

USE OF METHODS AND SKILLS TO TEACH ESL LEARNERS AT SECONDARY LEVEL IN ASSAM: AN EVALUATIVE STUDY

DR. BAISHALEERAJKHOWA

Abstract: Teaching English to speakers of other languages can be looked at from many different angles. Language is to know and do things; it is both 'knowledge' and 'skill'. One useful way to look at the teaching process of a language teacher is the teaching of various language skills. Ayodele (1987) opined that pupil's inadequacy in the range and control of language is a dominating factor in educational failure. This deficiency in the students generates a vicious circle of difficulties which goes on increasing in magnitude as school life progresses. The state policy on language education, curricular statements and syllabi and materials for teaching-learning of English along with teacher inputs decide the quality of education in schools especially in rural schools.

Key words: Methods, perception, performance, skills.

Introduction: In the process of learning and teaching, a method of teaching is very important. It is a tool in the hands of the teacher. Selection of the right method ensures in the achievement of goals. Again, the basic aim of teaching English language is to enable the students to develop the skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing English language. It is while speaking and writing that the problem of intelligibility and acceptability arises. Correctness based on internally accepted standards cannot be ignored by us. For today, English in India is a symbol of people's aspirations for quality in education and a full participation in national and international life.

Methods Of Teaching English:

The methods of teaching English are as follows:

- **Translation Method:** The Translation Method is also known as the Grammar Translation Method. It is called the Classical Method too. This method has been used in the present day classroom where there are a large number of students. The advantage of this method is that by telling the meaning of a word or a sentence in mother tongue, the teacher can at once make the students understand. Hence, it is less time consuming.
- **Direct Method:** Direct Method of teaching English means teaching English directly through the medium of English. In this method, the mother tongue is not used at all.
- **Bilingual Method:** Bilingual method is a method where two languages i.e. the mother tongue and the target language is used. Here the mother tongue is used to achieve the target language.
- **Natural Approach:** The Natural Approach is a language teaching approach which claims that language teaching is a reproduction of the way humans naturally acquire their native language. It belongs to a tradition of language acquisition where the naturalistic features of L₁ acquisition

are utilized in L₂ acquisition.

- **Phonetic Method:** This method emphasizes "oral expression as the basis of instruction, stressing pronunciation, avoiding grammatical rule giving and seeking to impart a practical mastery of language forms for using in country, cultural information is also provided.
- **Audio-lingual Method:** This method represents a return to the Direct Method as its main goal is to develop native like speaking ability in its learners. It is an extension as well as a refinement of the Direct Method. Translation or reference to the first language is not permitted.
- **Communicative Language Teaching:** Since the main purpose of learning a language is to be able to use it for communicative purpose, CLT, in broad terms, is any form of language teaching which aims at helping the learners to acquire the ability to communicate.

LANGUAGE SKILLS: There are, in general, four language skills, each based upon the modality of emphasis. These are the Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing skills (LSRW).

Generally speaking, it is emphasized that at first listening should be taught and then speaking, reading and lastly, writing. However, in real life situations of language communication, these skills are interdependent in many ways, even though they can be taught independently to some extent.

Listening Skill: Listening in English is attending to and interpreting oral English. Listening is necessary to develop the speaking skill. The student listens to oral speech in English, then separates into segments the stretch of utterances he hears, groups them into words, phrases, and sentences, and, finally, he understands the message these carry. Listening prepares the students to understand the speech of the teacher of English as they speak naturally in a normal speed and normal manner.

In the classroom, students listen in order to repeat and to understand. In listening to repeat, students imitate and memorize linguistic items such as words, idioms, and sentence patterns. This is an important beginning task and focus of listening exercises.

Speaking Skill: Speaking involves using the sounds and words of English in an acceptable manner for meaning or message. The two skills of listening and speaking are grouped together under the 'aural-oral skills' because they usually function together and constitute the basic language skills.

