

Competency of Teaching English in Indian Context: A Situational Analysis

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Abstract—Teachers and educationists today are struggling to innovate and develop new methods as well as techniques of teaching English that can optimize and achieve the teaching and learning objectives. Secondary English language learners especially face major difficulties in acquiring proficiency in using the English language. The modern trend in education and the complex nature in teaching and learning have made the role of the teacher more challenging. This new role does not only involve the mere transmission of knowledge to the students but it also involves looking at the problems associated with learning and instruction in English. Secondary Education is a vital stage where education is given to the children of age group 14 to 16 years. In the Secondary level, the basic aim of teaching English language is to enable the students to develop the skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing English language. Teachers all over the country are not clear about the aim of teaching English. While the demand of improving the proficiency of the language increases on one hand, the competency and capacity building of the English teachers also needs a complete revamp on the other. Problems regarding the teaching method have also been discussed from time to time by different Commissions. But in most Indian schools the suggestions have not been implemented in a true manner. This work is an attempt to throw light on the English teaching methods in order to develop the teaching strategies and competencies of English teachers in the Secondary level.

Index Terms—methods of teaching English, skills in English and teaching competence

I. INTRODUCTION

Secondary Education is a vital stage in the overall scheme of educational training and its importance can never be overestimated although the emphasis upon its aims and purposes has varied from time to time. This is the stage where education is given to the children of age group 14 to 16 years. In the Secondary level, the basic aim of teaching English language is to enable the students to develop the skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing English language. However, the Secondary English language learners especially face major difficulties in acquiring proficiency in using the English language. Problems regarding the teaching method have also been discussed from time to time by different Commissions and many have given some suggestions also. But in most Indian schools these suggestions are not implemented in a true manner.

Moreover, however, a high percentage of school leavers leave the precincts of school as ignorant of English usage as when they entered the school first. Teaching of English is in a chaotic state today. The modern trend in education and the complex nature in teaching and learning have made the role of the teacher more challenging. This new role does not only just involve the mere transmission of knowledge and information to the students but it also involves looking at the problems associated with learning and instruction in English. While the demand of improving the proficiency of the language increases on the one hand, the quality of English language teaching in our state run schools, more particularly in rural schools, presents an abysmal picture.

Various factors varying from place to place and situation to situation do exist and create difficulties in a teaching and learning situation. Unmanageable student numbers, poor classroom conditions, poor motivation, lack of teaching resources, lack of support from home and society, pressure from unwieldy syllabus in other subjects, too many subjects to be studied at the same time, unhealthy attitude of the school authorities in many case may lead to a decline in the standard of teaching English language teaching in schools. Besides, there are also certain teacher oriented factors which lead to poor English language learning.

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 complaints from the school authorities. It drives home the fact that in general, students are not found to be competent in using the language because of the language skill development in students is not found to be up to mark. However, a good pedagogy can provide optimal learning objectives for the children. It can lead to a positive impact on students in terms of their reading comprehension, practical skill and presentation skill.

In the process of learning and teaching, a method of teaching is very important. It is a tool in the hands of the teacher. Some of the English language teaching methods are the Grammar Translation Method, Bilingual Method, Direct Method, Audio-Lingual method, Natural Method, Phonetic Method, Communication Language Teaching Method (CLT), Total Physical Response Method and Immersion Programmes.

There are, in general, four language skills, each based upon the modality of emphasis. These are the Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing skills (LSRW). Medgyes (1986) observed that teaching a language aims at helping the learner acquire the skill of using the target language as an effective communicative tool.

Competence is the degree of accomplishment of an objective with respect to quality and time. Competence based education is an approach to instruction that aims to teach each student the basic knowledge, skills, attitudes and values essential to competencies. Melinda (2004) found that the pragmatic competence can be developed in the classroom through a range of situations and activities. He believed that the pragmatic rules that are different from or non-existent in the students' first language need to be given emphasis.

