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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Improving English Language Curriculum in Indian Madrasas: Measures for Empowering the Madrasa Students with English Language Skills.

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Abstract

This study focused on improving English language curriculum in Indian madrasas for empowering the students of madrasas with English language skills. The findings showed that in comparison with modern or secular schools the madrasas are following the same traditional syllabi. So madrasa students fail to find better opportunities because of lack of English language skills. English language syllabus need to be redesigned so as to give an inclusive outlook to the madrasa curriculum. While English seems an optional subject for them, yet the importance of English language for madrasa students in modern teaching method cannot be undermined. Therefore, after making a review this paper showed certain aspects of English language syllabus that can be introduced with modern teaching methods in madrasa education so that they can brought at par with mainstream and this minor part of Indian students can promote themselves for inclusive growth with the skills of English language.

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Introduction:-

Curriculum in Madrasas needs a lot of urgent attention and calls for a serious rethinking because this curriculum “is not friendly to the job market in the contemporary world” (Upadhyay, 2003: 04). The aim of madrasa education is to strengthen and advance the society which has failed to achieve its goal and when the whole world is under ruled of advanced science and technology, this Islamic world is unable to participate both culturally and educationally. It does not provide higher studies and successful career in this modern era. Moreover, the modern institutions do not recognize the certifications of madrasas and it seems very difficult for the learners to go to other institutions to complete their higher studies because of absence of modern knowledge. And also these certifications are not acceptable for an administrative job (Anzar, 2003). But as the time passes it is noticeable that in tenth to nineteenth century madrasa education system has lots of modification and they include the modern subjects in their curriculum. Although other modern subjects like Sciences, Mathematics, Social studies, Logic (Mantik) are taught in these traditional institutions, English has not received great emphasis till now. English language is not flourishing in madrasas because of the impact of establishment of British rule after the Mughal, the Muslims became fundamentalists and they were considering the English language as a threat to Islam. But at present, nearly in all madrasas English is an optional subject (Kaur, 1990).

The centrality of English language in madrasas needs a great focus because madrasas are considered as marginalized and excluded because of lack of English language. As Graddol says, “we are fast moving into a world in which not to have English is to be marginalized and excluded” (Graddol, 2010 cited in Ghodke, 2015: 98). Empowering madrasa students with English syllabus for getting a job opportunity or to handle any business deal or in internet world this language particularly rules over other languages.

Existing Curriculum in Indian Madrasas:-

Traditionally madrasas only focus on the knowledge of Holy Quran. Thus, the Quran and the traditions of Prophet (pbuh) are the crux of madrasa curriculum. Madrasas are belonging from different types of schools of Islam and these types of schools are *Ahl-e-Hadith*, *Salafiyya*, *Ahle-sunnat*. Although they are in different types but most of the madrasas are following Mullah Nizamuddin's prepared curriculum, named, Dars-e-Nizami (Jhingran, 2010). This system has some modern books but the main aim is to teach Islam in the light of Quran and Hadith. From the very first there are some common subjects that are used to be taught like, translation of Glorious Quran, Tafseer, Tajweed (Art of Quranic pronunciation), Qirat (art of recitation of the Quran), Hadith, Philosophy, Arithmetic etc. (Qasmi, 2005a). But, "It is a fact that Indian madrasas have produced a number of world famous Islamic scholars, but lakhs of Muslim educated from these madrasas are deprived of the job opportunities because of the ignorance of career-oriented education" (Upadhyay, 2003: 5). Although Madrasa Modernization Programme has come and various government policies try to make over the shortcomings of the curriculum and how modern madrasa claim to have but the syllabus is still following the same traditional method and approach. As Fahimuddin had some findings that most of the madrasa students are not getting opportunity to learn secular subjects like Science, Mathematics, English and Hindi (Fahimuddin, 2004).

Beside this own existing curriculum system, influence of state school boards and modernization of madrasas necessitates Madrasa Boards in some states like, Uttar Pradesh Madrasa Shiksha Parishad, Bihar Madrasa Board, West Bengal Board of Madrasa Education, Orissa Madrasa Board etc. Although these Madrasa Boards have some secular subjects in their curriculum but the madrasas under these boards also focus on religious teaching and following the same traditional teaching method like other madrasas (Siddiqui, 2004). Hence, the goal of English language learning and teaching remains incomplete here also.

English Language and the Madrasas:-

Arabic language plays the principle role in madrasas. Besides, modern curriculum teaches other languages also like, Urdu, Persian, Hindi and English. But in the period of 1757 British Raj had come and they snatched economic, political power of previous Muslim sultanate and they spread Christianity in all over India and tried to dilute the identity of Islam. Moreover, some Ulamas were hanged because of participating in 1857 freedom fight and thus, English language became the identity of a particular community and it brought a negative image in this madrasa education system. And the Ulamas and madrasa owners think that English language will damage the fundamentalism of Islam and it will also mislead the future generation (Qasmi, 2005a).