The Need for Proper Pronunciation: Pronunciation is a very important component of speaking skill. Without proper pronunciation, which should be somewhat similar to but not necessarily identical to native performance, second or foreign language users of English will not be able to communicate accurately.

It is possible to communicate the information without elegant pronunciation. It is also possible to communicate one's intent without elegant pronunciation. However, such communication would be inadequate or could even lead to miscommunication. Moreover, if we allow this to happen all the time and if we do not insist on certain standards of pronunciation, there is a danger that the students would be "led to a permanent plateau of pidgin from which very few emerge" (Bowen et al, 1985).

Pronunciation has been often taught through modeling by the teacher who asks students to listen and imitate him/ her. The teacher corrects the pronunciation, possibly then and there, and asks students to listen and imitate him/her pronunciation through graded presentation of words, phrases and sentences.

Reading Skill: Like other language skills, reading is a complex skill involving a number of simultaneous operations.

Reading may be divided into two types-Oral reading and silent reading. Oral reading, like other speech work, is a useful means of mastering the language code. It is motivating for students of all levels and can therefore be used to practice the structures. It is also an effective device for quick testing of reading comprehension and for improving pronunciation. Silent reading, on the other hand, means reading completely silently without even moving the lips.

Writing Skill: Writing is a manual skill and an individual effort. Writing is an individual effort or work, but it must follow the rules laid down. The development of writing even in native English speaking children is conscious and is thus non-spontaneous. Thirumalai (1977) argued that written language differs from oral language in structure and mode of functioning. The acquisition of oral speech

by itself is the acquisition of signs (symbols). The acquisition of writing is a step further and the learner must now transfer the symbolization he/she acquires in the process of speech acquisition to written language. Vygotsky (1962) compares this to the acquisition of algebra which is harder than arithmetic.

Vocabulary: The importance of learning new words in any language cannot be overlooked. When we say that we know English, we mean that we know the meanings and usage of a few thousand words in English. Communication in any language is impossible without some mastery of the words used in that language. It is mainly through using words that we compose and express our thoughts to others.

A second or foreign language learner of English is required not only to focus upon the sentence structures but also upon the acquisition of new words. Often, the learner seeks to learn the words before even attempting to understand and use the sentences. When a new sentence is presented to a learner, he tends to break it into manageable units called words.

Secondary Education is a vital stage in the overall scheme of educational training and its importance can never be belittled although the emphasis upon its aims and purposes has varied from time to time. This is the stage where education is given to the age group 13 to 16 years.

Aims and objectives of teaching English in the Secondary School Stage:

Following are the aims and objectives of teaching English at the Secondary School Stage-

- 1) The student should understand English when spoken at the normal conversational speed.
- 2) The student should speak English correctly.
- 3) a. He/ she can read English silently with comprehension.
b. He/ she can read aloud English pieces correctly.
- 4) He / she can write English correctly.
- 5) He/ she acquire knowledge of the elements of English.
- 6) He/ she appreciate pieces of good English.
- 7) He/ she develop an interest in English.

Teachers all over the country are not clear about the aim of teaching English. They divide the time table into reading, writing, composition, translation and grammar and are satisfied as long as the students are kept busy and they do not get any trouble from the school authorities. It drives home the fact that in general, students are not found to be competent in English because of the language skill development in students is not found to be up to the mark. According to Vishwanathan (2003), the strategies that are to be adopted in L₂ classroom are awareness raising, modeling, general practice, action planning, focused

practice and evaluation strategies.

A teacher's target is to "prepare" the students for the examination and not to make the pupils competent in the use of the language they are learning. In reality, neither the student is anxious to learn nor the teacher anxious to teach English. Regina (1994) argued that if the learners are meaningfully exposed to a sufficiently large number of samples of authentic discourse in the second language, the competent use of the language can be imbibed.

