



THE CHANGING ROLE OF ENGLISH TEACHER AND NEED FOR TEACHER TRAINING

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Abstract

In the first half of the 20th Century, language teaching emerged as an autonomous profession and since then, it has undergone different stages of development. Various methods such as- Translation Method, Direct Method, Bilingual Method, Situational Approach, Audio-lingualism, Communicative Language Teaching had been introduced, but then replaced by some newer methods. Methods were usually determined by the approaches to language teaching. In recent years, the teaching of English has undergone a great paradigm shift. The earlier pedagogical ideal of the teacher as an authority of knowledge is no more valid. Now, the focus is on more democratic, student-centered approach. Earlier methods were based on the structural approach, while the recent methods were based on communicative approach. The language teaching approach determines the method to be followed and each method assigns a new set of roles to the language teachers. To make the teachers familiar with different methods of teaching, they need to undergo training from time to time.

Key-Words: *Teaching, Learning, Approach, Method.*

Introduction

Language teaching emerged as an autonomous profession during the first half of the 20th century and since then it has undergone different stages of development. Various methods had been introduced, but then replaced by methods based on newer theories. Methods such as- *Translation method, Direct method, Bilingual method, Situational approach, Audio-lingualism, Communicative Language Teaching*, were adopted internationally during their own times. The earlier methods were based on the structural approach, while *Communicative Language Teaching* is based on communicative approach to language. This method believes that a second language can be learned best through the process of struggling to communicate. The success of a method greatly depends upon the role played by the teacher and for the successful execution of his/her role, the teacher must be well trained.

The Changing Role of English Teacher

In order to meet the need of the present time, the teaching of English has undergone a great paradigm shift. Now-a-days, the old pedagogical ideal of the teacher as an authority transmitting knowledge to students ‘who do not know’ is no more valid. The ideal now is for a more democratic, student-centered approach, in which the teacher facilitates communicative educational activities with students. In fact, the language teaching philosophy determines the method to be followed and each method assigns a new set of roles to the language teachers.

Teacher roles in methods are related to the following issues

- (i) The types of functions teachers are expected to fulfil.
- (ii) The degree of control the teacher has, over how learning takes place.
- (iii) The degree to which the teacher is responsible for determining the content of what is taught.
- (iv) The interactional patterns that develop between teachers and learners.

(Richards and Rodgers 2001:28).



The teacher's role as defined in some of the popular methods of second language teaching is briefly discussed below

- a) **Grammar Translation Method:** In this method, the teacher is the authority in the classroom. The basic goal of teaching the target language is to learn about the language, not the language itself. For this, the students have to learn the grammatical rules and vocabulary of the target language. The teacher controls and determines the language to be used in the classroom. The students' duty is to follow the teacher, so that they can learn what the teacher teaches. The teaching takes place as a one-sided interaction that is from the teacher to the student. There is little student to teacher or student to student interaction. Getting the correct answer from the student is considered to be very important. If the students make error, the teacher supplies them with the correct answer.
- b) **Direct Method:** In Direct Method, the teacher directs the class. For successful implementation of this method, the teacher must be highly competent in the target language. Unlike *Grammar Translation Method*, it is a bi-directional method, where both teacher and students have to participate. Apart from conversing with the teacher, the students should be encouraged to converse among themselves as well. The emphasis should be given on vocabulary, rather than grammar. Although attention should be paid on all four language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing), oral communication is considered as basic. If the students make mistake in using the target language, instead of supplying with the correct answer, the teacher should facilitate self-correction by the learners by employing various techniques.
- c) **Situational Language Teaching:** In this method, teacher's function is threefold. "In the presentation stage of the lesson, the teacher serves as a model; setting up situations in which the need for the target structure is created and then modelling the new structure for the students to repeat." (Richards and Rodgers 2001:43). In this method, the teacher 'becomes more like the skillful conductor of an orchestra, drawing the music out of the performers.' (Byrne 1976: 2).
- d) **Audio-lingual Method:** This is also a teacher dominated method where the teacher models the target language, controls the direction and pace of the learning and monitors and corrects the learner's performance. The teacher at the same time has to keep the learners attentive by varying drills and tasks and choosing relevant situations to practice structures. Brooks points out that the teacher must be trained to- 'Introduce, sustain, and harmonize the learning of the four skills in this order: hearing, speaking, reading and writing.' (Brooks 1964: 143).
- e) **Bilingual Method:** In the Bilingual Method, the mother tongue can be used in the class. Only the teacher may use mother tongue in the class. In the initial stage the teacher uses the mother tongue more liberally even in asking questions and in giving explanations and instructions. But in the later stages, the use of mother tongue is reduced gradually, and the teacher and learners communicate only in the target language.
- f) **Total Physical Response:** In this method, the teacher's main role is not to teach but to provide opportunities for learning. The teacher's main responsibility is to provide the best kind of exposure to language in order to internalize the basic rules of the target language. In other words, in this method of teaching, the teacher is the controller of the language input that the students receive.



