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English Language Teaching: Methods and Techniques

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Abstract:

India is a linguistically and culturally a rich country from its length to breath. English though a global language has been given a different type of treatment, especially in India. It is considered to be a language of elite class. English is taught at various levels at schools and colleges. The methods may vary depending upon the needs and background of the learner. The teacher learner ratio has to decrease to make learning effective at the same time the learner should be self-motivated to learn a language which has been existing from more than 200 years. Instead of treating it as a foreign language it should be seen as a link language between the learner and the world.

Keywords: English Language Teaching, self-motivated, learner, Methods, Techniques.

Introduction:

In India, as in other linguistically and culturally pluralistic societies, the position of English is determined by various political, cultural and social considerations (Kachru, 1986b p.15: 11-30) India is a multilingual country where English is a global language. But teaching Language is an art in itself. To contribute to new ideas on how to learn a second language which is so very of prime importance one needs to study three aspects of it.

1. Proficiency of English teachers teaching this global language.
2. Student's exposure to English language outside the learning environment.
3. Methods employed to learn that language.

This limited paper will try to analyse the various methods deployed to study and learn this second language as first. It is an attempt in this paper to interpret and evaluate the methods that have been in use from time to time in different parts of the world.

To study let us start at the base level i.e. at school level: According to Kurrien(2005) there are four types of schools:

- a) **English-medium private:** government aided elite schools: In this type of schools, the teachers of English language are highly proficient, the school allows only English to be spoken in the premises throughout thus creating different ways of giving students the

environment to build liking for the language. Finally the students also get an ambience at home where they can learn and pick up the language at a fast pace.

b) **New-English medium private schools:** Here English is taught along with other Indian languages, where other languages are also given importance. Teachers teaching English has limited proficiency and children attending these types of schools have little or no background in English.

c) **Government regional-medium schools:** In this type the schools have a tradition to teach English as an important language at the same time other regional languages are also taught as per the establishment of the management. The students come here from various backgrounds.

d) **Government regional-medium schools run by district and municipal authorities:** This type sees the largest number of students enrolled in rural India. The teachers are less proficient in English language and not much attention is given to the language as it is only one subject taught in that language. Children mostly from economically weaker sections come to these types of schools.

After looking at the school level let us find out the various teaching methods deployed to find out the strengths and weakness of the language. English language teaching (ELT) tries to interpret and evaluate some of these methods. Some of these methods are as follows:

1. The Grammar- Translation method.
2. The Direct Method
3. The Reading Method
4. The Army Method
5. The Audio-lingual Method
6. The Structural Approach

1. **The Grammar- Translation method:**

Teaching Language in this Bilingual Method is where English is translated into one of the regional language of that place. It is also known as Tradition or Classical Method. As the name clearly indicates and emphasizes on teaching English as a second language with its basic rules, grammar, practice, and techniques in translation from the language into the target language or the regional language which is generally the mother tongue or vice versa. It is also called as paraphrasing where line to line and word to word is translated into the mother tongue to understand its meaning. Since English also has a lot of Greek and Latin words, to some extent it becomes a formal method and a way of teaching the second language. This method has basically three important aspects:

- a) Proper interpretation of words from foreign languages into their respective regional language.
- b) Proper structuring of these sentences into their regional language.
- c) Original meaning should not be changed in the process of translation from foreign language to their mother tongue.

In the 19th century this method gained a lot of popularity. For this purpose one had to learn strict grammar rules thus resulting to produce the end result among people or learners to speak fluent English. The problem that this method faced was that people think in their mother tongue and then directly translate it into English language. This creates a problem because the hidden meaning does not come out with this methodology which strictly follows only the literal meaning translation to a greater extent. This becomes a hurdle in learning a foreign language here ENGLISH. The teacher here has no choice except to strictly follow the text and discuss the literal or exact meaning with the learner using their mother tongue. This method is generally suited for teaching large classrooms with limited resources. The learners in these large classrooms are made to learn the grammar rules, do the exercise in notebook, listen to the teacher's understanding, pronunciation, writing on the black board translating the meaning into simpler meaning etc. thus correcting themselves wherever they make a mistake. Here the teacher may or may not be competent to know the language well as he/she has to translate things in the regional language.

