Some Aspects of Teaching-Learning English as a Second Language

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Learning without thought is labour lost;

Thought without learning is perilous. - Confucius

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1. Preface

Learning and teaching languages effectively is a major concern to many teachers throughout the world. Several practices are in use and there are continuous efforts underway to improve the effectiveness of language learning and teaching. There are many languages used across the globe. In India too, there are hundreds of languages used. According to the Constitution of India, every language is assured of some place in the school curriculum. So, it is always good for the teachers to learn more about the problems of language teaching in order to improve their own ways and means of teaching languages successfully.

The primary goal of this work is to provide an easy to understand and yet some comprehensive in-depth description of the new trends used in the field of language teaching. This easy to read short work makes just a few simple assumptions about the background of its readers. The techniques presented here are described in plain English. As a reference source, this work can be used by researchers in areas related to language teaching, and by individuals who are simply interested in developing their own language skills.

This short work has been designed to develop the skills teachers already have so that they can prepare their students more effectively. Although my focus is on language teaching and learning in general, I present the contents mostly as these relate specifically to teaching English language in general. The contents, methods and strategies offered here are easily transferable to teaching any language in India and elsewhere by a diligent teacher.

I shall look at ways to make our teaching as communicative and effective as possible, focusing on the challenges teachers and students face due to various factors: rural versus urban, mother tongue versus second/foreign language learning conditions, aptitude,

motivation, teaching and learning strategies, etc. We all learn a language in order to develop our ability to communicate not only in speaking but also listening, reading and writing.

This work has been divided into various sections for easy reading and reference.

The booklet seeks to place the position, influence and understanding of English language and communication, reward of knowledge from one generation to the next. It focuses on LSRW: Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing skills receive equal treatment. The book also deals with various factors such as the need for high level of communication between teacher and student. I make a brief attempt to specify models that approach human performance in the linguistic task of communication skills and our educational system.

The booklet focuses also on the basic principles of teaching-learning situations in the classroom, effective teaching as well as the long-term learning process and the improvement of critical listening strategies and self-evaluation, using power words while speaking before the audience and so on.

I deal with the SQ4R method to develop our reading skills and writing, and this is designed to help learn to identify different uses of language also.

The booklet also describes the language teaching method, the TBL methodology and tasks description.

There is no doubt that our classroom needs to be more communicative in order to give our students the best chance of success. I think that surely this short work will enlighten every language teacher to help each learner achieve optimally in their language using all the four language skills, LSRW (Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing).

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We must recognize that wholesome language learning should be the goal of any language teaching, even when our curriculum may seek to learn a language such as English only for specific purposes. Purposes of language use and language learning may differ based on need and context, etc., but the basic underlying elements, namely, listening, speaking, reading and writing, would always receive focused treatment.

We need to note that our goal in teaching languages in most curriculums is to use them adequately for pre-set purposes. Thus, practice to achieve that goal must be provided in plenty and in a manner easy to acquire, master and perform. Far too long, language teaching in India gave more importance to reading and writing, ignoring the important skills of listening and speaking. Performance in examinations took precedence over actual performance in using the language effectively to meet the needs.

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2. Introduction

English is the first language for most people in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, United Kingdom and the United States of America. The influence of the British Empire was the primary reason for the initial spread of the language for beyond the British Isles. However, the growing expansion of American influence around the world helped it further to become *the global language* of today.

As Thirumalai (2002) points out,

> "English is learned everywhere because people have found out that knowledge of English is a passport for better career, better pay, advanced knowledge, and for communication with the entire world. English is also learned for the literature it possesses, and for the variety and rich experience it provides. English has replaced French as the language of diplomacy. In this computer age, English is bound to expand its domains of use everywhere. Everyone wants to appropriate English as their own." (http://www.languageinindia.com/april2002/tesolbook.html#chapter1).

English is today the world's most widely studied foreign/second language. However, some 500 years back, it was Latin that dominated education, commerce, religion and government in the western world. Modern English is sometimes described as the global *lingua franca*. English is the dominant international language in science and technology, business, entertainment, diplomacy and communication.

