

Teaching English as Second Language: An Evaluation of TESL Practices in Indian Context

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Abstract

The paper attempts to unfold the various TESL (Teaching English as a Second Language) practices followed in Indian classrooms. It would also aim to mark a vivid distinction between the understanding of L1 also known as mother tongue, and L2 or second language. The paper would attempt to reflect the various challenges and difficulties witnessed by the non native learners of English language. Through this paper, the authors would attempt to clearly define what exactly the term TESL reflects in its truer sense, what are the aims and objectives behind designing of such courses and which methodologies are usually adopted in the Indian Classroom teaching of English. There would also be an effort to hint on the current scenario and the gaps that exist in the effective implementation of ESL (English as a Second Language) and how those gaps may be filled by following certain effective strategies at the end of the language teachers thereby contributing to the enhanced proficiency levels of the learners.

Keywords: ESL (English as a Second Language), TESL (Teaching English as a Second Language), L1 (First language or Mother tongue), L2 (Second or Foreign Language).

Introduction

In the present era, the need to explore information and the prime requirement of global communication has turned English into an international language. It belongs not only to the British, the Americans, the Canadians, the Caribbean, the Australians, or the Africans but it also belongs to the rest of the world. English is broadly known, spoken and read by all educated people in the world. English is the only major lingua franca to have an immense impact and is taught in almost all parts of the world irrespective of the nationality, caste, creed or religion. The

rapid increase in the international exchange has raised an emergence for the masses to learn English as a second language. The English language enables the people to participate as the unit of the whole world and not just one nation. William Littlewood aptly states about the status of English as a second language, “The study of second language learning is an immensely rich and varied enterprise. Most participants in this enterprise still see its ultimate justification in terms of the desire to improve learning and teaching”¹ (Littlewood: 2006).

Individuals in different parts of world speak this language in their routine communication either as the mother tongue or as a foreign language or as a second language. The countries, whose mother tongue is not English, learn this as a second language for its enriching, enlightening and practical values. Philip B. Gove in his preface to ‘Webster’s Third New International Dictionary’ very aptly exemplifies the significance of English language, “It is now fairly clear that before the twentieth century is over every community of the world will have learned how to communicate with the rest of humanity. In this process of intercommunication the English language has already become the important language on earth.”²(Philip B. Gove: 1981)

The people of India are no exception to English. English is accepted as the second language in India. The historical account of English in India goes back to 1835 when Lord Macaulay favoured English education and he sought to enhance Indians in English language. English language has had a great footing on the Indian subcontinent, when the East India Company established settlements in almost all the major metropolitans of India. India has an old connection to English and a much longer exposure than any other country which uses it as a second language. The National Policy on Education, 1986 and Revised Programme of Action (POA) 1992 recommended English as second language in secondary schools. In 1968, the National Policy on Education laid down that “Special emphasis needs to be laid on the study of English and other international languages. World knowledge is growing at a tremendous pace, especially in science and technology. India must not only keep up this growth but should also make her own significant contribution to it. For this purpose, study of English deserves to be specially strengthened.”³ (NPE: 1968). As per the policy the language of English has been included as a second language in the school curriculum of the country. We may term it as a

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language of functional value. This stature of English has imparted a novel outlook to the teaching and learning of English in the country like India.

The term *ESL* (English as a Second Language), indicates the usage of English in a non-native area. And the term *TESL* (Teaching of English as a Second Language) can be more clearly defined as a teacher centered term in which the curriculum is designed to train the pupils whose native language is not English or who are not adept in this particular language or who cannot fluently speak, write, or read English. Individuals across the world join ESL courses for numerous reasons. It may be for accomplishing school education or to get into a higher education or to join a professional course. Apart from these reasons, students generally take ESL courses to boost their career. In a nutshell, the primary purpose of an ESL course is to make an individual proficient in the use of the English language.

