

## Need of Teaching Remedial English Grammar to Indian Students

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### Abstract

Despite learning the English language for about 10 years in schools, majority of the learners of English face various problems in using it for communicative and other purposes. As a result, they usually get away from the mainstream education and employment sector even if they have good command over the contents of other subjects. The reasons behind it are many, but it is desirable to address the problem. It calls forth the need of using Remedial Teaching of the English language so that the learners can acquire the expected level of competency. Every language consists of basically two components: lexicon and grammar of that language. One must know the semantic and syntactic features of lexical items, and the conventions, rules or systems to put them together to form phrases and sentences. Thus, intuitive or apparent knowledge of the grammar of that language is essential to enable one to become a good user of the language. And it becomes obligatory when language learning takes place in the linguistic swimming pool. The present paper aims to show how teaching of remedial English grammar as a component of ELT is required to achieve the goal and such a programme should be properly structured to enhance its success rate.

**Key Words:** remedial education, ELT, linguistics competence, teaching strategy, grammar

### Introduction

It is an irony of the working of Indian education system, especially in the government schools that despite learning the English language for ten to twelve years, from the KG to +2 level, most of the learners are far below the expected competency level at +2. The number of English teachers employed in Indian schools for this purpose is the highest among the total number of teachers at school level. There are various reasons for such a state of affair; they have social, cultural, psychological, educational and economic background. Instead of discussing other aspects of the present issue let us come to the academic aspect of the present issue directly before examining the need for remedial teaching for the English language.

English occupies a unique position in India. It is not only the intra-national but also an important international language. The role it was assigned to at the advent of Indian independence has changed. With the entry of Indians in the international arena and participation in different activities, with the emergence of global economy there is a greater participation of the Indians abroad. And the language to access the world for Indians is only English.

In this changed scenario of the 21<sup>st</sup> century there is a growing demand of learning and using of the English language because it serves as a ladder to climb and reach the heights of the world. Politicians may condemn it in public but in private they are for it, and their wards have been studying in English medium schools. Because of its instrumental function, even the uneducated and less educated people who can hardly read or write an English sentence send their wards to English schools.

Secondly, India is such a country whose people have been working abroad in various capacities as doctors, engineers, teachers, scientists, technicians and skill labourers. It is worth mentioning that India is an exporter of manpower. In all these higher-class jobs the ability in English is a must. Many technical and general graduates get a big shock when they are not selected to various positions because of their lack of proper skills in communication in the English language. Despite their best knowledge in their technical subjects their dreams remain unrealised because of their inadequate communication skills in English; and they are forced to take up any job to earn their livelihood. Even for government and public-sector jobs the applicants have to pass the English language components in all these examinations, though it may be a qualifying in nature. Thus, the positions of the applicants with insufficient English language skills including that of English grammar are not difficult to imagine. It is too late by that time. Language skills are difficult to acquire in a short period, one must practise them longer and use them in real life situations to gain mastery over them.

Thirdly, there is a difference between the use of English language and the knowledge of other subjects taught at the schools and colleges. English becomes a part of their professional career, they must keep on using it throughout but not the other subjects taught unless it is a part of one's profession.

For these and other practical purposes the use of the English language has become desirable for all the Indians. Now the question is how to address the present problem at hand. India is a vast country with the second largest population, out of every six persons on this planet one is an Indian. Should the government, the educationists and other agencies working in this field leave these young aspirants to their fortune? Can every student be made an efficient user of the language or only a selected few are taught and trained in their linguistic skills? Likewise, many questions come to our mind. Introduction of remedial English language programmes at some specified levels may be an answer to the problem. 'Remedial English Grammar' is a component of this comprehensive English language programme. The focal point of this article will be primarily on English grammar because it is regarded as an essential part of learning a language.

Before proceeding forward, it is worth mentioning that the term 'grammar' has various shades of meanings. Formal grammar is taught as an autonomous discipline like mathematics and physics in which the learners try to understand the subject in the forms of rules and formulae. Here things are understood in isolation without their uses; in fact, practical application or uses of such rules is out of its scope. Such a formal grammar does not form part of any English language teaching programme.

The second aspect of the study of grammar is as a tool to help learners to learn the English language. In such a case the focus of study is not on the formal nomenclatures, rules, and theories of grammar but it is on the uses of various forms and structure to perform various communicative functions in real life situations. In ELT, English grammar is an area where students need understanding of concepts of grammar and their uses in context. Remedial teaching of English grammar is identified in case of a group of learners will certainly be helpful in successful teaching and learning of the English language.