The problem of translation is that the whole paragraph of lesson, poetry, joke, essay is taken away as it is presented in the original text. The other thing is that less stress is given on accurate pronunciation and intonation or communication skills to speak correctly and fluently. It is mostly neglected. Learning rules of grammar with exceptions also puts the learner in great stress. Therefore the learner just becomes a passive listener and only absorbs the meaning of the text to understand it. Still one cannot discard this method totally as it becomes easy to translate the content in the mother/regional language than to give the meaning in the same language. Not much changes can be done in this type of method as the learners come from rural and poor background, here the classrooms have a large no. of students and finally the teachers have to cover a vast syllabus in that time slot.

2. **The Direct Method:** Teaching language particularly in European countries attempted to teach language in a more logical way. Various methods were developed somewhere between 1850-1900 as many people were discontented with the grammar translation method. This method as promised could hold back attention of learners for a longer period of time. This method had various names attached to it such as 'the natural method', 'the psychological method', 'the phonetic method' etc. But the best way to describe this method was 'the direct method'. It targeted to learn the language as a means of giving instructions and also in communicating in the same language in the learning conditions. To make it more precise this method does not employ the grammar translation method and therefore the teacher or the student does not have to translate things into his/her mother tongue. Hence it is called as direct method. Some of the feature of this method is:

enhancement of everyday vocabulary, teaching of grammar rules and sentence structure orally, getting the exact meaning in the same language, listening and seeing audio-visual presentations, more time for discussion in classrooms, more importance given to reading and pronunciation.

Since a lot of importance is given to oral presentation it gives a lot of opportunities to the learners to listen and speak, thus encouraging spoken language to be learnt in a better way. Thus the learner is encouraged to think in the target language here English and to speak in that language enabling him to get confidence to face people and talk to them. This method does not work well in higher classes. It ignores other language learning skills like writing and reading. This method basically emphasizes on listening and speaking fearlessly. This results in the learner to only develop listening and speaking skills but not that of writing and reading. This teaching method makes the learner to be at a very primitive state of learning the second language. This could be the reason that the learners understand the language but does not communicate effectively nor can frame correct sentences on their own as less emphasis is given on writing.

3. **The Army method:** This method was the outcome of the requirements of World War II. In 1942 the American authorities required some Specialized Training for their Army. They wanted interpreters of various languages to communicate with each other. The main purpose was to train their soldiers to be fluent speakers in as many languages as possible during that war time. Here again a lot of stress was given on spoken language and least importance was given to reading and writing. They wanted people to immediately interpret the language and according to it give instructions that can be followed by the army without wasting time. This method became successful within the army as the group was small and the trainees were also highly motivated during a lot of training sessions.

But this method could not gain success within a classroom as it was made for a specific time period. It lost its charm after the war got over. In the classroom the learners were unable to learn one language it was a difficult task for the teacher to introduce some other languages into classroom teaching. Without reading and writing it would become difficult for the learner to learn and understand the target language. Plus it was like learning half way. Grasping power of each learner was different. The teacher was also required to be competent enough in few of the other languages which became a very difficult task to accomplish as well as to find a person with such kind.

4. **Audio-lingual Method:** This method of learning a language is a process which is viewed as that of habituation or conditioning without any intervention of the analysis of the intellect.

B. F. Skinner's Operant Conditioning theories has inspired this type of language learning. Just as a child changes his social behaviour through the process of forming a habit in the similar way the linguistic behaviour of the child can also change. This type of thinking introduced memorization of foreign language teaching. Audio-lingual techniques appeared to offer the possibility of language learning without having to have a strong academic

background or inclination for that language. This made learning the foreign language within the scope of the ordinary learner. Some of the features of this method are as follows:

1. This method helps the ordinary learner to get access to learn the foreign language.
2. It helped to develop simple techniques without harassing the learner with strict grammar rules or translation or structuring of sentences etc.
3. It developed a theory of language teaching derived from linguistic and psychological principles.
4. It also developed the separation of the language skills into one pedagogical device. (Stern 465-66) It raised hopes of giving in a golden chance of language learning to learners.

Albert Valdman had criticized this method that it is an exaggerated emphasis on oral drilling in Audio-Lingual Method (Valdman 30). In country like India there is an absence of well-trained teachers and if they are there the numbers are pretty handful thus making it further more difficult to go with this approach. The other reason for its failure is the facilities needed for implementing this method in schools and colleges with proper infrastructure, softwares, maintenance of staff, etc.

