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NEED FOR PARADIGM SHIFT IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING – AN OVERALL VIEW

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ABSTRACT

This paper deals with the need for a great change in English language teaching. Due to rapid demand for learning / teaching English language, there is a need to revise and re-orient the methods and methodologies conventionally followed till now. For learners to whom English is either a second language or foreign language, it is imperative that oral or spoken skills should be given more emphasis so as to activate and involve the learner in the learning process. This article discusses the need for new orientation and the required changes to be brought into the curriculum and current curriculum should meet the needs of the present day in terms of English language.

Key words – English language teaching - Methodology – Oral skills – New Curriculum – training the teacher

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In contemporary world, English language has become the golden key to open the doors of higher education and employment. The advent of globalization resulted in tremendous demand for English Language Teaching / Learning skills. There is a demand from growing corporate sector suited to the changing communicative needs, for the expansion of business and the global network. Apart from this, there is also a paradigm shift in educational outlook and English language is given the highest priority as a means and channel to access higher education.

It is a quite known fact that education at the upper-primary and higher secondary level is still continued in a traditional, conventional form and is yet to undergo a radical change suited to present day needs. In this age of marketisation, learners coming from traditional schools have to explore the latest communicative skills in English which are founded at the level of higher secondary education. Unless this problem is remedied and new changes brought into the curriculum of English Language teaching, this drawback will continue to play a crucial role in the conventional educational system that has to match the demand to change the academic scenario. It is more so in the case of devising new pedagogic models and class room strategies for effective teaching / learning skills of English language.

The purpose of this research article is not only to critically assess the teaching strategy of English language at the higher secondary level, but also suggest appropriate remedies and formulate new models of enhancing classroom strategies of English language including the use of audio-visual techniques and education technology. In other words, it is going into the foundations of English language teaching at the higher

secondary levels especially in the government run schools and offer better and innovative models to improve the efficiency of class room teaching.

One of the basic and fundamental flaws in the present English language learning and teaching method is lack of emphasis on the spoken one, of the four skills LSRW, necessary for any language learning. In the present model, the traditional Grammar Translation Method is employed in the schooling system that is not only inadequate to the present needs of the students but also gives a slanted and skewed idea of English that it is a very difficult language to learn, resulting in learning inefficiency and preventing the realization of the potentiality of the students.

This weakness becomes generalized, in course of time and affects the learning of other subjects too. In addition, there is much emphasis on introducing, developing and cultivating spoken language skills at the higher level of education while nothing is there at the fundamental level. The methods are defective, weak and incoherent. There is a need to approach the problem in a holistic manner and innovate a new model of teaching that will help to introduce and exercise communication skills or oral skills at the upper primary, secondary, and senior secondary level so that by the time the learners reach the stage of higher education, the syntactical structures are properly programmed leading to ease and fluency of the target language. At the same time, the time table should include oral activity hours at least twice or thrice weekly and evaluation at the end of the each class up to senior secondary level should be conducted for assessing the result of each spoken exercise.

The focus of this article is to create such a new model of learner – centered methodology to train the learners to adapt themselves to language needs at the higher level of education. In other words, it is overhauling the present methods of English language teaching and reorient them towards the contextual methods of teaching keeping in mind, the average learners and the below average learners by designing a communicative model to help him / her learn English in a natural and effective manner, sometimes with the support of his / her mother tongue.

In the present model of teaching at upper primary, secondary and senior secondary level the learner becomes a passive recipient of language without having an opportunity to activate and rigorously exercise the language structures that he or she is taught at the school level. This defect in learning becomes evident at the higher level when the students are expected to express themselves without having the necessary background and exercise giving the impression that their learning processes are defective. This leads the learner to be incompetent in other subjects too. Having good command over communication skills in English makes a learner self-confident without which even though an individual has high potential in the overall subjects, he becomes dull in communicative skills. If it is tested and examined right from upper primary level, an individual becomes at least, an average speaker of English when he or she enters the world with his or her degree without having much stress.