### **State of the Art**

Remedial teaching programmes that offer students special one-on-one attention are much more in demand in modern times. Many students today find it difficult to sit down in language classroom and stay focused in class because of the delivery of traditional lectures even in the English language classes; therefore, they fail to understand various learning types. Many public schools today offer mainstream remedial programmes into the class and teachers address typical needs of smaller class sizes. Taking courses to learn special remediation skills and methods helpful for educators to deal with common learning problems various types of capsule courses are offered. Such programmes aim to achieve the expected levels of competency in various areas and put them at par with their peers.

### **Need for Remedial Teaching of English**

There are many reasons why a student might need remedial education in India specifically in learning the English language. There are various reasons for it; some of the major reasons are as follows.

- (a) Most of the students wish to learn English but they are least motivated for it. They do not show their commitment to it and take it casually as they do in other subjects too.
- (b) The teachers of English use the traditional lecture method to teach even the English language classes. They hardly see any difference between teaching of language and teaching of literature.
- (c) Majority of the teachers of English come from the literature background and have no intensive training for teaching skill-based courses. They hardly find any interest in language teaching and consider it an 'inferior job'.
- (d) English language teaching demands small size classes maximally up to 35 students so that the teacher may pay individual attention to them. But Indian situation is different as it has large and crowded classes to cater to.
- (e) Multimedia and other technologies are quite often used in the classrooms in the West. Their impacts are visible instantly. But no such technology is available in Indian schools; the only teaching tool a teacher uses in the class is blackboard and chalk. Thus, there is hardly any scope to supplement and support the teaching activities of a sincere and committed teacher in the classroom.

The reasons mentioned above are sufficient to predict the outcome of teaching of the English language in the Indian context. This is a problem. The challenge lies in

addressing the problem in a heavily populated country. The introduction of remedial English language teaching programmes at various levels can improve the situation.

The next natural question that comes to our mind is what the levels or classes are where the remedial teaching of English language be introduced. Such programmes are bridge course to be implemented for a short duration ideally for three months. Since it is not a regular course, therefore it can be used either during vacations or just after Class X and Class XII Board Examinations. There is a gap of about two to three months between the end of the examination and starting of the next higher class. Such programmes can be organised by the schools themselves or by some private institutions. Working map of such courses should be planned beforehand so that they can prove to be beneficial to the students. It should not be confused they are organised for teaching grammar only, but it is an English language teaching programme in which ‘teaching of English grammar’ is component.

Now the most important question is: is it possible to offer remedial course in English to all the students who are poor achiever? Is it possible in this vast country? Do we have sufficient resources for? Naturally everybody cannot be provided such a facility, and even it is allowed it will never be a successful programme. For this purpose, the potential students must be selected. Students who have average or higher intellectual abilities but who are not performing well in school for various reasons need a remedial programme. Typically, remedial students are not struggling because of their intellectual abilities but instead because they are paying less attention to English in comparison to the other subjects, or they did not get a chance to be taught by an efficient and professional teacher.

### **Planning a Remedial Course on English Grammar**

Since remedial programmes are need based and time bound courses, the students are usually given tests to determine their level of competency. Based on test results, the students are placed in classes which are most likely to provide benefits. Classes are often small, with a focus on high teacher-student interaction. During the class, the instructor will bring students up to the expected level so that they have skills comparable to those of their peers. Some students may feel embarrassed to join remedial education classes, especially if they are attending college or university. Some institutions offer it in the summer so that students can start on the same level of their peers. Some institutions give slightly different names, since “remedial education” carries some negative connotations. Students should remember that if they need to take such classes, it probably reflects more on the education system than on them.

Syllabus designing is an essential component of any teaching programme. A syllabus for a remedial teaching cannot be used for a decade; it is a short term need based course. Therefore, it is necessary to identify the areas of weaknesses of a set of learners, and students having common areas of difficulties are grouped together. Accordingly, the aims and objectives of the courses are fixed, and the topics on English grammar to be taught are listed. To meet the objectives teaching materials are prepared. Some of such materials, if available in the market can be prescribed; others can be compiled by teachers from various sources. It must contain workbooks. Care must be taken that the

contents are students friendly and alien in content. It is also equally desirable that the instructor is fully conversant with the aims and objectives and course materials so that he can handle them effectively. At the same time the teacher should be trained properly in this unique programme. Success of such courses lies in making the class interesting by the teachers by motivating the learners. Periodical testing and evaluation of the performance must be monitored, and teaching strategies may be modified according to the progress of the learners. The teacher should never stick to a rigid and fixed methodology of teaching; there must always be scope for the alternatives.

