FIRST, English is responsible for our interstate and intrastate communications , and for interaction with the outside world. The British culture represents as a symbol of better culture and higher education. During the independence period, English was considered a foreign language, but now there are other European languages in the school's foreign language columns. The English empire disappeared in India but the effect is still there. It has now become a neo-colonial empire and its influence and importance have become so great that it has become attractive and necessary for all.

Poverty is also a dominant cause which excludes underprivileged children from good health; and good mental physical health play a pivotal role in learning new knowledge . As **Rita Paul Sen Gupta et al.** expressed that it appears that the children of the lower income group of the society are not mentally ready to enjoy the formal education going to the institutions which affect their cognitive and mental progress and on the other hand it helps to accept their existing position in the academic and social field.It can also be said that their homely environment greatly affects the whole upbringing of a child , specially in case of academic development.

### Survey Report:

1. Category ?	UR -(60)	OBC-(54)	SC-(76)	ST-(110)	
2. Gender ?	Female - (175)		Male - (125)		
3. Do you belong from BPL family ?	Yes - (183)		No - (117)		
4. From where you belong ?	Rural area - (221)		Urban area -(79)		
5. Any service in the family ?	Yes - (110)		No - (190)		
6. Any person in the family to teach English ?	Yes - (105)		No - (195)		
7.Why do you think English subject is tough ?	Crisis of teacher-(55)	Foreign language - (60)	Preference of mother tongue - (85)	Teachers attitude towards students	Belonging in a Bengali medium -(

				(55)	45)
8. What is the main problem to learn English?	Financial condition - (80)		Social background -(92)	Wrong teaching process - (60)	Study materials - (68)
9. Do you find English subject material tough ?	Yes - (203)		No - ( 97)		
10. Do you find any negative attitude of the teacher to the deprived students in classroom ?	No - (240)		Yes - (60)		
11. Why do you think English subject is important ?	For gathering knowledge in higher education -(91)	Because it is international language - (38)	Because it is necessary to get a job -(83)	To improve social status - ( 88)	
12. Are you fluent in English ?	Yes - (62)		No - (238)		
13. What are the causes behind the lack of English proficiency ?	Fear to speak -(74)	Shyness - (64)	Lack of teachers initiative(42)	Backward family background- d (81)	Absence of English speaking person in the family/locality - (39)
14. How can the underprivileged learners in non-English medium schools improve skill in using English ?	By engaging more English teachers -(67)	By changing the teaching methodology - (91)	By taking extra initiative in the institute -(79)	By using scientific tools - (63)	

**Data Analysis :**

A well-thought questionnaire has been prepared with more than 10 questions which are related to the subject of this research paper and this has been circulated among the students of various schools of Tripura . Within a limited time 300 students responded to this questionnaire giving their own views. The responses to the questions given by the learners are arranged systematically and analysed one by one. It is observed that among the respondents 58.3% are women and 41.7 % are men. Among them there are UR- 20% , OBC -18%, SC-25.3%, ST- 36.7% respectively. As per financial category 61% students belong to BPL family . Again 73.7% learners are from rural area. It is also found that in 63.3% families there is no job, while 36.7% families are having job. Further in 65% families there is not a single person who can teach English to their children at home. Responding to the question- “ Why do you think English subject is tough?” 18.3% students think that the crisis of teacher is the cause; 20% learners feel that English as a foreign language is hard to them; 28.3% students consider the preference of mother tongue is the reason; 18.3% students feel that teacher’s attitude is also a clue behind it; 15% students being the learners of Bengali medium school is the fact. Some of the major problems to learn English are identified by the students- 26.7% students, 30.7% students, 20% students and 22.7% students earmark financial condition of the family, social background of the students, wrong teaching process and insufficient study material are the major issues. 67.7% students opine English subject as a tough one. A mere section of students have addressed their anguish against a section of teachers who are very much aware of their high social status. English is considered as an important subject to 30.3% students for gathering knowledge in higher education, 12.7% students consider English as an international language; 27.7% students prefer English language for job purpose; 29.3% students prefer English for developing their social status. It is alarming to note that 79.3% students are not fluent in English. Students have identified some causes behind the lack of English proficiency among them. 24.7% students are afraid to speak English; 21.3% students are very shy; 14% students consider the cause for lack of teachers initiative; 27% students belong to backward community; 13% students feel that they fail to learn English as there is no one to teach English in their family/locality. In order to overcome the short-falls of teaching English in non English medium schools, students have given various opinions. 22.3% students have thought that this problem can be solved by engaging more English teachers; 30.3% learners believe that it can be done by changing the existing teaching methodology in the institutes. And 26.3% students are of the opinion that the weaker students can be improvised by taking more remedial classes ; 21% students think that by using scientific tools the teaching learning process can be more helpful specially to the teacher and students.

