REVIEW OF RESEARCH

TEACHING-LEARNING STRATEGIES IN THE ENGLISH CLASS ROOM: SOME OBSERVATIONS

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ABSTRACT:

How to communicate better in English in this era of globalisation has become a concern both for the student and the ESL teacher. In most cases the teachers have to stick to the old grammar-translation method. The syllabus too is heavy and the number of students is often unmanageable. Plus, the group is from heterogeneous sections of the society. Options for the students to interact in English are less. So it is better to prefer Communicative language teaching approach. Further, to make the whole learning process attractive, syllabus -framers should take into account the students' need into account. The teachers should also be properly trained in CLT. Lastly, the errors committed by the students should be properly handled for errors indicate the progress of a learner.

KEYWORDS: *Mass media, Media ethics, Global media ethics, Journalism, Professionalism.*

INTRODUCTION :

Centuries ago Francis Bacon has acclaimed the magnitude of speech: *it makes one ready*. In the present situation there seems to be no respite from the hard reality- the better you speak the better you are placed. For the purpose of oral communication, English has now become the most effective language in this fast changing world. Therefore, to empower students through spoken English has now become a challenge for the English teachers throughout India, where barring a few English is nobody's mother tongue.

Instruction through mother tongue is preferred in most schools for almost all the subjects. English is offered as a subject for very few periods in a week. Besides these periods, the majority of our students do not get any environment where they are supposed to speak in English. But the world beyond the institution's premises is quite harsh to our non-English speaking students. During the last two decades the world has been rapidly getting smaller-a global village with USA as its headman. Quite expectedly, in this era of globalisation one has to transact business through the medium of English. Its necessity is felt in the academia, industry, trade etc. interaction has taken a major role through different modes of communication and the most effective mode is conversation. It is, therefore, pragmatic that a fresh look at the English teaching-learning situation be made and a congenial situation be ensured in order to improve the spoken skills of our students in English.

The existing teaching-learning situation of English in Andhra Pradesh and in some backward states of India is horrendous. Teaching English through grammar- translation -method not only dissuades the learner but also raises doubts on the sincerity and pariache of the syllabus framers to deal with the new environment. Persuading a student to learn grammar first and then to translate his/her ideas from mother tongue to

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English often becomes an uphill task for the learner to use the language at ease. Grammatical correctness often stands as an impediment between the language and the learner. Further, the existing process of framing curriculum appears to be an imposition on the students. The curriculum, as well as the course- books, is prescribed for the students without recognising their needs, aspiration, aptitude and taste. Generally, some politically motivated educationists loyal to the ruling party are given the task of framing the syllabus for the language-learners. Therefore this extra-academic preference of the syllabus-framers ultimately scales down their muchneeded attention on the learners' interest.

Given this situation, this article attempts to focus on some situations and evolve some guidelines relevant to an ESL classroom in order to motivate and develop the skills of the students. Some observations of foremost academics in this area are taken into account for a proper appreciation of the problem. Hopefully, the syllabus - framers may be benefited while re-evaluating the existing one for upgradation, if necessary. Research shows that students do not learn a language at the same pace; The levels of competence for the learners are also diversified., Surely, the teachers cannot be held responsible for this difference in learning ability of the students in a classroom. However, they can motivate the students and make sure that they become involved in the learning process. Learning is an active process of translating new knowledge, insight and skills into behaviour. Cawley and his associates have identified three domains of learning-cognitive, affective and psychomotor. The learners have their own preferences to learn by adapting either of these strategies suitable for their environment. These preferences are known to be an individual's, own style of learning a language. The learning is usually accomplished more rapidly and retained longer if it is presented in ways that the individual prefers and on its competency to meet the learners' needs. Claxton and Murrell consider that if the teacher's instructional style and the student's learning style match, there is usually a productive language - learning environment. It is important that the teacher should be aware of the learning style preferences of the students and accordingly adjust his/ her own method of teaching.

Boylan points out that learning is more productive when teachers are conscious of the learning strategies they are going to apply in a language class. Subsequently, another significant researcher in this area, Davis, came out with the suggestion that students can be taught what strategies the teachers are going to apply in the language class, which improves learning efficiency no matter what style the teacher uses. As students practise a variety of activities, they become aware of various strategies that can be used. If the teacher specifically demonstrates how the various strategies can be implemented, the ability to use different strategies is enhanced. A teacher should try to provide a variety of learning experiences to accommodate the various learning styles that exist in average language classrooms. Often it is found that a gap exists between the learner's interest and knowledge of the subject and the teacher's ignorance of it. Curriculum should be framed as a negotiative process between the teacher and the students. Thus the curriculum should be more learner-centered where information by and from the learners will be built into every phase of the curriculum process. Students can help in identifying their own needs right from the planning stage of the course if their opinion is considered. Further, needs analysis is not a one-time- activity. Teachers can gather the students' opinion through ongoing discussion and consultation based on day-to-day teaching activities. Teachers are thus enriched by their daily contact with their learners, learn continually and incorporate everything they learn into their teaching. The curriculum framers, while framing a syllabus either for a State or for a Central Board, should share this knowledge of the teachers.