### **Teaching Strategy for English Grammar:**

Strictly speaking there is no such thing as a remedial teaching method. Successful teaching of English language and grammar always depends on a combination of factors which include:

- (a) a well-planned programme,
- (b) a stimulating approach,
- (c) interesting and meaningful content/tasks
- (d) sufficient exposure including use of multimedia technology.

This is perhaps truer for students who are lagging far behind. For weaker students however, more emphasis can be put on the following:

- (a) Start from where students are.
- (b) Use materials that suit their level
- (c) Provide more concrete examples to show how the language functions
- (d) Provide more opportunity for practice and use.
- (e) Encourage more exposure to English language with the help of grammar
- (f) Plan a slower progression of work.

In general, the remedial class teacher of English Grammar needs to adopt an approach which emphasizes variety of content and tasks of English grammar to cater for student interests and needs; make full use of concrete examples and aids to facilitate understanding; give sufficient practice and recycle items to improve retention; and provide plenty of exposure to good English using various English grammar books and language tapes. Integration of the four language skills as far as possible is also recommended to make teaching and learning of the different skill areas more interrelated and mutually reinforcing. Teachers are advised to read the Revised Syllabus for more detailed guidance on teaching methodology.

### **Significance of Teaching English Grammar**

Grammar instruction is crucial in the English classroom. The National Council of Teachers of English Assembly for the Teaching of English Grammar states that one of the goals of language instruction is that every student, from every background, will complete school with the ability to communicate comfortably and effectively in both spoken and written Standard English. If English teachers continue to teach grammar in

the traditional way, students will not be comfortable and effective with Standard English, and these English teachers will have failed at meeting a crucial goal that their professional organization deems very important.

Many English teachers were taught grammar in the traditional way, and they may think that is just how it should be done, and that students will benefit from this type of instruction. But traditional grammar instruction is not so effective at helping students understand grammatical concepts and apply them to their own writing. In India middle-school and high-school aged students are simply not cognitively developed enough to be able to learn about the English language in this way. An integrated approach to grammar instruction, where learning about grammatical concepts is taught through reading and authentic writing activities, is a much better approach to teaching grammar. Students who are taught with an incorporated approach are better able to apply advanced grammatical constructions to their own writing, and their writing also tends to be more error-free.

Grammar instruction becomes much more effective if teachers teach grammar mini-lessons to the whole class, small groups, or even individual students. So, in remedial grammar classes these mini-lessons must reflect concepts that students are ready to learn and need to learn, based on a diagnosis of writing samples. Each grammatical concept taught in a mini-lesson must also then be practiced and applied to the students' actual writing, not just isolated workbook exercises. Grammar instruction has traditionally been characterized as an error hunt. Remedial English teachers would search through students' papers and mark up the errors with red pen. Teachers must learn to re-conceptualize their thoughts towards errors in student writing. Many errors are due to students trying out new ways of writing. In remedial classes students do not need to be discouraged from trying new ways of writing, which can happen when teachers simply mark the errors and give them a bad grade. Teachers need to applaud students for trying something new, and students need to be offered more support on the topic to learn to use the new concepts correctly.

Teachers also need to provide students with the opportunity to turn in multiple drafts, so that they can first develop the content of their writing before they worry about polishing it grammatically for a final draft. For these lessons remedial grammar classes become a need for Indian students. In these remedial classes teachers should pay attention to teach grammar to students in such a way that it would become quite easy to understand it. So, teachers and schools must move away from teaching grammar instruction in the traditional way and move towards teaching grammar in the context of reading and writing enhancing their competence in communicating in real life situations.

### **Conclusion**

Our discussions on the need of teaching remedial English grammar can be summed up as following. The introduction of remedial English language teaching programme is immediately needed throughout the country so that the students with sufficient intelligence in other subject must not fail in realising their dreams both at the national as well as international level. English grammar will be taught in such programmes as a component of English language learning programme. Language is a skill and therefore

sufficient time should be allotted to it in natural context for better output. Without a proper internalization of English grammar, it is very difficult to use it, hence it must be provided prime slot in the overall plan of teaching English.

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