

TRANSFORMING ELT EDUCATION: LEARNER-CENTERED CLASSES, A REALITY IN  
OBTAINING COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE IN INDIA

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***Abstract***

*This research paper examines the multicultural characteristics of India that tend to reduce the comprehensibility of English communication and sometimes objectionable even to fellow-Indians. Normally, in India, students are asked to practice merely copying or imitating the teachers by repeating what they say. Students are not allowed to construct their role in the language learning process. The inclination of using English as a medium of instruction at university level necessitates the educators in search of effective activities and resources for their classrooms. Qualitative research analysis has been conducted while exploring various books and journals about the topic. This study contemplates on NEP2020 that minimized the time duration of language hours at university level. Focusing on the importance of the learners' initiation in language classes is the need of the hour and unveiling the crux of their personal growth in communication competency within the allocated short period of time is inevitable.*

**Key Words:** Multicultural reality, mother-tongue pull, learner-centered classroom, peer-group learning, student initiation, virtual learning and blended learning.

## **Introduction**

An erudite society is a necessity for educational excellence since society plays a dominant role in determining the educational system. Similarly culture has a pivotal role in the progress of society and education. Hence socio-cultural aspects of a country plays vital role in language learning. Besides learning one's own mother tongue, learning English as a second language is a necessity for Indian students. Learning one's own mother tongue is generally supposed to be easy for the students in India. A large number of students find it difficult to learn English language because their socio-cultural background is not conducive to learn the foreign language with ease. Conversing in English is appreciated as a matter of respect, but the compulsion of learning English as a second language is commonly considered as a catastrophe. It is realized that the students who have good family background or social status can get academic excellence in English language learning. Those who are not having amiable atmosphere find it difficult to get expertise in learning English language. They find it as incompatible, unpleasant and adverse.

## **Challenges**

The socio-linguistic reality in India stands as a challenge in the track of learning English language. In *Studies in ELT, Linguistics, and Applied Sciences*, the words of Jaydeep Sarangi (2004) are to be reminisced. "There are, of course, many varieties of English spoken in India, each being influenced by the mother tongue of the speakers of these varieties of English. The influence of mother tongue on English is known as 'mother tongue pull'" (p. 51). Being a multicultural land, India finds different cultures happen side by side. Each culture creates its influence on other cultures. The multicultural characteristics of India tend to reduce the comprehensibility of their English communication and sometimes objectionable even to fellow-

Indians. Normally, in India, students are asked to practice merely copying or imitating the teachers by repeating what they say. Students are not allowed to construct their role in the language learning process.

Students may learn English language naturally if they have ample environment. In India, there is insufficiency in learning English because people are speaking more than one language. Jaydeep Sarangi (2013) quoted the words of Parasher in his article that “English and Indian languages co-exist in a diglottic relationship” (p. 180). It cannot be denied that Indian Variety of English is a great exodus from the Standard British English. Therefore English Language Teachers need to build thoughts about the subject matters i.e., what to teach and about the consciousness of students i.e., who they are and how they learn the specific subject matter efficiently. In addition, they have to become aware of the thoughts that guide the actions in the classrooms. They have to study the necessity of the subject matter and it is inevitable for them to recognize what impact it gives the students.

Majority of students in English classrooms, particularly at the college level, come from non-English medium schools. Unfortunately ELT educators of those students can't handle the language classes how it should be. It is very disheartening and appalling when they observe the performance of the students in the classrooms. Many students hesitate to read when they are asked to read English text as they don't know how to pronounce the words properly. In the multiethnic Indian subcontinent, English is used as the ‘Second Language’ (L<sub>2</sub>) which is learned after one has learned the ‘First Language’ (L<sub>1</sub>). ELT teachers in India can no longer be satisfied with the classroom teaching by ignoring the multicultural reality. It is chiefly opined that students' interaction while completing a task or learning content or resolving real-life problems

is considered as an exceptional methodology. Here the attention is not only directed towards the language itself, but also focuses on linguistic form.