The real life experience is rather far off from what it ought to be. Very often, the teachers are consulted only after the necessary changes in the curriculum have been made. As a result, teachers have neither their say in the course designing nor have the essential tools to train the young students at their best. Another important factor - how to hold motivation for a longer period specially for the learners opting for English as a second language is hardly taken into account at the time of syllabus framing. Students have diverse forms of motivation and not all of them are motivated enough to continue their study of English language for twelve long years without detracting from whatever they had at the initial stage. Next factor that is not properly highlighted at the time of framing a syllabus is that students reach their secondary level (from Class IX onwards) with a mixed bag of abilities. Often the teachers are in a

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dilemma as to how to make their students having heterogeneous levels of intelligence adapt to the syllabus that maintains a fixed intellectual height. The onus lies on the primary teacher to teach ESL to the non-English speaking Indian students. But incidentally, the pay package does not attract talents. So, with very few exceptions, these primary teachers take the responsibility with little awareness of the weightiness of their duties. At the initial stage, learners are supposed to commit mistakes as many times but all the attempts should be hailed. Constant encouragement, patience, tactful handling of the students, playful approach etc. are some of the techniques to be adopted by the teacher at the initial stage to tackle the new learners in ESL. If otherwise, the future interest as well as the confidence of the learner is sure to be jeopardised within a short span of time. So it is essential that teachers have to familiarize themselves with the learners' potential at the very elementary level in order to run the learning process efficiently. Lack of confidence leads to communication barrier among the ESL learners and in most cases, they feel scared to articulate in their newly acquired second language. Cognitively and linguistically, they are well developed as their English-speaking counterparts although this development has taken in another language and culture. It is for the teacher to create a favourable atmosphere for the learner to gain enough confidence so as to transfer and apply his/her knowledge effectively to a new context and continue developing their skills in both the languages. So the challenge for a teacher in a language class is how to create a positive environment. It is imperative that in a language class the atmosphere should be learner-friendly. Initially, ensuring participation of every student in the learning process may be a step towards confidence building of the ESL learners. Generating self- confidence and love for the language on due part of a learner is more valuable at this juncture. The teacher must be careful lest accuracy in respect of pronunciation and grammatical correctness may have a reverse effect and the very objective may be scuttled. The encouragement s/he receives in the classroom will boost up his / her level of confidence to use the language elsewhere whenever opportunity comes. At this juncture, it is important also to take into consideration the fact that many students in Govt. or Govt. aided schools are first- generation learners. After the initial steps are followed, the teacher may be in a position to take the next step. At this stage, both the teacher and the ESL students in most cases face a hindrance - not many classes a day are provided for them in the target language as well as on the subject. Even the situation outside their classroom is not conducive enough for the ESL learner to use the language for communicative purpose. So, in order to provide best opportunity for the learners' to speak, it is essential for the teachers to devise some innovative techniques for CLT suitable for the learners within a classroom. One such activity is to divide the whole class into small groups and ask them to exchange information among themselves and / or with the teachers in target language. This kind of student collaboration has double benefits. First, the whole class actively participates in a task at the same time and students can then compare their findings when the task is over; and second, the meaningful task is rehearsed in class for later use in real life outside the classroom.

At times, things become complicated for the teacher. The teacher is hardpressed into several serious and unmanageable problems. He may have to manage a large class which, for him, may be a genuine problem. He may also fail to identify the right kind of group activity for CLT. This is because of his lack of necessary exposure in communicative teaching. In the rural or semi-urban India, both the government and private authorities find training in Communicative Language Teaching not so seriously. This leads to an improper approach by the teachers to tackle the class in sustaining the proper spirit. So while using textbooks designed for communicative activities, teachers tend to revert to traditional teacher-centred one-way communication - method. The huge language syllabus is another obstacle that most schools cannot overcome. Often, a textbook in itself is a set of texts, which may include an all-in one textbook, a listening tape, a grammar book and a short story book. Theoretically, teachers have to follow the rationale and sequence of each chapter but in reality, they skip items for a variety of reasons. If the syllabus is too long and detailed and the students' ability being very low and if the teachers have a heavy schedule of extra-curricular activities, they may choose only essential tasks that require little or no preparation. When this happens, teachers prefer mostly not to explore the use of communicative language teaching in their classes.