The structure of current language learning itself is a defective one, giving little practical exposure to the learners and less emphasis on cultivating spoken one. In other words, we are not giving proper inputs in terms of communication skills in English at upper primary, secondary and senior secondary level but we expect drastic output at higher level. In my view, the problem is not within individual who studies at schools run by government but with the system itself.

The remedy lies in redesigning the syllabus so as to make the learners active participants in the learning process. This gradually builds up his / her language skills from the school level itself. The method should be reinforced by allotting more time in the time table for the students to exercise their spoken skills and overcome natural inefficiency and stage fear in learning the language skills that are most essential in speaking the target language fluently and effectively. The need to create a conducive ambience for the learning and expression of spoken skills as the focus of new English language paradigm is very much emphasized by Indira Nityanandam in her incisive analysis of class room atmosphere where the learners are reduced to passive listening, without an opportunity to activate and absorb their own language skills in the spoken form.

“Some teaching methodologies suggest the possibility that internal processing mechanisms can operate equally effectively even when the learner is not producing the language himself. They further add that there is a silent period during which the learner need not produce language at all. However, in the teaching of pronunciation at the class room level, it is the utterance, the production alone, which will enable the teacher to gauge the actual transfer of learning”.¹In the present system of education and pedagogy, the traditional and conventional system of language learning and teaching is blindly followed. Alternatively language learning can be re-oriented by means of giving equal priority among the four language skills (LSRW) but we have been giving much importance to the one and only skill which is nothing but written skill for a long time, by giving less importance to spoken skills.

Even teachers who are recruited to teach English language at upper primary, secondary and senior secondary level should be tested not only lexically but also orally. In other words, they should have adequate control not only on the written skills but on spoken ones as well. A teacher of English should be a first-hand role-model in the class room to be followed by the learners so that a teacher of English must be trained in the proper way. The traditional and conventional methods of teaching English, results in poor, inadequate and defective teaching methods in the class room that impacts the learning of the students. It should be followed by regular checks and upgrading the skills of the teacher which will help them to train the students up to the expected level, so that the learners are fully equipped to adapt themselves to the needs and challenges of contemporary society. Briefly there is an immediate need not only to revamp the syllabus, train the teacher, constant improvement of the skills acquired and transfer of the skills to the learners to make them face the challenges at the higher level of education right from the upper primary level.

The teacher should be trained in the use and application of the latest educational technology, especially the aspect that deals with the training of oral skills, so that the teachers themselves are aware of the right forms of pronunciation. There is a need to develop a self-learning language programme so that the learners can learn the language at their own convenience. The latest findings of research and innovative methods of learner – central learning should be incorporated into the syllabus so that the learners can benefit by them. In addition, there should be research on the minimum vocabulary, Grammar and syntactical structures necessary for a reasonable command over English, especially, the spoken form in order to succeed at interviews, where communicative skills are much in demand. Finally there is a need to train the trainer to benefit the students both for higher education and employment.

Due to lack of familiarity with the latest developments in educational technology compounded by the conservativeness and indifference of the teachers, there is woeful lack of application of new methods to enhance the learning process which is quite a glaring one in the opinion of H.S. Chandalia and G.K. Sukhwal. “Information technology revolution has transformed the ways of teaching globally breaking away from the traditional methods of rote learning in the four walls of a class-room and has extend a new venue. Video lectures, e-mail, text chat, fax, video conferencing, text messaging television, internet and numerous emerging technologies have influenced language teaching. The language skills and nuances of English can be mastered through a number of ways that are non-traditional.”

Several teachers, either in government employment or private sector lack the necessary linguistic or research background to teach the language with confidence and competence. Due to this handicap they create a negative impression on the learners that English is a difficult language to learn, unaware of the poor academic background of the teacher himself, who lacks the right competence. While learner chooses the best person, whenever he needs the service of any professional, the best doctor among MD even for a minor ailment, a Civil Engineer instead of a mason for a petty construction, the best advocate in preference to mediocre one, it is anomalous that the best language teacher available is not chosen who can build one’s career by imparting communicative skills for a life time.

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