### **Possibilities**

Indian Educational system insists more on ‘teacher-fronted’ classrooms instead of ‘learner-centered’ one. It is high time to rethink the perspective of the teacher as a ‘focal-person’ in the language learning process. In the ‘learner-centered’ classrooms, teachers can act as initiators, assessors and facilitators rather than dominating the students as controllers of various educational activities. Technical growths have navigated new pedagogical strategies in the form of virtual learning. So, teachers can have some relief instead of getting jumbled over multiple numbers of tedious works in the language learning process. Thus, students are enthused to think out of the box and triggered to acquire language proficiency not only through virtual learning but also indulged in mixed types of group activities.

Teachers should redirect the passive listeners to active speakers by building their personal conceptions of how thoughts lead to actions. It is the duty and responsibility of the English Language Teachers to motivate the students that learning English language is a state of pleasure. Here Diane Larsen- Freeman (2005) says “...effective teachers who are more experienced and expert have a large, diverse repertoire of best practice..., which presumably helps them deal more effectively with the unique qualities and idiosyncrasies of their students” (p. x). Dedicated and inspiring teachers are the real strengths of an erudite society because they can motivate the students to accomplish what they should. They have to vitalize the students to take more creativity. Student initiative classrooms encourage the students to take complete conception in the particular topic which they are asked to learn.

In Indian classrooms, lecturers are giving tedious lecture on a topic and they do not allow the students to interrupt in between their speech. Similarly, students oriented activities such as projects, seminars and conferences are included in the curriculum just for the purpose of filling in the column that focuses on activities. Peer Group Learning, Role Play and Group Activities are uncommon in Indian classrooms. Student initiation in classroom activities is commonly rare. Certain pertinent questions arise to find out perpetual and promising solutions to overcome this predicament. They are: What is the purpose behind the teaching of English language in India? Who will direct the mediocre students towards academic excellence in English Language learning? Is it applicable in the existing circumstances? Is it possible to create adequate environment to the learners? And, what are the future directions to accomplish language proficiency in English?

### **Literature Review**

Literature Review is quintessential for identifying the research gap in the field. Key concepts such as multicultural reality, mother-tongue pull, learner-centered classroom, peer-group learning, student initiation, virtual learning and blended learning have been explored to recognize the applicability of this study.

Diane Larsen-Freeman has contributed an enlarged vision of her knowledge in language teaching in the book *Techniques and Principles in Language Teaching*. Reading of this book enables an ELT educator to examine his /her specialized activities for likely inconsistencies between his/her view of language and the way he/she teaches it. This book is a brilliant overview for a novice in teaching field.

Jack C. Richards and Theodore S. Rodgers have focused on the changed status of English as an international language in the book *Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching*.

Innovative techniques, technical growth, rising inclination of teaching English at primary level and the use of English as a medium of instruction at college level are clearly clarified in this book. It is considered as a rich storehouse of instructional practices in teaching field.

Mohit K. Ray has incorporated twenty-four essays in his book *English Language Teaching: Recent Approaches*. Importance of communicative aspects of English, proper language planning for tribal students, appropriate teaching methodology and pattern for the flood prone areas, importance of educational technology, practicability of multimedia and English for special purposes are contributed in this book. It explores various aspects of English language teaching and addresses the issues in communicative competency.

Meenakshi Raman has included nineteen insightful papers in the book *English Language Teaching*. English Language Development, implanting American ELT experience in India, importance of news media in ELT classrooms, study of intonation, use of advertisements, multimedia techniques and role of teacher in a multi-lingual classroom are the varied topics explored in the book. The scholarly papers in the book cover a wide-ranging gamut of topics under ELT.

This paper intends to analyze the ineptitude of the learners who find it challenging to acquire competency in English communication. This study is an analytical one which targets to investigate the practical approaches and methods that cope up with the students of multi-lingual background. The present work aims to inculcate practical results and adaptable activities to learners as well as teachers. Moreover, students find comfy environs in acquiring English communication in multi-lingual classes whereas teachers can merely act as facilitators. The present work affords an insight into the deeper understanding of the various issues involved in teaching communicative English at the university level. 'Student initiative classrooms can turn

into ultimate destinations in acquiring communicative know-hows’—is the research argument of this paper. Teachers and researchers find it massively beneficial in identifying and understanding the nuances of ELT.

