

## ENGLISH AND ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING IN INDIAN CONTEXT: A CRITICAL STUDY

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### **Abstract**

English has undeniably emerged as the most influential world language in the present world of globalization, encompassing the treasure trove of knowledge in various fields. India, as a former colony of British supremacy faced somewhat an existential dilemma over the teaching and learning of it in post-independent period. Further there are obviously difficulties in teaching and learning of English in the Indian context, keeping in mind its unique socio-economic and cultural background. The paper aims to discuss the importance of English as a language, its teaching and learning process and the effective methods according to the Indian context.

**Keywords:** English, teaching, methods, importance, India.

The teaching of English as a second language (ESL) has emerged as a subject itself in India and has assumed an important place in the present context. Now, English is one of the most widely used international language and to tell the truth the most important obviously. English also plays a key role in our educational system and national life though centuries, starting from the colonial period. The British introduced English as a subject in our educational system to produce cheap clerks for their colonial administration and to produce, what Lord Macaulay said that a class of people, Indian in blood and color but English in taste, in opinions, in morals and in intellect that would both be reliable and responsible to the colonial administration to safeguard its interests. Thus, English maintained its position as the British ruled over India, and English could not be displaced from the position of dominance given it by Lord Macaulay as projected by his famous Macaulay's Minute (2 February, 1835). On the other hand the fact is that the British came here as traders and their first and foremost attention was on trade. At first they did not concentrate and neither had they the opportunity to focus their attention on teaching of English.

Thus English education in India as a matter of fact, had a relatively slow opening, because in the first century of their stay, the British had not really paid their attention into education. But when for their own politico-religious and administrative purposes, they ventured to take the effective measures, English education is inserted into the education and social system

of India in such measures that by the year 1900; almost all the important educational institutions in India were using English as the medium of instruction.

Naturally when India becomes independent then a sharp controversy begins about the place, importance and study of the English. People like Rajagopalachari favored its importance and place in the education arena of India. But there were other who did not support the views of Rajagopalachari and the fact is that the leaders, who had so long fought against the English, how could they tolerate English remaining in free, independent India? So their opinion is of course that English should leave India with their bags and baggage including their language, which served as the colonial master's language and a means of British supremacy over the Indians. Immediately after the independence, there was a haste to usher out English because of its colonial association. The Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and Maulana Azad, the first Minister of Education in free India both favored the early replacement of English by an Indian language particularly for the purposes of instruction. However it was not so easy to drastically redefine the role of English in education and indeed in other spheres of activity as well for the Indians.

English is the language of the world and the knowledge of the language makes a person, a citizen of the world. Pandit Nehru, the first prime minister of independent India has said very rightly that English is a big key on the modern world. Its importance as international language cannot be denied either. For this, the reasons are as follows:

1. **International Language:** English is undoubtedly the international language. International English is the concept of the English language as a global means of communication in numerous dialects, arising from its various locales, and also the conscious movement towards an international standard for the language. It is spoken over the whole world. This language is mother tongue of nearly 320 million people and another 200 million people from different parts of the world including former British colonies use it as second language. So it is very useful and simultaneously relevant also to establish international relation for communication purpose in various fields and for the exchange of views with different countries of the world. The establishment of first English speaking colony in North America in 1607 was a great step towards the globalization of the language which was of course not done consciously. British English was only partially standardized when the American colonies were established because it had to maintain its overall dignity and supposed supremacy. Isolated from each other by the Atlantic Ocean, the dialects in England and the colonies began evolving independently, each according to its tradition and direction and culture. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century the standardization of British English was more settled than it had been in the previous century and this relatively well-established English was brought to Africa, Asia and Oceania in different colonies in the midday of colonization. The first form can be seen in New Zealand English and later in formation of Indian English. In Europe, English received a more central role practice since 1919, when the treaty of Versailles after the first world war (1914-1919) was composed not only in French, the common language of international diplomacy of the time, but also in English.

International English is a relatively newer concept of English that minimizes the aspects defined and constructed by either colonial imperialism of Victorian Britain or the so-called cultural imperialism of 20<sup>th</sup> century United States that emerged as a world power after Second World War. While it is the fact that British colonialism laid the foundation for English over much of the regions of world, international English is a byproduct of an emerging and also ever-growing world culture, very much attributable undeniably to the influence of United States as well, but conceptually, it is based on a far greater degree of

cross talk and linguistic trans-culture in this era of global village, which tends to mitigate, if not utterly negate both United States' influence and British colonial influence.

