

Challenges in English Language Teaching

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Abstract

English is an international language and has an important place in the Indian Education system. But still many of the regions in India are such that has never been exposed to the language. The result is that, many children do not have access to the language and therefore feels totally out of context not able to compete with the world. Teaching children from such strata of society or from vernacular medium is a challenge in itself. To overcome such challenges this paper tries to find out solutions in an easy way which can be implemented in our daily class-room activities and thus help these students to learn the language in a more better and fruitful way. Thus methods like Reading, Listening, Speaking Pronunciation, Fluency, Activity -based learning can be useful to atleast get the knowledge about the language.

KEYWORDS: international language, pronunciation, fluency, activity based lessons, listening

Introduction:

English as an International Language

English is an international language, spoken in many countries both as a native and as a second or foreign language in the schools. It is a living and vibrant language spoken by over 300 million people as their native language and still millions more speak it as an additional language.

An important characteristic of English has been its receptivity to loan words from other languages. No other language exhibits such an extraordinary receptivity. This has resulted, to refine the meanings and hence greater clarity in the expression and creation of ideas.

Teaching language especially English to a vernacular medium student is a challenge in itself as many of them has never ever been exposed to the language. To overcome such challenges certain methods can be adopted.

Research Methodology: The paper is based on the secondary data and information is collected from books and the net.

Language Teaching Methods:

Teaching English in heterogeneous contexts

In the natural process of language acquisition, students should first develop basic communication skills in English. The focus is on fluency and learning to speak English in a social context with native speakers, which is why heterogeneous cooperative grouping is so important to the Natural Approach. According to Krashen, this method allows for effortless acquisition. Rather than getting caught up in

grammar and the mechanics of language, non-native speakers learn by interacting with English-only models. This approach is most successful.

2) Grammar-Translation. “This method emphasizes reading, writing, translation, and the conscious learning of grammatical rules. Its primary goal is to develop literary mastery of the second language. Memorization is the main learning strategy and students spend their class time talking about the language instead of talking in the language. The curriculum requires the memorization of paradigms, patterns, and vocabulary, with translation being used to test the acquired knowledge. Consequently, the role of L1 (that is, mother tongue or native language) is quite prominent” (O’Grady, et al. 1993).

3) The Natural Method. Children learn a language naturally to speak before they can read, or write. Like the child in his home, the student is to be immersed in language and allowed to formulate his own generalizations . . . it consists of a series of monologues by the teacher, interspersed with exchanges of question and answer between instructor and pupil—all in the foreign language . . . A great deal of pantomime accompanies the talk. With the aid of gesticulation, by attentive listening, and by dint of repetition, the beginner comes to associate certain acts and objects with certain combinations of sound, and finally reaches the point of reproducing the foreign words or phrases . . . The mother tongue is strictly banished” (Bowen et al. 1985:21; part of this cited text contains a quotation from the Report of the Committee of the Twelve, 1890).

4) The Phonetic Method. This method emphasized “oral expression as the basis of instruction, stressing pronunciation, avoiding grammatical rule giving, and seeking to impart a practical mastery of language forms for use in-country; cultural information can also be provided. The teacher should read a passage aloud, explaining unfamiliar words as students followed along. After discussing questions on the passage, students should paraphrase the story aloud. Next would come written answers to questions, phonetic work on new words, and ultimately recitation. Gestures, pictures, and interesting contexts is to be used in making applications of familiar material.

5) The Direct Method. “Adult L2 learners can learn a second language in essentially the same manner as a child. Therefore, if possible, the teacher should try to create a natural learning environment within the classroom. Instead of explicit grammar instruction, the major emphasis should be on communicating. The expectation is that through question and answer dialogues, the second language will gradually be acquired. Problems have arisen with such an approach because adults do not in fact learn exactly like children, and they express the need for explicit instruction in grammar and other aspects of the second language” (O’Grady et al. 1993). Teaching of receptive skills (listening and reading) rather than teaching of productive skills (speaking and writing) should be encouraged on the first level.

