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ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING IN INDIA: A THEORETICAL STUDY

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Abstract

This paper focuses on a theoretical study of English Language Teaching in India. It covers English language educational-status in India. It also gives a brief overview about English language use in technical education and gives vivid details about Indian researchers' contributions in the field of English language teaching.

Key words: English language teaching, English for specific purposes, library language, communication skills.

Introduction

English has a status of associate language, but in fact it is the most important language of India. After Hindi it is the most commonly spoken language in India and probably the most read and written language in India. English in India is used not only for communicating with the outside world, but also for inter-state and intrastate communication. Because of the great ethnic and linguistic diversity found within our nation, English acts as an indispensable ‘link’ language. English symbolizes in Indians’ minds, better education, better culture and higher intellect. Indians who know English often mingle it with Indian languages in their conversation. It is also usual among Indians to abruptly move to speak fluent English in the middle of their conversations. English also serves as the communicator among Indians who speak different languages. English is very important in some systems – legal, financial, educational and business in India.

English language in Indian educational system

Before Independence, Lord Macaulay, in his famous “Minutes”, recommended the use of English for educating the Indian masses. He felt that English language was the only suitable medium to transfer technical knowledge and scientific bent of mind to Indians. His aim was to groom a small section of Indians who could later use English as a medium of communication and bridge the gap between India and the western world. In spite of his efforts, for various reasons he could not bring up full-fledged English –based educational system for Indians. In 1854, Sir

Charles Wood stated that English could be a suitable medium at higher levels of education, because a sound knowledge of English was a prerequisite to seek admission into any university.

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However, at lower levels, English was not felt so necessary, and Indian languages could still continue as the mediums of instruction.

In order to enhance the overall status of education in India, the Kothari Commission suggested development in primary education, vocationalisation of secondary education, and introduction of work experience as a part of general education. At the tertiary level, the commission suggested consolidation of advanced study and research centres with an aim to attain international standards in the teaching and in research areas. Above all, it stressed on the quality of teachers and increase in the strength of teaching staff at all levels. To achieve these, the commission undertook the responsibility of making relevant suggestions for improving important sectors of education such as school education, medical education, scientific education and research.

Thus, English was adopted as the medium of instruction for natural sciences and mathematics, which resulted in the rapid growth of secondary and university education, particularly in urban areas. In the post-independence era, the need for English was strongly felt in the field of higher education. In this regard, the Kothari Commission referred to the study of English in India- a report of study group appointed by the ministry of education, Government of India in 1964. The study group has supported the structural approach to the teaching of English, which is now extensively practiced in different parts of India. The study group also came up with a detailed syllabus for the study of the English language from class V to XII.

In a move to introduce English early in the stream of education, the Kothari Commission recommended that the teaching of English be introduced in class V, but realized that it was not possible because the study of English would not commence before class VIII for pupils in the rural areas.

The Commission advocated adequate command of mother tongue before the learning of English as a foreign language. The Commission also recommended that the study of English as a second language should be introduced only after class V.

Effective learning takes place only when the learner is able to communicate fluently both in writing and speaking and is able to use English for library purposes. In this context, Mahajiteswar Das holds a different view saying that teaching English as a 'library language' was not beneficial in terms of providing job opportunities because the students who learn to use English only as a 'library language' are less competent than the students who acquire competence in all the four skills of English language. Therefore, according to Mahajiteswar Das, it is necessary to develop all the language skills in order to improve communication skills (Indira, M.2003:4).

Besides, it is worthwhile to note that effective written and oral communication of a general nature in English might be relevant to general learners but a specialized kind of learning would be of relevance only to a few. This observation made by Mahajiteswar Das gains special significance in the context of vocational and professional courses. Thus, there is a need for a study of the learners' needs, so that the tailored use of English will result in satisfying the immediate needs of learners undertaking the specialized courses of study (Indira, M.2003:4).

A new pattern of education (10+2+3), as mentioned in the Kothari Commission and the National Policy of 1968, saw its beginning in the year 1976. Its most important objective was to vocationalise education. It meant proper training for students in selected fields so that they can take up certain vocations without going in for aimless higher education. The institutions, which helped in strengthening the National system of education, are University Grants Commission (UGC), All India Council for Technical education (AICTE), Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR), and Medical Council of India (MCI) and Dental Council of India (DCI).

In 1968, the National Policy on Education (NPE) laid special focus on the study of English and other international languages. The NPE insisted that India must not only keep pace with scientific and technological knowledge, but also should contribute to it significantly. It was for this purpose that the study of English required to be strengthened. As this study concentrates on English in technological and Engineering institutes, it would be worthwhile to look at the profile of AICTE; the body that monitors technical education in the country. AICTE ensures the co-ordination and integrated development of technical and management education. At this level, a lot of thrust has been given to the subjects and little importance is given to English language. AICTE is vested with the statutory authority for planning, formulation and maintenance of norms and standards, accreditation, funding priority areas, monitoring and evaluation, maintenance of a parity of certification and awards, and ensuring the coordinated and integrated development of technical and management education. A duly constituted Accreditation Board conducts the mandatory periodic evaluation to maintain standards.

