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RESEARCH ARTICLE



## TEACHING ENGLISH IN AN INDIAN CONTEXT

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### ABSTRACT

English is spoken around the globe by native as well as non-native speakers and in the context of India which was once under the colonial rule, English plays an important role in academic as well as in offices. But with the recent emergence of globalization English is now being viewed as a medium of communication. According to Crystal (2004:4) it is “the world’s first truly global language” and has right now dominated the different spheres of world communication. This effect has also made people think of re-evaluating and developing newer methods for teaching English as a medium of communication.

This paper tries to focus on the approaches and problems in teaching of English in an Indian context. Though so much emphasis on teaching of English has been emphasized still it is facing quite a number of challenges.

Key words: Native, approaches, global, communication, problems

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### INTRODUCTION

English language has believed to be imported from its colonisers who ruled this country and the main objective was to popularise European culture and science and further to consolidate the position of the British Raj in India. However, nowadays it is no longer remains the language of natives but has acquired the status of “World Englishes”.

Globalisation has become an important need of the time, which is affecting the world in this new era by making huge changes in the social, political, economic and cultural ways of different nations. According to Chomsky (2006), “Globalisation is a process by which the people of the world are unified into a single society and functioning together”. In fact, this drive forced a need for a common language which can act as a medium of communication and on the other hand be a language of technology and medicine too.

English is perhaps spoken today by some 380 million people across the globe as their mother tongue and another two-third are using it as their second language. In fact it has now days become the lingua franca for the whole world and in the words of Crystal “the world’s first truly global language.” The basic reason for this type of sudden demand for English was the increase of international business, politics and diplomacy.

Furthermore, the increase in the use of internet and information technology in order to exchange ideas has made English language to dominate the global market.

Over two billion people are learning English now days which indicates the demand for developing newer models for teaching and learning English language and further it introduces one to new realms of ideas, customs, habits and values. Krishnaswamy and Sriraman also feels "Students of English in India have realised that English is necessary if they are to talk about their identity, their languages, their society and economy and polity, their values and their culture so that the world outside will know what they are. We need English to project and interpret India to the rest of the world".

The twenty- first century in fact demands a global knowledge both in one's professional and personal life. Earlier during the British rule English was basically learnt in India by a few percentage of people who wished to please their rulers by conversing on topics which would interest them and the basic goal of learning English comprised of mastering literature, but the move globalisation, post-independence brought a wave of different mediums of communication like newspapers, magazines and numerous television channels which inspired viewers to master English language.

### **Role of English in Present Scenario**

English as a language has acquired the status of an associate official language since 1965 and thereby given a special place for, in the Indian curriculum course of study. Indian Education Commission (1964-1966) designated English to be used as a library language. The Commission also allowed the use of the mother tongue as a medium of instruction up to university level, but no student would be further promoted until he/she has acquired proficiency in English. Almost all the national boards have given special place to it and have made it to be one of the compulsory subjects which students have to clear before they are promoted to the next higher class. The textbooks too on the recommendation of the National Curriculum framework has updated its content in a way to discourage rote-learning and promote what students learn in classrooms can be associated with their life in real life situations.

### **Approaches to the Teaching of English**

There are a number of approaches which were used to teach English in Indian context.

#### **Grammar Translation**

This method usually analyse a language firstly through its grammatical rules, followed by an application of this rote learned rules in the translation of sentences and text into and out of the target language.

#### **Objectives of this approach**

1. Reading and writing are basically focused.
2. Words/ vocabulary taught through bilingual dictionaries.
3. Much of the class was devoted to memorisation and translation of sentences and words.
4. Accuracy was emphasized.
5. Native language was used to understand the target language.

#### **Direct Method**

This method is a move towards 'Natural Method' of language learning. It takes into account a natural method of adopting a language i.e. the method a child develops in order to acquire his/her first language. Use of the mother tongue is avoided and language is taught in a more direct form that is through live demonstration.

#### **Objectives of this approach**

1. Classroom instructions were carried in the target language.
2. Oral communication skills were mainly focused
3. Grammar was taught inductively.
4. Vocabulary was taught through demonstration.
5. Speaking and listening comprehension was given priority.