### **Directions**

Experts and authorities of ELT engage in exploring new instructional designs and pedagogies continuously. The conception of English as an international language has augmented the need for more effective approaches to language teaching in India. The inclination of using English as a medium of instruction at university level necessitates the teacher educators in search of effective activities and resources for their classrooms. Contemporary approaches in language teaching do not completely depend on the standard approaches and methods. New teaching proposals continue to embrace various group activities and games by taking into consider the multi-lingual circumstances of India. If the policy makers incorporate certain productive deviations from the existing approaches and methods in the curriculum of ELT, teacher educators and learners can get benefitted. This research paper is aimed to include certain ‘learner- centered’ programs and applicability from the repertoire of varied instructional practices in the field of ELT.

Tracy Terrell, a Spanish teacher, introduces a new attempt to teach English language that is known as Natural Approach. This approach is mainly intended to cultivate basic communication skills—both oral and written. Situations, functions and topics are given to the students to bring forth their communication skills. Learner is seen as a processor of comprehensible input. Here learners are expected to participate in communication activities with other learners. Even though it is considered as a traditional approach, it can give ample environment to learners in acquiring communicative competence.

Total Physical Approach, a new approach to produce linguistic capability, was announced by Asher. It is a language teaching method raised around the harmonization of speech and action and it tries to teach language through physical activities. Asher believes that concepts and thoughts are unnecessary to translate the grammatical structure of a language. When students assumed the program, concepts and thought are easily comprehensible. He wants to focus on stress-free environment in learning language. Here the learner is said to be freed from embarrassed and stressful situations and is able to bestow full energy to learning activities. Learners are encouraged to speak when they get ready to speak. Even though teachers are the directors of this approach, learners can get liberal opportunities to learn language without any embarrassment.

Caleb Gattengo presents The Silent Way approach into the field of foreign language learning. In this method, teacher should be silent in the classroom and the learner is encouraged to speak or write. Lesson advances through a number of stages: pronunciation practice, writing or speaking simple sentence patterns, learning language structure and understanding vocabulary. Native fluency in the target language, correct pronunciation and mastery over stress and rhythm of the target language are highlighted. Learner can feel comfortable while correcting others' mistakes and being corrected by others for his/her own mistakes. Even though this method is considered as a peripheral method, learners are accountable in eliciting and practicing language.

New Media in ELT classrooms at the university level focuses on the advantages of thought provoking tasks. IT enables the learners to familiarize with the journalistic language, register and other stylistic devices either in print or through a television channel. These kinds of tasks give them confidence to read and view English language news items. Moreover, listening to English channels such as BBC and Doordarshan enable them to collect proper pronunciation,



idiomatic expression, intonation, stress and accent. It also shapes the editorial skills and critical thinking of the learners. Here Meenakshi Raman (2013) quotes the words of Carter and Nunan in her article, “Communicative task is a piece of classroom work which involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the target language...” (p. 14).

Computerized Multimedia Language Teaching is considered as an appropriate in our day today life. IT reduces the apprehension of the learners and they can enjoy the learning process in their own space. This approach is included in Blended Learning that assists the learning communities of all over the world during Covid outbreak. This approach is instruction-oriented as well as fun-packed one that motivates the learners by emphasizing various communicative activities of everyday life.

In addition to the above approaches, learners must be asked to enact role-play, perform seminars and produce projects. One-act plays and dramas can be recreated by the learners in the classroom. These kinds of activities improve their thought, aptitude, interaction and competitive spirit. It offers them confidence and moulds them to become efficient learners and mainly they can have a great escape from ‘Teacher Monologue’ sessions.

### **Conclusion**

In India, English is no more considered as a foreign language since English language has a lead role and function in the multi-lingual classrooms. It becomes the principal medium of Education at university level and the language of administration in the centre and in many southern states. Learners who want to get national and international approbation and interpersonal advancement must indulge in activity oriented English Language learning. Activities that encompass communication promote language learning with ease.

Completion of real-world tasks promotes the learning task speedily. Learners' initiative activities could have a significant role in promoting comprehension since it gives more space and time to learners. It is high time to change traditional interaction pattern, lecture method and teacher oriented classes in view of implementing learner initiative classes more effective. Learner-centered classroom can be the only vital choice to encourage communicative competence within short period.

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