



Cover Page



ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING IN RURAL INDIA: NEW PERSPECTIVES

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Abstract:

Change is the law of nature. “There is nothing permanent except change,” says Heraclites, the pre-Aristotelian Greek philosopher. A trend is the general tendency or direction towards change. With a number of educational options available before the present generation learners, the newer trends seem to have emerged in the field of education that have entirely changed the face of traditional system of education.

Recent trends, methodologies and developments portray the vital role of education sector in general with its internalization of the education process, stress on quality above quantity, increase in the adoption of technologies, necessity for professional talent, etc. The theories and methods are constantly evolving in the field of ELT also. This research paper presents the famous trends in ELT that have been used practically in recent times in the entire world with specific reference to the trends prevalent during the previous decades.

Key Words: Trends, Methods, Peer Practice, New Devices, ICT, Pedagogy, Learning Process, CALL, CLIC, Cooperative Learning, Neuro-linguistics.

In the last two decades, so many books have been published in English about English language in general and English Language Teaching in particular. These books view the subject differently by presenting a plethora of voices trying to liberalize themselves from the clutches of traditional methods of teaching. The innovation that the researcher talks in the paper pertains both to methodology and materials used in language teaching.

Moreover, this article brings out the subtle distinction between the scholarly perception of language as treated in research and pedagogy. The argument advances as the paper proceeds with trends of education with specific reference to the Indian scenario, methodologies adopted, the bygone methods, the peer practice, the present trend, new teaching design, new devices, the need for change, the ICT and English language and also the CALL and so on.

General Trend

English language teaching has undergone tremendous changes over the years, especially in the last ten years. Students are burdened with studying, learning and grasping the materials, and of course, lectures with the collection of relevant information from prescribed texts.

Many career alternatives once regarded insignificant are gaining importance at present such as communication skills, soft skills, technical skills, interpersonal skills, ICT literacy, etc. The need for chiseled graduates to merge successfully in the tough competition of survival in the global market is in great demand nowadays. For this, a change in the trend, especially in the teaching-learning process of English language, has to undergo a transition for the betterment.

Seasons change, fashion changes, attitudes of human beings change, but it is disheartening to note that in the last century English curriculum has hardly undergone any change.



Cover Page



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The Indian Scenario

There had been much of changes in the attitude of people as to what they perceive to be a language. When the Indians were tutored by British masters, they were exposed to native language in every sense of the word. The methodologies adopted were also akin to that of what was practiced in English-speaking countries.

After their retirement, the glory, richness, depth and vastness of the language started fading in India little by little and it has come to a stage wherein educationalists and language experts strive hard to choose the best out of the innumerable existing methodologies.

The prevailing trends of teaching English, especially in India, lacked both in quantity and quality or may fail to obtain a universal appeal. Rigid curriculums and huge syllabi continue to threaten students who speak regional dialect but love to excel in English.

Methodologies Adopted During the Previous Years

Communication is the groundwork based on which any idea can progress and develop into a full-fledged one. Without that, sustenance in any field is impossible. Some of the recent trends in ELT are quite apparent while others are still to make their presence felt. Some are yet to come into existence and therefore subject to evolution and change. During the last decade, various crucial factors have combined to affect the current ideologies of Teaching of English such as the ineffective methodologies, unsuitable materials, integration of contextualized teaching, over emphasis on multi language skills etc. Teachers who practiced Grammar Translation method during the previous decade solely relied on black board as the apt tool to impart communication skills and the nuances of English language. Later on, over head projectors, acted as another medium for the teacher dominated class room. Such teachers believed in the dictum of drill and practice. As such, audio tapes acted as medium of Audio-lingual method. In the later years of 1970's, audio lingual method fell into disregard. During 1980's and 1990's, there was a sweeping change over the existing trends then, and more emphasis was laid on authentic and meaningful contextualized discourse.

Modern Trends of Teaching English

Deena Boraie highlights that there are eight trends in teaching of English as discussed further. "Change is the Goal of Teaching English" says Boraie "In my opinion there are two key changes in the purpose of teaching English. Firstly, as Penny Ur (2009) noted, the goal is to produce fully competent English knowing bilinguals rather than imitation of native speakers. The purpose is not to aspire to become native speakers of English because we are already native speakers of our own but to focus on English as a means of communication. Secondly, English is not viewed as an end in itself but as a means to learn content such as science and mathematics".

Early Start of Teaching English

Many countries have started teaching English in earlier grades at school. For example, since 2011, Saudi Arabia and Vietnam have introduced English from Grade-IV. Also in 2011, Japan introduced English in the primary stage and in 2012, Dubai introduced English in the KG stage instead of Grade-I

Change in the Approach to Teaching Culture

Both the local or native and international culture dominates in English language classes. There is less focus on teaching the culture of native speakers of English unless there is a specific purpose for doing so.



