

ELT in India: An Analysis

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Abstract: *Due to its association with the British colonizer, English started life in India as not just a foreign language, but as a much hated language. From the despised instrument of oppression to the reluctantly adopted lingua franca to the status symbol of the upper classes to its position today as a second language, English has come a long way. English Language, the language of news, business, information, opportunity, employment, power and prestige in India, has become the synonym of all progress in the recent years. The liberalization of the Indian economy ushered in all kinds of reasons to learn this language. English language teaching (ELT) has acquired new dimensions in as much as it has crept itself into diverse methods of ELT at school as well as college levels.*

Keywords: *English Language Teaching, Teaching Methodologies, Communicative Language Teaching, Situational Language.*

1. INTRODUCTION

While earlier in the century students who had specialized in English joined either teaching or the civil services, now a whole new spectrum of job opportunities has opened up. There are now call centers that need trainers to equip their employees with communication skills, there are multinationals who have been recruiting marketing staff that need to be taught spoken English, there are medical transcription centers which need efficient translators and reporters. Those desirous of immigration to the West need professional help for qualifying tests like the IELTS, TOEFL etc. Hence, the avenues where English Language Teaching (ELT) has come to be required in India are unlimited today.

2. ELT-NEED FOR TRANSFORMATION

Notwithstanding the fact that today English enjoys the status of a big business in the wake of globalization; teaching and learning of it in educational institutions in our country especially in the small towns and rural areas is rather inadequate and unproductive. Of late, we the Indian teachers of English at the undergraduate level have become painfully aware that most students in the college easily manage to pass the examination without making much effort to either pick up the language or learn to appreciate the utility of language. Most of the students attend classes because they have to complete the minimum requirement of lectures so that they can appear in the examination. The situation is worse in rural areas where most of the students are commuters and find it hazardous to carry books for they need both the hands for fighting their way into the crowded buses as well as for getting out of them through the jostling crowds.

So, they attend classes without books which are supposed to be their unavoidable companions. Also, most of them have already developed the habit of cramming everything because the effort, the attitude and the methods adopted in schools which are repository of only availability to rural students, do little to help a child who finds solution only in the rote method of learning. Therefore the 'creativity' is lost somewhere. Even the capable students who can express themselves in writing do so in their native language, not in English. This is their understanding of only the vernacular language well that the teacher is always expected to translate each and every phrase so that at least the literary texts are somehow driven home.

But there remains the important task of importing the basic function of language i.e. to communicate properly. Though there are some students who can write fairly well in English, but when it comes to

speaking, they find themselves in tight corners. Just consider the frustration of such a first generation learner who has all the expectations of his elders behind him and knows that no job is waiting for him till he has a good command over the English language. Hence the students are not eager but unwilling, angry and frustrated to improve their speaking skills.

Now, when we, the teachers of English, address ourselves to the ever passing problem of how to meet the requirement of Indian students because of their deficiency in the said language, we confront this crude fact that more than the student, it is the teacher of English who is guilty of leaving the student in a quandary. This is so because we refuse to do anything for the student. Most of us have matter of fact attitude towards teaching which allows us to perform our duty only and do nothing else. In a way, we become the carriers of degeneration in teaching as well as life in general, for expediency rather than morals, is what informs all our activities of life including teaching.

3. TEACHING METHODOLOGIES

Several reasons can be accounted for this sad and deplorable situation of ELT in India but much of the onus lies on the ways, approaches and methods adopted to teach English. However much the examination system may be faulty and the syllabus not suitable to the needs of the students, the methodology of teaching is the key factor and the real power in the hands of a teacher. English is still treated as a subject to be taught, not a skill to be mastered. Also, the traditional ELT methods like Grammar Translation Method, Direct Method and Situational Language Teaching are in no way beneficial to the students in the changed scenario where the majority of students are desperate to learn English only to be communicatively competent.

3.1 CLT

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) was introduced in India in the 1980s as the traditional approaches were failing to fulfill the current demands of English language learners. CLT is a language teaching programme focusing on learners' ability to communicate -to facilitate them to use the language for communication. Communication is thus seen as the major concern in learning a language. Dell Hymes, who developed the concept of Ethnography of Communication, emphasized that the study of language involves knowing not only the language structure but also what to say to whom and how to say it appropriately in any situation. He thus developed the concept of communicative competence. Communicative Competence in simple words means that it is not enough to be able to produce grammatically correct sentences but it is important that the speaker is able to produce appropriate sentences, understanding the social context, the role of the participants, the information they share, and the function of the interaction.

