

A BRIEF ON VARIOUS FACTORS THAT PROMOTE AN EFFECTIVE TEACHING AND LEARNING PROCESS: MY PERSPECTIVES/EXPERIENCES OF TEACHING ENGLISH

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Abstract:

Everyone wants to acquire a foreign language; especially English language for this is the language which is ruling every other domain in the present world. Consequently this leads to a cut throat competition among the persons who teach English and also among those who sincerely want to learn the language. Eventually learning and teaching the English language is becoming an indispensable requirement of everyone who aspire to have a good career and better life. The high demand to acquire this language is now dominating the whole scenario in terms of globalization, localization and interdisciplinary. In order to cater to the needs of these learners, linguists are coming up with the new, creative, and advanced methods to enable the teaching- learning process more active, enthusiastic and effective. As an added advantage the teaching and learning has been more successful with the advent of technology. Technology is playing a great role in enhancing the learners' knowledge of English through ICT, CALL, educational technologies, etc. This paper is an attempt to discuss some of these methods, learning technologies and the relevant factors that promote quick learning/teaching of English language and to help everyone to improve the language skills and thereafter to help them to accomplish the ultimate goal of communicative competence. In addition to this I would refer to some of my own experiences in teaching and learning English and also to update myself with the current trends in the field of English Language Teaching (ELT).

Keywords: Teacher, Learner, English Language, language skills, globalization, localization, interdisciplinary, communicative competence, ICT, CALL, current trends in ELT field, methods.

Introduction

Learning English is very important now-a-days. Most of the countries like India are learning English as second language and we see its presence in the syllabi of their schools, colleges and universities. English has become the favourite language of the world. India is a multi-

linguistic country. Many Indians could speak at least more than two languages. But it is the English language that draws all the Indians together. The knowledge of this language helps them to stand as equals with the people of different languages of different spheres/professions in this world. Every field whether it is medicine, engineering, aviation, astronomy, science, etc. is in English and this demand for English brings together all the professionals under a single roof.

At present the one who communicates in English is regarded as the literate one. A person who has command over this language is treated as the good cultured and a successful person; and this person is placed above all either in treating or in referring. People strongly believe that the person whose communication skills in English are good then s/he will have very good opportunities to get a better job. English communication skills has become the component that promotes one's survival; survival of the fittest.

In such a scenario the competency levels of a teacher who teaches English are seriously assessed. These teachers, to enhance their teaching skills are striving hard to live up to the expectations put forth by the world. They are adopting technology in their teaching. They are putting their relentless efforts in order to make their teaching new, interesting and effective. We all are aware that there was a recent shift from the teacher-centred to learner-centred classroom teaching/learning. That is, there had been a tremendous change in adopting various teaching methods; from the old teaching methods like Grammar Translation to Audio-lingual method to Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and Task Based Teaching method to Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) and Information and Communication Technologies.

Moreover the present generation learning styles differ from us. They are more comfortable in learning English by using technology rather than listening to lectures for hours together. They show more interest to get involved in technology based learning. So it's time for teachers to make optimum use of technology in their teaching that results in learners' active participation in a language classroom; thus making it an inclusive one. In the process of learning more English and teaching good English many new trends and developments occurred in the field of English Language Teaching (ELT). And these technological innovations will definitely inspire the language teachers.

In bygone days some people learnt English for no particular reason and few learnt to imitate the native speakers, few others learnt to interact with other people, etc. Eventually there had been a dramatic change in teaching English throughout the world. The teaching and learning English has become a source to make people realize their social responsibilities and also to make them aware of happenings around the world in different arenas viz., education, new discoveries and inventions, economy, corruption, etc. English was not learnt just as a second

language but something more. As a result many sub fields evolved as TESOL, CLT (communicative language teaching), CLT (contextualized language teaching), etc. Subsequently the focus of research shifted to World Englishes and New Englishes as lingua franca (ELF) thus bringing in a new trend in ELT. My initial days of teaching English would be a good example for this change in teaching and learning English.