Cover Page



Changing the View of an English Teacher

It is increasingly being recognized that the quality or effectiveness of teachers is determined by their linguistic, teaching and intercultural competence rather than their being native speakers of English.

Change in Teaching Content and Test Design

Teachers use a range of local texts or English translations of literature in the classroom. The use of language as well as the use of a variety of accents in listening activities or tests is encouraged in the English language classroom.

E-learning

With the proliferation of tablets and smart phones, it is believed that textbooks will disappear in a few years. Furthermore, the access to knowledge in terms of flexibility and mobility has changed drastically.

Strategic Teaching and Learning

Teaching in English language classes focuses on fostering the students' thinking as well as language content, outcomes and learning activities. There are significant and complex student-teacher interactions inside and outside the classroom. The gamification of learning is emerging as a way to make language learning more engaging and relevant to the younger generation.

Teachers as Lifelong Learners

In a knowledge-based society and to remain competitive and employable, teachers are expected to engage in continuous professional development or professional learning activities from the beginning to the end of their careers. As with any other profession, teachers are also expected to assume greater responsibility for their own professional learning, continually developing their knowledge and skills. Apart from the above-mentioned items, Andrian Under Hill lists the following as recent trends in English language teaching:

1. Networking, interest and support groups
2. Learner centeredness and learners' needs
3. Reflective practice and teacher learning
4. Portfolio development for teachers
5. Syllabus design/materials development
6. Criticism of published materials
7. English as an International language
8. Corpora

The Present Trend

All over the world, student-centered English language teachers seem to have realized that gone are the days when teachers reigned their class with all monopoly where the students remained as passive. There is rethinking regarding the growing interest of implementing the basic educational goals. Having realized the need of the hour the English teachers convene different types of conferences and seminars to create a platform and to get to know the upcoming ideologies in the ELT and also to upgrade themselves professionally. Larsen Freeman (2007) asserts that it is the fifth Skill of language that enables the efficiency to use grammatical structures with accuracy. Academic qualification alone may not help teachers to



Cover Page



grow professionally; on the other hand, they need to equip themselves with current practices. The teaching materials that are being used in our country are almost made available all over the world.

There have been too many methodologies of teaching English language. One method is embraced as a development of the other. Still, no method has been a panacea for the solution of ELT problems. At present, the era of method is over and ELT in the current scenario is in “post-method thinking”.

English Teaching and the ICT

The third dimension of globalization which is inseparable from English teaching is the advancement of Information and Communication Technology (ICT). The field of ELT has been deeply influenced by ICT. Easy access to technology has made information possible for enhancement of learning programmes and about 80% of it is in English (Mc-Crum R. et al., 1986).

At the outset, English teachers regarded the internet as one of the alternative media to teach language (Warschauer, 1995). The following are some of the ICT-enabled teaching activities:

Computer Mediated English

English has been undoubtedly the lingua franca of the internet. Computer Mediated English uses language as per convenience and not by convention. For instance, using a single letter or number for a word, such as “c” for “see”, “u” for “you”, and “2” for “two”; the use of acronyms like TTYL (talk to you later), WUATB (wish you all the best); using asterisks “*” for emphasis and emoticons for smile or frown, etc. Realizing its significance as a source of communication, the linguistic elements and discourse of Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) need serious attention.

Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL)

Computer Assisted Language Learning is another manifestation of Computer Mediated Language Learning. The first phase of CALL was conceived in 1950 and implemented in the 1960s and 1970s. In this method, the computer gives stimulus to the learner, acting not merely as a tool but also as a tutor.

Web Based Learning

Web-based learning, also known as technology-based learning, distance learning, online education, or e-learning, is one of the fastest-growing areas. It provides opportunities to create well-designed, learner-centered, affordable, interactive, and flexible learning environments (Khan, 2005).

There are thousands of English web-based classes that offer training in basic language skills such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing, and are made interactive in various ways.

Some of the common technologies available for the promotion of education are as follows:

E-mail

Students can correspond with native speakers of the target language using email by creating a personal email account (Gmail, Yahoo, Hotmail, etc.), which is free. The Students can mail their homework to teachers concerned and get



Cover Page



it corrected in turn. Teachers can also provide revisions and feedback, suggestions for the betterment of every work and send them back.

Blogs

A blog is a personal or professional journal frequently updated for public consumption. Blogs enable uploading and linking files and serve as online personal journals for students. Pinkman (2005) indicates blogging becomes communicative and interactive when participants assume multiple roles in the writing process, such as readers/reviewers who respond to others writers' posts and as writers-readers who, returning to their own posts, react to criticism of their own posts. The readers in turn can comment on what they read, although blogs can be placed in secured environment as well.

