

# The Teaching of English in India - A Perspective

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**Abstract**—*The teaching of English in India goes back to the Dispatch of 1854 of British India( described as the Magna Carta of English education) and has over years acquired a prominent place in our country's education system, having taken over today as the universal medium of instruction to most of the subjects esp at college level.*

*Moreover, the British have left a legacy of giving a status of 'superiority ' in society to those who are acquainted with the language and that is the reason, why 'hallmark ' of high value to English is attached even today.*

*All languages are taught by the sequence of listening, speaking, reading and writing ( LSRW method). The role of the teacher of English begins from effective listening and moves on to guiding his students in adept writing.*

*In India, however, students begin to study English after they are familiarised with their mother tongue fluently. They have formed their habits in intonation and pronunciation. The learning of a second language English, after this, means the forming of fresh speech habits and this is no easy task. Greater persistence of effort is therefore needed on the part of the teacher.*

*So initially the teacher strives to work towards making the student speak the language with reasonable correctness - that is without elementary or linguistic errors. By further concentrating on correct pronunciation, useful vocabulary, he can develop the student's interest in the language. If used as a medium of instruction for other subjects, it can further provide the opportunity to the students to speak, read and write the language incidentally.*

*The following piece of writing on my behalf, is a modest attempt to discuss the several ' different ' approaches that can be used as various methodologies adopted by the teachers to teach English in the contemporary scenario. The practical methodologies for teaching the language are enunciated herewith.*

## INTRODUCTION

Throughout the history of teaching languages a number of different approaches of teaching and methods have been tried and tested, with some being more popular than others.

Language and speech, both consist of words – but language is for study and speech for use. The unit of language is the word, the unit of speech is the sentence. Nevertheless, all languages are taught by the sequence of listening, speaking,

reading and writing (the LSRW method as it is called). The role of the teacher begins from effective listening and moves on to guiding his students in adept writing.

The language of English, has over the years acquired prominent place in our country's education system, having taken over today as the universal medium of instruction to most of the subjects esp at college level. Moreover, the British have left a legacy of giving the status of superiority in society to those who are acquainted with this language. Considering this the learning and teaching of English has acquired a prominent place in the Indian society today.

In India, however, students begin to study English after they are familiarised with their mother tongue fluently. They have formed their habits in intonation and pronunciation. The learning of a second language English after this means the forming of fresh speech habits and this is no easy task. Greater persistence of effort is therefore needed on the part of the teacher.

The aims of teaching for every language, as has been pointed out, are four –

1. To understand the language by listening
2. To speak the language
3. To read the language
4. From then on, to write it.

A modest attempt at discussing the kaleidoscopic nature and essential components of various approaches for teaching English are highlighted now.

Probably the most popular method of teaching English is called the Communicative Language teaching method. This approach helps learners to communicate effectively and correctly, in realistic situations that they may find themselves in. This type of teaching focuses on important functions like suggesting, thanking, seeking information etc.

Another way associated with this method is called Total Physical response. This follows the idea of learning by doing. It is especially helpful in teaching beginners – they can be taught English by a series of repetitive actions such as -'stand up' ' close the door ', 'open the book.'

The next method known as Suggestopedia, relies on the atmosphere and the physical surroundings of the class. All learners feel important, comfortable and confident here. This method can also involve art and music and can we talk in three different phrases – deciphering, concert session and elaboration. For example, a word like Winter - the dictionary gives the meaning as the season between autumn and spring, but the picture of winter with snow will explain it better.

Language is the communication of ideas and the teaching of English through the Direct Method focuses on oral skill and is taught by a repetitive drilling. This method was initially used by British to teach soldiers of war. Grammar is taught using inductive way, and the students need to try and guess the rules through teacher's presentation (like the learning of mother tongue).

Since grammar has no place in Direct method, there is another method that teachers may also use called Grammar Translation method. Students learn all grammar rules, so they are able to translate a number of sentences.

Moving on to structure of language, the Structural approach of teaching English through grammar rules, is no doubt tedious, but is more strengthening in learning of the language. The rules need to be learnt in a specific order, for example the logical thing would be to teach the verb 'to be' prior to teaching the present continuous tense which requires the auxiliary form of the verb 'to be'.

It has been noticed in many States of India at the school level, that the teachers adopt the Community Language learning method, where English is taught as a second language, and a lot of mother tongue is used for translation purposes.

Sometimes the teacher on analysing his students calibre well, may just be a facilitator to encourage students to active learning.

This leads to another method of teaching called the Silent Way. The teacher says little and emphasis is on pronunciation. The teacher does not insist on formal tests. The learners are encouraged to correct their own language errors. I have found this to be helpful where students have well educated parents who have been using English every day at home.

In recent time, a new approach towards teaching English in the country is used – it is called the Lexical approach. The lexical syllabus is based on computer studies that have previously identified the most commonly used words. This approach in teaching focuses on vocabulary acquisition and teaching lexical chunks in order of the frequency and use.

The search engines on the Internet guide, aid the teacher and the students to the learning and strengthening of their concepts.

The teacher also has a role to make his students actively responsive to new words and ask them to train themselves to be on constant lookout for unfamiliar words on signposts, advertising etc by reading and listening to them.

Besides these various methods, the four parameters of learning a language should be focused and in consideration while teaching it.

In Listening, the English language, we cannot separate it from sound; so at all stages oral work needs to be emphasised while teaching it. To acquire a correct pronunciation prolonged practice in listening to producing speech sound is needed. A practical knowledge of phonetics is an advantage for the teacher since the teacher would then be able to impart pronunciation of words in isolation as well as in combination.

Further at all levels of learning this language, the learners should be imparted the importance of reading books for their superior knowledge of the language. An omnivorous reader has a more fluent language. An unfamiliar word should not be skipped impatiently; instead the students should get used to its sound and appearance. That means reading should be done with a challenging attitude to get greater results.

In India, students become so used to their vernacular, that habits have been formed in the association of an idea or a word. The teacher's task is to painstakingly help him to differentiate between simple vocabularies usages, such as 'catch' and 'hold,' 'listen' and 'hear'.

Also, in writing of English there is a difference to many languages of this country. The students must learn to write a running hand with cursive writing so as to give it the necessary rhythm and have a good spacing between words by the cursive letters.

Lastly, a word on the teaching of English Grammar -students can acquire this at an early stage unconsciously – by imitation and intuition or consciously, later by observation and deduction. Formal grammar can be acquired by conscious study and here the role of the teacher becomes important. The teacher may take advantage of such vernacular grammar as is possessed by the students of the region /state, that he is staying in, and that is likely to help him in the teaching of English grammar. This then should be followed by considerable practice.

English teaching in India thus becomes a dynamic area and is undoubtedly at times, a formidable task.

In a nutshell, the teacher should try to arrive at practical standards for each of the objectives of English teaching – that is listening, speaking, reading and writing, with the help of methods and observations that have been mentioned.

However, we as teachers must also avoid the temptation of pitching our standards impossibly high, for to do so would be to court confusion.

A practical methodology from the various approaches cited above should be derived, so that our students have the ability to learn and then adopt the language with reasonable correctness, without frequent elementary grammatical or linguistic errors.

**CONCLUSION**

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