

Teachers of English Facing Challenges in India

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Abstract

There is a well-settled principle that what is relevant today may not be equally true tomorrow. Language teaching is also not an exception. The teachers of English cannot follow or adopt all the methods and approaches as were practiced by their predecessors. Change is the salt of life. When the profile of students is no longer the same, the teachers also cannot remain the same. English is the second language in India both for teachers and students. At present challenges before teachers of English include putting their learning into practice in day-to-day life to fulfill their practical demands through effective communication skills apart from gaining command over the English language.

Keywords: English, Teachers, Challenges, India

Introduction

Soft skills are indispensable in communication skills in the modern era. They are such skills that a person makes use of them to inform, to persuade, to explain, to present, to understand, and to elicit information. One may not like soft skills as he/she is not at home in the essential skills of persuading, explaining, or understanding the spoken word. But today one cannot afford to ignore the role of soft skills in any learning process, more so in learning and teaching of English. Today English has become a global language. It has reached and is still reaching the far flung areas of India. Many commercial activities such as BPO, medical transcription and IT have further made English more important and relevant. Prof. Jacob Tharu says, "English is no longer a remote language or a powerful mystery, lying hidden in the world of textbooks and examination."

English Language Teaching: Now and Then

Earlier, students were mostly exposed to English only in their sixth standard in some states of India like Rajasthan, UP, etc. Students could learn English just as another subject like social studies and science. They hardly had any opportunity to use English in and out of school practically. Teachers did not have to hone up students' communicative skills. The teachers of English could afford to adopt and follow the following methodologies to teach English.

Direct Method

In the past, teachers adopted the direct method to teach Indian students mostly in private English medium schools. Such schools would normally charge a hefty tuition fee. These teachers were bound to use only English, without depending on the native language. Here, teachers were not permitted to make use of even a single word from the native language. Such a method made students from many families with no past history of learning or using English confront great challenges in understanding certain words and their meanings. However, this method proved to be more useful for students to learn language than any other method. This method creates more encouraging language environment for students in the class room in the long run.

Grammar cum Translation Method

Grammar cum Translation Method was convenient for teachers to teach young children, where teachers could explain every word to students in their mother tongue to make them understand and learn English. But in this method, they suffered from at least one disadvantage. The teachers and the taught concentrated more on the native language rather than the English language. In this method, students were partially benefited. Unfortunately, this method is still being followed in many schools in the rural pockets of India. This method is also supported to

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teach the mother tongue in schools.

Bilingual Method

A good majority of teachers follow or are constrained to follow the bilingual method to teach students in Indian schools. In this method, teachers first of all explain the entire English sentence in the native language and then ask students to perform activities in English. Here, the main assumption is that only teachers are at liberty to take the assistance of the native language and students are not supposed to use it. However, this assumption is limited to paper, not in the practical classroom. When students really write their English sentences, they can seek abundant help through the use of mother tongue sentences as well. This method spoils fluency and naturalness in language expression. In this way, this method is beneficial to students in learning English only up to some extent.

English as a Subject, Not a Language

All the methods referred to earlier have their own merits and demerits. But this fact has to be kept in mind that English was neither taught nor learnt as a language. Students had to learn English in Indian class rooms only as a subject. They were not entitled to practice it just like any other language. There was no stimulus to make use of the language in a spontaneous manner.

Moreover, teachers were allotted very limited time to teach English – mostly from three to six hours per week. The duration was not sufficient to teach the second language, which was an alien language both for teachers and the taught.

The teachers of English were hardly well versed in the latest developments of ELT pedagogy. However, even now the situation is far from being rosy. 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.” In India teaching of English is more or less examination-oriented only.

Challenges to Teachers of English

The challenges before the teachers of English in India are enormous. They are expected of catering to the practical needs of students. Students have to be made competent enough to interact and communicate with others all over the world.

English has got a base in some countries and as such it is convenient for such countries for effective communication. Persons having proficiency in this language can avail of a large number of jobs. They can secure high positions in many national and international bodies.

In the past, English was just like a paper language. But now that situation has changed drastically. At present, the challenges before the teachers of English in India are many and are emerging every other day, calling for remedies. It is necessary for them to rise to the expectation of all concerned. The main challenges for teachers of English are related to spoken English. They can evolve certain strategies to meet the challenges.