2. **Library Importance:** Kothari Commission (1964), named after its chairman, Dr. D. S. Kothari, suggested that English be studied as the most important library language with the aim of getting the updated knowledge of science and technology, commerce and trades by reading standard books in English. The commission further argued that no student be deemed qualified for a master's degree unless and until he has gained a reasonable expertise in some other library language. Keeping a view of the fact that the medium of instruction even at the postgraduate level is the regional language or the mother tongue in many universities (only the professional courses are taught through English medium), the commission's recommendation would simply mean that teachers at postgraduate level should be essentially bilingual, that is they should both be able to teach in the regional language as well as English proficiently. Radhakrishnan Commission (1948-1949) said that English must continue to be studied. It is a language which is rich in literature, humanistic, scientific and technical knowledge. If being sentimental Indians give up English, then it would be nothing but to cut them from the living stream of ever-growing knowledge of the world over.
3. **National Importance:** In India English serves as the link language, to connect people of various regions and diverse backgrounds through a common language that would not deny their respective cultural dignity. It is the official language, being the language used for communication among the central and state governments also. Pandit Nehru's words make us remember and to ponder over the invaluable role of English language especially in Indian context as he says that the language link is a greater link between the Indians. He further argues that *Hindi* is not potent enough to replace English for the Indian context because of the various languages that are spoken in India and because of the question of their respective autonomy and dignity and as because the speakers of various other regional languages of India look at *Hindi* as another regional language and not more. As a result to push out English would mean to push out a unifying factor that binds the people of India.
4. **Recreational Importance:** English is a source of recreation and useful employment of leisure time. A person, who knows English, can have the opportunity to enjoy best stories, dramas, and novels etc., written in English language and further they can even taste the splendor international literature because most of the famous literatures, written in the diverse languages are translated in English. It is also the language of world sports, radios, television telecommunication and internet, fashion and glamour etc.
5. **Educational Importance:** Education systems around the world give special attention to teaching of English. The English system of education was introduced in India in 1835 by the British, inaugurated by famous Macaulay's Minute. It is the direct medium of acquiring knowledge of modern arts, science, technology and humanities.
6. **Cultural Importance:** English widens one's cultural and intellectual horizon in various fields. It simultaneously develops commercial, scientific, technological relation with other countries. English enriches knowledge of foreign cultures.
7. **Vocational Importance:** English offers opportunities that are many and varied. Vocational possibilities like diplomatic and foreign services, business, commerce, medicine, teaching, law etc. all over the world, are gained for the persons having proficiency of the language.

**Methods:** It has been evaluated that some sixty percent of today's world population is multilingual. Both from a contemporary and historical perspective bilingualism or multilingualism is a norm rather than an exception. Thus throughout the history foreign language

learning has always been an important practical concern. Today English is the world's most widely studied foreign language. In India English is taught in each and every state's school in a way or other. The way of teaching English is various in different parts of India. We know that English is taught as a second language (ESL) in India. The fact is that when any language is taught as second language it becomes veritably necessary to know for the teachers concerned to know how and what to teach to students because it is very difficult for teacher to use suitable method according to the demand of the situation and pupil. Indian classes have their own problems and one of them is teaching methodology. There is no single method that can be considered effective and acceptable to all and perhaps it is truer regarding the Indian school system with so many diverse cultures, backgrounds and socio-economic structures.

Methodology refers to systematized scientific way of teaching any subject in this context. It guides the teachers how to teach and how his teaching may be effective for the students. It is very necessary for the teacher also to know various types of methods and techniques of teaching English. Method may also be defined as Anthony said that it is the process of planning, selection and grading language materials and items, techniques of teaching etc., in an effective way. Thus the term method is a particular trick, strategy or contrivance used to accomplish an immediate objective properly. It must be consistent with a method and in accordance with an approach as well. The term approach is sometimes seen as unified with the term method, but it is definable though the difference seems to be blurry sometimes. Richards and Rodgers defines it as "theories about the nature of language and language learning that serve as the source of practices and principles in language learning" (Richards and Rodgers 1986:16).