**Discussion :**

One of the main ways to change underprivileged people to developed ones may be through education but the existing educational system is not so much helpful to them ; it is very important because the current education system is based on culture of privilege . It demands a detailed discussion . keeping in mind all the collected data, an initiative has been taken to discuss the topic- Influence of English on underprivileged section of society. These available data guide the analysis and help to find out new areas connected with the subject matter.

The process of selecting books as well as selected books play a vital role in the teaching learning process , especially in the course of progressing an underprivileged country. It is observed that often the guidelines regarding selecting books are found framed from a stand point of vested interest .

If we take History textbook, for example , in that case, there is almost no mention of the contribution of the so called less important people specially of the underprivileged section for building nation. There were at-least one hundred tribes that resisted the foreign authority prior to war in 1857 . Unfortunately most of the history books do not talk about this historical information . Again when the privileged students do not make good use of the textbooks, they normally turn to private coaching and private tuition. On the other hand, the guardians of the disadvantaged students are not capable to get that help mainly for financial constrains.

It is also observed that, as in case of the selection of books, teaching methodology also is determined for the interest of the privileged section of learners . For example, one of the principles behind most accepted teaching methods is reward and punishment - reward for good performance and punishment for poor performance . This principle is mainly adopted for the upper class children. But it has a tremendous negative effect on the psyche on the deprived class.

A major reason for the underperformance of disadvantaged students in exams is the prevalence of cultural biases in exams and exam materials. On the one hand the question content guides the time limitation, on the other hand, the entire examination process is more concerned with the benefit of the privileged learners of the town/city areas . This in another way poses threats to the disadvantaged learners .

Most of the teachers who teach outstanding students, come from well-to-do family backgrounds . They sometimes show a kind of negative attitude towards the disadvantaged . For example, a few teachers belonging to lower class background are found embarrassed in front of bright students. Current training courses for the teachers do not highlight their negative approach towards the poor students. These programs do not make them aware of one sidedness in favour

of their own class. So, it is the fact that the selection of books , way of teaching and study materials are not congenial to the weaker students .

English Language is considered to be a method of instruction in most of the educational Institutions, specially, in the field of higher education . But the most disadvantaged learners are direct speakers or the persons who talk in local language. It is a common factor that these group of students are bound to learn their own language in standard form spending a lot of time with hard labours as well as the dialects of the dominant groups . Due to all these hurdles the educational institute seems a stranger to the underprivileged students, as it becomes an open house for the brightest students .

So far, we have noticed that the current situation of education, the underprivileged suffers from many problems and the problems examined are complex and deep rooted . Unfortunately , our solutions to these problems are just sticky and do not address the deep rooted reasons . As an example, it may be mentioned that in case of the tribal children drop-out issue is very alarming in several states across the country. Extension of time by one year has also failed to show the expected result. But this step will not drastically reduce the drop-out rates of tribal children as this issue is deeply related to a upper class mentality of the non tribal privileged society .

In-fact a rational approach to control the dropout rate may be taken by adopting a policy for the educational institutes as much as possible to fit the tribal way of life. The same applies to other disadvantaged students . Existing education systems can be culturally appropriate for disadvantaged children by making favourable changes are made in the field of school education .

We have noticed how current textbooks favor the privileged . This biasness should be eliminated as much as possible. Textbook topics should be relevant, interesting and usable for less privileged students .

At the time of designing and selecting teaching methods for learners in challenging circumstances , it is essential to consider their learning style . If we propose educational methods to the tribal students who make up a large portion of the underprivileged students in India , then we must consider the tribal learning method through memorizing music and conventional peer discussion. For example , a methodology such as oral presentation like reading , recitation , group discussion and words playing can be useful for the tribal children. Again we have to think of some of their characteristic features , their concern of autonomy and way of thinking.