Sixteen years back when I joined an Engineering College as an Assistant professor in English I saw students attending language classes in full strength. There was no language lab then. There was a textbook prescribed for first year students. I used this text to teach grammar, vocabulary, and communication skills. I remember that the students were interested in enacting role plays and participating in group discussion, debate etc., rather than listening to the text. Then I got an idea. I asked my students to read the lesson and prepare notes of the same. The next day they were asked to read out and find out if there were any differences in making notes of the same lesson by different students. Then I made each one to read a paragraph from the lesson and asked them to rewrite by incorporating the information they missed or by correcting their mistakes in grammar, vocabulary, sentence formation, vocabulary usage, etc. I was just a facilitator assisting them to understand the lesson in ENGLISH. This, of course took lot of time which sometimes discouraged the students and slowed down their learning speed and gradually the percentage of the students who attended the class got reduced. To cope with this I thought of administering tasks that promote language and communication skills along with the soft skills. This attempt of mine made the class interesting and led to their overall development. Most of these tasks were based on the authentic situations which attracted the students to learn the language and improved their attendance in the class.

In due course we had language lab installed with a software. The most used softwares were K-van and Globarena which had activities on both language and the language use. This change further motivated my learners to attend the classes regularly and improve their language. The activities gave them enough practice in various language aspects. The exercises on pronunciation attracted the attention of most of my students. They never let go until their graph on pronouncing a word matched with the graph of expert's pronunciation recorded in the software. Since English was included in the syllabi of first and third years, my students could get ample time in learning and practicing the language. I could see how correctly they were pronouncing the words. They were able to learn the word stress and right intonation quickly. Later the institute provided a communication skills lab which proved an asset in improving the students' communication skills. As we all know that the proficiency level of students will vary. Yet with little guidance and proper motivation even the shy to slow learner to fast learner participated in all activities. Their involvement in the classroom/lab activities boosted up their confidence levels and they were too excited to learn the language through discussions, oral presentations, extempore sessions, JAM sessions, role-

plays, etc. Team learning was happening. I was bit careful in selecting the topics for the above activities. Most of the topics were of learners' interests. This led to a learner-centred method and learners' interest-oriented approach. Moreover I asked them to prepare presentations on these topics. All these topics aimed to make them responsible for protecting their society from harmful external factors; so as to groom themselves into civilized social beings.

Gradually the goals of teaching English changed. English is taught and learnt to make our students realize and follow their social responsibilities. That is teachers realized that English shouldn't be taught as a second language alone but to give away the responsible and dedicated citizens for the society. This is how the competent language users, critical thinkers, and constructive social change agents etc. are born according to Cook and Crystal. Imparting education with a holistic approach was in high demand.

If the goals of teaching change then the approaches and methods of teaching English also will change. In the 21st century Kumaravadivelu's approach of 'Postmethod' is in demand where the focus of teaching English is on eclecticism. Eclecticism involves the use of a variety of language learning activities, each of which may have different characteristics and may be motivated by different underlying assumptions. Today one can use L1 (mother tongue) in understanding L2 (English). And this trend is being adopted and is experimented throughout the world. Prior to this the learners were forced to learn English like the one that was spoken by the native elite group. But now they are encouraged to listen to world Englishes and their accents, viz. American accent, British accent, Australian accent, etc.

I remember that I collected few speeches on different accents and had my students listen to them. Most of them found British accent was easy to understand than other accents. But listening to those audios repeatedly they could comprehend better. Few tried to follow American accent and many others were seemed to be comfortable with the Indian accent. As a result the English teachers preferred to teach texts with content and good English. Henceforth the focus shifted to develop texts based on English for Specific Purposes, EFL, etc. that included multicultural content and knowledge of English. The teachers as well as the students were exposed to both local and foreign cultures which helped them to understand the content and the language. Therefore the curriculum was both content and theme based. The outcomes of this program helped the learners to face the real world and live successfully with their creative skills, language skills, strategies, cultural awareness, etc.