- g) **Communicative Language Teaching (CLT):** *CLT* was developed during the late 1960s. This method is based on communicative approach to language. This method believes that a second language can be learned best through the process of struggling to communicate. This approach to language brings a great paradigm shift in teaching English as second language. All *CLT* methods advocate for a learner-centred classroom, where the teacher will act as a counsellor. ‘The counsellor’s role is to respond calmly and non-judgementally, in a supportive manner and help the client to understand his or her problems better by applying order and analysis to them.’ (Richards and Rodgers 2001:95). In this method, “communicative competence” is considered to be the ultimate goal of language teaching. According to Breen and Candlin- ‘The teacher has two main roles: the first role is to facilitate the communication process between all participants in the classroom, and between these participants and various activities and texts. The second role is to act as an independent participant within the learning –teaching group. A third role for the teacher is that of researcher and learner, with much to contribute in terms of appropriate knowledge and abilities, actual and observed experience of the nature of learning and organizational capacities.’ (Breen and Candlin 1980: 99).
- h) **Natural Approach:** In this method, the teacher has three-fold roles. ‘First, the teacher is the primary source of comprehensible input in the target language.... Second, the *Natural Approach* teacher creates a classroom atmosphere that is interesting, friendly, and in which there is low affective filter for learning.... Finally, the teacher must choose and orchestrate a rich mix of classroom activities, involving a variety of group sizes, content, and contexts.’ (Richards and Rodgers 2001:188).
- i) **Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT):** Like that of Communicative Language Teaching, in *TBLT* also, the focus is on the process rather than the product. *TBLT* proposes the notion of “task” as a central unit of planning and teaching. In *TBLT*, the *CLT* teacher has to accomplish the additional roles of - (a) selector sequencer of task (b) preparing learners for task (c) consciousness-raising (Richards and Rodgers 2001: 236).

Though there are many other such methods of teaching a second language, the teachers should be able to use approaches and methods flexibly and creatively based on their own judgment and experience. As the teacher gains experience and knowledge, he or she should begin to develop an individual approach or personal method of teaching, one that draws on an established approach or method but that also uniquely reflects the teacher’s individual beliefs, values, principles, and experiences.

The Present Scenario of Teaching of English in the Assamese Medium Schools of Assam

Many of the students who have completed their education in Assamese medium, can neither write nor speak English even after completion of his/her graduation. Students consider English to be one of the toughest subjects of the curriculum and many students get very poor marks in it. Though few students score good marks in English, most of them cannot use the language in real life situations. All these suggest that there is a gap between teaching and learning of English in the Assamese medium schools of Assam. As every normal child is capable of learning a new language, if provided with proper input in a proper way; the learners are less to blame for their inability to read and write English even after wasting so much time and money. Again, no curriculum is perfect in itself; yet frequent syllabus modifications have been taking place to meet the need of the contemporary learners. In spite of all these endeavours, the teaching of English is found to fail to meet the need of the learners, one main



reason of which is lack of teacher training. Generally, in classroom teaching, the English teacher finds out the difficult words of the lesson to be taught and gives the meaning of those words in the students' mother tongue; thereafter he/she translates each and every English word into the students' mother tongue. Grammar is taught deductively and a good deal of importance is given on grammar, because it is believed that a language can be learnt by mastering the rules of its grammar. The students are never taught how to speak in English with correct pronunciation, stress, and intonation. The emphasis is always on writing and while answering a question, students are usually encouraged to follow the language of the text book. Apart from reading out the text and practicing the question-answers, the classroom communication takes place in the students' mother tongue.