Statement of the problem: The basic problem undertaken for investigation in the present study is to examine the various skills used by the teacher to teach English at the Secondary School. Hence, the study has been entitled as-"Use of methods and skills to teach ESL Learners at Secondary Level in Assam: An Evaluative Study."

Objectives of the study: The objectives of the study are as follows:

- 1) To study the methods and skills used by the English teachers in classroom situation.
- 2) To examine the perception of Secondary School students in learning English.
- 3) To investigate into the performance of the students in English at the Secondary School level.

Research Questions of the study: The following research questions have been formulated for the study:

- 1) Do the English teachers use appropriate methods and skills to teach English to the Secondary School students?
- 2) How do the Secondary School students perceive the learning of English?

Hypothesis formulated for Objective 3:

H₀: There is no significant difference between the performance of the students in English in the Secondary schools in rural as well as in urban areas.

Delimitations of the study:

- a) The present study has been delimited to the Secondary (Assamese medium) School teachers teaching English in the Kamrup District of Assam.
- b) The study is delimited to students studying in Class VIII, IX and X in Government/ Provincialised (Assamese medium) Secondary Schools of Kamrup District.

Methodology: The present study has been carried on with the help of Evaluative Survey Method. The target is to evaluate the problem of the study and also to point out in which direction the object of the study can be improved.

Sample of the Study: The sample of the study comprised of the following:

- 1) 10 students studying in Class VII, 10 students studying in Class IX and 10 students studying in Class X Students of Class VIII, IX and X of 10 Rural Secondary (Assamese medium)schools and 10

Urban Secondary (Assamese medium) Schools.

- 2) Teachers teaching English in 20 Secondary (Assamese medium)Schools (both rural and urban).

Construction of tools for the study: The investigator has made use of the following tools to gather the data for this study. They are as follows:

- a) Observation schedule and questionnaire for teachers teaching English in Class VIII, IX and X.
- b) Interview schedule for the students of Class VIII, IX and X.
- c) Achievement test for students of Class VIII, IX and X.

Achievement test for students: In the study, an achievement test was conducted for Class- VIII, Class- IX and Class-X students to find out the level of competence of the students in listening, speaking, reading and writing skills.

Findings:

Objective 1: To study the methods and skills used by the English teachers in classroom situation.

- It has been observed that all the teachers used the mother tongue in the class because it was a common language which the teachers and the students knew and it aided to comprehension easily.
- 75% of the teachers of urban schools and 69% of teachers in rural schools of Class VIII, 81% of the urban teachers and 72% of the teachers of rural schools of Class IX, and 79% of the teachers of urban schools and 67% of the teachers of rural schools of Class X always used the mother tongue in the class.
- From the analysis it is observed that the students of Class VIII, IX and X liked the listening skill the most followed by the writing and then the vocabulary skills and reading skills. Grammar was least liked by the students. Speaking skill was liked by some students sometimes.
- **Activities provided to the students related to Listening-**
 - It has been observed that 100% of the teachers spent the English class hour reading the text aloud and making the students fill in tables, charts etc. frequently.
 - The teachers never made the students listen to recorded materials and made them do the given tasks.
- **Activities provided to the students related to Speaking-**
 - Though 85% of the rural teachers and 88% of the urban teachers said that they conducted debates occasionally, the debates were conducted only in the mother tongue of the students.
- **Activities provided to the students related to**

Reading-

- 65% of the teachers in rural schools and 68% of the teachers in urban schools read the text aloud and explained the idea so that the students could do the exercise without any difficulty. Only 35% of the teachers in rural schools and 32% of the teachers in urban schools made the students read silently and compare their answers with their partners.

➤ **Activities provided to the students related to Writing-**

- Only 10% of the teachers in rural schools and 7% of the teachers in urban schools made the students to write letters.
- The teachers also made the students write summaries by reading and listening to texts.
- 22% of the rural teachers and 15% of the urban teachers made the students write paragraphs on given topics and area of interest frequently.

