

An Analysis of the Actual English Language Classroom at the Primary Level in Kashmir: Problems and Suggestions

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Abstract

English is considered to be a *lingua franca* because it helps people to communicate with each other irrespective of their cultural backgrounds. English is playing a major role in all the sections like education, medicine, engineering, and business. It is an extraordinarily powerful language. In Jammu and Kashmir, English is introduced as a subject from class 1 in all the government and private schools. Many theories have been propounded by various scholars about the process of language teaching and language learning and, on the basis of these theories, several teaching methods were developed which include Grammar Translation Method, Direct Method and Communicative Language Teaching Method among the contemporary methods of teaching and learning a language. This paper explores the actual English language Teaching Classroom of the government schools at the primary level in Kashmir Valley and discovers what actually happens in the classroom. It will also highlight the teaching inadequacy and will suggest some remedies as well.

Keywords: Kashmir, English language teaching, teaching methods, Teachers, Classroom.

Introduction

English is the language of international communication as it is the only language that is spoken and understood by a majority of the people in the world. It is considered to be a *lingua franca* because it helps the people to communicate with each other irrespective of their cultural backgrounds. English is playing a major role in many sections like education, medicine, engineering, and business. In Jammu and Kashmir, English is introduced as a subject right from class 1, in all the government and private schools. Currently, English is a highly demanded language in the world and particularly in the state of Jammu and Kashmir. Everyone dreams to be proficient in English communicative skills and that is why there are hundreds of

English speaking institutes/schools in the Valley that try to inculcate the English language skills in the desirous students.

English is taught as a subject of study in the schools of Jammu and Kashmir and not as a language, and the learning material has been designed in such a way that it should not only develop the English Language skills among the students but also boost their interest in the literature of English. But after passing the middle and secondary school education, the students are still not able to communicate in the English Language, even though they are taught English from class 1 of their schooling.

This paper is an attempt to ascertain the lacunas which prevail during the teaching-learning situations, to study the problems faced in the teaching-learning process and to suggest solutions for the same. Many theories have been propounded by various scholars from time to time about the language teaching and language learning and on the basis of these theories, several teaching methods were developed like the earliest Grammar Translation Method, Direct Method and Communicative Methods among the contemporary methods of language teaching and learning.

Review of Literature

A lot of work has been done in the field of English Language teaching, and researchers are continuously trying to find new Avenues which can become fruitful for this broad domain of English Language Teaching Research.

Awan, A. G., & Shafi, M. (2016) conducted a study in Pakistan in which they found that the students from government secondary school D.G Khan are preferring the Grammar Translation Method in place of the many contemporary language teaching methods. They are more comfortable in using Urdu rather than English while talking to their friends. The study also shows teachers use Grammar Translation Method because they find it more suitable and effective than direct method.

Richards, J.C., & Rodgers, T. (2001) have discussed almost all the methods of Language Teaching and Language leaning starting from the Grammar translation Method and all the present methods with detailed advantages and disadvantages, in their book. The role of the English teachers and the students has also been discussed thoroughly. Richards, J.C. (1996) has discussed the teachers' Maxims while they are teaching. The maxims are actually the principles a teacher develops, on how he is going to teach the students. These maxims reflect cultural beliefs, experience, training of the teachers, etc. Kak and Farooq have also written a paper on needs of English Language Teachers where they have suggested that the studies of English literature should be separated from the field of English Language in the context of Kashmir. They have also suggested special training for the teachers of English Language teaching.

Objectives of the Study

The present paper attempts to analyze the English language teaching in the actual classroom situation in the Government schools of Kashmir valley.

1. The paper will highlight the teaching methodology adopted by English Language Teachers, and their knowledge about the different teaching methods.
2. To explore whether the teaching-learning process is teacher-centric or student-centric.
3. Suggestions will also be made for the problems that act as the barriers for the smooth teaching-learning process for English language.

