

REVIEW ARTICLE

Teaching of English Language in India: A Perspective

Sagayam Sebastian

Adhiyaman Boys Govt. Hr. Sec. School, Dharmapuri.

Abstract

English in India is a symbol of people's aspirations for quality in education and a fuller participation in national and international life. The visible impact of this presence of English is that it is today being demanded by everyone at the very initial stage of schooling. ELT in India is vibrant and dynamic today. The context of the whole teaching paradigm has changed totally. This article traces the course of this change, along with the causes and consequences while comparing this with the course of ELT in other contexts where it has always been a first language.

Keywords: *ELT in India, Evolution of ELT, Foreign Language and Educational Programmes.*

Introduction

"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.

Every educational system has certain objectives which aim at bringing about desirable changes in pupil. In order to bring about those changes, the institutions arrange learning experience. The success of learning can be judged only in terms of the changes brought about by this experience. This is a learning experience and evaluation. English has become a global language and teaching it as a foreign or second language has increasingly become a universal demand.

Due to its association with the British colonizer, English started life in India as not just a foreign language, but as a much-hated language. From the despised instrument of oppression to the reluctantly adopted lingua franca to the status symbol of the upper classes to its position today as a second language, English has come a long way. In fact, it won't be an aberration to label it a first language for some echelons of Indian society. Just as the status of the language underwent constant

reinvention, the whole ELT paradigm also travelled the complete gamut of modification. In the closing years of the Twentieth century when English began to emerge as the global language, the Indian classroom was transformed because of the change in the environment of the learner. Whereas the earlier surroundings had been acquisition poor with regard to English, suddenly every language user seemed to be jumping upon the learn-English-bandwagon.

The liberalization of the Indian economy ushered in all kinds of reasons to learn the language. While earlier in the century students who had specialised in English joined either teaching or the civil services, now a whole new spectrum of job opportunities has opened up.

There are now call centres that need trainers to equip their employees with communication skills, there are multinationals who have been recruiting marketing staff that needed to be taught spoken English, there are medical transcription centres which need efficient translators and reporters. Those desirous of immigration to the west needed professional help for clearing tests like the IELTS. Hence, the avenues where ELT came to be required in India are unlimited today.

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.

Learning a Language

Each language is structured differently, and the different structures offer users different suggestions to meaning. So when we learn our first language, our brain/mind 'tunes into' the way the particular ll works, and we learn to pay attention to particular cues to meaning that are most helpful. When we meet a new language, our brain/mind automatically tries to apply the first language experience by looking for familiar cues. Part of learning a foreign language

is developing new understandings about the particular cues to meaning that the new language offers, and that differ from those of our first language. The transferability of knowledge, skills and strategies across languages depends closely on how the two written languages work.

Role of a Teacher

As said by Sir Philip Sydney, teaching is the end of all learning. A teacher's primary role is not only to enable the students to understand what he is intending to say or teach. It is also the duty of the teacher to understand what the student wants and says.

In teaching-learning process, two things play the vital roles; one is the delivering capacity of the teacher and the other one is the receiving capacity of the students. Without the two aspects, the teaching-learning process will not be a successful one.

Teaching-learning process is just like making sound by clapping. Without two hands we cannot clap. Like that without a right teacher and the students, the teaching learning process is meaningless. Teaching should be a worthy of learning a concept deeply and broadly. Teaching should facilitate the students to face the world which is full of political, social, international as well as personal controversies, without fear. It should give self-confidence to the students. By the effective teaching, the students should be enabled to go for right choices, judgments and also decisions individually.

In the process of teaching-learning, the teacher should try to understand the students first. Then only, he can enable the students to understand him or his teaching. Theory with practice on some of the teaching topics may enable the students to understand the concept easily. Success of a teacher in his/her attempt in enabling the students to understand what is the concept taught by the teacher, depends on the methods he/she applies.

The teacher may be a good, but the students' physical problem may lead him to ignore the teaching. Or sometimes, the background of family of the students may drive him to be dull.

Hence, the teacher should take into account everything At the school level, the teaching-learning process is checked up the teacher by repeated class tests and examinations. Based on the result (marks scored by the students), different methods are adopted to improve teaching in case of negative result. At the college levels also the same traditional (Macaulay) method of examinations is used. The only difference is the volume of syllabus prescribed for the colleges students will be more than that of the school level.