Generally speaking, when a language has got the position of a universal language, the position tends to be affirmed and extended by it. Since "every one" knows and uses English, people are almost forced to learn English and use it, and learn it better. Even when we expect the majority of our students to understand and use their native languages extensively, we may be tempted to use English when writing, for example, about research work.

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Language is the most important tool of communication. Linguistic problems of understanding arise even when people speak the same language. Tone, facial expressions and voice play an important role in one's speech and the process of communication. Words with relative meanings, jargon, technical terms, connotative and denotative meanings of words also make it difficult for people to understand the communication they are exposed to.

Language is the means of communication of ideas and feelings to one another. And, language is one of the fundamental aspects of our lives.

There are two types of language styles: spoken language and written language. The spoken form serves as our primary means of coordinating our day-to-day behaviors with others. The written form serves language use for deliberate purposes such as knowledge communication, business correspondences, contracts, etc. It also serves as a long-term record of knowledge from one generation to the next.

Comprehension is a Key Element in Any Language Learning

Generally speaking, communication skill may be divided into two groups, namely, Verbal and Non-verbal communication. Here, verbal communication involves listening, speaking, reading and writing skills while non-verbal communication involves accuracy and audience awareness, brightness and body language correctness (of usage and grammar). Comprehension means the power of understanding. In language learning and teaching this term refers to an exercise aimed at improving or testing the learners' understanding of a language.

The important thing to remember when working with comprehension skills relate to both speaking and reading. Often the comprehension based on an understanding of oral language takes precedence over comprehension based on reading. Thus, there must be

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oral communication on as high a level as possible between the teacher and the children, and among the children themselves. Teachers can take time for oral discussion of ideas. To foster an understanding of language, teachers can provide opportunities for ESL (English as a second language) student to hear speak and read it throughout the day.

At the same time, reading comprehension cannot and should not be ignored. For most of us in India, English is a reality, mostly through our reading and writing. This situation may not change soon. Our speaking is almost similar to reading in both formal and informal situations. This is valid even for our business communication contexts. We are so heavily influenced by the written style of the language since the time English was introduced, we may not get out of this situation easily!

Multilingual Societies and English Learning

In multilingual societies, different languages are allocated different functions, with perhaps the language of the home being completely different from the languages used at work, play, school or in the market place. In such situations, it is common for students to simultaneously acquire two or three language as 'first/native' language. When they first start school, majority of children in India is fluent only in their home language. However, there is also a good number of families that use more than one language at home and in their immediate environment. Bilingual families are found everywhere. Moreover, with increase in floating populations, especially in metropolitan areas, many children may be already fluent in two or more languages.

Parents in India who know some English begin to speak in English to their children and within the family. In the early days of Indian Independence, such tendencies were decried and looked down upon as aping the West, etc. However, there is no such feeling seen among the parents these days.

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We should say that English has come to stay in most educated families and is no more considered a stranger insofar as interpersonal communication is concerned. This model influences the speech behavior of children as well, both within the family and in the school.

Communication is an attitude, but also a skill, a technique, an art, and a facility of expression. There are four parts to communication, namely, speaking (30%), listening (45%), reading (16%) and writing (9%). So, the ultimate goal is to be able to specify models that help human performance in the linguistic task of reading, writing, listening and speaking. Whatever model we may adopt to teach a language, we should ensure that language develops in a natural way.

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3. Principles of Teaching-Learning

"A good teacher will ever be willing to learn".

We continuously learn all through our life. Our learning may or may not be pursued in a conscious manner, but we all seek to improve our knowledge of the environment. The process of learning is never-ending and hence you must be willing to learn. You learn for all sorts of individuals and contexts, etc. learn from an infant, a person much junior to you or from anybody who is senior or lower in age to you. Always be open to learn.

If I may ask you a question as to why you have come here, you answer will surely be, "I am here to learn." That is an indicator that you are a person who is willing to learn. So, this is the right attitude for a teacher. Remember also, learning is a long process and we must embrace it without any reservations and must always be willing to learn.

Effective teaching is a process to increase the knowledge, skills, and attitudes of the group and its members. Here, the focus is on learning, not teaching. For teaching to be effective, learning must take place.

The steps of effective teaching include

* Choosing the learning objectives, and
* Providing a discovery experience that helps the learner understand the need for the skill.