5. **The Reading Approach:** Reading approach or reading method was devised for learners of English in India who had less time to master the English language orally. Reading approach is similar to Grammar Translation Method since it also put a stress on written skills. Here only grammar that is necessary for reading with fluency is taught. But, it has flexible approach as far as the teaching is concerned. It is one way that will help learners to solve their problems in reading. In reading approach, students improve their knowledge and get something new because they are demanded to read more. Reading becomes important because reading is an active activity which involves understanding, guessing, drawing conclusions etc. It also has, an important function, i.e. a communicative function. By reading learner will know about the subject-verb agreement, sentence structure, kinds of tenses and other grammatical functions and how to use them. He/she will also know about the different types of culture by reading and develop cross-cultural understanding. Simultaneously the learner will learn to pronounce the words correctly. In reading approach, many things can be accomplished by the learner and they can master English to a greater extent.

Reading approach is a way to start teaching and learning to the beginners who want to learn English. It is based on cognitive theory originally conceptualized by Albert Bandura. To understand this a little deeper explanation is required. Let us focus on some of these aspects. Reading has various approaches like:

Skimming:

It is based on the activity to read shorter texts so as to extract the detailed information in an accurate manner. Skimming is used to quickly identify the main ideas in the text which the learner is reading. Skimming is done with a greater speed than normal reading. People often skim when they have lots of material to read in a limited amount of time eg. novel, drama.

There are many strategies that can be used while skimming. Some learners read the introduction and conclusion first as to get an idea as to what is discussed in the text. The learner might read the title, subtitles, subheading, and illustrations. Consider reading the first sentence of each paragraph. This technique is useful when the learner is seeking specific information rather than reading for comprehension. Skimming works well to find dates, names, places as well as short information. It might be used to review graphs, tables, and charts as well.

Scanning:

It is quickly reading the text to get the gist of it. Scanning is a technique that used quite often when learner is looking up for a word in the telephone book or dictionary. The learner would search for key words or main ideas. Scanning involves moving eyes quickly down the page seeking specific words and phrases. Scanning is also used when the reader first find a resource to determine whether it will answer the question. Once the learner has scanned the document, he/she can go back and skim it. When scanning, the learner look for the author's use of numbers, letters, steps, or the words, first, second, or next. He looks for words that are bold faced, italics, or in a different font size, style, or colour. Sometimes the author will put key ideas in the margin or use red colour to mark it.

Extensive reading:

Extensive reading is reading a longer text, mostly for pleasure at leisure time. Extensive reading is an approach to language learning which also includes foreign language learning. This means a large amount of reading is required by the learner. The learner's view and review of words whose meaning is unknown with respect to the specific context will interfere with the total or full meaning of the text. This helps the learner to understand the meaning as well as learn the new words. While the mechanism is commonly accepted as true, its importance in language learning is disputed. One can consider extensive reading as private reading affair in which the pace required is as per the requirements suited to the individual's ability, taste, preference and mood. Extensive Reading is the free reading of books and other written material that is not too difficult nor too easy! Extensive Reading is sometimes also called Free Voluntary Reading.

Why use it? English language learners always want to learn more words, acquire more grammatical structures and be better readers and writers. Doing extensive reading will help learners with all of the above, along with motivating them to enjoy reading and learning independently.

The role of extensive reading in language learning:

1. It helps in providing 'comprehensible input.
2. It enhances learners' general language proficiency.
3. It increases the learner's acquaintance to the language.

4. It helps increase vocabulary.
5. It leads to improvement in writing the language.
6. It motivates the learners to read.
7. It can amalgamate previously learned language.
8. It helps to build confidence with extended texts.
9. It encourages the exploitation of textual redundancy.
10. It facilitates the development of prediction abilities

Intensive reading:

It is a quickly going through a text to find a particular piece of information. It is essentially reading in depth and is usually done in the class with each learner having the same text.

Intensive reading involves learners reading in detail with specific information to learn thus to achieve the desired result. It can be compared with extensive reading, which involves learner's reading texts for enjoyment and to develop general reading skills. The Intensive Reading Technique is reading for a high degree of comprehension and retention over a long period of time. For example, the learner read a short text and put events from it into chronological order.

6. **The Structural Approach:** As the name suggest the Structural Approach is a way/ method where the learner has to master the pattern of sentence. Structures are the different provisions of words that are arranged in the best accepted style. It includes different styles in which words, phrases, clauses, might be used. It assumes that language can be best learnt through a scientific selection and grading of the structures or patterns of sentences and vocabulary.