6) The Audio-lingual Method: The audio-lingual method in some sense represents a return to the direct method, as its main goal is to develop native-like speaking ability in its learners. It is an extension as well as a refinement of the Direct Method. Translation and reference to L1 are not permitted. Underlying this approach, however, is the notion that “L2 learning should be regarded as a mechanistic process of habit formation . . . Audio-lingual learning comprises dialogue memorization and pattern drills, thus ensuring careful control of responses. None of the drills or patterns are to

be explained, since knowledge of grammatical rules would only obstruct the mechanical formation of habits.”Some of the things which can be used to the spread of this method in this century include: Greater allotment of time, smaller classes, greater emphasis on oral-aural practice which led to automatic production of sentences repeated or in the internalization of sentence structures through repetition and inductive generalization, the structural description and gradation of sentence and other linguistic utterances presented to the students for drill, contrastive analysis between the structures of the native and target languages, and careful preparation and presentation of learning materials based on all these.

7) Neutralizing mother tongue influence: An accent the world understands should be the target kept in front of the students. This is accomplished through the study and knowledge of neutral pronunciation of English, one that is free of regionalisms and that conforms to the norms of the theatrical stage and public usage - that is, the pronunciation of news broadcasters, television actors and national mass media performers. This is not to imply that neutral pronunciation has greater merit than any of the regional dialects. It is also a dialect, but one without any regionalisms. It is, however, the dialect that is used by trained speakers and performers for public usage. The way we speak English regionally is part of our personal identity. It is something that should be used and mentioned in our everyday speech. However, when we are speaking or performing in a public forum, neutral English should be used, so as to erase regional barriers and communicate effectively with the most people. - Kathryn LaBouff. Eg. A call center employee, an actor.

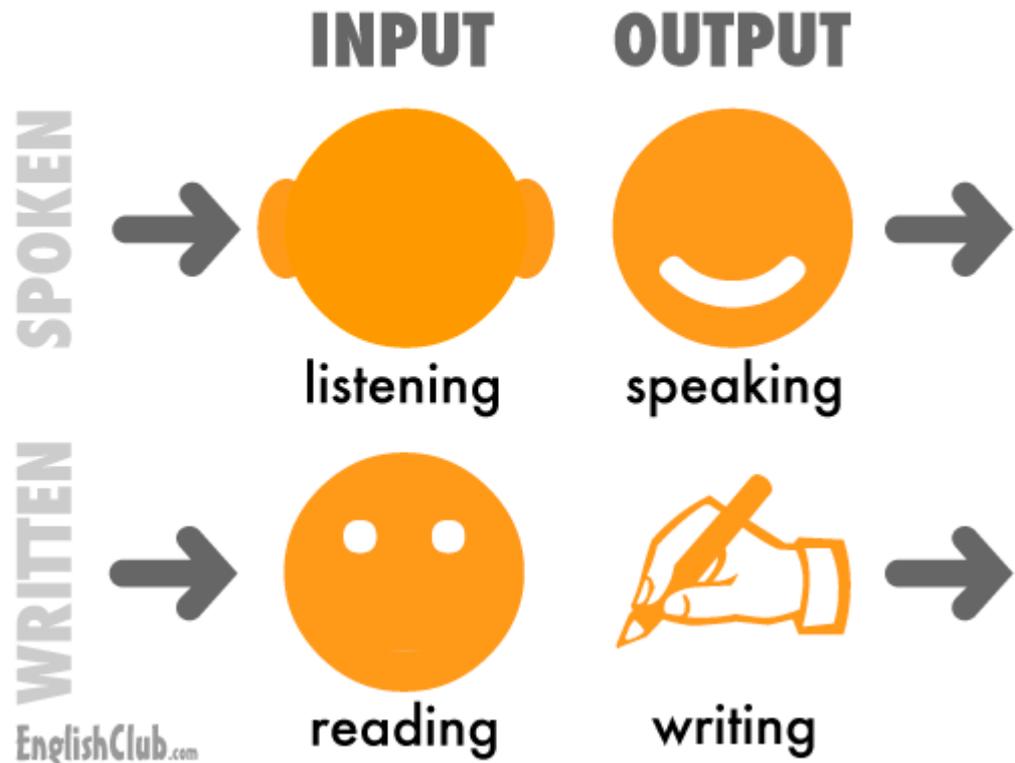
8) Communicative Language Teaching. This approach argues that “merely knowing how to produce a grammatically correct sentence is not enough. A communicatively competent person must also know how to produce an appropriate, natural, and socially acceptable utterance in all contexts of communication. ‘Hey, buddy, you fix my car!’ is grammatically correct but not as effective in most social contexts as ‘Excuse me, sir, I was wondering whether I could have my car fixed today . . . (Communicative competence) includes having a grammatical knowledge of the system, . . . knowledge of the appropriateness of language use . . . (such as) socio-cultural knowledge, paralinguistic (facial and gestural) and proxemic (spatial) knowledge, and sensitivity to the level of language use in certain situations and relationships . . .” (O’Grady et al.1993). The fact that English grammar has its own set of complicated rules and regulations makes it a tough language to conquer. A good number of students struggle with these rules, and cannot really understand many of the principles on first or second reading. To make matters worse, English itself is of different varieties. Therefore, students may find the Queen's English quite different from American English