The following basic principles are usually emphasized in teaching-learning situation:

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1. LSRW (Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing) should be emphasized in teaching-learning situations as being separate facets of vocabulary development. Vocabulary would be developed in isolation in the class setting.

2. In learning activities involving writing, each of the language arts areas of grammar, handwriting, spelling, punctuation and content might be stressed in isolation in teaching-learning situations.

3. Reading instruction may be divided into the following categories: Phonics instruction and other word recognition techniques, comprehension of content and oral reading.

Diverse purposes in reading may also be stressed in the elementary school. These purpose would be include:

a) Reading to acquire facts.
b) Gaining a sequence of ideas.
c) Reading to follow directions.
d) Reading critically and creatively.
e) Acquiring main ideas and generalizations.

Back in 1971, the Ministry of Education, Government of India (now called the Human Resources Development Ministry) spelled out the objectives that English should achieve by the end of the secondary school stage:

By the end of the course, a student should be able to:

a) Read with fluency and understand passages of prose written within the limits of the teaching points, and reading vocabulary suggested in the syllabus.
b) Understand a simple talk on a subject with his experience and

c) Use the language correctly in the speech and writing within the limits of the teaching points and active vocabulary detailed in the syllabus.

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4. Listening Critically

Listening is one half of the communication process. Learning how to become a critical listener is an important step towards comprehension and successful communication. Improve your student's critical listening skills through the use of listening strategies and self-evaluation.

I. Teach the listening process

1. Focus their attention
2. Interpret the information
3. Respond to the speaker's message

II. Evaluate their listening

1. Rephrase and repeat statements
2. Compare and contrast interpretations
3. Research points of interest or contention

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5. Types of Listening

Type	How to listen	Situation
Critical	Listen for facts and supporting details to understand and evaluate the speaker's message	Information or persuasive essays, class discussion, announcements.
Empathic	Imagine yourself in the other person's position and try to understand what he or she is thinking	Conversation with friends or family
Appreciative	Identify and analyze aesthetic or artistic elements, such as character development, rhyme, imagery and descriptive and narrative language	Oral presentations of a poem, dramatic performance.
Reflective	Ask questions to obtain information and use the speaker's response to form new question	Class or group discussion

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6. Powerful Words

1. Watch your words. Like arrows, once out of the mouth nothing in this world can stop them from creating havoc or happiness in the other person's mind.

2. Your choice of words reflects your personality and maturity. You can use words to generate optimism, and motivate people or push them to depths of despair.

3. Do not say anything that you will not put on paper and sign. Always use words that create positive effect or neutral expression with others.

4. The tune of your voice, if not carefully monitored, can be a turn off to others. You might convey a totally different impression compared to your statement if the tone does not match the situation and words.

Evaluating Word Choice and Language Usage

Language is a tool used to make sense of the world. Until we can express a thought in words, we usually do not understand the thought and cannot explain it to someone else. In addition to thoughts, we express feelings by means of words.

As Thirumalai (2002) points out, "Learning words in any second or foreign language program involves not only learning the meanings of the words, but also learning how these words are used appropriately in linguistic, sociolinguistic, and cultural contexts. … When we say that we know English, we mean that we know the meanings and usage of a few thousand words in English." We also need to master the "particular attitude associated with the use of words: Approving, Derogatory, Euphemistic, Figurative,

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Formal, Informal, Ironic, Jocular, Offensive, Rhetorical, sexist, slang, and Taboo."
(http://www.languageinindia.com/april2002/tesolbook.html#chapter10)

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7. Top 10 Tips for Public Speaking and Tips for Plain English

1. Feeling some nervousness before giving a speech is natural and healthy. It shows you care about doing well. But, too much nervousness can be detrimental.

2. Know the room. Be familiar with the place in which you will speak. Arrive early, walk around the speaking area and practice using the microphone and any visual aids.

3. Know the audience. Greet some of the audience as they arrive. It is easier to speak to a group of friends than to a group of strangers.

4. Know your material. Practice your speech and assess the length of time available and make changes suitably, if necessary.

5. Relax. Ease tension by doing some breathing exercise.

6. Visualize yourself giving your speech. Imagine yourself speaking, your voice loud, clear and assured. When you visualize yourself as successful, you will be successful.

