

Innovative Pedagogical Styles in English Language Teaching: Learning in Rural Context

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Abstract

English, though a foreign tongue, has acquired a unique status in Indian context. The history of English language teaching reveals that teachers and academicians have always been in search of innovative methodologies and curriculum designs. The reason was to find a solution to the problems encountered in their respective classrooms. English has emerged as the language of trade, economic growth and social mobility and this outlook has in fact made English language a necessity in present times. Indian education system has laid great importance to teaching and learning of English right from school itself. It is observed that it poses no such problems at the metropolitan level but poses a great struggle in rural areas. This is because, the population living in Indian villages lack the facility of technological innovation and supportive context. It becomes quite essential that novel styles and strategies of innovative teaching practices should be introduced. This paper examines various innovative tools and strategies of English language teaching which can be implemented in teaching English as a second language. It further examines the challenges faced by the teachers and learners. Today, things have become quite easier with the advancement of science and technology but it is the implementation of appropriate strategy which could make teaching and learning quite innovative.

Rise of English language in India

India is a country of varied linguistic landscapes and it is very well known for its continental diversity. English occupies a central position and emerges as a unifying factor in our multilingual nation (Patel and Jain, 2011). In fact, it has assimilated into the very roots of the everyday affairs of our country. A language which was once considered as a language of the literati with its growth and expansion today, it is considered as a language of opportunity. English language entered into Indian sub-continent through its colonisers who made their entrance after the incorporation of East India Company in 1600s. Later, the teaching of English formally in Indian schools and colleges commenced with the Macaulay's Act.

Lord Macaulay became the president of General Committee of Public Instruction in 1834. His main motive to come up with such an Act was to create a group of Indians who would form a link between the rulers and the ruled. He wished to create a class of Indians who were supposed to be Indians in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect. (Scrase, 2004, 3) states it *"The hegemonic colonial project in India was to create and maintain a class of administrative officers, clerks and compliant civil servants to carry out the task of ruling the vast and expansive subcontinent."*

With the frame of Indian Constitutional Acts, many opinions were formed regarding English language to continue in the country as a medium of teaching and learning. Finally, it was unanimously decided to continue English as an official language for fifteen years. Article 343 (Clause 2) of the constitution stated:

"For a period of 15 years from the commencement of the constitution, the English language shall continue to be used for all purposes of the

Union for which it was being used before such commencement.”
(Aslam, 2009, 5)

This Article was passed and adopted by the assembly keeping in cognizance the importance of English language in consideration to India's future course of development and removing it would mean an exit from the current trends and knowledge of science and technology. Another fear which made the officials approval was the fact of imposing Hindi language to non-Hindi speakers. Despite, continuous efforts by the central and state governments, Hindi could not gain impetus to become a link language in India. However, with the Official Languages Commission's Report in 1955 and the Official Language Act Number 19 of 1963 Point 3 stated *“Continuance of English Language for Official purposes of the Union and for use in Parliament – Notwithstanding the expiration of the period of fifteen years from the commencement of the Constitution, the English language may, as from the appointed day, continue to be used in addition to Hindi-*

(a) for all the official purposes of the Union for which it was being used immediately before that day, and

(b) for the transaction of business in parliament;” (Government of India, 1963,.373).

Thus, English language was given the status of a subsidiary official language to be continued. The reason was clear that English was the lingua franca for the mass who were not proficient to communicate in Hindi. With lot of apprehensions and continuous discussions regarding continuation and proliferation of English in education, a committee headed by Dr. S Kothari reported that English should be continued as a library language in Higher education and a firm foundation should be built right from early schooling itself. (NCERT, 1970, p. xiv).

This commission further observed that Hindi can not be adopted as a common medium to be used for educational purposes , atleast for some years to come in non- Hindi areas. As the people may not accept Hindi with ease and would definitely resist. Neither of the committees or Acts could think of rejecting English from Indian context. The importance of English from educational perspective was very much realized by our educated leaders.

Today, English language occupies an significant place in Indian school curriculum. As everyone is aware of its importance regarding learners' future academic, professional and social development. It is taught as a compulsory subject in major Indian curriculum. This demand for English to be continued emerges from many of the factors which are recognised by the Position paper on teaching of English produced by the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT, 2006) and National Curriculum Framework, 2005 (NCERT, 2005).

