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Language Teaching – The Present Day Challenges

# Language Teaching -The Present Day Challenges

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## Abstract

If language teachers teach as they taught earlier, then one may not achieve the required goals of teaching English in the present global scenario.

This paper deals with the importance of teaching English to fulfill the ever growing demands of English. The methods and approaches adopted or followed by teachers in the past to teach English language, the lacunae in their language teaching which is the second language for both teacher and students is discussed.

Challenges before teachers in present day ELT are taken up in this study. The way in which students can put their learning into practice in day-to-day use to fulfill their practical demands through effective communication skills apart from gaining command over English language is highlighted.

This paper also deals with various language games which are introduced in teaching to create interest of students in learning English language apart from conventional learning.

## Introduction

Soft Skills are part of Communication Skills. You may soft skills or hate these but you cannot ignore soft skills in any learning process, more so in learning and teaching a language.

As English has turned into a universal language, its presence and value in the world has expanded enormously in the past decades. Many money-earning activities such as BPO, Medical Transcription and IT add to the importance and relevance of English in every walk of life. Prof. Jacob Tharu says, “English is no longer some remote but a powerful mystery, lying hidden in the world of textbooks and examination.”<sup>1</sup>

## Conventional English Teaching

In the past, students were introduced to English only in their sixth standard. Students learned English just as another subject like Physics and Mathematics and got very little opportunity to using it within the school as well as outside the school.

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The above context was appropriate for the use of methods that did not focus much on communicative competence. Language teachers adopted and followed some or all of the different methodologies listed below to teach the language.

### **1. Grammar Translation Method**

Grammar translation method was used by the teacher to teach young children, where teacher explained every word to students in the native language to make him understand and learn English. But in this method there was at least one disadvantage. Both the teacher and the student concentrated more on L1 rather than L2. In this method English language class seemed to be L1 class rather than L2 class. Students got only limited benefit through this method.

Unfortunately, this method is still in use in many rural schools throughout India. This method is also supported by the methods used to teach mother tongue in our schools.

### **2. Bilingual Method**

May be we should declare this as **the method**, our own favorite method in our schools.

Most teachers follow the bilingual method to teach the students in Indian schools, where the teacher first of all explains the entire English sentence in L1 and then asks the students to perform activities in English. Here, it used to be a main assumption that only the teachers have the freedom to take the help of L1 and students are not supposed to use it. However, this constraint is found mostly on paper, not in the classroom. When a student is in the process of composing his or her English sentences, abundant help through the use of mother tongue sentences is provided. This method does not help fluency and naturalness in language expression. Thus, this method became beneficial to, students in learning the second language only up to some extent.

### **3. Direct Method**

Earlier, teachers used to follow the direct method to teach Indian students mostly in private schools, which usually charge a higher tuition fee, etc. These teachers will stick to the practice of using only English, without depending on L1. Here, teacher is not supposed or authorized to use any single word from L1. This forced seclusion made students from many families with no past history of learning or using English face great difficulty in understanding certain words and their meanings. But this method turned to be more useful for the students to learn language than any other method as this method creates more encouraging language environment for students in the class room.

### **In the Context of English as a Subject**

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All the above methods have their own advantages and disadvantages, where the students learned English only as a subject rather than as language. They were also unable to put their learning into practice due to lack of a favorable environment.

In addition to the above constraints, the teachers used to have very limited teaching hours, mostly from three to six hours per week which are not enough to teach the language elaborately giving emphasis for the basic elements of language.

Another limitation seen in Indian teachers is that some of the English teachers are not familiar with the latest developments in ELT pedagogy. The situation is no better even at the college level as Robert Bellarmine observes, “The most serious problem in the teaching of English in our country is the appallingly small quantity and atrociously poor quality of English to which our learners are exposed.” (Ref 1)

Teaching of English in India is examination-oriented only.

### **A Challenge in Teaching English Today**

Challenges before the English Language teachers in India are enormous and apparent. They should be able to cater to the practical needs of learners, to make them competent enough to interact with one another and also to retrieve information all over the world.

English has a base in several countries and is considered as the most suitable and convenient tool for International Communication. The people who have proficiency in this language could access large number of jobs and also were seen holding high positions in many National and International Organizations.

In the earlier days English was just like a Library language, but now that notion has changed totally. At present the challenges visible before the English language teachers in India are diverse and it is necessary for them to shape up accordingly to meet the demands of the day.

### **Methods Adapted to Improve Spoken Skills**

#### **1. Group Discussions**

Now due to the world wide growing trends in English, teachers give more emphasis to communicative approach rather than the lecture mode. Their main goal is to make the students effective communicators in English both inside and outside the class room.

To achieve this, they involve the students to participate more in classroom activities so that they will acquire adequate command over speaking skills. To create this environment, teachers can conduct group discussions, where students are supposed to

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speak only in English. Here, they can give their views, ideas and thoughts in English due to which they develop the habit of speaking fluently in English like they do in their mother tongue.

