

12. English as Second Language Learning in India: Challenges and Resolutions

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Abstract:

The primary purpose of this paper is to discover and determine the most appropriate method of English language teaching in the Indian classrooms. The study has explored the prior research in this area especially English language teaching in India. In order to know the challenges, the study comes across the articles published in British Council UK/IN journal. Some effective methods of teaching are discussed that are adopted by the teachers in Indian classroom. The study stresses on the problem-solving approach in teaching students. The study concludes as per the empirical research and suggests effective techniques to teach students English as second language. The study will be a fruitful endeavour in the field of ELT specifically teaching English as creative practices.

Keywords:

ELT; British Council; Methods of teaching.

Introduction:

In India, English is the second largest medium of instruction in schools after Hindi. The number of students has increased in English medium schools in current scenario. As a result, a large number of English medium schools have started in urban, semi-urban and rural areas. The real struggle is, most of the schools apply methods to teach the language seems inadequate. Children find difficulty in attaining reading and speaking skills. They have a limited revelation to English in their learning environment. As per the research in this area, there are a large number of schools in India where students are not able to communicate, read and understand the mode of instruction. Due to this, children undergo poor language skills, and it affects their learning outcomes critically.

The problem of language learning varies from urban to semi-urban and rural area. As the students of urban area are comparatively good, because they have exposure of English at home. Their parents are educated so that students are quite familiar in the mode of instruction. But students from semi-urban and rural areas have inhibitions about English as second language. They want to learn English because they consider it as the opening of opportunities. They take so much pressure to learn English, and simultaneously have fear in speaking, reading and writing. Children suffer in writing, reading, speaking and understanding English due to anxiety of judgement.

This study stresses on the suitable methods for English teaching so that a large number of students can get benefit. In order to realize the appropriate method of teaching in Indian classrooms, we should know the existing methods of teaching. Some of the most predominant methods are as follows:

Grammar-Translation Method: Grammar-Translation Method (GTM) is the oldest method of Language teaching. It is widely applicable in foreign language teaching. The method has been prevalent from the mid-19th to mid-20th century. In the current scenario too, this method is used to teach foreign language and English in the classroom. GT method of teaching is also known as “Classical method” and “The Traditional method” because in the past days it had been used to teach classic languages such as, Latin and Greek. GT method was originated to teach English language, but it was applied to teach other modern languages in Europe and US.

GT method aims to teach language by enabling the students to read the literature of the source language, to know the grammatical structure of the source language, vocabulary building, and written translation into and out of the target language with a special focus “on the form, and not the meaning” (Krashen, 128).

Direct Method: Direct method of teaching was established in England (1900) and it has a contrastive approach to GT method. As Direct method focuses on target language and doesn't use native language in the process of learning. It is a method of teaching foreign language stressing on to improve the oral skills. The main purpose of this method is to acquire the fluency in second language as similar to the native language. It is based on question-answer patterns and rules of grammar are taught through presentation (Naik, 68).

Monitor Model: Stephen Krashen gave the theory of learning under the term Monitor model also called Input Hypothesis. According to Krashen, language acquisition is more effective than language learning. Where acquisition is a natural-phenomena that one is acquired subconsciously, language learning is conscious process, people are given formal instructions in this process. After some time of its emergence, the model is alienated into five hypotheses as a group (Byram). These are as follows:

- The Input Hypothesis: At this stage of learning, learners understand the language more efficiently. Krashen describes this as “I+1, here I stands for Interlanguage (transitory stage between target language to native language) and +1 is the advanced stage of language acquisition.
- The Acquisition-learning Hypothesis: This stage differentiates between acquisition and learning. Where former is a natural phenomenon, later is conscious process.
- The Monitor Hypothesis: According to this hypothesis, we can monitor language output only in learned language not in the 1st language.

- The Natural Order Hypothesis: This hypothesis claims that language learning is acquired in a particular order and is universal to everyone.
- The Affective Filter Hypothesis: It talks about the constraints that people encounter in the process of language learning. When learners may have fear or embarrassment in learning a language. In such situations the affective filter should be 'up'.

In Monitor model, person's learned system acts as a monitor to check what is being spoken. Person checks internally before speaking second language (Krashen).

Suggestopedia: Suggestopedia was developed in the 1970s by psychiatrist Georgi Lozanov. It was affirmed by UNESCO as the second language learning technique. This method of teaching stresses on the comforts of students. The process of teaching is divided into three phases:

1. Deciphering—teacher introduces some written and oral content specially the foreign language text and translation in native language to the students.
2. Concert session—this session has two options active and passive. Active deals with reading a text at a normal speed by the teacher and followed by students. Passive suggests the students to relax and listen to the teacher. Soothing music are played in the background while passive session is going on.
3. Elaboration—in this phase, students share to the teacher what they have learnt. They express it via acting, songs and games (Richards and Rogers).

We have seen the most prevalent methods of teaching. There have been various researches conducted that discovers the suitable method for language teaching. In Indian context, a lot of projects have been done in order to find the challenges and solutions in diverse regions. For this paper, I have reviewed some articles related to action research undertaken by ELT professionals. The articles are retrieved from ELTReP Awards in India published online by British Council.

