

Development & Effectiveness of English Language Skills in Indian Classrooms



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Abstract

According to the Functionalists, language is a tool for the expression of meaning. Unlike the structuralists, they emphasize the meaning and communicative dimension rather than just grammatical form. Communication is inevitable wherever man is. Language is required for communication. The language used for communication varies from place to place.

In India, after Independence, the nation has been divided politically into linguistic states; the population in Tamilnadu has Tamil as its vernacular, Andhra Pradesh, Telugu; Karnataka, Canarese and so on, but for official purposes a common language is needed and no Indian language (even Hindi) has attained that status. Only the people of North India are fluent in Hindi whereas in down South Hindi has not reached many. At this juncture, a foreign language like English occupies the status of the common official language, or educational language, or business language or computer language. Anyhow, such a user- friendly language like English in India has to be promoted for the well-being of the people of India. This could be possible only through the field of education where English is taught as the second language (the vernacular being the first language) right from the primary education. The method should emerge from the interaction of teachers, learners and the objectives of the learning material. Such a healthy suggestion is arrived at only based on the needs of the people across the country.

The present qualitative study is an attempt to produce a teaching-learning perspective of the English language learning skills in the context of the Indian schools

Keywords: Development & Effectiveness, Language Skills

Introduction

English Learning Skills have always been a serious concern to the researchers and scholars all over the world. In India, English is taught at the school level as the second language. It being a foreign language, the students do not find themselves comfortable with it. Several researches on the theme have been conducted all over the world with an adoption of different methodologies. There are four language learning skills, namely, listening, speaking, reading and writing. The learning of a language begins systematically with listening which motivates the learner to speak the same language following the person who speaks that language, which further leads him to read it through the printed material available in books meant for the elementary education at the initial level. Later it enables the learner to be skilled in writing. In the foreign context, the English language learning is developed through the same process, but in India the reality of the development of the English language learning is different.

The Challenging Development of the English Learning Skill in the Indian Classrooms: A Surface Reality

Among the various challenges India faces every day in education, English Language Teaching must be one of the crucial ones for it has an impact on every learner right from primary level to the tertiary level and even beyond in research arena. India cannot be considered just like any other country in the world because it is secular with a multi-lingual background. Even in its geography, it is a land of striking contrasts.

Listening

Listening is a receptive language skill which learners usually find the most difficult. This often is because they feel under unnecessary pressure to understand every word. The listener has to get oriented to the listening portion and be all ears. The listener is also required to be attentive. Oral expression receives much attention in the class. Learners learn by imitation and practice. 'Spontaneous memorizing' takes place in

the learners. The teacher as well as the learners remain active in the class room. As there is no place for cramming of words and their meanings, the learners learn the new language naturally and with interest. The learners regard speech as the basis of language as the teacher in this method lays emphasis on phonetics. The approved way of development of the English skill is that the English language teacher should be well informed with a perfect command over the rules of phonetics to speak English with correct pronunciation of the words being used by him in the classroom, but the reality of most of the English language teachers appointed in government and private schools in India is that they themselves are unfamiliar with the rules of phonetics and fail to pronounce and stress the words properly.

Speaking

Language is a tool for communication. We communicate with others, to express our ideas, and to know others' ideas as well. We must take into account that the level of language input (listening) must be higher than the level of language production. In primary schools elocution and recitation are main sources to master the sounds, rhythms, and intonation of the English language through simple reproduction. The scenario of the development of the English speaking skill in the students is too shocking and horrible in the Indian classrooms, as most of the north-Indian teachers use translation method and fail to create English speaking environment in the classrooms.

Reading

Reading is a learning skill. It helps the learners improve all parts of the English language – vocabulary, spelling, grammar, and writing. It helps to develop language intuition in the corrected form. Then the brain imitates them, producing similar sentences to express the desired meaning. Using skimming or scanning technique to read quickly is highly effective. Reading Skills help the students grasp the content and draw conclusions. For the proper development of the English reading skill, the reading material like books, magazines and newspapers should be available for the reading of the students, but in the Indian schools, particularly in the north Indian schools, English reading is confined only to the prescribed English textbooks. The shocking thing is that most of the students even fail to read the text books correctly.

Writing

Writing provides a learner with physical evidence of his achievements and he can measure his improvement. It helps to consolidate their grasp of vocabulary and structure, and complements the other language skills. It helps to understand the text and write compositions. It can foster the learner's ability to summarize and to use the language freely. In the Indian classrooms, when the other three English language skills are not developed properly, writing becomes a mirage. No doubt, the students attempt to write, but it is based on cramming. The reason is that they lack the knowledge of English grammar, appropriate vocabulary and the spontaneous flow of thought in English.