9) Creativity in Designing Curriculum: Role play, speech, one-act play, story writing, dialogue writing are some of the ways to make the curriculum interesting and at the same time help in achieving the end results.

10) Practicing Innovative Ideas in the English classroom : Since the size of the classes are considerably large it becomes difficult for students to participate in large nos., therefore individual attention becomes impossible. Tutorial classes can to some extent help in learning the language .Some of the methods adopted by the teacher can be a role play, dialogue writing, reading from various journals and ask the students to say and write in their own words, and making them **Think in English.**

11)Use of Technology in the classroom : Practical Implications like power point presentation, use of e-mails, sms can be some of the ways of making the classroom teaching interesting.

Language Skills



Teaching English to speakers of other languages can be looked at from many different angles. One useful way is to look at the teaching process as the teaching of various language skills. In general there are, four language skills, each based upon the modality of emphasis. These are the Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing skills.

Generally speaking, it is emphasized that we first teach listening, then speaking, then reading and writing. However, in real life situations of language communication, these skills are interdependent in many ways, even though they can be taught independently to some extent.

Listening Skill

Listening in English is attending to and interpreting oral English. Listening is necessary to develop the speaking skill. The student listens to oral speech in English, then separates into segments the stretch of utterances he hears, groups them into words, phrases, and sentences, and, finally, he understands the message these carry. Listening prepares the students to understand the speech of the native speakers of English as they speak naturally in a normal speed and normal manner.

There are three approaches to listening: interactive (listening to a message and doing something as a consequence) and one-way communication or non-interactive (just listening and retaining the message, in activities such as conversations overheard,

public address announcements, recorded messages, etc.) and self-talk. Listening to radio and watching TV and films, public performances, lectures, religious services, etc., generally reflect non-interactive listening. Responding to the commands given reflects interactive listening, which, in fact, is equally widespread in communicative situations. Self-talk is also an important process by which internal thinking and reasoning is carried out. All these three modes or approaches to listening may be included in our listening comprehension training.

Teaching Speaking

Asking and Answering Questions

How do you get a second/foreign language learner to speak English? You may just ask the student to speak, ask him to say something in English. You can even tell him what to say. He may or may not understand the meaning of the utterances he is asked to produce, but he will imitate what you told him to repeat. Another way is to ask the student a question. He will try to answer if he realizes that he is being asked to answer a question. For this, he should understand what the question is, and he should have some mastery over the English phonology, grammar, and lexicon necessary to frame an appropriate answer. This is a more difficult task.

Asking and answering questions is an essential part of teaching, learning, and using any language. Asking questions and eliciting answers may be used for various purposes. First of all, asking questions enables the student to practice what he has learned. Secondly, you may ask questions to find whether the student understands the new vocabulary and the need for proper pronunciation. Pronunciation is a very important component of speaking skill. Without proper pronunciation, which should be somewhat similar to but not necessarily identical to native performance, second or foreign language users of English will not be able to communicate accurately.

Pronunciation lends accuracy to the message conveyed. Remember that if the learner's pronunciation is "very poor", a concept which needs to be clarified and specified in context, he will have great difficulty in communicating orally with native speakers of English. He may have excellent skills in writing and reading, but if his pronunciation is very poor, he will not be seen to be proficient in English. Native speakers of English often tend to be generous towards the second/foreign learners of English. And yet there is always the danger that poor pronunciation may be equated with the lack of knowledge of English.

