

English Language Teaching - A Theoretical Perspective

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Abstract

Language, the divine gift of God, is man's finest asset. Language distinguishes human beings from animals. Language is an instrument of thought to the philosopher. By using language, people communicate themselves and sharing their ideas, feelings and sorrows. Language is a form of behaviour to the sociologist and form of activity to the psychologist. Webster (1984) is of the view that, "Language is audible; articulate human speech is produced by the action of the tongue and adjacent vocal organs". Jespersen (1966) defines language as "a set of human habits, the purpose of which is to give expression to thoughts and feelings". It is inferred that language is purely human, a vehicle of thoughts, expression or communication of ideas and feelings. In the Encyclopedia Britannica language is defined as "a system of conventional spoken or written symbols by means of which human beings, as members of a social group and participants in its culture, communicate". This makes it clear that language is a human quality, a social activity and means of communication of ideas, feelings and thought.

English as a foreign language started life in India due to its association with the British colonizer. In the closing years of twentieth century, English began to emerge as the global language and the Indian classroom was transformed because of the change in the environment of the learner.

The present paper tries exploring English language teaching in school and college curriculum employing methods of language teaching and Audio visual aids in terms of teaching of English

Keywords: English Language Teaching, Methods, Grammar Translation, Audio-Lingual, Phonetic, Task-Based, Audio-Visual Aids

Introduction

Language, the divine gift of God, is man's finest asset and distinguishes human beings from animals. Language is a tool for communication by which human beings express their feelings, ideas, emotions, desires, etc. Through language only, more than any other means, the experience of human beings is recorded, interpreted and transmitted. It is the basic tool for the acquisition and transmission of language in the educational domain. Effective use of language is a powerful help for broadening the mental horizons of human beings. The effective use of language obtains many a benefit in all possible ways besides acclaiming the inner hearts of fellow human beings. To perform every social activity, human beings use language as a tool.

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vocal organs". Jespersen (1966) defines language as "a set of human habits, the purpose of which is to give expression to thoughts and feelings". It is inferred that language is purely human, a vehicle of thoughts, expression or communication of ideas and feelings. In the Encyclopedia Britannica language is defined as "a system of conventional spoken or written symbols by means of which human beings, as members of a social group and participants in its culture, communicate". This makes it clear that language is a human quality, a social activity and means of communication of ideas, feelings and thought.

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English Language Teaching

Teaching is noble work and a common experience of almost all the good teachers of English. In teaching English language, it is desirable for the teacher to understand exactly what he/she to achieve and how he/she knows the methods of teaching English.

The objectives of teaching English language is to make the students to use English in their day-to-day conversation and develop them proficiency in producing discourses well-formed in terms of grammar, meaning and contextual appropriateness. Teachers of English have some general aims which are common to all the lessons and are achieved at the end of schooling and which help in the pursuit of higher studies.

Methods of English Language Teaching

English as a second language is being taught in school and college curriculum in India in general and Tamilnadu in particular. English language teaching has been tremendous changes throughout the twentieth century and has adopted various changes in teaching. Teachers of English language teaching have moved forward to select and implement various optimal methods in English language teaching. Following are the methods employed in language teaching.

Grammar Translation Method

In the beginning of the 20th century Grammar Translation method started using by the teachers to help the learners in learning language skills. This method focused on teaching grammar first besides using translation as next. This method has been a very popular method of teaching English at the primary stage of schooling. Even though the teachers are get oriented about the modern methods of teaching English they follow the old and traditional translation-cum-grammar method. English is commonly taught through translation method in most of the schools of the country. While teaching English through translation method, words, phrases and sentences are taught with the help of mother tongue. Grammatical rules are also translated by the teacher in mother tongue and students are encouraged to learn the grammar of English by rote or mechanical drill.

Phonetic Method

This method focuses on oral expression as the basis of instruction emphasizing pronunciation and imparting the students to obtain practical mastery in use of language and its form. The teacher of English read a passage aloud and explain the words which the students unfamiliar and expect them to follow the passage. In this method, after the teacher discussing the questions in terms of passage, the students are expected to paraphrase the passage aloud. Phonetic drills are given on new words and recitations are taken by the students.

Direct Method

In the year 1901, direct method was originated in France and viewed as the natural method or reformed method. As a reaction against translation-cum-grammar method, the direct method of teaching an English language existed among the teachers of English. The translation method emphasized grammar, reading and writing. It is very difficult for children to learn a foreign language without the opportunity to speak in that language. The direct method is a method of teaching English through conversation, discussion and reading in the language itself without the use of pupils' language, without translation and without the study of formal grammar. In this method the student is encouraged to think directly in English (Quoted in Neena Dash and M. Dash: 2007).