The increasing specialization of content in English teaching curricula saw its beginning in the early 1960s. English language plays a major role in transmitting knowledge as a means rather than as an end in itself. Teaching of English generally is treated as teaching with utilitarian purpose.

English language usage taught at the school level is less communicative in nature, but consists more of how the syntactic rules of English operate. Generally, adults use English language only when associated with an occupational, vocational, academic or professional requirement. When needs are clear, learning aims can be defined in terms of these specific purposes under which the language content are tailored. This results in focused teaching such that the learner picks up communicative ability in the required area. The results can be impressive where such a requirement for communicative ability is matched with specially designed materials relevant to the needs of particular students. According to Mackay, “ A difference in approach from the current ‘start at the beginning again’, or remedial ‘solutions’ is needed, when English ceases to be an examination subject and assumes the role of instrument of communication’.

To meet the rising needs of English language teaching, variants of general ELT have paved way to English for Specific Purposes (ESP), English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and English for Occupational Purposes (EOP). In all the above-mentioned variants, the nature of the purpose involved is self-indicative.

ESP marks advancement in the conventional framework of ELT, which defines the teaching requirements depending upon the specific needs of different groups of students.

ESP advocates the designing of special courses instead of one multi-purpose course, to suit the needs of various groups of students. The concept of ESP is said to be particularly appropriate for teaching English to students of science and technology (EST). Besides, English at the undergraduate level of engineering studies differs from English in other undergraduate courses because it has a specific purpose unlike a general purpose in other colleges. It differs from other courses in the three aspects, such as relevance, register and style. These three aspects gain prominence in material designing because the course must equip the learners for both academic and professional requirements. Their academic functions include oral and written communication, comprehension of lectures and books, note-making, note-taking, paper presentations, participation in regional, national and international seminars and taking interviews.

Contributions by Indian Researchers for ELT

I want to close the article by saying that there are a lot Indian researchers have done immense contribution to ELT field of study and in this article I brought them close look . However, As this research deals with English language teaching in India, the substantial research works done by Indian researchers in relation with English learning are studied. Most of the works were contrastive analysis in nature with particular reference to the errors made by native speakers of various Indian languages while learning English as a second language. The some of researchers are:

George and Visveswaren (1967) have done an investigation of the acquisition of vocabulary in English of children studying in IV Standard to V Standard.

Ganapathy (1968) has done a contrastive study on speech pattern in Kannada and English.

Agrawal (1970) has studied the English tense equivalents of Rhyme of the Hindi tenses.

Ahmed (1970) has done contrastive analysis on Urdu –English reported speech.

Bhor (1970) has studied present tenses in Marathi and English.

Govindan (1977) has dealt with the sociolinguistic aspect Tamil and English. This study brings out the phonological and morphological aspects of English learned by Tamil speakers.

Ganapathy (1980) in his study has elaborately discussed the problems connected with the pronunciation of English by the Tamils.

Subbiah Pillai (1983) in his study has dealt with the contrastive analysis of interjections in Tamil and English in a detailed way. His study attempts to describe the interjections in both Tamil and English to find out the similarities and dissimilarities found between them. He also discusses about the syntax of interjections in Tamil and English, and their use in the field of pedagogy.

Pramanik (1988) has done a study of some affective variables related to learning English as a second language at the post-secondary stage in Orissa.

Mubarak Ali (1999) has pointed out the areas of interference of English on Tamil students (from standard VI to IX) in the English medium schools. He specifies the inter-lingual aspects in the field of interference at all linguistic levels; namely, phonological, morphological and syntactical.

Shameem (1992) has studied the errors committed by Tamil students (VI to VIII) while learning English in the schools.

Soundarajan (1996) made a study on attitude factors in relation with English Language teachers of Tamilnadu.

Pradeep (1997) has compared mainly the intonation pattern of Tamilian English with Received Pronunciation of English, mainly in interrogation.

Ravi (1998) has done research work in the study of the motivational problems with reference to teaching –learning English as a second language.

Lalitha Raja, R. (2003) has done research work in the syntactic development of Tamil mother tongue children in learning English.

Indira (2003) has done research on the suitability of course book in engineering colleges for developing communication skills.

Ramamoorthy (2004) has made a study in multilingualism and second language acquisition and learning in Pondicherry.

Balasubramanian (2005) has studied attitudinal difference and second language learning with reference to Tamil and Malayalam.

Meenakshi Raman (2006) has done a study on developing task based language tests for assessing oral skills in English.

Sankary (2007) has studied the rural-urban divide in English as second language learning.

Pushpa Nagini Sripada (2007) has studied in the area of second language vocabulary teaching.

Jahitha Begum (2007) has done research on metacognition and mediated learning experience as language learning strategies.

Sandeep(2007) has done research on teaching English as a second language to meet the needs of the learners from rural areas.

Conclusion

In the of field English language teaching is growing day by day in India because of good and dedicated researchers have contributed something to English language teaching and moreover number of linguists have made footprint in the field of applied linguistics.

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