Review of Literature

Dr. Usha Dutta & Dr. Neeru Bala (2012) in their report entitled Teaching of English at Primary Level in Government Schools observe that English in India is a symbol of people's aspirations for quality in education and a fuller participation in national and international life. The visible indicator of this presence of English is that today its teaching being demanded by many to be taught at the very initial stage of schooling, the mushrooming of private English medium schools and the early introduction of English in State schools. The NCF2005 stresses the use of child's mother tongue as a medium of learning at the primary level. The English teaching profession has consistently recommended a relatively late introduction of English and this is reflected in spirit in policy documents. The level of introduction of English has now become a matter of State policy to respond to people's aspirations, making almost irrelevant an academic debate on the merits of a very early introduction.

Annika Agelii Genlott & Ake Gronlund (2013) in their study entitled Improving literacy skills through learning reading by writing: The iWTR method presented and tested observe that learning to read and write is a basic skill that unfortunately not everybody acquires sufficiently. Lack of teachers and time in school are some of the reasons, but in addition the enormous rise in informational activities due to the Internet and other information technology-enabled opportunities has made literacy skills increasingly important to ever more people. This means literacy education must be improved so more children in the world get better chances. In order to contribute to developing better methods for learning to read and write in early years this study tests a new method developed to improve reading and writing learning in early ages. The ICT (Information and communication technologies) supported "Integrated Write to Learn" (iWTR) method lets children in 1st grade use computers and other ICT tools to write texts and subsequently discuss and refine them together with class mates and teachers.

Yulia Morozova (2013) in her paper Methods of Enhancing Speaking Skills of Elementary Level Students comments that speaking is one of the most important skills to be developed and enhanced as means of effective communication. For ELT (Elementary Level Teaching) the question of how to increase communicative competence was and tends to be the most crucial one. In a short period of time English displaced other languages and became one of the leading means of communication worldwide. Its domination continues to extend. The modern world of media, mass communication, and Internet demands good knowledge of English, especially of spoken English.

Akdal, D. & ahin, A. (2014) conducted a study titled 'The Effects of Inter-textual Reading Approach on the Development of Creative Writing Skills' with the purpose to determine the effectiveness and efficiency of an inter-textual reading approach on the improvement of writing skills among primary school fifth grade students. The "Pretest – Post-test

with Control Group” experimental research design was employed for the study. In this study, the creative writing works of the students was examined and evaluated in terms of “Originality of Ideas” and “Vocabulary Richness”. At the end of the study, it was found that the Originality of Ideas and the Vocabulary Richness scores of the students from the test group, to whom the inter textual reading approach had been applied, were higher than from the students of the control group, where the courses had been conducted conventionally.

Blanka Klimova (2014) in her study entitled Approaches to the Teaching of Writing Skills discusses the product approach and the process approach that make the development of the students’ writing. The product approach to writing usually involves the presentation of a model text, which is discussed and analyzed. According to this model text learners construct a similar or a parallel text. This might seem a mechanical task; however, learners can discover the structure of the given discourse, its linguistic features and how its ideas are organized. The process approach to writing in contrast focuses on the development of language use: brainstorming, group discussion, re-writing. Finally, the author of this article proposes due to low students’ language proficiency to try to employ the third approach to writing – the social-constructionist approach introduced by Dudley-Evans and St John (1998), which takes account of individual writers and readers.

Abbas Pourhosein Gilakjani & Narjes Banou Sabouri (2016) in their study entitled The Significance of Listening Comprehension in English Language Teaching observe that Listening is a significant language skill to develop in second language learning. Despite its importance, language learners consider listening as the most difficult language skill to learn. Since the role of listening comprehension in language teaching has been repeatedly emphasized, many teachers do not pay enough attention to its importance in their classes. It starts with a definition of listening and listening comprehension, a brief discussion of reasons for listening, followed by reviewing listening comprehension process, the importance of listening, teachers’ roles in listening comprehension, and discuss strategies, techniques, and goals of listening.

Serena Masino & Miguel Niño-Zarazúa (2016) in their study entitled What works to improve the quality of student learning in developing countries? highlight three main drivers of change of education quality: (1) supply-side capability interventions that operate through the provision of physical and human resources, and learning materials; (2) policies that through incentives seek to influence behaviour and intertemporal preferences of teachers, households, and students; (3) bottom-up and top-down participatory and community management interventions, which operate through decentralisation reforms, knowledge diffusion, and increased community participation in the management of education systems. Their findings suggest that interventions are more effective at improving student performance and learning when social norms and

intertemporal choices are factored in the design of education policies, and when two or more drivers of change are combined. Thus, supply-side interventions alone are less effective than when complemented by community participation or incentives that shift preferences and behaviours.

Valerie L. Marsh (July 2018) in the study Best Practices for Educating English Language Learners: History, Controversy, and a Path Forward comments that programs that promote dual language proficiency or bilingualism appear to offer the most promise, not only for academic achievement, but for social-emotional support and cultural affirmation of students from diverse linguistic backgrounds. The importance of culturally relevant instruction and an acknowledgment of the assets ELLs bring to U.S. classrooms underlie all academic success they may achieve. Further, such an approach promotes pluralism and linguistic diversity, not only in school, but also in the wider society in which ELLs and native English speakers must continue to live and work together.