Review of Literature:

An article by T. R. Murlikrishnan, "The role of translation in second language learning with specific reference to specialized technical course" stresses on the role of first language (L1) in second language (L2) learning. The study advocates the relevance of translation method of teaching despite knowing the fact that this method had been criticized by a number of scholars in later half of the twentieth century. However, various researchers find this method appropriate for second language teaching as it has maximized effects. The study concludes that L1 is steppingstone in learning the L2 successfully.

Bhanu Shankar in his paper, "Shared reading strategies using bilingual methods to improve listening, speaking and reading skills in young learners between the ages of four and eight"

aims to improve learning outcomes in language by applying ‘Shared reading methodology’. This method is used to improve language acquisition within young students. They use to teach students through story telling activities. Along with this, other engaging activities were provided that help in enhancing their language learning.

“The teaching of English grammar in Hindi medium high schools in Jharkhand” by Robert Slattery discusses problems and challenges that have been faced by the students of Jharkhand region. The study identified the major causes why after ten years of learning English, students were not able to write or speak grammatically correct sentences. The study is an empirical study based on interviews with teachers and observations of students in the classroom. The study suggests that the problem is in the methodology that has been adopted by the teachers to teach students English.

Subhra Sarita Samal in the article, “Phonological awareness training for learning to read in early ESL contexts: A study of young learners in Odisha” focuses on reading problems and evaluated the effectiveness of phonological awareness (PA) training in the improvement of those learner’s reading skills.

The study concludes that introductory classes of Anganwadi preschool does not focus on sound awareness while teaching of rhymes to the students. Rhymes are meant to teach sound patterns to the little students. The study also reveals that English textbooks also limited in PA activities that is essential for acquiring reading and speaking skills.

The paper, “An Assessment of ICT implementation for English language teaching in secondary schools in Bihar” by Chanchala Tiwari and Ranjit Singh stress on the role of ICT in teaching-learning process. Government committees recommended blended learning technology with education. The findings of this research reveals that the perceptions of English language teachers of Bihar of the use of ICT for teaching English are favourable.

Maruthi Kumari Vaddapalli in “The Effect of Self-regulated Strategy Development (SRSD) instruction on improving the paragraph writing skills of engineering students” investigates about SRSD instruction to know whether it is an effective way to improve writing skills.

The study concludes that teacher of engineering colleges should get training in teaching writing skills so that they can teach them efficiently.

We can see, these studies are a part of projects. The studies are based on different states of India and identifies the challenges in teaching-learning English as a second language.

But there is one thing common in all the studies, the struggles of students to acquire written and oral proficiency in English as second language. This study is fundamentally pondered upon the choices of methodologies made by the teachers to teach English.

Discussion and Conclusion:

After careful exploration of these studies, we have understood the challenges teachers face while teaching the students. Some questions arise regarding the aptness of methodology for teaching such as:

- What should be the method to teach English as second language?
- How teachers perceive the attitudes of the students towards method of teaching?
- How should teachers implement the methodology in teaching?

In order to find the answers of these questions, one should be able to understand their students well, their background, level of learning and so on. Teacher can make questionnaire for students, interact with them, take interviews, discussions, etc. Once we learn about students' attitude, we will be able to choose the correct methods of teaching.

Various studies revealed that in Indian states, students have little exposure in out-of-school. In most of the cases in India, students are the first generation to learn English as second language. The scenario is different from those students who lives in urban or metropolitan cities where their parents are educated and working. Their knowledge and proficiency are higher than other students. So, in the process of second language learning, various factors play crucial role. If we look upon the methodology, we can clearly see that distinction is made between methods of teaching. Some methods are specifically focus on writing skills and have association with first language. While some methods are designed to concentrate on speaking proficiency. Every method has its pros and cons. If we take Grammar Translation method, it is considered to be the most effective teaching method in terms of error free writing skills in L2 learning. Student with this method acquire fundamental base in second language, they gain mastery in grammar rules and can write accurate sentences. But it has some major setbacks, students are not able to express properly in spoken form. Their speaking proficiency is not good as compared to writing. Simultaneously, some methods like Direct method, Suggestopedia, Read-out-loud have special focus on speaking skills. They work on the oral proficiency of the learners and provide great fluency after learning. But students are weak in grammar rules and there are chances that their writings are filled with grammatical errors.

The study concludes that we need multi-model approach to teach Indian students English as second language. India is a land of diverse cultures and languages. We have seen in the literature review, a lot of research have been conducted in the states of Telangana, Odisha, Bengal, Jharkhand and Bihar. Each state has its own language that has been spoken by the people of their respective states. English is used as second language and formal mode of instruction in schools. The studies have also revealed that students are unable to communicate in reading, writing and speaking. One method is not enough for teaching, we should combine two or more method for effective teaching. In order to start from beginners'

level, we should choose GT method of teaching. After that we should apply the methods that focuses on speaking proficiency like Direct, Audio-visual, Read-out-loud and so on. By applying the multi-model approach of teaching-learning, we will be able to accomplish great success in teaching the students English as second language.

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