Methodology

The present study is based on the firsthand experience of the researchers while doing their B.Ed. programme and getting the opportunity to observe the English language teachers while teaching English in the actual classroom.

Four primary schools have been taken for this study from Pulwama and Srinagar, 2 schools from each district. The researchers observed the teachers of classes 4 and 5 in both the districts and a total of 16 classes were observed in which 8 classes were from Pulwama and 4 from each class, and likewise 8 from Srinagar, 4 from each class. Manual notes were taken by the researchers while observing the classes. In addition to the observation, some questions were also asked by the researchers to the teachers of English Language regarding the teaching-learning scenario. The teachers' responses were recorded and later analyzed in order to come to the conclusion.

Analysis and Discussion

During the analysis it was found that the majority of the teachers use Grammar translation method for teaching the students of English. There is no scope for the recent and advanced Language teaching methods. In the actual classroom situation, the teacher was found reading aloud from the English textbook and was followed by the students in the same manner. After reading, the teacher explains the meaning of the text to the students which they are supposed to remember by heart. The teachers were found using Urdu and Mother tongue which is Kashmiri most of the time in the classroom. It was also observed that speaking the English language was not the goal of teaching and learning, and oral practice was limited to students reading aloud the sentences. It was found that children are taught through rote learning. The students are the passive listeners and thus have no active participation in the teaching learning process. There were no lesson-plans which a teacher was supposed to have planned before entering the class and as such there are no general or particular goals to be achieved. The only goal, teachers were found to be focused on, was the syllabus. Speaking English language in the classrooms and students' participation were hardly noticeable. There was no extra learning material in the classroom like phonetic charts or diagrams supposed to be pasted on the walls of the classroom.

Talking about the recent shift from teacher centric approach to student centric approach, based on the observation it can be concluded that the approach is totally teacher centric, as there is no scope of involvement for the students or a role to play.

The teachers were asked two simple questions regarding the teaching of English.

1. What do you know about the different teaching methods of language?
2. Why do you use grammar translation method only?

Regarding the different teaching methods, 75% of the teachers responded that they know different teaching methods and 25% were not having any information about the different teaching methods. But when they were asked to discuss about the recent Language teaching methods, they were not able to speak clearly about any method.

In response to the question of using the Grammar translation Method only, the teachers admitted that they use the grammar translation method because they don't get any response from the students when they use the direct method or any contemporary method of teaching English, because the students don't understand the information conveyed. Most of the students in the government schools were found to be the first generation learners. The teachers also claimed they are given the target to complete the syllabus within a definite time period. The teachers also spoke about the irregularity of the students, not completing the provided homework and thus not cooperating in the teaching-learning process. The teachers claimed that most of the students are not able to read from the textbooks. In spite of the fact that the students taken into observation are from 4th and 5th classes, the teachers are not able to switch to the direct method or communicative method of teaching as they claimed that the children won't be able to cope up.

Conclusion

English language teaching has become a highly demanding field in global world in general, and Kashmir in particular. Better English means the better opportunities for people. People feel proud if they are able to communicate successfully in the English language. It has been always the quest of many linguists and language teachers to find and implement better methods of language teaching in the actual classroom which can develop the language skills efficiently and effectively in the learners. English is being taught as a subject in the government schools of Jammu and Kashmir, and not as a language. Based on the data and its analysis, it can be concluded that government teachers use the traditional methods of teaching and are far away from using the recent methods of teaching English, like the direct method or communicative language teaching method. The approach to teaching in the teaching-learning process is completely teacher-centric. There is no role for the students to play; rather they are mere passive learners. Neither the teachers use contemporary methods of teaching nor the students cooperate to participate actively in the classroom. In conclusion, it can be summed up that the government needs to update the teachers supposed to teach English with contemporary

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teaching methods by organizing conferences, workshops, seminars and teacher training courses frequently, and to engage the parents of the students as well, so that the goal of teaching and learning English as a language can be achieved efficiently and effectively.

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