

English Language Teaching in Primary Schools: A Pedagogical overview

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Abstract:

Qualitative primary education is considered as one of the foundational aspects of any nation's development. Formal language education is the crucial part of the primary education. Languages form the basis of imparting knowledge of every subject. In most of the states of India, three languages, namely, English, Hindi and regional language of the particular state are taught at the primary level. Out of these three, Hindi has the status of national language and English serves the associate official language. Today English plays the role of a second language in India. It has been adopted as the compulsory subject in all the primary schools. It is considered as a gateway to better career opportunities and a tool for advanced knowledge and better communication with the world. But the poor standard of English language teaching and learning, particularly in rural areas is a major concern for all the stakeholders related with education. Ineffective and monotonous pedagogies of teaching English and inefficiency of teachers to deal with them are one of the major causes of students' poor standard of learning English at the primary level. If the new effective pedagogies are evolved to cater the linguistic needs of the students and teachers are trained to implement those in classrooms, the standard of teaching and learning of English will be definitely improved. The present paper attempts to deal with the present pedagogies of English being employed in the classrooms of primary schools in India and need to evolve new ones.

Key Words: Pedagogy, ELT, Primary school, language skills

Introduction:

Today English is considered as the global language, so everyone desires to have command over it. It is a gateway to better career opportunities and a tool for advanced knowledge and better communication with the world. Practically a person can't be considered literate without having the knowledge of English. In 21st century, an era of information technology and global economy, we are so much surrounded by English that we can't move away from it.

In India English has got a significant position in public as well as in private matters. It is the official, legal and financial language in India. So, obviously English language teaching is an important aspect of education field from elementary level to the higher education. English is no more a foreign language, but the second language in India. Children start learning English from the pre-primary level in play schools, crèche, Anganwadis, kindergarten, nursery etc. unofficially and from the first standard officially along with the vernacular language. The Rapid growth of pre-primary schools in urban and rural areas shows parents' keen interest in providing

education to children in English medium. It is a known fact that many Government-aided vernacular schools in urban and rural areas are not working as per the parents' expectations, especially about English and Mathematics, as they measure their children's progress through linguistic and arithmetic skills. So parents are moving towards private English medium schools where English is taught as the first language and it is the medium of instruction and Government-aided vernacular schools are getting deserted gradually due to fewer enrollments of students.

Pedagogies of English language have been always a crucial part of English Language Teaching (ELT). The significance of English has been accepted by the world as a link language. English plays the role of a co-official language in administration and second language in schools in India. It has been made a compulsory subject from primary to higher education level by most of the state governments. But the poor standard of teaching and learning of English has been a major concern before all the stake holders of education. According to a recent survey of 54 countries, India ranked 14th for the English proficiency index with a third level of "moderate proficiency" [1]. It suggests that the average proficiency level of students in all four basic linguistic skills, namely listening, reading, speaking and writing is poor. As English is not a native language, students have only alternative to learn it in schools in a formal manner. They learn it only for examinations which are focused on writing. Even the teaching methods of English used by teachers are examination oriented. So, learning English has become a monotonous task for students. Learners are all very different. Their attitudes in the classrooms are affected by their motivations, their needs, their educational cultural backgrounds, and their learning styles and personalities [2]. So, teachers need to evolve new student friendly pedagogies, which could cope up with the changing needs of the time. The present paper attempts to answer two questions regarding English pedagogies. First, what is the common tradition of English teaching methods in India? And the second, why do teachers need to develop new methods for teaching English?

Pedagogies are basically, instructional methods used by teachers to impart knowledge or skills. In case of language, it refers to the activities of the teacher such as speaking, listening, writing and asking questions etc which a teacher undertakes in a classroom with the objective of transmitting curricular content to students [3]. It influences the way in which the curriculum inputs are transacted and so, it forms the crucial part of the whole teaching learning process.

In order to understand the concept of pedagogy, the comprehension of three key terms, techniques, methods and approach is important. Edward Anthony made a distinction among these



three levels, with specific reference to language learning. An approach is a set of assumptions dealing with the nature of language and language learning. A method is an overall plan for the orderly presentation of language material. A technique is that which happens within the classroom and consistent with the method [4]. So, techniques are part of the method which is consistent with the approach. Methods and techniques are more relevant to teachers who actually perform in classrooms.

English language has been a part of school curriculum since before independence. In most of the states, it has been introduced as a second or third language in vernacular schools from std. V or VII, where the medium of instruction is L1. In such schools, Grammar- Translation is the most adopted methods by primary teachers, where reading and writing are the major focus. The method approaches the language first through detailed analysis of its grammar rules, followed by application of this knowledge to the task of translating sentences and texts into and out of the target language [5]. Understanding the literary text through translation in native language is the primary focus of teaching and there is little need to improve listening and speaking skills of L2. It has been the most suitable method of teaching English for teachers rather than for students.

‘Need is the mother of invention’. This is quite true with current status of English as a link language. With the changing times, particularly in India, with the beginning of LPG (Liberalization, Privatization and Globalization) in 1991, the expectations from the English language learners also changed. ‘Communicative Competence’ became the key word in ELT. The change in language teaching approach from Grammar-Translation method to Communicative approach is understood by English medium schools to some extent, but the vernacular schools, especially in rural areas remained backward in this context.

Today, English language has been made compulsory from standard first by most of the state governments in India, considering the growing importance of it. But still the poor standard of English language teaching and learning is a major concern for all the stakeholders related with education, especially parents whether rural or urban who want to provide quality education to their children. The seriousness of this problem can be understood from the students, even at the post graduate level who are not proficient enough to apply linguistic skills in their academic and routine life. The problem is not only limited with rural students but also with the urban students. The root of the problem lies in imparting language education at the primary level.

Teaching English as a second language to non native learners at primary level is really a challenging task. The important place where students get exposure to English is their classroom.

So, the language contents need to be imparted to them with suitable method which could encourage them to learn language. As India is a diversified country with respect to geography, culture, language, and social status, one particular teaching method will not prove to be a suitable method for all the classrooms. Every student is a unique personality and so each classroom is a unique one. Every teacher has to keep it in mind and devise new pedagogies to deal with students.

It is commonly experienced that most of the students are weak in basic language skills. Though some students are good on report cards, they are incapable of applying language skills in practical life. The major reason behind their poor linguistic performance is the inadequate language exposure at the primary level. The teachers at the primary level couldn't develop interest in learning English among students. Gradually students started feeling English as an unnecessary burden imposed on them. After completing the primary education, when these students entered the secondary school, they found a large gap between their current linguistic capabilities and the expected capabilities at that level. This is the common picture of students in secondary and higher secondary schools, especially in the rural areas. So, there is a tremendous need to evolve new pedagogies or modifying the existing pedagogies which will cope with the students' abilities, especially at the primary level to develop English fear-free generation.

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