Teaching English as a Second Language

The Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), U.S. defines English language proficiency in this way:

A fully English proficient student is able to use English to ask questions, to understand teachers, and reading materials, to test ideas, and to challenge what is being asked in the class- room. Four language skills contribute to proficiency as follows:

- Reading-The ability to comprehend and interpret text at the age and grade appropriate level.
- Listening-The ability to understand the language of the teacher and instruction, comprehend and extract information, and follow the instructional discourse through which teachers provide information.
- Writing-The ability to produce written text with content and format fulfilling classroom assignments at the age and grade-appropriate level.
- Speaking-The ability to use oral language appropriately and effectively in learning activities (such as peer tutoring, collaborative learning activities, and question/answer sessions) within the classroom and in social interactions within the school.

Hence, the teacher should keep in mind while teaching English as a second language to the students.

Conventional English Language Teaching

In the past, students were introduced to English only in their sixth standard. Students learned English just as another subject like Physics and Mathematics and got very little opportunity to using it within the school as well as outside the school.

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

Grammar Translation Method

Grammar translation method was used by the teacher to teach young children, where teacher explained every word to students in the native language to make him understand and learn English. But in this method there was at least one disadvantage. Both the teacher and the student concentrated more on L1 rather than L2. In this method English language class seemed to be L1 class rather than L2 class. Students got only limited benefit through this method. Unfortunately, this method 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.

Bilingual Method

May be we should declare this as the method, our own favorite method in our schools. Most teachers follow the bilingual method to teach the students in Indian schools, where the teacher first of all explains the entire English sentence in L1 and then asks the students to perform activities in English. Here, it used to be a main assumption that 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 does not help fluency and naturalness in language expression. Thus, this method became beneficial to, students in learning the second language only up to some extent.

Direct Method

Earlier, teachers used to follow the direct method to teach Indian students mostly in

private schools, which usually charge a higher tuition fee, etc. These teachers will stick to the practice of using only English, without depending on L1. Here, teacher is not supposed or authorized to use any single word from L1. This forced seclusion made students from many families with no past history of learning or using English face great difficulty in understanding certain words and their meanings. But this method turned to be more useful for the students to learn language than any other method as this method creates more encouraging language environment for students in the class room.

In the Context of English as a Subject

All the above methods have their own advantages and disadvantages, where the students learned English only as a subject rather than as language. They were also unable to put their learning into practice due to lack of a favorable environment.

In addition to the above constraints, the teachers used to have very limited teaching hours, mostly from three to six hours per week which are not enough to teach the language elaborately giving emphasis for the basic elements of language.

Another limitation seen in Indian teachers is that some of the English teachers are not familiar 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." Teaching of English in India is examination-oriented only.

A Challenge in Teaching English Today

Challenges before the English Language teachers in India are enormous and apparent. They should be able to cater to the practical needs of learners, to make them competent enough to interact with one another and also to retrieve information all over the world. English has a base in several countries and is considered as the most suitable and convenient tool for International Communication.

The people who have proficiency in this language could access large number of jobs and also were seen holding 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.

Methods Adapted to improve Spoken Skills

Group Discussions

Now due to the world wide growing trends in English, teachers give more emphasis to communicative approach rather than the lecture mode. Their main goal is to make the students effective communicators in English both inside and outside the class room.

To achieve this, they involve the students to participate more in classroom activities so that they will acquire adequate command over speaking skills. To create this environment, teachers can conduct group discussions, where students are supposed to speak only in English. Here, they can 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.

Various types of discussions also help students to improve their general awareness and understanding about current affairs. It gives a lot of scope for good imagination and deep thoughts. This type of discussions helps the students to listen to the views of fellow students which in turn help them to gain knowledge and enrich the vocabulary also.

Debates

Debates too play an important role to improve 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 to take one stand and be firm and consistent on that. Along with this advantage of reasoning, it gives students some experience to control their emotions without losing their temper.

This also helps them to organize their thoughts and ideas in a specific way while speaking.

Role Plays

Role-plays are another important task that can improve the basic colloquial English of the learners. 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 have to 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 now and then to understand and take up the role given to get a grip on the tone of voice.

Online Language Learning (OLL)

Now-a-days computer has become a part and parcel of our day to day life. 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 easy and also made the language learning process interesting and enjoyable for both teacher and student throughout the world. OLL has reduced the burden of the teacher whose teaching methods will be outdated to teach language to present day generation of the world. It is described as one of the interactive methods that can help a learner according to their own ability to learn, which enriches their language skills. OLL enables the learner to look beyond the conventional mode of learning and encourages self-learning.