Objectives of the Study

1. To study the importance of English as the second language in India.
2. To be familiar with the process of the English language learning.
3. To distinguish between the development of the English learning skills in India and the other countries where English is the first language.
4. To study the development of the English learning skills in the Indian classrooms.
5. To explore the positive and the negative aspects of the development of the English learning skills in the Indian classrooms
6. To produce a surface reality of the development of the English learning skills in the Indian schools.
7. To find out the problems and challenges before the English learning development in the Indian classrooms.
8. To provide suggestions for the proper development of the English learning skills.

Hypothesis

1. Language learning focuses on developing communicative skills
2. Interaction between learners is encouraged through pair work or group work.
3. The teacher innovatively creates variety of activities through which the learners unconsciously get started to express themselves freely unmindful of the errors they make.
4. English language is taught in India as the second language.
5. Both the teachers and the students in the Indian schools are not comfortable with English.
6. Direct method, bilingual method, translation method and CLT method are some of the suggested methods for teaching English.
7. In Indian schools, direct method of teaching English is used only in the well and long established Christian schools and some other well-reputed schools only.

8. In government schools in North India, translation method is used.
9. The development of the English learning skills in India has several challenges.
10. The development of the English learning skills in the Indian students is defects, and it needs change considering the demands of the present times.

Methodology

The present study which is based on the secondary data collected through the various traditional and modern sources of literature is content-analysis based study, and falls into the category of the qualitative research. The method includes the selection of the problem to be studied, that is, development and effectiveness of English language skills in Indian classrooms; study of the literature related to the theme and subject through the journal articles available on various internet sites; selection of the suitable found studies for the sake of thorough study, content analysis of the selected articles on the basis of the authors and their nationality, publishers and the publishing years, objectives, hypothesis, findings and other relevant aspects; application of the studied stuff to the Indian schools and the development of the English learning skills therein; setting of aims and determination of hypothesis; application of own experiences, perceptions and observations; putting the thought together, and production of thought with findings and fruitful suggestions in the article form.

Core-Findings & Suggestions

1. At present, though a second language in India, English is in utmost demand and should essentially be learnt by all in order to enjoy a good socio-cultural status
2. Very few schools in India teach English on the principles prescribed for the teaching of English language
3. The first skill of English language to be developed is Listening, but to our surprise, in most of the schools in India, the learning begins with the writing of the Alphabet written by the teachers in the exercise books to be practiced by the students
4. The teachers in most of the government and private schools in India lack fluency of speaking in English
5. The English teachers in most of the schools are not familiar with phonetics, hence, they fail to speak English correctly and fluently
6. Since the pronunciation of words made by the teachers is weak, poor and faulty, the students fail to grasp the correct pronunciation of words which makes them suffer much when they enter the practical life for public interaction, jobs or for interviews
7. The schools in India lack the reading environment through the well equipped libraries and study material in English in them
8. The writing skill of the English learners in the schools remains underdeveloped and undeveloped, as the students are not allowed sufficient practice of writing in the classrooms,

and that whatever is written by them, is just cramming based.

9. CLT is not adopted in most of the schools in North India.
10. There are several known and unknown difficulties and challenges before the English teachers and learners.

Suggestions

For a balanced development of all the four skills of English language, the following suggestions can be given-

1. English should be taught keeping in view the future prospects and demand of times
2. Bilingual method should be used in place of translation method, as in the bilingual method-based teaching of English, the students can listen to the teacher speaking more and more in English
3. Situational approach should be adopted for the teaching of English Grammar
4. All the four skills of English learning should be imparted an equal weightage
5. Innovations should be made by the teachers in the classrooms so as to develop the English learning skills in the students
6. The English teachers whether in private or in government schools, should be imparted a sufficient teaching in how to teach English and how to develop equally all the four skills of English learning
7. The approach of the English teachers should be practical more than theoretical
8. In order to make the teachers familiar with the latest trends in the field, there should be a regular conduction of refresher courses

Conclusion

Today, the life of an individual solely depends on effective communication. Language is primarily concerned with communication. Apart from one's mother tongue, one has to have a mastery over a second language that is commonly used all over the world. Such a second language is undoubtedly English in a country like India where it has established itself for more than three centuries. English is being taught in India at all levels. So English language teaching also undergoes changes according to the changing trends. Many methods of teaching of English have been in vogue but the most appropriate method today is the fast growing communicative language teaching method. Depending upon the needs of the learners and the demands of the world around, English Language Teaching has been undergoing a gradual metamorphosis.

The contemporary scenario of the development of the English learning skills in the Indian schools is not appreciable, and in the interest of the societal demands, it needs to be improved.

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