It has also been noticed how the present system of examination and related study materials are framed for the benefits of the premium learners . For this the weaker learners do not possess the skills to face the examination and enjoy a desirable result .Therefore , efforts must be made in two directions : minimizing cultural biasness prevalent in testing , and training bright students

in examination oriented skills. Biasness is to be eliminated in these fields of language learning – examination related situation , test content , timing as well as associated competition .

At present experts in education agree that it is better way to teach a child to read and write in their mother tongue before introducing them to other non-native languages . The students find it easier in improving their oral and writing skills in the mother tongue which can then be easily transmitted into other languages in future.

For example , a student who can already read a language will not have to struggle with re-reading problems. So , whenever possible , the language of an educationally disadvantaged student may be used . It is known to everyone that language itself is an important part of our way of life and its absence leads to a catastrophe .

Further teacher's role in teaching students is crucial ;some of the changes in the field of dealing assessment methods are made for textbook preparation and dialect usage of disadvantaged students for a variety of reasons . But these are not all the time practical. But if the faculty is capable , in the class room he or she can utilise all these changes at his or her teaching process even if the prescribed books are biased to the privileged and even if the education system does not offer these languages . Unfortunately , it is also observed that traditional teacher education programs do not improvise the teachers' skills for the betterment of weaker students . Apart from these, Special education programs for teachers should be designed for them who would teach underprivileged student in order to equip them with these skills. Underprivileged students need to learn English specially because English in India is somehow connected to elite culture which is a symbol of higher position in the society . Moreover, better English language proficiency for disadvantaged students enhances their social status and it will be an equalizer for them .

**Why Should Underprivileged Learn English:** From the historical perspective and for some practical reasons it has become necessary to learn English for every educated person in our country .By the course of time many varieties are found in Indo – English language . Moreover , in the field of science and technology it is mainly considered as the medium of instruction. English is now a remedy for solution or examination for prestigious jobs at the state as well as at the national level. Largely due to their poor proficiency in using English language , their percentage in higher post in service sector is very low. Again the students who are from privilege section of the society in our country and had taken admission in the higher education institutions, specially of science and technology basing on higher fees are also found in crysis and are compelled to drop out partly due to poor English proficiency.



There are many special English language programs for disadvantaged students around the world. English language teaching programs exist in most developed countries to teach English to disadvantaged ethnic minorities in order to equip them parallel to advanced learners of the majority group. Study materials, teaching methodology and examination process in teaching English have been taken care of for the benefit of the disadvantaged students. As a result, EST (English for science and technology), ESP(English for specific purposes),TED(teaching English to the disadvantaged ) are introduced in ELT recently.

### **Conclusion :**

For a variety of causes like taking English subject as foreign language , for crisis of English faculties, poor social background, and preference of mother tongue , ample numbers of students are afraid of the English language, which appears on their way to get knowledge of English . Their fear in English language is partly because the English language is associated with elite culture in our country and partly due to inadequate pre-made textbooks and teaching methods . Again a good number of English Teacher recruited in various institutions are from the privileged section of the society. And their presence create a fear psychosis in the mind of the students' belonging to the backward communities . As a result there is gap in the mental make up in case of making a better teacher - student relationships for the benefit of learning the language. This is a peculiar issue or hurdle to teach English to the deprived students. It is mentioned by some of the students who responded through the questionnaire. Infact in our state Tripura, it is not cropped up in a bigger way , but in other parts of our country it is really a big issue. To solve all the problems faced by backward learners we may take some useful strategies.1) In the classroom the teachers may use the colloquial language used by the backward students for better understanding of the text. 2) The teachers should be more friendly with the weaker student for the removal of unknown fears in the mind of the students. 3) Teachers may take extra remedial classes for improvising English proficiency .

While these strategies are useful for teaching other subjects or audience, these may be equally applicable and useful for teaching English to disadvantaged students. We , i.e the authority and teaching community can empower disadvantaged learners through motivations and providing all helpful facilities and have to understand the issues related to the system of learning English from their own standpoint .We have to be very closer to them in order to get genuine feedback, have to encourage them to answer the questions that are very much related to their problems and we can allow them to answer in one word or a group of words . The teachers should not insist them to make complete sentences . As a teacher , we can ask them easy yes or no questions that can be answered in class . We may permit the disadvantaged students to give answer in their native language when they face troubles to speak in English . As a teacher we should not concentrate our mind only on outstanding students rather than on the backward students who are really in need of our care and assistance.

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