Teaching Language through Visual Aids

One of the innovative methods used by the teacher to teach language in class room is visual aids. The teacher distributes visual aids to students by dividing them into various groups. The students are then given stipulated time to extract relevant information on the given aids. After that, those learners are supposed to speak about the 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 acts as facilitator who motivates the students to talk freely. As each person gets their own

unique thinking it helps to sharpen their thinking process.

Language Games

In addition to the above mentioned methods teachers also use various language games to teach English language apart from the conventional ways of language teaching, which helps in developing vocabulary from the language that is being learned.

- Crossword puzzles
- Games to teach basics of grammar to the students through various structures.

English for Specific Purposes

As English has emerged as a global language, it also plays a vital part in every profession with respect its importance and demand. Every profession has its own professional terminology which is used frequently in that particular profession. For example, certain terms used by the doctors, lawyers, et al. are quite different from 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.

Language Proficiency Tests

Oller and Damico indicate that language proficiency tests can be associated with three schools of thought. The first of these trends, the discrete point approach, was based on the assumption that language proficiency: ...consisted of separable components of phonology, morphology, lexicon, syntax, and so on, each of which could be further divided into distinct inventories of elements (e.g., sounds, classes of sounds or phonemes, syllables, morphemes, words, idioms, phrase structures, etc) A discrete point language proficiency test typically uses testing formats such as phoneme discrimination tasks where the test taker is required to determine whether or not two words presented aurally are the same or different (e.g., /ten/versus /den/). A similar example might be a test designed to measure vocabulary which requires the test taker to select the appropriate option from a set of fixed choices.

Technical / Business English for Engineers

Students comprises of the four skills as follows: a) Listening, b) Speaking, c) Reading, and d) Writing.

The subject title is “Technical English”, a theory subject and “Communication Skills Lab”, a practical subject. The former is taught to the first year students of the four years engineering degree course and the lab course is conducted in second or third year of the same students.

Technical English-Theory

The main objective of this course is to help students to develop listening skills for academic and professional purposes.

- To help students acquire the ability to speak effectively in English in real-life situations.
- To inculcate reading habit and to develop effective reading skills.
- To help students improve their active and passive vocabulary.
- To familiarize students with different rhetorical functions of scientific English.
- To enable students write letters and reports effectively in formal and business situations.

The lab training is given with the assistance of Networked Computers and specially designed software. The objectives of the practical training are given below.

- To equip students of engineering and technology with effective speaking and listening skills in English.
- To help them develop their soft skills and people skills, which will make the transition from college to workplace smoother and help them to excel in their jobs.
- To enhance students’ performance at Placement interviews, Group Discussions and other recruitment exercises.

The lab practice is divided into two categories as “English Language Lab” where the listening comprehension, reading comprehension and vocabulary and

speaking tests are conducted, and “Career Lab” where writing tests on Resume/ Report preparation and Letter writing are conducted. Also the students are given training in presentation, Group Discussion and interview skills. Forty per cent of the total marks (100) in final examinations is given for the English Language Lab practice and the rest of 60% is given for the Career Lab Practice, for which the test and evaluation are decided by the examiners during final examinations.

Conclusion

In our country, as already said 75% of the students are from rural areas and they are coming through regional language medium schools. Hence, based on their background, we have to design the syllabus and adopt methods to test their English language proficiency. Therefore, it is necessary to go for a detailed discussion as to whether the existing curriculum is fulfilling the need of the hour and suitable to the students in achieving their goals, the present methods for testing the proficiency of the students are suitable and opinion and suggestions from the teaching faculties of the English language in technical institutions are to be obtained. Taking into consideration of all the above points and undergoing a detailed analysis, a real solution may be found out for the betterment of the students as well as society.

To meet the present day challenges in teaching English, first of all, English should not be treated as a subject as it is to be used actively in interacting with one another throughout the world. By using conventional methods, maximum portion of class time will be wasted in 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 students cannot put their language in practice.

In the era of competitive world, where the majority of the students are attempting GRE and TOEFL, good listening and speaking skills become an absolute necessity. Communicative approach has been totally neglected by teachers and learners which has

become a global demand where students are supposed to communicate across the globe. Teachers should act as facilitators, and should observe how well students organize their thoughts while speaking with their fellow members. As language changes geographically due to dialectical variations, the teacher should take adequate steps to teach their student about neutral accent and their importance while communication. Clear pronunciation, not perfect pronunciation, is the goal. Students are also now facilitated by 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.

In addition to these, our faculty too should update their knowledge, skills and should acquire thoroughness over their syllabus to meet the demands of globalization since English is seen as a key educational investment in this world. If provided with the latest language teaching tools and with the support of technology, one can teach the language effectively and motivate the students towards language learning [1-10].

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