Neena Dash and M.Dash (2007) are of the opinion that “the direct method aims at teaching English directly through the language itself. It seeks to establish association between experience and expression. In teaching English through the direct method, the teacher helps children to form an association between the English word, phrases or ideas and their meaning, to think in English, to grasp what he/she hears or reads in English, to express his/her thoughts and wishes directly and fluently in English. The aim of teaching English through the direct method is to enable the learners to obtain a real command over the language. The direct method depends on the material association between the word and thing. Words are chosen from names of things and actions of common day experiences. In the teaching of vocabulary the pupils pass from the near to the remote, from the concrete to the abstract, and from the immediate environment to the distant. Pictures, models, diagrams and situations are used to teach new words”.

In direct method, teachers try to create natural learning environment within the class room and emphasize the students to communicate by making questions and answering dialogue thereby English language will be acquired.

Audio- Lingual Method

At the time of World War-II, the need of proficiency in languages of enemies was realized by the Americans and eventually a new method was adapted by the army as Army method. In 1950 it was known as Audio-lingual method which is an oral-based approach though its emphasis is on listening before speaking, reading and writing rather focusing on vocabulary acquisition of language. It is closely tied to the psychological idea of behaviorism. It is contrary to the direct method and has a strong theoretical base in linguistics and psychology (Larsen-Freeman and Anderson, 2011). They also confer that “the way to acquire the sentence patterns of the target language was through conditioning-helping learners to respond correctly to stimuli through shaping and reinforcement, so that the learners could overcome the habits of their native language and form the new habits required to be target language speakers”. The major challenge of this method is that over emphasis on repetition and accuracy do not help the students to achieve communicative competence in the target language. However, the audio-lingual methodology is followed in many text books and teaching materials.

Communicative Language Teaching

This method was first introduced in the 1970s. The need for communication leads to the emergence of communicative language teaching and it focuses on the ways of communicative competence and explores the array of functions of language which the learners able to accomplish and probe the styles and nonverbal communication. In this method, teachers and researchers are better equipping to teach communication through actual communication rather not merely theorizing it. According to Richards and Rodgers (1986), the communicative activities are designed in a way for the learners to have communicative activities in curriculum, engage them in communication and the required use of communicative processes.

In this method, the responsibility of teacher is to provide situations to the learners making communication and the speaker has an option on what to say and how to say. This method encourages cooperative relationships among learners and makes a chance to work on negotiating the meanings.

Task- Based Language Teaching

The task-based teaching has been recognized as the most efficient approach to teach a language by giving students authentic tasks to use language in the classroom. With this approach, the teachers' job is to help the students by giving them a range of assignments with defined goals. On the other hand, the learners are motivated to face the real world in this task-based method by performing tasks.

The above mentioned methods have their own pros and cons. Moreover, recently more technology oriented methods such as Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL), E-learning and M-learning are also evolved besides employing multimedia representing audio, video and animation.

Audio- visual aids in English Language Teaching

The Audio visual aids using in teaching English. Audio visual aids break the monotony of formal type of teaching in the classroom and make the learners to look into the matter displayed in the class and understand the teaching content easily. The function of audio visual aids is to enable the learners curiosity and interest in terms of extension, application and development of the topic which the teacher to teach in the classroom. These aids also provide additional mental activity besides enriching learners' understanding in the concerned topic.

Advantage of Audio-visual aids

These aids stimulate the learners' imagination and power of observation. They are having the following advantages in the teaching environment such as i) provision of sensory experience, ii) provision of substitute for direct experiences, iii) supplement of direct experience, iv) important motivators and v) effective aid to the slow learner.

Use of Audio-Visual aids

Audio-visual aids shall be used when and where necessary and the teacher these are expected to use aids as the means to an end. These aids should be simple and to create genuine interest among the learners. Teacher should use required number of aids before the learners rather than more number of aids. The audio-visual aids should be exhibited before the students for a sufficient time so that their curiosity of learning will be satisfied.

Conclusion

To sum up, the foregone discussion reveals the theoretical concepts that English language teaching and its objectives in teaching situation, methods of English language teaching such as grammar translation method, phonetic method, direct method, audio-lingual method, communicative language teaching, task-based language teaching, and the audio-visual aids in English language teaching and its advantages and use of audio-visual aids.

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