Distinction between L1 & L2

English as a second language course is chiefly planned with a range of practices and techniques to develop listening, speaking, reading, writing, and vocabulary skills. William Littlewood says about Second Language Learning, “The term ‘second language’ refers to any language that is learnt when the first language system is already in place.”⁴ (Littlewood: 2006). This means second language is consciously acquired for varied purposes whereas the first language or the native language or the language that a child picks from his family environment, before he gets into the mock atmosphere of a school, just grows naturally out of a child. There is a marked difference between the learner learning a first or native language and the learner learning any second or foreign language. “L1 refers to the language acquired or learned first by the student. It generally refers to the mother tongue or the first language of the student. L2 refers to the language or languages acquired or learned subsequent to the first language. The term Second Language also refers to the language or languages acquired or learned subsequent to the first language. It is generally assumed that the first language of a person comes to influence the quality of learning and use of the second language. In this context, the term Source Language generally refers to the first language or the mother tongue or L1 and the term Target Language refers to the second language or L2.”⁵ (M. S. Thirumalai: 2002)

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Difficulties Witnessed by Non-Native Learners In India

The learners definitely require enough time and facilitation in order to maximize their second language learning potential. During this learning process they face a number of difficulties and challenges which are discussed under:

1. **Mother Tongue Influence:** The Indian pupils are found to be extremely perplexed because the second language definitely has some sort of similarities with that of the mother tongue. As S. P. Corder (1973) rightly remarks in his book *Introducing Applied Linguistics*, “ A cursory examination of learner’s attempt to speak the target language will show that many of the forms he uses do bear a resemblance of one sort or another to that of the mother tongue”⁶ (S. P. Corder :1973).
2. **Differences between Spoken and Written English:** A well instructed child is expected to be well versed with rules of grammar and basic fundamentals but this cannot be considered favorable in the context of spoken English or English pronunciation. Mastery of rules in the target language cannot ensure the correct functional usage of English. Moreover different languages may not necessarily have a common syllable structure. So the non- natives may have problems of making distinctions between the sounds. Corder aptly remarks in this context, “A well motivated learner will eventually master the grammatical rules of the target language. The same cannot be said about his pronunciation. There appears to be some difference of kind between the learning of pronunciation and learning of the formation and speaking rules”⁷ (S. P. Corder :1973)
3. **Non-Native Teachers:** Since the paper is focused on TESL (Teaching English as a Second Language) in the Indian context, the presence of non native English teacher in the Indian classroom is but obvious. The worst challenge the Indian students face that their first exposure to the second language is helped through by the non- native teachers while

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it is undoubtedly true that native English teachers can impart more authentic pronunciations and much richer expressions as compared to the non-native teachers.

4. **Perception Set Differences:** Students hailing from different cultural, family and social backgrounds may have different perceptions in the classroom. The varying backgrounds due to different cultures, experiences, exposures, values give rise to the distinct level of perception sets in these students. These differences results in communication differences and gaps and further act as a hindrance in the learning of a second language.
5. **Lack of Natural Exposure to Language:** The students have to only depend on the classroom instructions and there is an obvious lack of natural exposure to language as they have in the learning of L1 or first language. Joseph. C. Mukalet precisely observes in this connection, “The L1 is picked up at home, in the most natural situation, guided and controlled by those who are near and dear to child. The L2, on the other hand is learned in most artificial situations, the overcrowded classroom, in an atmosphere of fear, anxiety and tension.”⁸ (Joseph. C. Mukalet: 1998)

Objectives of Teaching English as a Second Language

For an effective teaching of English as a second language, it is very important to foresee the desirable changes a teacher expects in the pupils. So it becomes significant to determine the objectives first and then carry the instructional work in the classroom. It is particularly important for a teacher of a language. A teacher of English should keep in mind the objectives of teaching English as a Second Language. The foremost objective of teaching English as a second language is to develop the communicative skills for the expression of basic needs and for basic interactive skills. The interactive skills include listening, speaking, reading and writing. A better substitute can be suggested in order to comprehend these four basic skills in a more lucid manner. Out of these four skills of LSRW (Listening, Speaking, Reading, Writing), two of them have a receptive purpose and the other two have a productive purpose. Listening and Reading are both receptive because in this the learner is the receiver of information while the Speaking and Writing are

productive because in these two the learner happens to produce the spoken and written expression.

