

English Language Teaching Versus Indian Classrooms

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Once a wall hanger was seen that read “I asked for opportunities to grow and god gave me challenges”. Of course, challenges viewed positively are opportunities for growth. This is time of language learning as well. A teacher or a learner, when faced with a challenge in the language acquisition process has really an opportunity to invent a method to help him acquire it. Hence challenges blesseth him that teaches and him that learns both are beneficiaries.

Language learning theories are scientific in nature and they help the unravelling of the mechanics of language. Instead of groping in the dark, a scientific study of language helps one master it easily. Similarly,

the theories of language learning are useful in studying and experimenting with various processes in the course of language acquisition.

Till now there is no single perfect or fool-proof method available either to explain the mystery of language acquisition or a solution for mastering a language, overcoming all the hurdles. The postcolonialists still blame the coloniser for imposing their language and the western theories; whereas the postmodernists point to the power-struggle going on in the classroom, between the privileged teacher and the underprivileged learner. Neither could help solve the problem and facilitate easy cognition.

A unique strategy has to be evolved

based on the cultural, social and prevailing context of the learner.

It is an agreed upon fact that to teach a language, the first step is to analyse its units and then design a course to teach it. But who is to analyse it and who is to design the course? If it is the teacher, he should not isolate himself either from the existing reality or the prospective learner. He should empathise with him, substitute himself in the learner's place and deduce the method and prepare the teaching material. For the teacher of English in our country, the **P.G.C.T.E** and **P.G.D.T.E** offered by English and Foreign Languages University is not only god but an eye opener. One comes face to face with language learning process and realises its full impact by there.... (Corder, Pit. 1986: 186-187).

Recent trends in teaching method are off-shoots of the second language acquiring research, be it the way in which a child acquires knowledge of its mother tongue or the difficulties a learner of L₂ faces. The knowledge about the process of second language acquisition helped the teacher with his selection, arrangement and presentation of teaching materials in a classroom. Unfortunately, the class is the least congenial of places to learn language. Language is learnt easier in the real contexts. (Lightbrown and N.Spadla.1993:72).

Krashan's Natural Approach scored over the earlier Grammar-Translation, bilingual and Audio-visual methods. The communicative approach with its insistence on generating communications due to interactions among the peer-group is so far the best approach. The learner is expected to

take an active part in the learning process; he is not reduced to a passive listener nor a dormant observer but a very active participant in keeping up the functioning of the language. Activities like, Role-play, group work, gap-filling demand a continuous and ever-alert involvement on part of the learner. The teacher acts just as a prompter or lead wherever the concentration snags.

Cummings (1994:685) contents that language construction is a collaborative endeavour for constructing the specific social context of the learner-group. Hence the dialogue is to be kept going without cessation.

By examining the interactions a teacher can very well deduce the most beneficial method for teaching.

But every now and then the teacher has to be alert so that the learning

process is reader-centred and not teacher-centred. This centre shift, Pennycook observes is “due principally to shift in social, cultural, political and philosophical climate (1989:608).

In fact, the amount of intellectual amassing of theoretical knowledge could solve the problem. A teacher should be aware of the existing reality, feeling the pulse of the students. Even if a target is set, the teacher has to practice some innovative method of teaching to suite specific group at that specific time

Suiting the technique to the actual need of the hour does not prefer all ready designed methods in a revolutionary or humanistic approach. Analysing the problem with the group in learning and arriving at a solution to it is the responsibility of the teacher. There can never be a model or format

for this analysis & solution. It depends on the ingenuity of the teacher to be as inventive and as communicative as possible. Here too the teacher has to be very vigilant as not to overdo his role. The learner and his problem should be the focus; a tricky but dynamic equilibrium has to be maintained between the teacher and the learner. The system should never lose sight of its centre (the learner) as James has remarked:

“The system will atrophy if the user just sits waiting to be told what the designer assumes will be of interest to the user: there must be interaction” (1993:23).

The assumption of the present educationists and the problems arising from them:

1. The introduction of the semester pattern. The aim of cutting short

the duration of the course is laudable but the truncation of the syllabus resulted in the mutilation of a comprehensive understanding.

2. The introduction of the Choice Based Credit System (CBCS) would just be reduced to absurdity as all colleges and universities lack the necessary infrastructure.

3. Mass education in the higher-education level would initiate any attempt at improvement in the standards. Higher education can never be a democracy's agenda. Dissemination of knowledge does not mean dissipation of resources and attention.

4. There should be dramatic change in the policy of the government encouraging privatisation and commercialisation of education on the one hand; government can never took itself calling for

uniformed education to one and all. Both are contradictory and conflicting. Such a dithering attitude could take the system nowhere. The government should be clear in its vision and mission.

5. Higher education and research is a much reflected neglected itinerary in the concern of the government and its budget. The allocation for defence is much more than it is for the development of human resources. This predicament should change.
6. Education policy and programme should never be haphazard and baseless whims of individuals who are in power. It should be arrived at after much scholastic and experienced deliberation.
7. Implementation of new try-outs in the higher education has reduced it to mockery so far. Transplantation

of certain education systems without creating a suitable ground (infrastructure + realistic mission and vision) would only aggravate the existing situation creating new maladies.

8. Hence, the demand of the hour is, for the avowed educationist with well grounded knowledge, to take higher-education in their hands and cater to the needs of the students not only theoretically but also practically too.

To sum up: the obstacles mentioned above are purely political; that is people in power trying to air their untested and half-baked ideas for self-glorification. Apart from these the challenges that the teacher and the target face theoretically, psychologically and in the field need to be addressed to. Would that happen? It is a challenge.

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