According to Kripa .K. Gautam is “ based on the belief that language consists of ‘structures’ and that mastery of these structures is more important than the acquisition of vocabulary. Early practice should focus on mastery of phonological and grammatical structures rather than on mastery of vocabulary.

Few Objectives of Structural Approach:

To help learners attain mastery over an essential vocabulary.

Correlate grammar and composition teaching with the reading lesson.

Teach the fundamental skills- listening (understanding), speaking, reading and writing.

Teacher should select this method to teach language to the learners as it focuses on the following:

Usefulness-the structures which are more frequent to be introduced first.

Frequency- i.e.how many times the structure/sentence occur.

Simplicity- the sentence's simplicity depends on the form and meaning of the language taught.

Learnability- teacher should focus on the items that are easy for learners.

Coverage: A word having multiple meaning. Eg: wind, minute.

These are some of the various methods used to make the learners understand and speak English as a second language. At the same time there are some more techniques which help the facilitator have a good grasp over the different types of learners. Some of them are as follows:

The facilitator should know his/her pupil: The instructor should understand who his/her students are like their background, educational experiences, to get an idea of what can be taught depending upon their educational requirements.

Get acquainted to their social and emotional needs: The need of the hour is English and the learner would definitely want to go. At the same time checking with the learners if they have some added responsibility like taking care of siblings or living with an extended family or having a job to support the family etc. helps the teacher to understand his/her learner better.

Understanding acquisition of first and second language: Not only understanding the learner's first language i.e. his/her mother tongue the teacher should know how the theory of second language acquisition works to help them teach the language in a better manner.

Need for SWRL in the class: The main interest of teachers should be to make their learners acquire the second language properly i.e. to make them Speak, Write, Read and Listen so that they can learn the language more effectively.

Increase the proficiency of the learner: The learner may be proficient in Social English but not in academic English as both are very different. He may be able to narrate the story of a movie or incident better orally but may not be able to describe a scene from a novel or a drama.

Language content: The English language has a number of polysemous (multiple meanings) words. If the learner understands atleast one meaning of the word he/she will understand some kind of the meaning in that language. The teacher must revise and check whether the learner has understood the exact meaning of the word or not. For eg. The word 'plot' in Literature has a different meaning as the 'plot' in a Geography class or the word 'table' in mathematics is different than that of 'table' we sit on.

Language Assessment: Every district has different parameters in which language assessment can be done. Therefore while formulating the results both formal and informal assessment should be considered to get a better understanding of what the learner has learnt.

Use of audio visuals: Authentic resources can be used like audio-visuals for showing menus, bus, train schedules, flight instructions, etc to help students comprehend complex concepts.

Strategy for language proficiency: Knowing the learners level of language proficiency is vital to understand and develop strategy to be able to make them learn the language. Not all strategies are appropriate for all levels of language learners. This helps in making learn the language more effectively.

Co-operation from others: The teacher can take help of other English language teachers as well as that of other subject teachers. Their ideas, experience, method, resources can help to make and understand students in a better way thus gaining support and success in the exercise of helping the learners achieve success or the desired result.

Conclusion:

Thus to end the discussion it is noted that any type of school or college whether with grants from Government or no grants teachers and students generally use some of these methods like the Translation method, the direct method, the reading method or any other method of teaching learning English. The Teachers both in Government and Non- government schools and colleges have started using teaching learning materials like the charts, models and flash cards. Tape recorder, TV or projector is also used in the classroom. Tutorials and Remedial classes are conducted to teach at micro level to develop the teaching skills of the student as well as teachers. This is reflected basically at the college level where the student already has a background of English. The English language teaching in Schools, the teachers have started giving more attention to the four basic important skills to learn English i.e. Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing. The problem is that Evaluation of the student and teachers is mostly based on theory and practical methods of teaching or on result analysis and not on the teaching of skills or English teaching method. It is properly pointed out that this language which is considered to be the language of the elite class in India can create a path for Economic development in the country. At the same time if education for the masses especially English if not done in a proper manner will create a problem. One can argue that though various methods are present to learn English it is a self- motivation of the learner irrespective of his background, capabilities, achievements etc. English throughout India should become a genuine link language of the country, not just, a style status of a few.

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