1. **Listening Objectives:** The learner shall be able to understand the basic expression used in the classroom. The pupil should be capable of responding to the instructions, commands and questions. The teacher of English should emphasize to demonstrate the critical understanding of any spoken discourse.
2. **Reading Objectives:** The teacher of English as a second language should enable the learner to demonstrate word recognition along with correct comprehension of the text. The learner should be able to identify the basic terminology and underlying concepts in the text. Also the pupil should become capable of skimming and scanning the text for required information.
3. **Speaking Objectives:** The teacher must ensure that the pupil should be able to speak correctly, coherently and spontaneously. This ability considerably depends upon the listening exposure to the child. Because the learner who gets enough listening to English gradually becomes efficient in the spoken aspect of language too. Pupil should also be able to communicate the basic needs like greetings, requests, directions, commands, questions, clarifications, repetitions etc.
4. **Writing Objectives:** The objectives of writing concentrate on developing in the learners the ability to write, accurately, precisely and coherently. The child should be able to sift the appropriate vocabulary and make out the differences between formal and informal expressions.

It is a pre-requisite to prune the learners at all the four levels in order to inculcate the language skills. But particularly focusing on TESL practices in the Indian classroom context, reading is probably the most important skill to be imparted to these foreign or non-native learners of English because it is only through reading they can continue to polish their communication. There is an understandable absence of speaking and listening of English in their

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immediate surroundings and reading is the only platform that can impart them an exposure to this foreign language. As H.A. Cartledge also puts reading in the forefront, “Of the four skills involved in language learning-listening, speaking, reading and writing- the one which is likely to be the most useful for the students of a foreign language is reading. Many of them, unless they are able to visit a country where it is spoken, will have little opportunity of speaking and hearing the language themselves, nor will most of them have occasion to write in it. All of them, however, once they are able to read it without difficulty can go on improving their knowledge of it indefinitely.”⁹(H.A. Cartledge: 1955)

Methods Used in Indian Classrooms

1. **Grammar Translation Method:** This is the most popular method of teaching a second language to last even today in Indian schools. This method is popularly used in the primary classes in order to make the students relate with the things being spoken in the classroom. Most of the govt. schools also use this method of teaching English because the majority of these schools cater to the students belonging to rural areas where it becomes almost a challenge for a teacher to teach English to those who have very rare or almost nil exposure to this language. The teaching through this method is done by translating the target language or L2 into the mother tongue or L1.
2. **Direct Method:** The method does not allow the use of translation. Teaching of L2 is done using the target language only. This method is generally employed by many private and convent schools of good repute or professional institutes. Joseph Mukalet aptly remarks about the Direct Method, “The Direct Method essentially consists of learning a foreign language without the medium of the mother tongue and by having a direct association between language and experience i.e. words and phrases with objects and actions. Just as the native learner picks up new language with environmental factors: things, events, persons and features of experience, the L2 learner is expected to master the meaning and the use of a language item by directly relating it to the reality or thing itself”¹⁰ (Joseph Mukalet: 1998).

3. **Audio-Lingual Method:** The teaching in this method is done by employing useful teaching techniques like demonstration, dramatization, verbal and pictorial illustration. This method is employed to develop in the learners the aural-oral abilities. This technique is used popularly by many professional institutions which train the professionals like Engineers, Chartered Accountants, Management Trainees, Education Trainees, Lawyers, Marketing Representatives etc, and particularly the convent schools that follow the western pattern of teaching and learning.

4. **Bi-lingual Method:** In this method both the languages L1 and L2 i.e. mother tongue and target language are used, if the situation demands from a teacher to make use of L1 to help the pupil understand L2. Joseph Mukalet rightly puts up, “The mother tongue of the learner is the most potential resource at his disposal in the learning of a language and instead of shutting the door upon the mother tongue, the resource should be systematically employed”¹¹ (Joseph Mukalet: 1998)

Thus, different set of learners need different methods that suits best to their requirements. If we closely analyze, we find that each method has its own significance in its own right. The main stress lies on the fact that how the teacher employs that method to the best of its utility. Otherwise no method can be termed as the most appropriate one to bring about the positive learning experience. Mukalet explains the significance of teacher’s choice and his way of employing the appropriate method for teaching, “There are no whole sale methods which the teacher may be able to use without employing his own mind and originality. Any method, for that matter, requires the teacher’s final polishing touch and organization to become adequate for the use in the class room. The final result of the language learning experiences in the classroom are governed by the way the teacher employs the method”.¹² (Joseph Mukalet: 1998)