➤ **Activities provided to the students related to Grammar-**

- While teaching grammar, majority of the teachers 98% in rural schools and 95% in urban schools presented the rules, gave examples and made the students do the exercise frequently. They followed the deductive method of teaching grammar.
- The teachers conducted drills using substitution occasionally viz. 2% in rural and 5% in urban schools.

➤ **Activities provided to the students related to Vocabulary-**

- 82% of the rural teachers and 79% of the urban teachers translated the words in the students' mother tongue very frequently.
- It was observed that the teachers did not spend much time in giving dictation, motivated the students to guess the meaning of the words or explained the meanings of the words through definitions, demonstrations and fill in the blanks.

➤ According to the teachers teaching English in Class VIII, IX and X in urban schools, the most frequent errors made by the students was in grammar and usage followed by sentence structure and vocabulary.

➤ It was observed that 83% of the urban and 89% of rural teachers of Class VIII used Translation Method in the class followed by only 17% in urban and 11% in rural school teachers use Bilingual method of teaching English. In Class IX, 73% of teachers in urban and 84% in rural school teachers use Translation method followed by 27% of urban and 16% of rural teachers use Bilingual method of teaching English. In Class X, 69% of urban teachers in urban and 79% of teachers in rural schools used Translation method of teaching

English while 31% of urban and 21% of rural teachers of Class X used Bilingual method of teaching English in school. No teacher was found to use Direct Method or Audio-lingual Method in the class.

➤ It has been observed that majority of the teachers teaching English in the Secondary schools viz. 84% in urban and 82% in rural school teachers of Class VIII, 88% urban and 85% rural teachers of Class IX and 83% urban and 86% rural teachers of Class X did not think of changing their methods of teaching according to the needs of the students.

➤ Only 12% teachers in rural schools and 18% teachers in urban schools were encouraged by the school authority to change their teaching method according to the needs of the students.

➤ 71% of the teachers of urban schools gave emphasis on both the grammatical aspects and literary excellence while teaching poetry or a prose lesson while 46% of the rural school teachers give emphasis only on the literary excellence while teaching poetry or a prose lesson.

➤ Majority of the teachers, 86% in rural schools and 78% in urban schools teaching English to Class VIII students, 87% in rural schools and 82% in urban schools teaching English to Class IX students and 89% in rural and 79% in urban schools teaching English to Class X students said that they were not provided with Teaching Learning Material (TLM) for teaching English in schools.

➤ It was observed that majority of the teachers teaching English to the students of Class VIII, IX and X in the Secondary level only used charts sometimes as TLM for teaching English. 64% teachers in urban schools and 73% of teachers of Class VIII in rural schools never used any TLM for teaching English. In class IX, 61% in urban schools and 68% in rural schools and again, in Class X, 65% in rural schools and 57% in urban school teachers never used TLM for teaching English.

➤ Majority of the activities provided to the students of Class VIII, IX and X for facilitating learning in urban as well as in rural secondary schools were debates and extempore speeches in the school. The debates and extempore speeches held in the schools were conducted only in the mother tongue and not in the English language. The teachers also did not pay much attention to discussion and role playing.

➤ Majority of the teachers of Class VIII viz. 86% in rural and 78% in urban secondary schools said that there was no necessity of A-V aids to teach English in the class. Again in Class IX, 87% in rural and 82% in urban, and in class X, 89% in rural and 79% in urban said that A-V aids were not

necessary for teaching English.

- Though activities like debates and extempore speeches were conducted by the teachers, only a very small percentage of teachers used discussion and role playing.
- Only a small percentage of teachers both in the urban and the rural schools often or sometimes gave home assignments to the students. Majority of the teachers never gave home assignments to the students.
- Both the rural and the urban school authority provided very less number of reference books or materials for making teaching aids. They were provided with only textbooks, dictionaries, reference books, magazines and journals.