Skype

Every Internet service has audio functions and technological instruments like laptops with cameras. The Students could communicate with their teachers and friends who are far away. Likewise, they could very well communicate with the speakers of native and get their pronunciation checked so as to improve their speaking.

The New Age Devices

This year, the Consumer Electronics Show (CES) which was held at Las Vegas, gave a glimpse of ground breaking devices purely meant for students. These "showpieces" ranged from 3D printers to smart watches. The youth's requirements are matched by a new age device, be it studies or social media, travel or portability. The media streaming devices like the Google chrome cast and the Rokku make group studies become interactive and presentations surprisingly fulfilled one. One has to stream the media on to a smart TV using a dongle. Another blessing is the e-reader for the on-the-move generation. The all new kindle paper white is a boon. Students can just tuck in the e-reader for easy reference. The portable document scanner like the Doxie Flip Cordless Flatbed Photo and notebook scanner are used to get the notes sorted. Other devices like copy and Olympus which have come with voice recorders can be utilized to record all the English lectures and be played as and when time permits. The laptop cooler like Thermapak's Heat shift could be used to cool the laptops after long hours of use especially during the CALL. Sessions for those who want to share data, notes, they would very well invest on a Maxell Air Stash Wireless Flash Drive (The Hindu, The Education Plus, 7th July, 2014)

Language Teaching Design

Geetha Nagaraj says, "A vital development in the area of language teaching design is the Council of Europe's- A Common Frame Work of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching Assessment, now mostly known as CEFR. CEFR is a document consisting of nine chapters and four appendices and is available on the Council of Europe website: www.coe.int. The CEFR aims to provide a common basis for the elaboration of language syllabuses, curriculum... what learners have to learn... skills they have to develop so as to be able to act effectively..." Morrow (2004) identifies four core areas in the CEF (Council of Europe's Common Frame Work of Reference for Languages)

The Transition of Focus on the Learner

The conventional method of teaching wherein the teacher enjoys the monopoly of teaching sometimes even obliterates the pressure of the learners. It is Dewey (1938) who originated the term learner centeredness which has gained popularity in the ELT. The Humanistic Approach which was developed during the second half of the Communicative Language Teaching, developed in the 1960s and 1970s was an outcome of the desire to make language teaching more flexible and more responsive to students (Tudor 1996, 7).



Cover Page



The Role of a Modern Teacher

Dornyei and Murphey (2003, 109) have defined the term “role” as a technical term which originally comes from sociology and refers to the shared expectation of how an individual should behave. Several methodologists like Little Wood (1981), Richards and Rodgers (1986), Tudor (1993), Harmer (2001) have evolved different roles for a language teacher. Richards and Rodgers conceive a teacher’s role as a part of “design”, component of a method. Little Wood conceptualizes the role of the teacher as a facilitator of learning, an overseer, a classroom manager, a consultant or adviser and at times a co-communicator with the learners.

To Harmer, a teacher plays the role of a controller, organizer, assessor, promoter, participant, resource, tutor and observer. Tudor also perceives the role of a teacher in the learner centered classroom. Task Based Language Teaching (TBLT), the current paradigm is basically an off shoot of Communicative Language Teaching. Nunan (2004,12) points out “experiential learning or learning by doing” as the main conceptual analysis for the TBLT. The TBLT breaks down the barriers of the traditional classroom, because in the TBLT, the role of the learner is significantly altered. The teacher becomes a true facilitator of learning for the language learners, purely by means of dialogic communication (Vygotsky, 1978). The teacher’s role is not shunned altogether but is restricted; the teacher is expected to be a guide by the side.

Conclusion

The traditional method lays more emphasis on a teacher himself and is teacher centered. Repetitive practice, mechanical drills and memorization are the hallmarks of the traditional methods. Wilkins (1976,2) calls a synthetic in which different parts of the language are taught separately and step by step so that acquisition is a process of gradual accumulation of parts until the whole structure of language has been built up.

The autocratic or the authoritative role of the teacher which pertains to the long cherished traditional notion that pedagogic principles depend on how articulately a teacher teaches. It is imperative to understand the current trends and evaluative methods of the ELT. The theories and methods are constantly evolving in the ELT. The teachers of the ELT are aware of the best practices in teaching and learning English and how they can be made beneficial to the students. It is possible for every child to learn English in the most enjoyable manner if it is supplied with the right kind of materials and pedagogy produced by one’s own native wisdom. A beautiful combination of art and science, with a fine tune of as many tools as possible to the repertoire can help an ELT to excel in his/her field of learning in India.

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