

LANGUAGE TEACHING IN INDIA - THE PRESENT DAY CHALLENGES

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***Abstract:** If language teachers do not change the strategies of teaching English, then one may fall short of reaching the target of equipping our students to face challenges posed in the present global scenario. This paper deals with the importance of teaching English to fulfil the ever growing demands of English. The methodology followed by teachers hitherto and the obstacles faced by both teachers and students who are both non-native speakers are discussed. Challenges faced by teachers in teaching English language are discussed in this study. The objective of this paper is to impart effective communication skills to students along with gaining command over English to have an edge over others so that they emerge as winners. This paper also studies the efficacy of language games adopted to make language learning more appealing to students. It deals with various language games apart from conventional learning which are introduced in teaching to create interest for students in learning English language.*

INTRODUCTION

Communication Skills include soft skills which play a vital role in explaining, informing, persuading, presenting, comprehending and eliciting information. Hence it is essential to develop soft skills as these are the reasons why we communicate. Education is not a degree or certificate that can be shown to others as proof. It is our attitude, actions, language and behaviour with others in real life. Communication becomes more powerful with the combination of soft skills and mastery over English language. As English has become a universal language, it has gained such currency in every field in the world such as many money-earning activities such as BPO, Medical Transcription and IT. Mastery over English has become almost synonymous with success. Prof. Jacob Tharu says, "English is no longer some remote but a powerful mystery, lying hidden in the world of textbooks and examination."

CONVENTIONAL ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING

In the past, English was taught only at the middle school level. English was like any other subject like Science and Social studies. Beauty of English as a language was

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never experienced by students. So students dreaded learning English. Students got very little opportunity to communicate in English either in school or outside school.

The above context was apt for the use of methods that did not focus much on communicative competence. Language teachers followed some or all of the different methodologies listed below for teaching the language.

1. Grammar Translation Method

Grammar translation method was adopted to teach young children, where every word was taught to students in the native language to make him understand and learn English. But in this method there was at least one setback as both the teacher and the student focused more on L1 rather than L2. In this method English language class seemed to be L1 class rather than L2 class. This method could not be very productive as it had severe limitations. Despite being proved as not so effective a method it is still in use in many rural schools throughout India. This method is also supported by the methods used to teach mother tongue in our schools.

2. Bilingual Method

This method is more popular for teaching English. Bilingual method is widely used to teach the students in Indian schools, where the teacher explains the entire content in L1 and then asks the students to perform activities in English. Here only the teachers have the freedom to take the help of L1 and students are not supposed to use it. However, this constraint is found mostly on paper, not in the classroom. When a student is in the process of composing his or her English sentences, abundant help through the use of mother tongue sentences is provided. This method hampers gaining fluency and natural flair in language expression. Thus, this method also failed to produce the desired effect though it helped to a certain extent became beneficial to, students in learning the second language only up to some extent.

3. Direct Method

Earlier, this method was employed teachers to teach Indian students mostly in private schools, which was out of reach for many students as usually they charged a higher tuition fee, etc. These teachers were made to teach using only English, without resorting to L1. Here, teacher is not supposed or authorized to use any single word from L1. In this method there was initial difficulty in understanding as they could get no help at home as they were first generation English learners. But this method turned to be more useful for the students to learn language than any other method as this method creates the most congenial environment for students in the class room.

Limitations in Teaching English as a Subject

The above mentioned methods have their own advantages and disadvantages as the students learned English only as a subject rather than as language. They also lacked the opportunity to put into practical use what they have learnt inside the classroom.

Major hurdle in teaching English language effectively is that the teachers used to have very limited teaching hours, mostly from three to six hours per week which indeed is a serious handicap as it is not sufficient to teach the language as it ought to be taught leading to compromising with the basic elements of language. Some of the English teachers are not updated with the latest developments in ELT pedagogy. The situation is no better even at the college level as Robert Bellarmine observes, "The most serious problem in the teaching of English in our country is the appallingly small quantity and atrociously poor quality of English to which our learners are exposed." (Ref1). It is disheartening to observe that English teaching is just examination oriented.

A Challenge in Teaching English Today

The challenge that looms large before the English Language teachers in India is to be able to cater to the practical needs of learners, to make them competent and confident enough to interact with one another and also to retrieve and infer information. English is the lingua franca in several countries and is considered as the most suitable and convenient tool for International Communication. Knowledge in English helps people scale great heights and hold high positions in many National and International Organizations. In the earlier days English was just like a Library language, but now that notion has changed totally. At present the challenges visible before the English language teachers in India are diverse and it is necessary for them to shape up accordingly to meet the demands of the day.