#### **Structural Method**

This Method focuses, basically that in learning of language, mastery of structure is more important than the acquisition of vocabulary i.e. language is viewed as a system of structurally related elements of

phonemes, morphemes, words, structures and sentence types which every learner has to master in order to understand any language. The advocates of this approach believed that English can be improved through intensive drilling if carefully and scientifically planned. The basic techniques used in classrooms were

Dialogues for memorisation, expansion drills, repetition drills, substitution drills, transformation drills, question answer drills etc.

#### **Objectives of this approach:**

1. Learning a language is not only learning its words but also the syntax.
2. Vocabulary is presented through graded vocabulary list.
3. Skills are presented in the following order: listening, speaking, reading and writing (LSRW).
4. Sentence patterns exist and can form the basis of a language course.

(Saraswati,V. 2005. English Language Teaching. Hyderabad: Orient Longman)

#### **Communicative Approach**

This approach was introduced in India in 1980s as other approaches were not able to fulfil the current demands of English language learners and teachers. This approach basically focuses on the learner's ability to communicate and later facilitating them to use the language in everyday situations. The learners are encouraged to focus the meanings and functions of language rather than in the form of language.

#### **Objectives of this approach**

1. Learner centered.
2. The development of communicative competence and not linguistic competence.
3. Focus on fluency and appropriacy.
4. Task based.
5. All the skills of language get equal importance.
6. Concentrate more on the message than meaning.

The teaching and learning of English in India has become inevitable and indispensable with the need of time. The policy makers have stressed the importance of English since independence and have given the status of English to be one of the compulsory subjects. Though so much emphasis is given to the learning and teaching of English still it is beset with too many challenges.

In the Indian context where a class is comprised of students from first generation learners to refined and polished students. A single approach may not seem to be best for teaching a language. So, it is in the hands of the policy makers and material developed to give liberty to the class teacher to choose and adapt the best method which she/he feels sure can bring good results.

#### **Major problems of teaching English in India**

##### **1. Objectives not well defined.**

It has been seen that the objectives laid down by the policy makers in designing a syllabus does not fulfil the intended goal. Teachers stick to those skills which are important from the examination point of view as the time is limited.

##### **2. Irrelevant to the future needs of learners.**

It is again seen that with the age of globalisation students want to grasp those skills which would help them to get a command to use English effectively in order to operate mediums in which English language is frequently used and teaching English language through literature poses a great problem. As a result student fails to acquire confidence in using the language as a medium of communication.

##### **3. Examination oriented educational system**

In India majority of the school syllabuses are designed with an aim to measure success on the basis of performance in the examination. This somewhere makes teaching and learning limited to time and further promoting memorisation of certain topics which could be reproduced in examination.

##### **4. Heterogenous classrooms**

It is again seen that an English teacher in India is exposed to a group which has mixed ability learners i.e. some are there who would be coming from the rural/regional backgrounds while others who would be

coming from convent or public schools. The teacher here has to either ignore the intellectuals or the weaker ones.

#### **5. Large Classes**

It is a common problem in India, where a single teacher has to cater to the needs, a large number of students which is quite impossible. To maintain discipline in such large classrooms is very difficult as a result the main purpose of teaching English is defeated.

#### **6. Lack of experience with teachers**

A teacher is usually the driving force in the classroom and if he/she lacks the proper training, it somewhere hampers the effective learning and teaching.

#### **7. Preference of Reading and writing skills over listening and speaking in syllabus**

Learning a language means proficiency in the four skills (LSRW). However the prescribed English syllabuses focus on the reading and writing skills rather on listening and speaking.

#### **CONCLUSION**

English in India has acquired its own identity of Indian English. Teaching and learning any foreign language requires great effort on the part of teachers and learners. Globalisation has definitely laid a deep impact on the Indian educational system too. English is definitely going to adapt it to meet new demands and this somewhere requires the interest of policy makers and educationists to revise a focus on acquisition of skills and proficiency in practical use of language.

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