Objectives of teaching English in India

Listening:

1. To differentiate between sounds.
2. To understand meaning associated to words.
3. To respond to teacher's instructions.
4. To recognise the meaning, associated to words and sentences expressed by the teachers.
5. To reproduce whatever he/she has listened in classroom context.
6. To organise the ideas in a sentence.

Speaking:

1. To be able to speak in correct pronunciation.
2. To use correct intonation and stress.
3. To reproduce proper grammatical sentences.
4. To answer questions raised by teachers in class.

5. To involve themselves in oral discussions, debates, etc.
6. To choose good vocabulary in speaking.
7. To be able to speak fluently.

Reading:

1. To be able to recognize and read letters, words and sentences.
2. To understand the meaning associated to the words and sentences.
3. To be able to read words with proper pronunciation, stress and intonation.
4. To be able to read both loudly and silently.

Writing:

1. To write English words and sentences accurately.
2. To choose appropriate words to form a sentence.
3. To put capital and small letters at appropriate places.
4. To use proper punctuation.
5. To produce an independent composition.
6. To be able to write down appropriate answers to questions.
7. To express his/her thoughts into written medium.
8. To write grammatically correct sentences.

Junior level:

1. To understand spoken language.
2. To speak the language.
3. To write the language.
4. To read the language.

Senior level:

1. Development of a taste for English literature comprising of prose, poetry, story, etc.
2. Drawing aesthetic pleasure from reading literature books.
3. Understanding critical reviews.
4. Ability to translate a text or a literary article.
5. Developing creativity in learners.

Present status of English in rural India

In India, condition of rural education is improving but the lack of facilities as compared to cities makes it incompetent in terms of qualities of English language teaching. However, majority believes that

"... in both rural and urban areas, in the transformative power of English. English is seen not just as a useful skill, but as a symbol of a better life, a pathway out of poverty and oppression." Graddol, 2010, 124.

There are very few schools in rural areas as compared to cities in India and the condition is not so encouraging. At some places they are located at a distant place while at other place the condition of the building and the other basic amenities do not encourage students to regularly attend them. The main aim of running schools at rural areas is to raise the level of education and literacy rate. Though Government of India has come up with various policies and initiatives, still it lacks a complete support from the locals. The majority of people, though believe in the "transformative power of English" (ibid) but feel that it is an alien language.

Problems encountered in rural areas in teaching and learning of English

- 1. Examination oriented syllabus:** The basic aim of teaching and learning in rural schools is just to get promoted to next class. After introducing an all pass system, students do not take pains to understand the concept rather develop short cut methods of filling up their answer sheets.
- 2. No initiative for supplemental inputs regarding English:** It is being seen that students do not receive any sorts of extra inputs of English skills other than what is carried in classrooms. Even, at home they seldom receive any exposure to English language.

3. **Grammar Translation methods are carried in classrooms and rote learning is promoted.** Memorization of grammatical rules and repeating them is promoted in rural areas.
4. **Extra duties other than teaching loaded on teachers:** Teachers appointed in rural areas are often assigned various other duties other than teaching which also hinders smooth functioning of teaching and learning.
5. **Overcrowded classes:** In some schools a single teacher has to take two to three level of classes together which creates chaos and confusions in teaching and learning of English.
6. **English is taught as a subject and not as a skill:** It is seen that students are not exposed to four skills of language as it should be, rather English class do focus only on reading and writing.
7. **Sub-standard textbooks and readers:** The books which are recommended in rural areas often have typological errors in grammar, syntax and spelling. It is also seen that sometimes the books do not reach at the beginning of session to the students. Apart, the books are also not so attractive to motivate.
8. **Lack of modern technological aids:** For any language program to get stimulus, technology-based programs should be introduced along with mainline classes. Audio-visual aids help students to get motivated and understand the concept in a more clarified manner. It is seen that rural schools do not have access to modern technological aids.
9. **Lack of trained teachers in English language:** It is seen that teachers teaching English in rural areas are not properly trained and equipped in teaching skills of English language through inventive methodologies.

10. Lack of clear-cut policy by the Government: It is also seen that policy planners have not set a clear-cut goal regarding the introduction of English language in their educational program.

Innovative practices in English language teaching

Report by Onate Press (2010) mentions some innovative modern trends in language teaching.

