

OBJECTIVES OF TEACHING AND LEARNING ENGLISH IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

The objective of teaching English in India, should not be 'producing bookworms' or 'linguistic robots'. What is important is to motivate the students, by creating awareness amongst them regarding the importance of English and then gradually helping the student to attain his goal. The basic objective should thus be, to make the student independent. It has rightly been said, "If you give an individual a fish you feed him for a day, but, if you teach him to fish you feed him for life." It is up to the teacher to make the student realize that gaining competence in English he shall hold the master-key to success in the contemporary world.

Keywords: Foreign language, Educational programmes, Multi-lingual

INTRODUCTION:

English, although a foreign language is now as much an Indian language as any other. English has been taught in our schools and colleges for many decades. It occupies the position of associate official language. It is used widely as a link language in offices and among the educated people. It is not only a compulsory subject at school, college and university but is also the medium of instruction to the large extent. It is the language of science and technology. It occupies the position of a second language in the school curriculum and for higher education. English language has been assigned the role of library language. Without exception every secondary school child has to learn English as a subject, usually for six years but in some cases for three years only.

This contemporary position of English in India shows English language teaching occurring at all levels of Education, mainly as a second language. This brings us to our present topic of interest - a history of English language teaching in India.

English language teaching as a discipline has come into its own during the past several decades both in India and abroad and along with it English language teaching historiography also has gained prominence. It is now possible to cite a large body of literature devoted to this area of study. But in India, even though English language teaching has been going on for many decades there is no document, which contains a comprehensive history of English language teaching in India. Now English language teaching has gained the status of a new discipline and also has gained relative importance on our educational programmes. It is felt that a comprehensive history of English language teaching in India is needed.

"I would have English as an associate, additional language, which can be used not because of facilities, but because I do not wish the people of non-Hindi areas to feel that certain doors of advance are closed to them. So I would have it as an alternative language as long as people of India require it"

- Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru,

(from the Convocation Address, delivered at University of Pune on 27th Jan. 1955).

English has become the language of Governments, Education, advancement, jobs and a symbol of self-improvement. The new ideas about language, the dimensions of usage and the new development in educational technology have given rise to branches in the use of English. Though the use of English as a medium of communication in India dates back to the colonial days, the native non-English speaker especially from the rural inland, frets and fusses when exposed to a situation where he has to communicate inevitably in English. Similarly, teaching English to the Indian students is the biggest challenge. Though enough awareness is prevailing among the students, parents and society and even among politicians, the majority of our students struggle a lot to acquire the language. On the other hand, teachers too equally toil and moil to find a suitable methodology to facilitate the students in acquiring the English language.

We have, in general, urban, semi-urban and rural students. And even among these, we have learners, who have all among studied through English medium and learners who have studied through the regional medium with English as one of the subjects. In addition, we have the learners from varied socio-economic, linguistic and complex cultural backgrounds. This situation stands to testify that we have an awesome number of learners, an amazing variety among them and varying kinds of competence of English language among the learners. To narrow down the above classification, we can see three kinds of students in any classroom. They are, Students who are really good in handling the English language; students who are not capable of learning the language, most often from the first generation category, but carry in their innate hearts the insatiable desire to speak in English; and finally, students who refuse to learn the language. As a language teacher something must be done to attract and satisfy all these students and enable them to acquire the language.

Conventionally, teachers of English teach the foreign language either by explaining the meaning or by translating the text in English into the regional language, i.e. in L1. This sort of teaching helps the learner in learning the text and simplifies the job of the teacher in explaining the text. But in reality, the learners are incapable of weaning themselves away from the mother tongue, because the teacher has also made him more dependent on mother tongue. As such, the students have not acquired any skill of the language and not confident in English. The situation will be worse in the areas of productive skills, i.e. in speaking and writing.

We all know that when a student enters college, coming from a regional medium school, coping with the English medium instruction is his greatest difficulty. As such college teachers are compelled to teach through regional language. If the teachers refuse to use translation, then they cannot reach the students through their teaching and students resort to the use of bazaar guides, which have the translated and transliterated version of the essays. Of course students feel comfortable through the language, which they have acquired naturally, as a part of the process of growing up. As such in a multi-lingual country, it is a difficult problem to reconcile the use of regional languages with a common language.

This situation generally prevails in most of the educational institutions and we cannot squarely blame the students and teachers. Many Commissions for education reform in India have presented their contemplated reports and we are yet to achieve the much-expected reform. The main reason for such a situation could be the absence of any concrete and applicable language formula and even the existing ones could not be implemented in to for want of enough cooperation and support from Political institutions, Central and State Governments and of course from Universities too.

As a result, teachers are made to teach English language without any clear-cut and achievable aims. To add fuel to fire, teachers of English are given the conventional course books, prescribed by the authorities of literary texts. However realization is growing to the dire need to modify English language teaching to suit a multilingual and multicultural country. Moreover, the objectives of teaching English language should be narrowed down to the application of the language by the students in their day-to-day conversation and to make the student aware of discourse organization and to develop proficiency in manipulating and producing discourses well-formed in terms of grammar, meaning, intention and contextual appropriateness.