Strategies for Speaking Skills

In order to meet the challenges adequately, the teachers of English can evolve some strategies. Some of them are as follows:

Dramatization and Role Plays

The technique of role play can improve the basic spoken English of the students. In the course of role plays, the students take themselves as one of the characters and behave and speak accordingly involving themselves like an assigned character. In such activities, teachers have to play a very important role as facilitators and guide students properly so that they can act appropriately to meet the situation. They should help students as and when required to understand and take up the role given to them to acquire a grip on the tone of voice, gestures, and body language.

Debates and Speeches

Debates and speeches are also quite helpful in improving the speaking ability of students, both in school and elsewhere. Debates and speeches not only encourage students to speak boldly and fluently but also teach them to stick to their stand. They are encouraged to be firm and consistent on the issue under debate. Besides cultivating reasoning power, 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.

Group Discussions

All over the world, when it comes to learning English, the stress is on spoken English. The teachers of English are bound to make more use of communicative approach rather than the lecture mode only. Their prime goal is to enable students to communicate effectively in English, both inside and outside the class room.

In order to realize this, they have to involve students to participate more in classroom activities so that they may acquire good command over speaking skills. To make students competent, teachers can conduct group discussions, and students may be encouraged to speak only in English. Here, they can express their views, ideas and thoughts in English, paving the way for the habit of speaking

fluently in English. Discussions on different situations, topics, and subjects also help students to improve their general awareness and understanding about current affairs. These activities enrich them to have good imagination and deep thoughts. Such exercises help students to listen to the views of fellow students as well. This helps them to gain knowledge and build their vocabulary too.

Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL)

Today computers are indispensable in our day-to-day life. They play a very important role in the process of teaching and learning. They can be used advantageously to learn English. Computers have simplified language-learning process, making it very interesting and enjoyable, both for teachers and students. CALL has lessened the burden of teachers. It is regarded as one of the interactive methods that can help students according to their own ability to learn. It enables students to go beyond the conventional mode of learning and encourages them for self-learning.

Language-Related Activities

Teachers can also use various games related to the language to teach English in addition to the conventional ways of language teaching. These help students in building active vocabulary:

- Crossword puzzles to improve vocabulary
- Games to strengthen grammar
- Funny games to cultivate spoken and written English

Need-Based Teaching

There is little doubt that English has assumed the role of being a global language. It also plays a very important role in every profession. Every profession has got its specific professional terminology and situations. They are very important to understand to communicate effectively. For example, certain terms used by the engineers, architects, doctors, lawyers, etc., may be quite different from those of other professionals. So, to make these professionals proficient in English, the module for specific purposes is required. It is why every professional has to be taught in a particular manner to meet the professional demands.

Use of Teaching Aids

One of the innovative methods is the use of proper teaching aids. They are used by teachers to teach English effectively in the class room. Teachers can distribute visual aids amongst students by dividing them into various groups. Students are then allotted stipulated time to extract relevant information using the aids. Students are asked to speak about the visual aids allotted to them. This method enhances analytical skills of the students. Looking at a picture, students should think and come out with innovative thoughts. This method also

helps them in learning English in a fun-filled environment around them. Teachers facilitate and motivate students to talk freely. As each student gets an opportunity to think, it helps them to sharpen their thinking power.

Conclusion

The problems confronting the teachers of English lie in the fact that English is merely being treated as a subject. Instead of this, it should be integrated with practical life. When teachers use conventional methods, they waste much of class time in dull exercises and drilling, dealing with grammar and pronunciation. Such methods were usually used to cultivate basic skills of language learning such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing. But while following these methods, listening and speaking skills were overlooked as students were unable to make use of the language in practical life.

Nowadays, a large number of students have to appear in GRE, TOEFL, and career competitions where good listening and speaking skills are a must. Communicative approach is hardly followed in letter and spirit. In the practical world, students are required to communicate. As such, teachers should rather play the role of facilitators, observing how well students organize their thoughts while speaking with their fellow members. When they observe that students' accent is not proper due to dialectical variations, they should take timely steps to teach their students about proper accent. Clear and perfect pronunciation should be the goal. Students should be facilitated through software as well to practice phonetics. The schools and colleges should be equipped with language labs, computers, LCD projectors, and the teaching aids. The modern teaching aids are a boon for teachers to meet the challenges to teach students effectively.

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