VARIOUS METHODS TO IMPROVE COMMUNICATION SKILLS

1. Group Discussions

Lecture methods are now being replaced by communicative approach to meet the demands of new trends that are evolving worldwide. Their main goal is to make the students effective communicators in English both inside and outside the class room. This is better achieved when teachers involve the students to participate more in classroom activities so that they will acquire necessary command over speaking skills. The ideal method is to conduct group discussions, where students are to discuss only in English. Here, they have to give their views, ideas and thoughts in English due to which they develop the habit of speaking fluently in English like they do in their mother tongue. Discussions also help students to improve their general awareness and understanding about current affairs. It gives a lot of scope for analysing problems, having a presence of mind and greater understanding. This type of discussions helps the students to listen to the views of fellow students which in turn helps them to gain knowledge and enrich the vocabulary also.

2. Debates

Debates are inevitable and play an important role in improving the speaking ability of the students both at school and at higher level. Debates not only make the students to

speak boldly and fluently but also help them take a stand and be firm and consistent. Along with this advantage of reasoning, it gives students some experience to control their emotions without losing their temper. This also helps them in organization of their speech.

3. Role Plays

Role-plays help students to a greater extent as life situations are given to them for enacting and they learn to relate it to real life. In role plays, the students assume themselves as one of the characters and behave and speak accordingly involving in the given character completely. In these types of activities teachers play a vital role as instructors and guide the students properly so that they can act appropriately to meet the situation. They should help the students with intonation and voice modulation.

4. Computer assisted Language Learning (CALL)

Computers have become an integral part of our life today. No one can deny the fact that it plays a vital role in the process of teaching and learning. It can be used to learn a foreign language like English. Computers have made language learning fun and also made the language learning process interesting and enjoyable for both teacher and student. CALL has reduced the burden offering innumerable methods to teach English thus making it more appealing to learners. It is described as one of the interactive methods that can help a learner according to their own ability to learn at his own pace which enriches their language skills. CALL enables the learner to go beyond the conventional mode of learning and encourages self learning.

English for Specific Purposes

It can be boldly assumed that no profession in the world has escaped the influence of English. Every profession has its own professional terminology or jargons which is used frequently in that particular profession. For example, certain terms used by the doctors, lawyers, et al. are not the same as those of other professionals. So, to benefit these professionals, English for specific purposes is introduced so that specific English words related to that particular profession can be taught by those professionals. Jargon related to one profession is different from the other. Hence every professional is taught in a particular manner that fits in well with his professional demands.

Learning English through Visual Aids

Using visual aids inside the classroom is one of the innovative methods used by the teacher to teach languages. Students are divided into groups and are given visual aids. The students are then given stipulated time to extract relevant information on the given aids. After some preparation students are expected to speak on visual aids given to them. This method expands the analyzing capacity of the students. By looking at the picture, the learner should think and come out with innovative thoughts which

also help in learning language by creating fun-filled environment around them. The teacher as a facilitator motivates the students to talk without inhibition.. As each person gets their own unique thinking it helps sharpen their thinking process.

Games to Enhance Communication skills

Another foolproof way to learn vocabulary effortlessly is to have language games inside the classrooms. It is very impressive to see students drawn into these games more readily than conventional methods of teaching. It helps in enriching vocabulary and thus empowering learners.

1. Crossword puzzles
2. Games to teach basics of grammar

CONCLUSION

To sum up English should not be reduced to a mere subject to be taught for examination but should be taught as an effective tool that can elevate the learner to greater heights. Learners should be prepared to meet the challenges thrown at them. Conventional methods involves doing exercises and drilling, dealing with grammar and pronunciation which takes away a large portion of class time. These methods were mostly used to develop basic skills of language learning such as Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing, but by following these methods listening and speaking skills were neglected as emphasis was on the other two skills.

In the era of competition world majority of the students are attempting GRE & TOEFL. Good listening and speaking skills become an absolute necessity to excel in these exams. Communicative approach has been totally neglected by teachers and learners which is the need of the hour neglecting which causes a serious handicap. Teachers should act as facilitators, and should observe how well students organize their thoughts while speaking with their fellow members. Owing to dialectical variations, the teacher should teach their student about neutral accent and their importance during communication. Clear pronunciation, not perfect pronunciation, is the goal. Students can now avail software to practice pronunciation through phonetics. To achieve the goals of language learning today every college should be provided with language lab, sophisticated equipment like computers, LCD Projectors.

It is imperative for faculty to update their knowledge, skills and to be well versed with their syllabus to meet the demands of globalization since English is seen as a key educational investment in this world. Thus equipped faculty supported by technology can make every student's dreams of speaking flawless English come true.

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