The Serious Flaws in the Current Scenario of TESL (Teaching English as a Second Language) In India

A major problem is the non availability of efficient community of English tutors. The teachers available are neither trained enough nor are they aware of the current techniques of ELT. One of the most serious issues is probably the authorities’ poor planning of qualification

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and eligibility requirement of English teachers. The universities in India only offer Masters in English literature and there is almost nil or very less provision for courses like M.A. in TESOL or in ELT. A teacher who has done M.A. in English literature cannot be expected to impart language learning skills in a very effective manner. Since ages students have been learning language from the teachers of literature while if we follow the opposite path the story can be entirely different. As M.E.S Elizabeth cites a quote of Palmer in her book *Methods of Teaching English*, “To aim at literature is to miss the way to Language. To aim at language is to pave the way to literature”.¹³ (M.E.S. Elizabeth: 2004).

At the maximum, our country offers Bachelor of Education and Master in Education teacher training courses under the approval of NCTE (National Council for Teacher Education) but these trained graduates or post-graduates can render their services in public or private schools only. On the other hand the eligibility for the English teachers of conventional or professional degree colleges is Masters in English literature along with qualified National Eligibility Test for lectureship. It is clearly unfair and unjust to have literature teachers for the language teaching purpose and the subsequent result is that the learners of English as a second language in our country are deprived of basic language abilities because they have not been appropriately guided.

Another problem is that the students are not able to get the required exposure to the language, because there is an absence of the real culture of English language and its native speakers. It is only the mock environment of curriculum defined classrooms or labs where these students get a tinge of exposure to this language. Moreover the examination system is just focused on judging the cramming ability of the students. How can a student restate everything in just three hour test that he has learnt in a complete year? Moreover these tests just focus on the writing skills, ignoring the very basic functional value of the language that can only be judged through speaking and listening skills. The complete stress is on the theoretical aspect rather than practical. The students may very well explain you, what is a Tense? or How many types of Tenses are there? They may very beautifully present a Tense chart in their notebook as their home assignment but practically, they are not able to speak English using the right form of tenses.

Another flaw which seems to intervene in the learning and teaching of English as a Second language is the reticent level of students and teachers in learning and teaching through use the latest equipment and technology helpful in the easy comprehension of language fundamentals. Some of the institutions cannot afford this infrastructure because of financial constraints and the institutions which can afford or already own these aids, the teachers concerned, do not prefer or are not trained enough to make a constructive usage of these aids.

Bridging the Gap

In the light of above discussion regarding the present scenario of English Language teaching in the country, and the ongoing chaos in its effective implementation definitely requires framing of some remedial policies to make the practice of TESL in India more efficient and dynamic.

1. The foremost necessity is to amend the policy for the teaching courses.
2. The literature teachers should also be trained in TESL and ELT practices.
3. The universities should offer specialized courses in ELT.
4. The government should encourage and extend financial aid for culture exchange programs, so as to enable the students and teachers to immerse in the real culture of English.
5. Native teachers should be invited to have extension lectures in the institutions in order to give an exposure to the original spoken dialect of English.
6. The curriculum should also emphasize on the spoken or functional value of language.
7. The examination pattern should include tests of oral and reading capability instead of just evaluating the writing efficiency.
8. More workshops stressing on the functional aspect of language should be organized for the students and teachers.
9. Schools and colleges should be encouraged to use the latest equipment and technology helpful in the easy comprehension of language fundamentals.
10. The focus in the English classroom should shift from teacher to the student which means the teacher should just act as a facilitator and the rest of the activity should be done by the student.

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11. Assignment and projects that involve the student should be made mandatory.
12. Power point presentations should be encouraged.
13. The teachers and students should also be made aware of the objectives of teaching and learning English.
14. Teachers should be trained to have a thorough understanding of the appropriate method to be chosen as per the requirements of the class.

Keeping in view the about mentioned suggestions India can surely expect some positive transition in the direction to improve the TESL practices followed in the country. It is a high time that the authorities frame novel policies for the teacher training courses offered in the country. Unless the ongoing chaos in the Teaching of English Language is dealt with seriousness, we cannot expect to raise the standards of teaching English effectively in our country.

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