The Need for Teacher Training

Even after remarkable improvement of the textbook and classroom infrastructure, the English teaching method in Assamese medium schools remain almost the same. It may have two reasons, one- the teacher instead of caring for students' learning, gives more importance on simplification of his/her duty, which shows that either the teachers are not properly motivated, or they are not much concerned with the contemporary goal of teaching English. The second and more probable reason, the teachers are not familiar with different methods of teaching English and therefore they have to apply the same method in which once they had been taught by their teachers. Therefore, in spite of setting new goals of teaching English and introducing innovative curriculum, the teaching and learning of English fails to attain any remarkable achievement. Though at present the government is taking initiation to make B. Ed. compulsory for the assistant teachers, yet the matter is not finalized till now and most of the existing assistant teachers do not have the B. Ed. degree. Till today, any graduate can join as an English teacher and start teaching English without any special language teaching training. In such situation, we cannot expect any higher role from the English teachers apart from being an interpreter or simplifier of the text. And in doing this, the English teacher naturally makes his/her job simpler by translating the target language text into the native language of the students. Though the popularly adopted methods of teaching English in regional medium schools seems to have some similarity with the Grammar- Translation Method or Bilingual Method, but in reality, it is none of these two and most of the English teachers are utterly ignorant of the various methods of teaching English. Therefore, merely setting the goal and introducing new syllabus cannot help much in learning English if the teachers do not get proper training.

Now as the language learning goal has shifted from 'language comprehension' to 'communicative competence,' an overall demand has arisen for 'need-based' syllabus and a client-centred teaching. Teaching is in fact a bi-directional process and "John teaches Mary English" may not mean "Mary learns English from John." In earlier teacher-centered approaches, the teacher dominates the classroom and the learners are always passive listeners; on the other hand, in the learner-centered approaches, the focus is always on 'active learning'- a process, where learners are actively engaged in the process of learning. In spite of all significant changes in second language teaching, the role of teacher remains pivotal to language learning, because nothing can replace a human teacher. For successful implementation of any method of teaching English as second language, the teacher must be well-aware of his/her role in the classroom and prepare himself/herself accordingly.

Again, lack of proper infrastructure makes second language teaching more challenging for the English teachers. In such cases the language teachers have to compensate it by introducing some innovative ways to make his teaching more effective. At the same time, English is not used outside the classroom.



The prescribed text and the English teacher are the only sources from which the students have to learn English. In such situations, the teacher's role is not only to disseminate information but to motivate the learners in the right direction. The teacher has to make use of any means to facilitate learning and boost learner's self esteem. This new role of teacher as a facilitator demands for a more versatile man in the traditional teacher. To impart 'active learning' the teacher must be an active man with utmost flexibility, so that he/she can facilitate the learners' need. And all these can be possible, only when the English teachers will get proper training to teach English.

Conclusion

Learning language does not mean learning about the language. Learning language is often compared to driving a car. W.T. Littlewood (1986) mentions that the only adequate test in a language is the ability to use the language in speech and in writing, very much as an adequate test of car-driving is the ability to drive it on the road and not the ability to state how to drive a car. Mere simplification of the content of the text at the best can help in scoring some good marks, but it cannot help in learning the target language. Therefore, along with the improvement of the teaching materials and classroom infrastructure, proper attention should be paid on adequate teacher training; otherwise, the process of exploiting students' time and money in the name of teaching them English will be continued.

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