But then, conservatively or conventionally most of the teachers are happy at explaining the meaning of a text in English language, as if it is a subject. Due to the system of education, due to the non-availability of the standardized text books, due to the dearth of regular training to teachers of English and also due to the lack of preparedness among teachers, opportunity to offer a skill based teaching programme is mostly absent. Allen and Corder rightly remark,

"If language is knowledge, then learning it will share some of the characteristics of learning, say, Chemistry; if it is skilful behaviour, it will be something acquire through practice; if it is an object, we may get to know it through descriptions or thorough descriptions or thorough use, while if it is a social event, we shall wish to participate in the social interactions in which it is manifest"
(*Error Analysis and Inter-language*, Oxford University Press, p.2, 1973).

As such teachers of English language must realize that their role is to help the students to acquire the skills of language and once they achieve it, they can manage any subject and any situation.

In fact, as Allen and Corder further say,

"Language teachers are not so much teachers of language, that is, a new and unfamiliar set of manifestations of what their students already process".
(*Error Analysis and Inter-language*, Oxford University Press, p.68, 1973).

This clearly explains that teachers have to tap the hidden resources of the students by infusing or booting up the confidence level of the students. Teachers have to create the situation in such a way to enable the students to enjoy the skill oriented language drills and at the same time learn the peculiarities and the techniques of language. For this the teacher have to acquaint themselves with the salient features of the language so that they can develop an insight into how the language works. Without this, it will be very difficult to see the rays of success in any of their efforts in imparting language items.

What is meant here is that the teacher has to attempt to train the students in accomplishing the skills of language and there is no need to acquire knowledge about the language. If the teacher explains the meaning of a text, the teacher is teaching the language as a subject. On the other hand, if a teacher trains the students in the skills of the language and give enough practice then the teacher teaches the language as a language.

Of course, teachers are hard pressed for time to cover the syllabus and cannot spare much time to handle the language items. And students will also make complains that the teacher has not taught the lessons. In such conservative situations, the teacher can spare at least ten minutes in each class to train the students in language items. The students can learn and acquire the language under the able guidance of the teacher. The remaining time can be utilized for teaching the students in the conventional or expected manner. It is vital, therefore that every teacher should aim at directing every classroom to equip the students with the basic language skills they really need.

Among the four skills of a language- listening, speaking, reading and writing, the conventional teacher concentrates much on writing and reading. Very rarely a few minutes are spared to speaking and listening. The excuse usually made by the teachers is lack of time. But in the words of John Haycraft,

"To be able to use the language to convey thoughts, intentions, wishes, information, etc. a person needs a mastery of various skills of language."

A course in English Literature should concentrate on improving the language proficiency and literary competence of learners. But the present system trains learners only in mastering the literary content of the syllabus. No efforts have been taken to improve their Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing (LSRW) skills, Study skills and Dictionary skills and to strengthen their critical sensibilities. So there is a need to train students with an alternative syllabus, which will help learners develop their communication skills and sharpen their literary sensibilities as well.

In the rating of LSRW skills and Study skills, both the students and teachers have acknowledged the fact that the former lacked minimum language abilities and skills required to follow lectures in English and study the prescribed texts. But then while estimating the LSRW skills and study skills, the group mean of the variables indicates that students have rated their skills in 4-points scale higher than the evaluation of their teachers. Here the rating of the teachers can be taken into consideration, as it is a natural tendency to rate oneself high in self-rating.

English plays an important role in producing and promoting changes and accepting new trends in the modern Indian society. English generates modernity, imparts new knowledge and skills and gives a formal system of living which is found in the developed countries of the world. Majority of the standard journals and magazines are published in English. It is true that if we have knowledge of reading, writing, understanding, speaking English, we would have better knowledge of science and technology, social sciences, industry and health. Language experts agreed that English learning is a very important aspect of life. English has enjoyed and still enjoys a very important place in the curriculum of Anglo-Vernacular schools in our country. It has been used as an official language, the language of administration of courts, legislature, etc. It is a language which has a rich literature and also covers the vast spectrum of science and technology as well as industries and commerce. English also plays an important role in the national life of the country. It still continues to influence the life and profession of the majority of educated Indians in every walk of life. The teaching of English has traveled a long way during fifty years in free India but the controversies and contradictions remain the same as before. The fate of English language teachers and learners does not seem to be very bright, if the activities of the various academic bodies at the boards and the universities level are considered seriously. The academic positions are over-shadowed by non-academic ones and the teaching of English remains an activity, questionable in its relevance. We have had a variety of English language teaching programmes in our country at the secondary and tertiary levels : programmes organized by the District Centres, ELT Institutes, Regional Institutes of English, Regional Colleges of Education, Central Institute of English and Foreign Languages, etc. In addition, these institutions have been organizing a variety of workshops, seminars, conferences and short courses. We have had a number of review type evaluations of ELT programmes. ELT programmes in our country may be viewed as a network of process - creating English based, high English and low English, English centered switching and mixing. These programmes are designed to help learners learn how to mean in a multi-lingual setting. In making ELT programmes effective we may use the following suggestions - language choice and language ordering in a multi-lingual setting, the role of English as a source language, the status of English as an associate national official language, the function of English as an international link language, etc.

In the educational scenario of India today, the abilities of teaching and learning English language seem to be sadly lacking. This lacunae can be attributed to a number of factors, the major one being the lack of motivation on the part of students due to various reasons such as - lack of awareness regarding the importance and scope of the English language, faculty teaching techniques, lack of interest of knowledge of books which may not have practical application, stereotype kind of syllabi which may not cater the needs of the students. The stalwarts from the field of education need to realize that what is needed is a revolution in the present syllabi which creates bookworms and not efficient communicators. The objective of teaching as well as learning English in India needs to be defined in clear terms.

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