Objective 2: To examine the perception of the Secondary School students in learning English.

- Only a small percentage of students got an opportunity to use English in the class.
- Majority of the students of both urban and rural schools said that they were not satisfied with the teaching method of the teachers.
- 80% of the students of Class VIII in urban schools and 77% in rural schools wanted their teachers to use new and interesting methods of teaching English followed by more opportunities to speak English in the class. 83% of the students of Class IX in urban schools and 79% in the rural schools wanted their teachers to use new and interesting methods of teaching English while 84% students

of Class X in urban schools and 81% in rural schools wanted their teachers to use new and interesting methods for teaching English and also more opportunities to speak English in the class.

- It has been observed that the students of Class VIII, IX and X of urban and rural secondary schools liked reading stories most followed by finding answers in guide books and learning answers through memorization. Writing letters and paragraphs on interesting topics and studying grammar were least liked by the students.
- It has been observed that teachers of Class VIII, IX and X of both rural and urban schools never resorted to group work, role playing, dramatization or watching a film or listening to radio other than reading or narrating stories from the text book .
- Most of the students of class VIII, IX and X of urban and rural schools said that using mother tongue in the class helped them to understand the different concepts better and also that the students found themselves at ease, comfortable and less stressed. The students of urban schools also felt that the use of mother tongue did not make them feel lost while the students of rural schools felt that the use of mother in the class is a necessity to understand better.
- Majority of the teachers in both the rural and the urban schools never gave home assignments to the students.

Objective 3: To investigate into the performance of the students in English at the Secondary School level:

Comparison of the means of the performance of the students of Class VIII, IX and X in the Achievement Test.

Area	Class VIII			** S	Class IX			*** S	Class X			*** S
	Mean	SD	T		Mean	SD	T		Mean	SD	T	
Rural	14.7	7.08	8.33	15.8	6.64	7.21	25.9	7.9	3.60			
Urban	22.7	6.48		20.5	7.75		21.7	7.71				

Table:1: Comparison of the means of the performance of the students of Class VIII, IX and X in the Achievement Test

**S- Significant at .01 level

The above table shows the mean and standard deviation of the test scores obtained by the students of Class VIII, IX and X of both urban and rural schools in the achievement test. From the table it is observed that the mean score of urban students is higher than the mean score of the rural students in

Class VIII and IX. But in Class X, the mean score of the urban students is less than the means score of the rural students.

In order to test the difference in the academic achievement of the students of Class VIII, IX and X of urban and rural schools, the following null hypothesis

has been formulated.

Null Hypothesis (Ho): There is no significant difference between the performance of the students in English in rural Secondary Schools as well as in urban areas.

To examine the significant difference between mean of the students of Class VIII, IX and X studying in rural and urban schools, a statistical test, "t" test has been applied and the following values were obtained:

Class VIII, $t = 8.33$

Class IX, $t = 7.01$

Class X, $t = 3.06$

The calculated value of "t" is more than the critical value 1.96 at .01 level of significance. It is observed that all the calculated values of "t" are more than the critical value of "t". So, the null hypothesis is rejected. Hence, it may be concluded that there is significant difference between the performance of students in English in rural and urban areas.

Suggestions: Teaching English to the speakers of other languages is both challenging and rewarding. The teacher of English as a second language will need to keep in mind the following suggestions as the poor standard of teaching English in the schools is a problem which needs a proper analysis and solution. So, few suggestions are given below-