W.F. Mackey said that a method must include four things viz. selection of linguistic materials, gradation of linguistic material, techniques of presentation, and practice by people. The engagement of approaches and methods is one of the prominent features in the contemporary scenario of second and foreign language teaching. The teachers or the program coordinators have now various options to select and regulate from the various processes that are available. According to the needs and demands of the learners they can specifically use any method and use that according to the situation. With the passage of time newer innovative ways have been evolved in this field and innovative teachers can always have their own ways having the sound knowledge of the methods and his actual classroom situation.

### **Types of Methods:**

1. The Grammar Translation Method
2. The Direct Method
3. The Bilingual Method
4. The Reading Method.
5. The Situation Method

**The Grammar Translation Method:** It is the oldest method of teaching English. This method is also known as the classical method. It dominates the European and foreign language teaching from the 1840 to the 1940s and even today in different parts of the world. However this method was used for the teaching of English in the beginning under the influence of classical languages like Latin, Greek and Sanskrit etc. In this method, the students are exposed to first study parts of speech and syntax in detail. The sentences in English and the mother tongue were compared and contrasted side by side to reach at an understanding of the patterns of structures. This method is the offspring of German scholarship with such leading exponents like Johann Seidenstiicker, Karl Plotz, H. S. Ollendorf and Johann Medinger etc. It was first known in the USA as the

Prussian method. The grammar translation method is also called as the old method of teaching. To use of this method is very easy for the teacher concerned. It tells that everything in English should be taught by translating into mother tongue. It is believed that vocabulary and phraseology of a foreign language can be learnt through translating its meaning into the mother tongue and the teacher points out the grammatical points and rules and thus the students are expected to learn the foreign language.

**Strategies:** 1. Words are taught through bilingual world lists, dictionary study and memorization.  
2. The English is taught in mother tongue with little use of target language.  
3. The student's native language is the medium of instruction.  
4. Students are expected to attain high standards in translation.

**Disadvantage:** 1. This method does not emphasize on the basic skills like listening and speaking etc.  
2. It is not possible to translate important aspects of spoken language like pronunciation, articulation, intonation, pauses, pitch etc., and there are words, idioms, phrases in English for which words cannot be translated into mother tongue as for example, prepositions and prepositional phrases. Language learning means speaking and reading but translation in mother tongue prevents students to read and speak in English. Student gets little opportunity to participate in the discussion of the unit. Some of linguistic items cannot be translated into mother tongue like article a, an, the etc. Thus psychologically and linguistically this method is not suitable or effective. The language is multi-sensory where as this method makes it only a part of the human information.

**Direct Method:** Child learns his mother tongue naturally and without practice. It means child learns mother tongue directly. An attempt to teach the language as one could in learning mother tongue is known as the direct method. It is also called natural method as it is learnt naturally like mother tongue or the first language. This method is categorically against the grammar translation method as a sense of the term. The extreme use of mother tongue affects the naturalness of language. The students did not learn language but practice of acquiring mother tongue or first language. In this method same environment is created to learn second or foreign language. Prof. P. Currey, in his book *Teaching of English as a Foreign Language* (1966), comments that essentially this method is a principle, not a teaching method, a system that operates through many methods, a way of handling the new language and of presenting to the class. It demands a direct bond that is direct association between word and the thing and between sentence and idea between experience and expression instead of an indirect one through the mother tongue. German scholar Frank wrote on the psychological principles of direct association between forms and meanings in the target language. For him a language could best be taught by using it actively in the classroom where learners participate in the discussion with interest and active attention. Teacher must encourage direct and spontaneous use of the foreign language in the classroom. The teacher replaces the textbook in the early stages of learning. Speaking begins with proper attention to pronunciation.

Famous words can be used to teach new vocabulary, using names, demonstration and pictures. These natural language learning principles provided the formation for what came to be famous as the direct method. Enthusiastic supporters of the direct method introduced it in France and Germany. It becomes widely known in the USA in successful commercial language schools.

**Disadvantage:** For every sentences or subject matter the teacher cannot perform an action and show any object. It means that every subject matter cannot be explained by an action or showing any object. The method is not useful in overcrowded classes. This method does not help in important aspect of language learning like reading and writing. To use this method in the class, the teacher should be master in subject. He should have active command on his teaching. He should be a perfect teacher. This method requires many audiovisual aids which are very expensive so most of our Indian schools cannot afford such equipments readily.