3.2 The Prominent Features of CLT

- a) CLT is learner-centered.
- b) CLT emphasizes on learning communication rather than grammar.
- c) CLT's objective is the development of communicative competence and not linguistic competence.
- d) CLT encourages 'fluency and appropriacy' rather than 'accuracy'.
- e) CLT syllabi are specified more in terms of language functions rather than in terms of language forms.
- f) CLT concentrates more on the message than meaning.

- g) CLT tolerates grammatical errors at an early stage of the learner, but expects them to master the language at a later stage and produces correct sentences.
- h) CLT is task-based.
- i) CLT focuses on problem-solving.
- j) CLT encourages individualized learning.

3.3 ELT in India

ELT pedagogy was developed primarily in the West where political and social realities were different and the status of English was fixed whereas, in India, ELT pedagogy depends upon the subtle and not-so-subtle ways in which the status of English keeps changing. The developments that have taken place in ELT methodology in the West took some time to reach Indian classrooms. Three factors are responsible for this gap:

- a) Only around the year 1980 did English achieve adequate attention from policy makers, administrators and teachers.
- b) No formal teacher training is given to new recruits or practising teachers (barring the one-year program).
- c) The examination system is more achievement oriented rather than performance oriented.

3.4 CLT in India

Communicative Language Teaching reached both regions (India and the West) between the years 1970 - 1980, with the difference that the Indian context was not ready for CLT. The context of the whole teaching situation actually started changing around the year 2000. Socio-economic factors played a major role in this change that is dynamic even today. The liberalization of the Indian economy led to the entry of many international brands into the learners' mindset. Call centers, shopping malls and trade fairs, all need young personnel, fluent in English. There is a mushroom growth of private institutes and academies offering the whole range of proficiency in English from clearing the IELTS to speaking fluently. The Internet has played a major role in creating a resource-rich environment by giving a wide range of exposure to English. Becoming web-savvy has emerged as the need of the day and this is possible only through English.

These are just a few of the factors that have created a panacea for the deadlock that CLT had found itself in. All these contextual changes in the Indian scenario have affected English language teaching in India positively showing some hopeful signs of modifications aided by modernization. These signs include introduction of CLT curriculum by Central Board of School Education in all its affiliated schools, introduction of 'English for Specific Purposes' (ESP) in some Indian schools, infusion of technology with the teaching of English in the form of Language Labs, availability of the native English Language to the Indian people with the widespread availability of cable television and satellite television in India, realization of English as the most preferred language of the global information highway by the new generation with the rise of computer expertise and internet and reframing of the curriculum by some universities on CLT pattern.

In spite of all these developments in English Language Teaching and popularity of CLT in many parts of the country as a comprehensive approach, there are many regions in India where English language is still facing a very precarious situation. These include mainly the north Indian states. The overall scenario of teaching English in these states is dismal as the graduates passing out from the colleges and universities

here are unemployable. Needless to say, that the sole reason for such a huge number of unemployed youth is lack of communicative competency in the students. So, it is the need of the hour to change the existing syllabi and reframe the new ones by following CLT approach on a pan-India level.

3.5 ELT Methodologies in India

Where the issue of methodology is concerned, ELT seems to be in three transient stages according to the different levels of the paradigm and its demands:

- a) The first level is that of the institutions run by the Government, mainly Primary, Secondary and High Schools.
- b) At the second level are those institutions that are Semi-Government are run by private managing bodies, assisted through government funds.
- c) The third level comprises purely private sector academies that undertake to make learners proficient English users within a stipulated period.

This creates a ripple which can be felt in three ways:

- a) Young teachers who work in undergraduate colleges work part-time at these academies where they use the latest teaching aids and materials to achieve fluency at the earliest.
- b) The administrative bodies of undergraduate colleges realize that a whole untapped market needs to be explored which is why they introduce revenue-earning courses in the field of English proficiency, open to the public.
- c) Parents of learners form an important component of the teaching paradigm in India.

3.6 CLT: A Paradigm Shift in ELT in India

Though CLT faces a lot of impediments in its successful implementation in India, it still holds the road to success. The whole process of curriculum change is riddled with cumbersome and time-consuming procedures in India and CLT has been able to attain only a limited success, yet it has not been removed from courses. This, in the long run, has been for the better because while on the one hand, the teachers have been able to familiarize themselves with its approach and methodology; on the other hand, the changed and changing context has encouraged its growing success today.

4. CONCLUSION

It is true that mostly this Communicative approach is practiced in the institutes that belong to the third category above but the ripple created is gradually reaching the ELT classroom. The most significant impact of this approach is its sensitivity to learner needs and responses. This sensitivity is what has been lacking in the academic aspect of ELT in India. The whole academic process is so unwieldy that it fails to respond to learner needs; learner response is too often ignored. The irony of the situation is that while academicians label these learning centres 'shops' or 'commercial institutes' it is these establishments that are a major influence behind the changing face of the ELT paradigm in India.

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