Various types of discussions also help students to improve their general awareness and understanding about current affairs. It gives a lot of scope for good imagination and deep thoughts. This type of discussions helps the students to listen to the views of fellow students which in turn helps them to gain knowledge and enrich the vocabulary also.

## **2. Debates**

Debates too play an important role to improve the speaking ability of the students both at school and at higher level. Debates not only make the students to speak boldly and fluently but also help them to take one stand and be firm and consistent on that. Along with this advantage of reasoning, it gives students some experience to control their emotions without losing their temper. This also helps them to organize their thoughts and ideas in a specific way while speaking.

## **3. Role Plays**

Role-plays are another important task that can improve the basic colloquial English of the learners. In role plays, the students assume themselves as one of the characters and behave and speak accordingly involving in the given character completely. In these types of activities teachers have to play a vital role as instructors and guide the students properly so that they can act appropriately to meet the situation. They should help the students now and then to understand and take up the role given to get a grip on the tone of voice.

## **Computer assisted Language Learning (CALL)**

Now-a-days computer has become a part and parcel of our day to day life. It plays a vital role in the process of teaching and learning. It can be used to learn a foreign language like English. Computers have made language learning easy and also made the language learning process interesting and enjoyable for both teacher and student throughout the world. CALL has reduced the burden of the teacher whose teaching methods will be out dated to teach language to present day generation of the world. It is described as one of the interactive methods that can help a learner according to their own ability to learn, which enriches their language skills. CALL enables the learner to look beyond the conventional mode of learning and encourages self learning.

## **English for Specific Purposes**

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As English has emerged as a global language, it also plays a vital part in every profession with respect its importance and demand.

Every profession has its own professional terminology which is used frequently in that particular profession. For example, certain terms used by the doctors, lawyers, et al. are quite different from those of other professionals. So, to benefit these professionals, English for specific purposes is introduced so that specific English words related to that particular profession can be taught by those professionals.

Jargon related to one profession is different from the other. Hence every professional is taught in a particular manner that fits in well with his professional demands.

### **Teaching Language through Visual Aids**

One of the innovative methods used by the teacher to teach language in class room is visual aids.

The teacher distributes visual aids to students by dividing them into various groups. The students are then given stipulated time to extract relevant information on the given aids. After that, those learners are supposed to speak about the visual aids given to them.

This method expands the analyzing capacity of the students. By looking at the picture, the learner should think and come out with innovative thoughts which also help in learning language by creating fun-filled environment around them. The teacher acts as facilitator who motivates the students to talk freely. As each person gets their own unique thinking it helps to sharpen their thinking process.

### **Language Games**

In addition to the above mentioned methods teachers also use various language games to teach English language apart from the conventional ways of language teaching, which helps in developing vocabulary from the language that is being learned.

#### **1. Crossword puzzles**

#### **2. Games to teach basics of grammar to the students through various structures.<sup>2</sup>**

- Here is an example for lower intermediate students:

Target structure: simple past. Words: bought, ran, ate, pen, smiled and walked.

Example sentences:

Bought: He taught English.

Ran: She made a flan.

Ate : She was called Kate.

Pen: He was called Ken.

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Car: They walked far.  
Walked: They talked and talked.

- Here is a difficult example to practice the present perfect:

A list of 6 words such as pen, chair, dog, dictionary, travel agent and bus is provided. Students should make sentences using the present perfect tense that contains a rhyming word.

Hat: She has become fat.  
Chair: I've been to the fair.  
Dog: He has burnt a log.  
Dictionary: I've played Pictionary. (Ref 3)

### **Conclusion**

To meet the present day challenges in teaching English, first of all, English should not be treated as a subject as it is to be used actively in interacting with one another throughout the world. By using conventional methods, maximum portion of class time will be wasted in exercises and drilling, dealing with grammar and pronunciation which takes away a large portion of class time. These methods were mostly used to develop basic skills of language learning such as Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing, but by following these methods listening and speaking skills were neglected as students cannot put their language in practice.

In the era of competitive world, where the majority of the students are attempting GRE & TOEFL, good listening and speaking skills become an absolute necessity.

Communicative approach was totally neglected by teachers and learners which has become a global demand where students are supposed to communicate across the globe. Teachers should act as facilitators, and should observe how well students organize their thoughts while speaking with their fellow members.

As language changes geographically due to dialectical variations, the teacher should take adequate steps to teach their student about neutral accent and their importance while communication. Clear pronunciation, not perfect pronunciation, is the goal.

Students are also now facilitated by software to practice pronunciation through phonetics. To achieve the goals of language learning today every college should be provided with language lab, sophisticated equipment like computers, LCD Projectors.

In addition to these, our faculty too should update their knowledge, skills and should acquire thoroughness over their syllabus to meet the demands of globalization since English is seen as a key educational investment in this world. If provided with the latest language teaching tools and with the support of technology, one can teach the language effectively and motivate the students towards language learning.

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