**Bilingual Method:** India is a very big country. Many languages are spoken in different parts throughout India. To make teaching effective and also interesting, the appropriate methods have to be applied in teaching learning process. For this process we need huge fund and also equipments. We know that teaching materials are very costly in such fields so we cannot use all of them in teaching activities. There are basic requirements like school building, blackboard, language laboratory language rooms and problem of overcrowded class, lack of efficient teachers. Through specific method, the teaching can be made effective despite of many such problems. Only there is one thing which can solve this problem and that is use of mother tongue in teaching of English. This method is improved version of audio visual aid. Dr. C. J. Dodson has developed this method during 1967 to 1972. This method is known as bilingual method because here a judicious and proper use of mother tongue is allowed. The use of mother tongue is one of the resources of this method. There is drilling of the pattern to engage learners to master basic required sentence pattern which is effective practice of this method.

In this method two languages that is the mother tongue and the language to be learnt are used. In this method, the mother tongue is used only to explain the meanings of difficult words. Mother tongue equivalent of English words are given and the use of mother tongue is gradually obliterated as the students progress in their journey of learning the language.

**Disadvantage:** Extreme use of mother tongue makes students inactive to learn foreign language. He becomes master of mother tongue but not second language or target language. Teacher should be master in use of mother tongue while teaching second language otherwise it could not be made effective. The teacher should have the knowledge of use of both languages while teaching English. If teacher is not innovative in his or her teaching learning practice, then it only becomes something of grammar translation method. This method can easily degenerate into the translation method.

**Reading Method:** Dr. Michael Waste was the director of education in Bengal before partition. He was an innovative professor in Dacca. His through study in field of teaching raised some of the basic knowledge of teaching English. At the time the direct method was being used by teacher and the result was very weak. Dr. Waste drew his attention towards the utility and aims of teaching English particularly to Indian learner. He said that English language was the need of the time because it was the language that provides the easy channel for communication with the international community most effectively. In his opinion, the Indians were learning English to open the window of the world to look in the advancement in the field of science and technology and treasures of knowledge that the western world holds so proudly. For these all, reading is extremely necessary. He emphasizes the silent and loud reading. He emphasizes on reading

ability of the learners. He says person who possesses good reading ability can learn, speak and write easily. It is the shortest road to learn, speak and write.

**Disadvantage:** This method is not scientific. Language is integrated skill. Every skill is necessary and useful in developing the knowledge of a language. This method emphasizes only on reading which is unscientific. Much reading cannot be helpful in mastering of a language. Only reading cannot create interest in students. They also want to speak and listen and write. Grammar, composition and idioms are of secondary importance in this method.

**The Situation Method:** This approach is also known as situational language teaching. British applied situational approach is developed by linguists. It dated from 1930s to the 1960s and which has a tremendous impact on language courses. Many teachers are still using this approach. This is based on the structural view of language. In this approach the importance of speech is emphasized as the basis of the language and structure is very important for developing speaking ability. In this method there is direct bond between speech and expression. This approach veritably suggests to present different structures in meaningful situations. Learners are to know the situation in which different structures may be used meaningfully and effectively. Learners are to know the situations in which different structures are used. The American psychologists also insist on this approach. British linguist Firth and Halliday gave the idea that structure must be used in different situations in which they could be used. So they gave its distinctiveness to situational language teaching.

**Disadvantage:** It is useful in lower class only. Higher class students are not benefitted by this method. Only few selected items can be taught through this method, not all language items. Such as a prose, rapid readers, and composition items cannot be taught through this approach. Only intelligent and bright students can take benefit of this approach, not an average student.

Actually languages are more to us than only system of thought-transference or communication. They are invisible garments that color us, our spirit and give a predetermined form to all its symbolic expressions and cultural pronunciation. When the expression is of general significance, we call it literature. Art is so personal expression that we do not like to feel that it is bound to predetermined form of any sort. The possibilities of individual expression are infinite; language in particular is the most fluid of mediums. Language is the medium of literature. Since every language has its distinctive peculiarities, we cannot just obliterate their endless distinctiveness and it is more so for the Indian languages. It bears the mark of culture and thus for the Indian students, coming out from the diverse backgrounds and scenarios, a particular method is perhaps not quite effective. Thus a judicious and chosen methodology should be adapted, taking the best parts of each available method to suit the needs of Indian students.

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