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Lack of adequate training to teach English for communicative purposes is a major cause of a teacher's handicap. What are the major features of CLT (Communicative Language Teaching)? Communicative language teaching requires authentic communication, which includes a believable setting, normal speed in speaking, a range of lexical items suitable for the students' age and an overall promotion of learning. People learn a foreign language for performing different functions. Therefore, it is natural to introduce authentic learning material in class. Based on student-centeredness, the CLT approach features low profile teacher roles frequent pair work or small group problem solving, students responding to authentic samples of English, extended exchanges on high interest topics, and the integration of the four basic skills, namely speaking, listening, reading and writing. The CLT approach discourages extensive teacher- controlled drills, quizzing of memorised material and extended commentary on forms of English. Excessive teacher talk hampers the emergence of sustained purposeful student talk. The learner should be provided with equal opportunity so that they may take part in the learning activity. To improve self-esteem, inter-ethnic relations and enjoyment of the school are the main objectives of CLT. Indeed students will benefit more from CLT if they understand that communicating and sharing with peers is a language-learning policy that they can apply outside their classroom setting. In order to prepare their students as good conversationalists, a teacher must have the knowledge of how to give effective feedback, employ cooperative behaviour and understanding and use accurate verbal and non-verbal language. However, in Beyond Methods: Macro strategies for Language teaching, B Kumaravadivelu claims that a teacher's own experience and knowledge must be added to create action plans and supporting reasons that are unique to that teacher's work environment. Closely associated with CLT is the handling of the errors committed by a student in a CLT class. So Error management is a great concern for both the teacher and the student. Errors are believed to be a pointer of the learner's stages of maturity in their target language. The teacher takes care of the errors committed by a learner in order to assess their level of mastery of the language system and reorient his teaching methodology and if possible, the teaching materials themselves to solve the learner's current problems. Of course, a teacher should know how to identify an error. Corder refers to errors as breaches of codes. Errors deviate from what is the norm. The problem is that at times there is no firm agreement as to what the norm is. Languages have different varieties or dialects with rules that differ from the standard. So, in most cases, there is no clear-cut boundary between errors and non-errors. Further, some forms may be acceptable in a particular situation but not acceptable in other situations. Thus young men in their late teens and beyond do not like to be referred to as boys. The difference between native speakers and foreign language learners' as regards errors is believed to be derived from competence. Foreign language learners commit errors because of their paucity of knowledge of the target language whereas unusual forms produced by the native speakers are dismissed as slips of the tongue. A distinction is also often made between the educated and the illiterates using the native language. Errors for an educated native speaker may be interpreted, as slips of the tongue while the same may be nonstandard for an illiterate or less educated person. The utterance of the foreign learners cannot be considered as non-standard because they do not belong to the same geographical or social group in the target language. So their utterances are tested against the norm for the standard variety of the target language. Thus *I were a student* may be non-standard for a Yorkshire speaker but is treated as erroneous for, say, an Indian speaker. Why is this incorrectness on the part of a foreign learner? A likely reason behind such erroneous use of the target language by an Indian speaker may be the learners' incompatibility between his/her knowledge and application of the same. Another relevant point raised by researchers is that the learners tend to give more attention to the content and as such commit errors. They can do better in a planned discourse as well as in written discourse rather than in spontaneous discourse. Some times their errors are context-bound. Burt and Kiparsky attempted to distinguish between global and local error. A global error is one that involves the overall structure of a sentence while a local error is one that affects a particular constituent. Cordor makes an interesting observation on errors. According to him errors fall in to four main categories: omission of some required elements. addition of some unnecessary elements, selection of an incorrect element and disordering of elements. Therefore an awareness of the multiplicity of errors is also

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significant for a language- teacher in order to initiate steps for any correction. At the same time, s/he must determine when and how, if at all indispensable, s/he should take steps to assist the learner in making necessary corrections. Therefore, it is imperative that the curriculum framed for the language teaching class should be flexible enough for the teacher to incorporate his/her own observations, make some additions and alteration as and when required. The curriculum framers should take into account the needs of the end users while framing the syllabus and not their own personal agenda to make the syllabus more democratic and user- friendly in order to empower the second language learner in spoken English. However, the teachers should be adequately and extensively trained in CLT so that they can properly guide the students to use the target language effectively. The teacher's role and motivation in the whole teaching-learning process is vital. S/he can both dissuade and motivate a whole lot of students in the language learning process with his/her activities.

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