7. Realize that people want you to succeed. Audiences want you to be interesting, stimulating, informative and entertaining. They don't want you to fail.

8. Concentrate on the message, not on medium.

9. Focus your attention away from your own anxieties and outwardly towards your message and your audience.

10. Gain experience. Experience builds confidence, which is the key to effective speaking.

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Importance of Speaking Plain and Simple English

As Thirumalai (2002,
http://www.languageinindia.com/april2002/tesolbook.html#chapter1) reports:

> The English taught, spoken, and written in the Third World countries is
> often not plain, simple, and straightforward. As in the Indian sub-
> continent, it is derived, more often than not, from the English style spoken
> and written a century ago, in some instances. We certainly need to
> emphasize grammatical correctness in learning English, but it is equally
> important to cultivate in our learners a sensitivity and skill to use natural,
> simple, and straightforward English. Indian newspapers in English and the
> radio news broadcasts should take the initiative in simplifying the usage.

It is important for us the teachers to teach how to speak and write plain English. We need
to avoid our archaic expressions and sentence and phrase constructions. Let us
continuously read modern magazines and journals to improve our writing in English.
Simple, plain, and natural English should be our goal.

Again to cite Thirumalai (2002), plain English has several important characteristics that
we need to consciously develop in our writing. He quotes the following from Dayananda
(1986:13) as the characteristics of Plain English:

1. Prefer the shorter word to the longer one.

2. Use simple, everyday words rather than fancy ones.

3. Prefer verbs over nouns and adjectives.

4. Prefer the specific word to the general.

5. Write short sentences with an average of no more than 20 words.

6. Use the active voice rather than the passive.

7. Be a miser with compound and complex sentences and a spend thrift with simple
sentences.

8. Write short paragraphs with an average of about 765 words.

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9. Avoid paragraphs that exceed five typed lines for business letters and ten lines for longer compositions.

10. Write with the ear. A sentence may look good on paper but its cadence may be jarring. Listen to your sentences in your head as you write, and do not write anything that you could not comfortably say.

11. Write for the eye as well as the mind. Prepare an overall design, positioning understandable headings, subheadings, and captions for each segment, showing the organization of the text. Make the whole document visually appealing.

12. Use appropriate underlining, ink color that contrasts sharply with the paper, lists, boxes or panels, bold or other typefaces to emphasize points.

13. Use 'white space' in margins, between sections, paragraphs, and lines to make the document look good. (Cited from Crystal 1987:379).

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8. Study Aids and SQ4R Method

You can study your textbooks more effectively by mastering the following 6 Skills:

1. Survey,

2. Question,

3. Read,

4. Recite,

5. Record and

6. Review.

These 6 skills, abbreviated as SQ4R, will prepare and guide your reading and later help you recall important information.

The SQ4R Method

Survey

Preview the material you are going to read for these features: chapters, title, heading. subheading, introduction, summary, questions and exercise.

Question

Turn each heading into a question about what will be covered under that heading. Ask the questions who, what, when, where and why about it.

Read

Reading is a visual means of acquiring and retaining information. It is the method by which the majority of students learn best. Reading involves mastering skills in a number of reading related areas and learning to apply those skills properly. Two of these areas are

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textbook reading and reading style. By gaining and applying skills in these two important areas, you will become a more efficient and effective reader.

Search for the answers to the questions that have been posed in the step above.

Recite

Orally or mentally recall questions and their related answers.

Record

Take notes to further reinforce the information. List the main ideas and the major details.

Review

Review the material on a regular basis, using some or all the steps above.

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9. Writing in Everyday Life

You may not be aware of how heavily you relay on writing every day. At home, you might job down a "To Do List", Take a phone message, send a letter or e-mail, or fill out an application or order form every time you pick up a pen or pencil, you are writing.

Why Write?

Writing is one of the most powerful communication tools you will use today and for the rest of your life. You will use it to share your thoughts and ideas with others and even to communicate with yourself. It is an exploration and it will still be part of your daily personal life.

What are the other qualities of good writing?