1. In every teaching-learning activity, aims are to be fixed up. The teacher needs to understand fully the different aims of teaching English. He should try to teach the language keeping the fundamental aims in view.
2. The teachers of English should be given training for the improvement of their own English. Some refresher courses and in-service training programme can be organized from time to time.
3. A good teacher need to select the material very carefully and then only he should present it before the learners. Surely he/ she keep in mind certain principles for the selection of material. In this way, the subject matter will not pose any problem to the learners.
4. Sometimes a picture is worth a thousand words and this is particularly true when English is taught as a second language. Visual aids can be used to teach everything from vocabulary to prepositions.
5. Visual experiences are more effective than verbal experiences. As the combination of sound and vision makes the class dramatic and imaginative, video- CDs are one of the best media for teaching English. Teachers should be made aware of the importance of A-V aids in teaching English. Grants should be provided to the schools for the same.
6. Mostly speaking practice in the classroom should be done in pairs and in groups with students talking to each other. It is a common mistake of

untrained teachers to think that students must or need to talk with the teacher alone.

In order to make classroom teaching interesting an English teacher should undertake the following activities in the classroom:

- **Listening activities**-In secondary schools, the ways in which listening activities are taught are not properly designed. In addition to this, schools do not have language laboratories at all. Without such facilities, it is very difficult to achieve the teaching of listening skills.
- **Speaking activities**-The speaking skill should be given the maximum teaching emphasis by the secondary school teachers. A variety of activities can be adopted by the teacher to give the learners opportunities to practice speaking in classrooms.
- **Reading activities**- It is understood by all that reading is a highly personalized activity. One cannot develop the ability to read and extract the required information according to his/ her reading purposes unless he/ she are involved in the reading process. For e.g. it is claimed that the learners cannot develop the ability to read if they merely listen to what their teachers read aloud and answer comprehension questions following their teacher's explanation of the main ideas on the paragraphs in the reading texts.
- **Writing activities**-As per the Secondary Education Council, writing skills of the students should be given due importance. To achieve this aim, different writing activities that enable learners to develop the ability to communicate in writing could be suggested in each and every unit of the textbooks.
- **Grammar activities**-One of the ways of teaching grammatical items in context rather than teaching grammatical rules using isolated sentences so that the student can see the use of target grammatical items in real situations. In other words, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) recommends the use of awareness raising activities that enable learners to use the grammatical items from which they draw rules by themselves rather than receiving explanations of grammar rules through isolated sentences.
- **Vocabulary activities**- While teaching vocabulary, the teacher cannot teach all vocabulary items that learners need for academic purpose at the higher classes and hence vocabulary teaching practices should focus on training learners in developing vocabulary learning strategies.

Conclusion: The language teacher needs the right attitude to language learning and teaching, rather than a formal method. There is a need for greater

attention to be given to the training of English teachers, both through pre-service and in-service training programmes. At present teachers are being recruited to teach English who did not have much exposure to the English language at their school level and could not have proper methods of English in Teachers' Training Institutions. Most teachers who take up the profession do not have the necessary competence in English and would therefore need more sustained help to improve these skills than it was necessary in the past. Furthermore, even those teachers who had the benefits of pre-service and in-service training were not always aware of the latest techniques in teaching or the need to make use of more suitable, relevant and varied materials including teaching aids in the classroom. According to Brenes (2006), the language lab has played an important role in language teaching for a long time. Its main objective is to keep language students improve the aural- oral skills.

While strengthening the teachers' training programmes, we also need to consider the most

effective way of utilizing our limited resources to achieve the well-defined objectives. According to Dodson (1963), a good method must be sufficiently flexible to cope with various classroom conditions and the pupil's specific and general abilities. Padmavat (2012) argued that the teacher should be apt in achieving an appropriate method and approach according to the subject matter and objectives of the study. There is no single method that can satisfy all types of students and teachers. Using a combination of various methods in the classroom is the best way for Indian teacher to teach English as a second language. Maley and Duff (1978) have also pointed the value and use of drama in the language classroom as drama can help the teacher to achieve 'reality' in many ways. This involves the review of the methods, techniques and materials that are now employed to teach English all over the country and restructuring of the courses to suit the present needs.

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Dr. Baishalee Rajkhowa/Royal Group of Institutions/
Assam/ India/baishaleeraj@gmail.com