Reading Skills

In a recent publication which gives a variety of new ways of teaching reading (Day 1993), the editor of the book classifies reading into three kinds: extensive reading, intensive reading, and oral reading. Extensive reading is used "to refer to the teaching of reading through reading. In this approach, there is no overt focus on teaching reading. Rather, it is assumed that the best way for students to learn to read is by reading a great deal of comprehensible material." Intensive reading is used to refer to the actual teaching of reading skills in an instructional setting. Students are exposed to a variety of materials and asked to perform activities such as answering comprehension questions on the passage read. They may be trained to look for critical information in the passage they read, and make inferences, etc. Intensive reading is instruction-based and forms the core of teaching reading in the classroom.

Teaching Reading

Through the short stories, plays, and novels, which often try to portray the society in some realistic way, students have a glimpse of the culture of the native speakers of English. The conversations give them the nuances used by the native speakers of English in performing various roles in the society. They learn the social etiquette and the words, sentences, tone, and tenor which go with the etiquette.

Through the study of literature, the second/foreign language learner of English is introduced to the historical as well as the current culture of the English speaking peoples. With the culture, they also come to study and understand the world view of the native speakers. No language makes sense to its learner without some understanding of the world view it represents.

Activity-Based Lessons

Students are interested in group activities. Devise group work which would require use of words and sentences for communication among members of the group. Devise group work which aim at accomplishing some language-related task such as language games.

If the textbook lessons are not activity-based, you should be able to convert the lessons in such a way that there are abundant activities built into the teaching of the lesson. Conventional textbooks provide for some activities as part of the exercises.

An activity-based lesson centers around the activity to teach the language. Students are given some words and some simple sentences. They are asked to perform a task as a group, conversing with each other. They will use the words and sentences, some in full and most of the time in abbreviated form to communicate with one another. They may use many gestures while performing the task. Ultimately they would achieve what they set out to achieve. They would complete the task and would be greatly involved in doing the task. In this process students are introduced to the use of English in natural communicative contexts. Students should be taught in English and not introduced to English language in an artificially pre-determined sequence of grammatical structures or functions.

Orientation to Teach English

Vale and Feunteun (1995) suggest the following orientation when we teach English to children or students:

- build confidence;
- provide the motivation to learn English;
- encourage ownership of language;
- encourage them to treat English as a communication tool not as an end product;
- show them that English is fun;
- establish a trusting relationship with their classmates;
- give them an experience of a wide range of English language in a non-threatening environment.

Physical activities help in learning the words and sentences. An activity-based approach is always better than mere classroom teaching mode with repetition, imitation drills, etc.

Emphasizing fluency and not only on correctness

Teachers who themselves have a good command of English with model setting pronunciation capabilities, will students learn English better and faster. Use English all the time in the class. However, do not refuse to give brief explanations in the native language of the students. But such explanations should have the focus on strengthening the use of English, not the mastery of translation from one language into another. Do not use the native language to elicit English responses. Use objects and actions instead. Keep the corrections to the minimum.

Focus on developing an ability to communicate in contexts meaningful to the students. Let the student act out the story. This will develop his listening and speaking skills.

Reading and writing will take deliberate effort on the part of the students. Reading and writing should be less in quantum than speaking and listening in English classes for students.

Many materials in print, audio and video are available in the market which aim at teaching English script, spelling, reading, and writing. Select those which match your student's needs at mastery level. Use these in the order suggested by the book. Add to the exercises in an innovative and interesting manner.

Ask for the catalogues of textbooks for children from the leading publishers! Collect stories from the children's native language and tell these stories in simple English to them.

These exacting and tricky challenges make it necessary for any teacher of English to have a formal training in teaching practices and methods. It is not enough to have sufficient skills in listening and understanding the language. Even a native speaker of the English language requires a methodical and intensive training program to qualify as a good teacher of English as a foreign language. Many of the skills like understanding specific problems related to particular regions and building basic communication skills in students etc can only be acquired through a formal learning of the same. A commonsensical approach would be of no help here. Teachers have to be prepared for the most bizarre mistakes, and need to know how to handle these delicate situations with aplomb. That is why it is important to undergo formal training in teaching English before you actually begin the process of teaching English as a foreign language.

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