- 1. Demonstrative learning:** comprising potential educational projects, presentations or products through which students demonstrate what they have learnt. It is also accompanied by digital and multimedia projects in order to assess students oral and listening skills.
- 2. Asset-based learning:** Focussing on talents of learners by viewing diversity in thought, culture and traits as positive assets. The objective of teaching English is not just to teach verbs and vocabulary but to use and produce language skills in different forms and for a variety of purpose.
- 3. Learner-centred approach:** This approach basically focuses on learner's aptitude, potential skills and hidden talents of an individual learner. Some other skills such as critical thinking, problem solving, creativity, innovation, collaboration, teamwork, leadership, cross culture understanding, communicating information, etc. are developed in further course of study.
- 4. Technology-based learning:** This type of learning makes both learning and teaching quite innovative. It improves access to education for students living in remote areas. Many underlying hesitations and lack of clarity regarding a topic gets simplified with the use of technology. Furthermore, it supports the classroom processes of teaching, learning and evaluation.

5. **Inclusion of stories and speeches in Language learning:** This type of innovation focuses on developing clear verbal articulation of ideas by promoting public speaking and presentation skills. Activities which could be carried in classrooms to promote oral skills are as debates, poetry readings and storytelling.

Innovative styles of teaching English in rural context

1. **Skill based learning:** This type of learning basically focuses on communicative activities to enhance the four skills of English language. The teacher should make every possible effort so that each individual skill gets equal importance in classroom and the students get exposed to English language in a simultaneous manner. *“Speaking and listening are said to relate to language expressed through the aural medium and reading and writing are said to relate to language expressed through the visual medium”*. (Widdowson, 1978, p-57)

Word building exercises, reading comprehension activities, listening activities in the form of radio or television shows, speaking skill activities should include comprehending, selecting, recalling, reducing and expanding language activities so that learners' get a wider exposure to the language. Sometimes learners can be asked to speak about the poem or prose carried in their class and then can be given freedom to explain their imagination regarding an ending. Later, writing activities can be developed based on the previous activities carried in class.

2. **Audio-visual aids:** Making students watch or listen to English news, short stories, poems, advertisements, etc. regularly can work wonders. These aids help learners to understand various concepts with more clarity and seriousness along with teachers' instruction. If the school lack these aids teachers' can use their

own mobile phones or just a simple radio as an aid to English teaching.

3. **Teaching through language enactment plays:** Short plays in English language based on Indian culture, epics, myths, folk tales, etc. In rural areas people are very closely associated to nature and deities. In fact, a teacher can help students to perform small role plays with English sub-titles based on mythology, folk tales, etc.
4. **Peer Teaching:** It involves one or more students teaching other students. Those students who are better than their peers can be involved in assisting other, not so competent partners. Peer teaching helps learners to ask and clarify their confusions. It motivates them much more as compared to asking their queries to a teacher.
5. **Harkness Method** of learning: Students sit in circle and certain topics are discussed. Oral poetry recitations are encouraged and once students get comfortable collaborative language games can be introduced and later on complex activities and discussions can be included. Meanwhile, the teacher acts as a facilitator through the whole discussion.
6. **Involving parents:** Conducting special sessions for parents to make them realize the importance of learning English for their children's future. It would be a more optimistic approach if parents are involved with student's learning. They can be counselled in order to make their children get involved seriously in school activities rather than sending them to earn money.
7. **Experiential learning:** Experience do play a greater role in any skill to be developed. Continuous exposure to a language helps him/her to understand its linguistic knowledge. Therefore, English class has to be focused on activities, exercises or programs which should enhance learners to imbibe the very nature of a language. The teacher should develop opportunities like simulation games, situational dialogues appropriate to the context of a learner. Teacher can themselves act and provide a demonstration through models and drills.

Conclusion

The discussion made in this paper is to encourage inventive ways of teaching and learning of English in Indian rural context. With the emergence of multinational corporations and industries, English language has achieved the status of a global language. (Crystal, 2003, p -10). Now, the need of times is to promote communicative activities through different mediums and styles of teaching. This fact has very well being accepted by the common class because of the recent developments in education and wider knowledge of the world through the use of internet. Indian government has come up with various schemes since independence, to raise the level of education in rural context. Though, an English language environment in rural Indian context cannot be created overnight but requires continuous experiments, research and coordination between the government, teachers and learners. A context, where learners are motivated and are exposed to regular inputs of appropriate language through innovations and variations show greater ability to comprehend it in future course. Though it would seem quite difficult in early stages but slowly it will bring change in the thinking of the rural learners too. In fact, it is the teacher's intervention at the exact point of notice which carries the most authentic remedial measure.

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