For example my students read the speech by Martin Luther King and a bio note on APJ Abdul Kalam. They even listened to Indian folk and Spanish folk. They could comprehend well the difference between the two cultures and tried to discuss with their peer groups. These discussions helped the other learners to gain knowledge of the two cultures. They even

understood that, for example a word co-brother does exist only in India. In English there is no word as such. Here as a language teacher I was compelled to understand different cultures to teach intercultural communicative competence. I think all the language teachers should teach intercultural communicative competence to produce students who would competently use English in real life situations. Therefore there is a need to provide competent teachers graded on their linguistic, instructional, communicative and intercultural competence.

The teacher in the present day had to play multiple roles. S/he is responsible in converting a mediocre into a brilliant learner who uses language effectively. Teachers are responsible to develop the learners' critical thinking skills, language skills, communicative competence, intercultural competence, knowledge of using technology, etc. The teacher plays a key role in maintaining the classroom dynamics to make the class more inclusive and active. In order to meet the demands of the above mentioned trends the technology stands a good supporter to the teacher.

Computer assisted language learning, ICT, etc. were few techniques used in teaching and learning of English. And it was observed that till recently, most of the students preferred this type of learning to traditional classroom learning. But now the use internet is at its peak. There are different views of communicative competence which are subjected to change. And this could be one of the reasons to change the role of an effective English teacher. As we studied in Braj and Mc Arthur's models of world Englishes we know that the old English is the language of natives of UK and USA; New Englishes- English language of non-native speakers of colonized countries, such as India, Nigeria, etc. And English is learnt as a foreign language in places which are not colonised, eg: Chinese English. The most important point to be noted at this point is English as foreign language is expanding and gaining importance to make it globalized English which develops a country's political, socio-economical and cultural status. As a result the roles of teachers of ELF and non- native English speaking teachers have changed. And these teachers form organizations like TESOL and are ruling the world of teaching English by their undisputable linguistic, instructional and intercultural competence.

Moreover the integration of information technology in English Language Teaching helped the teachers to think innovatively and help the learners to acquire the language quickly. Eventually the whole world started using mobiles; especially the students turned obsessive. They quickly search for the e-content, e-books, and like to watch videos, etc. This became a habit for them. So we, the teachers can take an advantage of this and provide them as many learning opportunities as possible. These cell phones serve as learning devices for both students and the teachers. We, the teachers should give them freedom to learn English through cell phones and other multimedia devices but under a careful vigilance.

Teachers have enough time to help the learner to apply what s/he learnt in the class in authentic situations; because at the touch of a keyboard button they can get the readily available materials that go into teaching. Furthermore the Internet, Blogs, YouTube, Web.2.0, e-books and many other websites have changed the lives of teachers. They are not stressful now and don't waste time in preparing lesson plans, notes, etc. Teachers are now able to bring in the real life situations into the classroom to have a meaningful discussion. And this could be a digital classroom where people from different places around the world can get connected and exchange their ideas and opinions. Teachers sit at one place and can deliver their lectures in any part of the world. Eg: Skype, online teaching, etc. So the teachers' responsibilities are increasing and they are playing multiple roles in imparting holistic education. And the students take the guidance of teachers in how to use technology, how and what to select and how to use the correct information to accomplish their learning goals.

To conclude, in this 21st century language classroom the teachers are more responsible in maintaining classroom dynamics and creating a productive classroom environment. The present teacher's role is to help the students to develop higher-order thinking skills, effective communication skills, and knowledge of technology. We could see teachers coming together to teach as a team. So it is essential for the concerned people/ management of educational institutions to help their faculty with required funds and extend support for their professional growth. And the students will be the ultimate benefiter to have such teachers; while the teachers take pride in producing global citizens in future. Using technology in a constructive way one can positively change the teaching learning process into a more effective, encouraging and a successful one.

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