
English as a Skill and Not as a Language with Special Reference to Developing Countries like India

By

K. KANAGARAJ
*ISBR Bangalore & Research Scholar
St. Peters University Chennai
India.*

J. SAVITHAA
*KVB, Research Scholar
MTWU Kodaikanal,
India.*

And

DR. N. PANCHANATHAM
*Dept of MBA
Annamalai University,
India.*

Abstract

English is no longer just a language it has become a skill which when used effectively can help us to earn our bread and butter. The way this language is taught in the Indian schools needs a considerable change especially with the advent of globalization. Although there are English medium schools but the output have to retrained in English and only then they can absorbed at the work place. In this regard we are far better than Japan or China but we cannot take rest as this is a highly competitive race. This paper tries to identify the how teaching of English as a language is done in India and provides certain insights on what can be done better in the methodology of teaching English as a language.

The advent of English as a global Language was a Historical accident. In the past, other languages like Latin and French have served as the "international language." It just happens that we have had two successive English-speaking nations as the most powerful in the world - first Great Britain, then the United States. At the height of British power, it was literally true that the sun never set on their Empire - they had significant holdings in places all over the world and on every continent. Furthermore, they were a major mercantile nation, and English traders could be found almost anywhere. English was a highly useful language to learn for this reason.

As American power eclipsed that of Great Britain, people did not have to learn a new language to deal with the new power - Americans spoke English, too. So English's position became more entrenched.

Meanwhile, the world became smaller as transportation in the British/American age eclipsed what came before it. In less than a century, trips that took weeks or months by ship could be made in hours by airplane. In this environment, anyone could theoretically go anywhere - and the best option for many of them was to go to the rich Western countries, many of which were Anglophone, for education. Thus, English again was reinforced as an international language.

With the start of globalization in India this language transformed into a skill as BPO were ready to pay to sharpen this skill from the immense English speaking population in India. But to their surprise we were ill prepared; a lot of challenges were awaiting them as all of them had to be retrained in English in order to put them to work. This meant a lot of time and money had to be wasted.

One major problem was MTI (Mother tongue influence) i.e. the influence that the regional language had on their accent in English. The other problem was to understand the different accents of English world over as we were serving global customers.

In this paper we have tried to understand how English is taught in India, how it can be turned into a skill. LSRW When we learn a language, there are four skills that we need for complete communication. When we learn our native language, we usually learn to Listen first, then to speak, then to read, and finally to write. These are called the four "language skills":

- Skill #1: Listening
- Skill #2: Speaking
- Skill #3: Reading
- Skill #4: Writing

The current style of teaching English is usually in the form of class room lectures in the form plays, essays, poetry and then followed by a grammar lessons. Not many students are able to appreciate this and moreover this way of teaching is not able to enhance their LSRW skills, many students tend to first think in their native languages and then try to translate it to English there by committing grammatical errors. Technology is nearly absent in many classrooms. The rural schools do not have teachers as per the expected standards.

The traditional goals for a language curriculum are twofold: attainment of a basic proficiency, such as is acquired in natural language learning, and the development of language into an instrument for abstract thought and knowledge acquisition through, for example, literacy.

Research Objective

1. To explore how English can be taught as a skill.
2. To explore the impact of doing the same from the academic perspective and from the industry perspective.

Research Methodology

This research is exploratory in nature and this paper is a conceptual paper. The research is based basically on secondary data. Secondary data was collected from media reports. There are sufficient media reports on this topic. There are other institutions in other countries which introduced similar courses and by now there are a few relevant courses in India.

Primary data was collected in the form of expert opinions. No statistical analysis was attempted. Suitable recommendations were made at the end.

Literature Review

Not many have attempted this way of teaching English as a skill except for the LSRW skills especially in India so there is no literature available except for a few research thesis done by the CIEFL Hyderabad.

Results and Data Analysis

The results of the research are presented here in terms of SWOT Analysis from both the academics and industry perspective.

Current Way of Teaching English as a Language

<u>Strength:</u> 1. We have a huge population that is quite versatile in Linguistics. 2. Exposure to Shakespeare and Milton's Literature in the Traditional English format. 3. Memory is given a very high weight age in learning.	<u>Weakness:</u> 1. As there are many native languages there is no standard accent of English in India. 2. MTI 3. No change in the methodology of ELT over the last decade or so. 4. Poorly qualified teachers. 5. Evaluation of language learning is subjective
<u>Opportunities :</u> 1. It enhances the Literary knowledge of the person. 2. Vocabulary is strengthened 3. New teaching methodologies for ELT.	<u>Threat:</u> 1. Lack of LSRW skills. 2. Cost of retraining is high 3. Unemployment in the globalized world

If English is taught as a skill and not as a Language:

<u>Strength:</u> 1. The students will be equipped with good LSRW skill. 2. The Neutral accent will make them competitive in the global world. 3. It will make ELT interesting to both the students and teachers.	<u>Weakness:</u> 1. The essence of Literature will get diluted.
<u>Opportunities :</u> 1. Employability is very high. 2. The confidence level to face the global competition is increased & no need for retraining.	<u>Threat:</u> 1. Money will become a priority instead of literary knowledge.

Conclusion

English has to be taught as a skill that will add value to their employability skills, we cannot afford to teach English in the traditional way where in it was just taught as a language.

Recommendations

1. Phonetics has to be taught first at the primary level so that they become expert of sounds.
2. Language labs have to be established where students can involve themselves in self learning activities.
3. The MTI (Mother Tongue Influence) can be removed if the Queens accent or the neutral accent of English is followed in all forms of teaching English (BBC follows it).
4. English has to be taught not by teachers or experts of Literature but by linguistic professionals.
5. Making TESOL (Teaching English to speakers of other languages) courses compulsory for English teachers at all levels.
6. Adopting Blended learning as a teaching methodology which is a combination of face-to-face teaching and online interactions (also known as CALL or computer-assisted language learning), achieved through a virtual learning environment (VLE).
7. Proper training to the English teachers at the Primary and the secondary school level should be provided.

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