

LANGUAGE IN INDIA

Strength for Today and Bright Hope for Tomorrow

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Effective Teaching of English: A CLT Perspective for Haryana

Ms. Daisy

Teaching Methodology/Pedagogy – Situation in India

English Language Teaching in India has not much changed for years and it is hardly different from the postcolonial ELT methods where Shakespeare and Milton are taught with the same style as was done 100 years back. First, the students do not feel comfortable with such age-old texts today and secondly, they have nothing to do in the monotonous classrooms but listen to a lecture.

With the inception of Communicative Language Teaching in the 1960s, English teaching/learning seems to be much affected positively and in the recent past, there have been some hopeful signs of modifications and modernization, not just in teaching and learning but also in the use of English:

- CBSE has already introduced in all its affiliated schools CLT curriculum “which is based upon an approach to course design which recognizes the importance of developing students’ communicative competence.” (Bhatt, 1995, 328)
- ESP (English for Specific Purposes) is introduced in some Indian schools.
- With the rise in computer expertise and Internet, the new generation has realized the importance of the preferred language of the global information highway (English) and for them English is no longer associated with colonial overtones.

- They see it as a necessary vehicle for upward and onward mobility, not just within India but also overseas.
- The widespread availability of cable TV in India has made the native English available to the Indians (through BBC, CNN, MTV etc.) and due to this exposure, people feel increasingly comfortable with the different native varieties and have stopped being threatened by them.
 - Technology has been infused with teaching of English in the form of Language Labs
 - Reframing of the curriculum by various universities on CLT pattern

Communicative Language Teaching

CLT is an approach to the teaching of second and foreign languages that emphasizes interaction as both the means and the ultimate goal of learning a language. It can be understood as “a set of principles about the goals of language teaching, how learners learn a language, the kinds of classroom activities that best facilitate learning, and the roles of teachers and learners in the classroom”. (Jack C Richards)

Since its inception in the 1970s CLT has served as a major source of influence on language teaching practice around the world due to its goal of teaching communicative competence. Communicative competence is different from grammatical competence in which the knowledge of a language is attained by producing sentences of that language and the knowledge attained is of the building blocks of sentences (i.e., parts of speech, tenses, phrases, clauses and sentence patterns etc.) and the formation of sentences.

Making Learners Communicatively Competent

But, while grammatical competence is an important dimension of language learning it is clearly not at all that is involved in learning a language. It is because one can master the rules of sentence formation in a language and still not be very successful in using the language for meaningful communication. CLT solves this purpose. CLT makes a learner communicatively competent by:

- Knowing how to use language for a range of different purposes/functions
- Knowing how to change the language according to formal and informal atmosphere
- Knowing how to produce and understand different types of texts i.e., narratives, reports, interviews and conversations etc.
- Knowing how to maintain communication despite having limitations in one’s language knowledge (through using different types of communication strategies)

Activities in the Classroom

For the above purpose, a variety of activities/tasks are carried out in a CLT classroom. Some of them are given below:

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- Role Play
- Interviews
- Information gap
- Games
- Language exchange
- Surveys
- Pair work
- Learning by teaching

Situation in Haryana

In spite of the above said developments in ELT, Haryana is one of the states in India where English language is still facing a very precarious situation. In spite of the fact that English is taught as a compulsory subject of study from Class I or Standard I onwards, the overall scenario is dismal. The graduates passing out from our colleges and universities are unemployable. The sole reason for this unemployability is lack of communication competency in our graduates.

Innovations in a University in Haryana

BPSMV is the first university in Haryana which has initiated a new syllabus. The university has designed its own syllabus for its students, which is task-based, skill-based and learner centered. The other universities in the state are continuing with the old (literature focused curriculum).

Syllabus of BPS

The English syllabus of BPS underwent a complete change in 2007, soon after the establishment of the university. In contrast to the earlier syllabus which contained loads of literature pieces and much grammar portion for the undergraduate students, this was designed on CLT pattern. It has the following features:

Approach

- The broad approach adopted is Learner Centred and Task Based
- The syllabus is an amalgamation of aesthetics and language skills

Methodology Adopted

- Equal weightage to both aesthetics and language skills is allocated

- Teaching hours allocated to various components are in tune with the content and tasks involved in the unit
- Conventional aesthetics are imparted through conventional teaching and language skills are developed through Language Labs
- The conventional teaching component contains less number of text/grammar portion because of the learner centred pedagogy
- Business English has been incorporated to make the curriculum industry friendly

The Texts

- The texts are smaller in length keeping in view the need for the undergraduate students
- Texts are contemporary and relevant to the socio-cultural needs of the students
- The texts having dramatic potential are selected

The Curriculum has been designed to add value to the life of the students by emphasizing the use of English creatively and transactionally. It deploys topics and skills relevant to the use of English in everyday life and prepares the learners to face the needs of the market environment by laying equal emphasis on the four skills- LSRW in the learning and testing of English.