☐ Ideas
☐ Organization
☐ Voice
☐ Word choice
☐ Sentence fluency
☐ Conventions

Developing Your Writing Life

☐ Keep track of your ideas
☐ Writer's Note book
☐ Clippings file
☐ Writer's journal

Written work is only one avenue for sending and receiving information. Much of what you need to comprehend comes to you aurally or through visual representation. To understand and remember effectively, you learn to give information orally and visually. By developing your skills in speaking, listening, viewing, and representing you will help your students increase their effectiveness as communicators.

Individuals may not be inclined to read and re-read what we write and make corrections wherever necessary. However, spelling, grammar, sentence structure, punctuation and capitalization, etc. always would need some correction or the other. Even if you have studied and learned English for a number of years, and even if you use it every day at work with some competence, you'd still need to self-edit your writing before you dispatch your letters, etc. In addition we need to learn how to use English in a persuasive and respectful manner when we write our communications. Inoffensive language would avoid gender bias, caste and religion bias, choosing appropriate pronouns, and so on.

You need to learn how to write e-mails in a persuasive way. Often students and teachers alike do not distinguish between the conventions adopted in SMS messages and the conventions that should be adopted in writing e-mails. Capitalization should not be dispensed with in e-mails. Paragraphs should be properly developed. Subject line in the e-mail should have appropriate descriptive and distinct content that truly reveals the content discussed in the e-mail.

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10. Language Teaching Method

TBL (Task Based Learning) Methodology

Why Task Based Learning (TBL)?

A Task is:

1. An good activity in which learners use language to achieve a real outcome
a) Do a puzzle
b) Play a game

2. Hundred and one things people do in everyday life
a) Buying a pair of shoes
b) Making an airline reservation

3. Activity or action, which is carried out as the result of processing or understanding language (as a response)
a) Drawing a map while listening to an instruction

A Task-based Approach to Language

1. Allows for a needs analysis to be matched to identified student needs

2. Is supported by the research findings of classroom – centered language learning

3. Allows evaluation to be based on testing referring to task – based criteria

4. Allows for form – focused instruction

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Tasks are activities where the target language is used by the learner for a communicative purpose (goal) in order to achieve an outcome. So, we should select topics that will motivate learners, engage their attention and promote their language development as effectively as possible. One of our tasks is to find practical information for students who are going to be trained on the job context in companies. That is why we would do well to select topics such as:

1. Filling in personal details in given forms/applications, etc.

2. Instructions to withdraw money from ATMs.

3. Instructions to open a current or savings account in a bank.

4. Writing or filling in a formal request to get a student card for free rides in bus.

5. Requirement to get a bank statement card

6. Instruction how to complete a check

7. Making inquires in which students will be involved in daily life. All tasks should have an outcome.

Let us have a brief explanation about the different phases:

1. The pre-task phase introduces the class to the topics and the task, activating topic – related words and phrases.

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2. The task cycle offers learners the chance to use whatever language they already know in order to carry out the task and then to improve the language, under teacher guidance, while planning their reports of the task.

3. The last phase allows a closer study of some of the specific features accruing in the language used during the task cycle.

Main Goal

Student should be able to understand and reproduce texts and basic messages in their own language, related to the daily and cultural and professional life.

Task Description

The tasks are designed for students who need to use the language on the job as they get their work experience.

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11. Conclusion

Language is the most important tool of communication. It improves our student's critical skills while communicating to others. Communication is the Latin word which means 'to share' our feelings and ideas to one another. In multilingual societies, different languages are allocated with different functions with perhaps the language of the home being completely different from the languages used at work, play, school or in the market place. Therefore, communication plays the most important role throughout world; it may include both verbal and non-verbal aspects.

Generally speaking, there are two types of language styles, namely, oral or spoken and written language. In oral language, sound is the basic element but we are not following the proper grammar while in written language letter is the basic but we are not following the grammar. Similarly, these communication skills such as verbal focused only as LSRW (Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing) both languages learning and teaching effectively. So, it helps the language teachers to involve the learner in the learning process so that language develops automatically and spontaneously with the use of all four language skills – LSRW (Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing) – receive equal treatment.

Learn to Identify Different Uses of Language

In your reading, you will find language used in various ways. Recognizing when language is being used to communicate honesty and when it is being used to distort information is an important skill. When you think critically, you need to distinguish between language that presents material clearly and honestly and language that misrepresents ideas and manipulates emotions.

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