But it is a misnomer that English is not acceptable in madrasas since it was viewed as an instrument for modernization and the replacement of Persian by English in 1837. Introducing English language curriculum in madrasas is to encourage and strengthen the teaching of English along with other subjects such as Sciences, Mathematics, Social Sciences so as to provide opportunities to students to acquire education comparable to the national system of education (Khan et. al, 2003). But in most of the madrasas English is taught as an optional subject. As the medium of teaching instruction is Urdu, Hindi, Bengali they do not focus on the functional aspects of language; focus is only on reading and writing skills. The English textbooks that are prescribed in madrasas having some lessons on writing (letter and application writing, paragraph, story and essay writing), grammar (narration, parts of speech etc.), vocabulary (antonym, synonym etc.); but neither they focus on speaking skill nor listening skill. So, the syllabus of English language is very outmoded as far the market need is concerned. Moreover, they do not consult with any modern educationist to give a new look in this traditional climate. English language syllabus which is prevailing in these institutions does not felicitate the teachers as well as the students about some functional competence of this global language which is necessary in this modern daily life. According to the census of 2006 English is speaking by 300-400 million people and this is the only language which serves at every corner of the world (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/English-speaking_world). Therefore, to connect with the modern world whether it is for higher education or a job opportunity English should be known to all. Although in some madrasas computers are implemented but without the proper knowledge of English language it is difficult to run with these kinds of tools. Not only these issues are considered for learning English but if we talk according to Hadith, serving knowledge to others whether it is about *Deen* (religious) or *Duniya* (earthly) is also necessary (Qasmi, 2005a) and to serve one's knowledge to all it is compulsory to know that language through which we can communicate globally.

Challenges of Teaching and Learning English Language:-

In this circumstance, the major deficiencies which directly and indirectly affect the teaching and learning of English language are:

- Madrasas teach the students about life in the light of Quran and Hadith. Although most of the madrasas are following *Dars-e-Nizami* pattern of syllabus and some secular subjects are included in it but there is variety in subjects according to the 'schools of thought' and this variety becomes an obstacle of progressing the education system. As Qasmi has said, "Some madrasas follow their own designed syllabus which is a hindrance for smooth functioning and all over quality education" (Qasmi, 2005: 12b). Moreover, these syllabi are very archaic. From a decade they did not update their syllabus.
- More or less the secular subjects are added in madrasas, therefore the syllabus become overburden to the students. As they have religious and some secular subjects also, they cannot be able to prepare themselves for future.
- As we are talking about the English language and the problems regarding it, it can be very well detected that the madrasas have the faulty teaching method. All the madrasas do not follow English language as a medium of instruction of teaching, so they use Grammar Translation method i.e. the teachers are accustomed to translate the textbooks or lessons into their mother tongue. Students are very comfortable with this and they comprehend easily but the use of English language is totally ignored. Thus, the application of suitable techniques of teaching is a crying need for them.
- The classes of all madrasas are teacher centered which is very traditional. Neither the students participate in classroom activities nor the teachers motivate them to participate. Practical activities like, debate, discussion, role play etc. are neglected. So using of English language in real life situation is far-beyond.
- The textbooks which madrasas are carrying in their curriculum are outworn. These are having some tasks on grammar, vocabulary and some on writing skill at the end of the lesson but there are no activities on speaking and listening skills.
- Poor infrastructural adequacy is another challenge to overcome. As teaching and learning of any language is concerned, there is no facilities like, computer aided language learning, recorder, DVD player etc. And when the focus is on English language which is considered as a second language in India, learning it properly becomes more difficult without these components in this Hi-tech era.
- Most of the madrasas are located in countryside. Thus, they do not get healthy exposure to the outside world.
- Teachers and students are also coming from backward background. Most of the students join madrasa for the benefit of free education and free lodging. The number of teacher for English is very few and even "it was observed that one teacher taught different type of subjects" (Fahimuddin, 2004: 62). No in-service teacher training program is conducted for the teachers so that they can improve themselves with modern teaching methods.

Measures for Empowering Madrasa Students:-

Regarding this issue there are several policies to make a smooth way so that English language can be reached to all. But in India these policies look so smoother on the paper but not in reality (Salma, 2015). The fact is find out the solutions is quite easy but make them applicable is toilsome. Without affecting the main aim and objectives of Madrasa Education System some solutions can be suggested for reducing the above discussed problems and these are:

- The first and foremost step they should take to bring their students at mainstream is to redesign the English syllabus so as to give an inclusive outlook to the madrasa curriculum.
- Outdated subjects should be replaced from the curriculum and they should only focus on those subjects which are more relevant and useful in future to survive this modern world.
- Another important step they need to opt that replacing the old-age teaching method (grammar translation method) by communicative language theory. Secular classes should not be teacher centered; teacher should motivate the students and allow them to participate in classroom activities so that they can prepare themselves for more exposure in outside environment.
- Textbooks of English language should contain the lessons which help them to make the language workable in day-to-day life so that they can take advantages of every stairs of their future. And the authority or the policy makers or the government should take the responsibility to look after this issue.
- The government should take care of infrastructural facilities of all madrasas. Besides all necessary services they should think about the technologies which are very useful for English language learning. Government should facilitate those equipments for learning English smoothly.

The policy makers and government should also conduct some training program for in-service teachers. Thus, they could gain more knowledge about teaching method and the new trends of teaching English for applying those in their classroom to promote the students inclusively.

Conclusion:-

At the end of this discussion it can be said in R. M. Bhatt's words that "At the dawn of the twenty-first century we are witnessing John Adam's prophecy coming true: that English will become the most respected and universally read and spoken language in the world" (Kachru, 1992 cited in Bhatt, 2001: 529). Therefore, keeping this prophecy in mind madrasa students can be brought at par mainstream by including certain aspects of English language with modern teaching methods. They should also need some functional skills of English language to survive this anglophilic atmosphere. So, improving English language syllabus in madrasas is an important issue to rethink to empower this small portion of future generation and for the inclusive growth of our society.

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