A Comparison of Syllabi

Since I have taught and observed the development of students in both types of Curriculum, I must say that if given a choice, I would prefer the latest CLT curriculum. This is because of the following factors:

- Students stay engaged throughout the class because there are lots of activities which keep them busy
- The interest level of the students is much more than their interest level in the old syllabus because the topics chosen are related to their day to day problems
- The confidence of the learners automatically increases very fast because of each individual's participation
- Hesitation goes away
- Exam fear also goes away due to the lesser number of texts
- The rote learning goes backstage because of lots of exercises related to texts
- The learners develop their own sense of answering when many things are discussed with them beyond the text
- Inclusion of soft-skills in the curriculum prepares the learners for the job market

Integration of Skills and Results

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Due to the integrated skills approach of a CLT syllabus, all four skills essential for a language have been covered and equal weightage has been given to listening/speaking skills and reading/writing skills. Whereas reading/writing skills are covered in the usual classes, a Learning Resource Centre has been established for the listening/speaking skills, which caters to the needs of all the undergraduate students. There are both kinds of language labs in the LRC – Video and Audio labs. This has been done to make the students communicatively competent. It goes without saying that learners are greatly benefited from the learning resource centre.

The difference between the two stages, i.e., pre and post learning resource centre is quite obvious. It clearly indicates that the centre gives a tremendous ignition to the desire of a learner to speak English. The learner's accent, pronunciation, stress, tone etc are controlled and modified according to the standard pattern. However there are certain grey areas which still require immediate intervention:

- Mother Tongue Interference in English Utterances
- Lack of Grammatical Knowledge
- Lack of Sufficient Vocabulary
- Non - conducive atmosphere at home
- Passive Attitude of the Peers

This list of hindrances obstructing the communication competency of the students is not exhaustive. We are trying to overcome these by giving much time to the learners for practice, involve them more in drilling exercises and creating imaginary situations for their role plays.

Now, though the knowledge of using modern communication devices such as mobile phones, computers and internet is an integral part of communication skills, it's not that c. skills cannot be taught without the modern technological equipment. Technology only makes the task easy and time-saving. Here I would like to suggest a few common techniques which can help a learner in building up good communication.

- Speaking gets improved only by indulging in speaking.
- A learner must always be encouraged to speak.
- Fluency must precede correctness.
- Do not discourage a learner in committing errors.
- Motivate a learner towards the importance of communication skills.
- Create enough opportunities for him/her to use English.
- Adopt Inductive method of teaching Grammar.

The Essentials

In fact, to my mind, there are three very important things in developing the communication skills.

- Urge to speak
- Opportunities to speak
- Grammar

The following are the practical solutions to improve our communication competence.

- Inculcating a habit of reading an English newspaper which will keep us update
- Listening to English news.
- Learning at least 10 new words of English daily
- Frequent use of a good dictionary

The need for good communication skills has always been there, but good communication skills have become crucial in the information age we live in. For this, the teachers must make the learners realize the importance of communication skills (in English) in today's world. With the number of foreign investors flocking to India and the growth of outsourcing, English has come to play a key role in professional relationships between foreign and Indian companies. With the onslaught of IT and ITES companies, English has become the language of employability and good command over it is considered a unique qualification. It becomes the moral duty of the teachers of English to create and sustain motivation levels of the college students, especially the marginalized ones.

Sharing Responsibilities

Much is usually said about the duties of the teachers and students, but the authorities/central bodies that control the institutions cannot run away from their responsibilities. If the authorities want that the products of their institution have a bright future in a competitive world today, they must take care of the following factors:

- Appoint trained/expert teachers
- Support the young innovative teachers who have new CLT based approaches and strategies
- Make the class-sizes shorter by increasing the number of teachers
- Giving importance to English language subject as to the other elective subjects
- Not neglect the requirements of the language teachers

The Need to Train the Authorities in India!

In India, there are many universities which are still continuing with the old syllabus. It might be because of the following reasons:

- No one in the concerned institution is aware of the fact that the new approaches (like CLT) of learning English language are there
- If at all, some teachers are aware, they are not ready to take the bold initiative
- If there are a few teachers who come forward with such proposals, they are ignored completely by the much senior members (like BOS members) who would like to stick with the old syllabus
- The authorities do not listen to the demands (which concern finance) of the language teachers because they still think that language learning comes almost free as it doesn't require any costly teaching tools like the science subjects
- The call of making a uniform syllabus now and then changes the minds of the authorities

There can be other reasons also, but the need for good communication should be realized by one and all because every person on Earth has a desire to understand and be understood which is fulfilled only by communication. In a world market that does business with diverse cultures and personalities, a good understanding of effective communication skills- written and oral- are the need of the hour and the best way of inculcating it is devising CLT curriculum in schools and colleges. Let's contribute wherever we can, whatever we can, and however we can for producing a new, confident and communicatively competent breed of our students.

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