The need for an eclectic approach:

At present, teachers of English around the world prefer some form of communicative teaching and learning more than the audio-lingual method and its derivatives. However, we must remember that a successful TESOL teacher should not be necessarily biased in favour of one method or another. He/she should be first of all should be competent and comfortable with the methods he/she wants to use. The teacher could also select different teaching strategies from different methods, and blend them to suit the needs of his/her materials and students.

It is important that the students are given ample opportunities to practice English in the class as well as outside the classroom, even as it is important for them to have time and freedom to digest, reflect and analyze what has been exposed to them. Maley and Duff (1978) argued that drama can also overcome the student's resistance to learning a second language.

The whole notion of the teacher as the disseminator of knowledge has undergone a tremendous change today. What in the old scenario, the teacher was the only dispenser of knowledge, in the new scenario, the teacher has become a facilitator. The teacher who employs knowledge in the classroom guides the students about the information to be assessed and interacted with. "The teacher is no longer the sage on the stage but the guide on the side". A teacher is called competent only if he has the competence in his teaching i.e. has teaching competence.

Statement of the problem:

The basic problem undertaken for investigation in the present study is to examine the various methods of teaching English used by the Secondary School teachers and whether they have sound knowledge about the methods of teaching the subject, so that they can claim themselves to be competent. Hence, the study has been entitled as "Competency in teaching English in Indian context: A Situational Analysis".

Objectives of the study:

The objectives of the present study are as follows:

- 1) To examine the academic and the professional qualification of the English teachers at Secondary level.
- 2) To study the methods and skills used by the English teachers in classroom situation.
- 3) To examine the competencies required of a teacher teaching English and how the competencies identified varied with the demographic variables of teachers i.e. (age, sex and educational qualifications) and with the contextual variables (urban and rural) of teachers.
- 4) To study the methods of teaching English Method at the Teacher Education Institutes (TEI).

Research questions of the study:

The following research questions as per the objectives have been formulated for the study:

- 1) What are the academic and professional qualifications of English teachers teaching in the Secondary Schools?
- 2) Do the English teachers use appropriate methods and skills to teach English to the Secondary School students?
- 3) Whether the competencies of the Secondary School teachers vary-
 - a) Between male and female teachers?
 - b) Between urban and rural teachers?
 - c) Among teachers of different age levels (5 levels)?
 - d) Among teachers of different educational qualification (4 levels)?
- 4) Do the teachers of the Teacher Education Institutes use the right method to teach the English Method to the student teachers?

Delimitations of the study:

The present study has been delimited to the Secondary School teachers teaching English in Assam. The study considers teachers below the age group of 55 years. The study also considers teachers teaching English Method in the Teacher Education Institutes of Assam, India.

II. METHODOLOGY

The present study has been carried out with the help of Evaluative Survey Method. The target is not only to evaluate the problem of the study but also to point out in which direction the object of the study can be improved.

In the present study, triangulation has also been used to find out the convergent and the divergent findings of the collected data. According to Jick (1979) in order to increase the validity, strength and interpretative potential of a study, decrease investigator's biases and to provide multiple perspectives to a research work, triangulation should be used.

Sample of the Study:

For the present study, the investigator had selected 54 teachers from 20 Secondary Schools teaching the English subject using stratified random sampling technique. The sample of the teachers would give a clear picture of the methods and skills used by the teachers for teaching English in India. Again, 8 teachers teaching English in four Government and four Non-government Teacher Education Institutes were selected for study.

Tools for the Study:

The investigator had made use of an observation schedule and a questionnaire for teachers teaching English in the Secondary Schools. An interview schedule for the teachers teaching English Method in the Teacher Education Institutes was also used to collect the relevant data.

III. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

The data gathered by the investigator has been analysed and the results have been summarized in a logical order in relation to the objectives of the study.

(i) ACADEMIC QUALIFICATION OF THE ENGLISH TEACHERS:

- Among the 28 teachers in the selected 10 rural secondary schools, only 5 teachers have a B.Ed. degree. Remaining 23 teachers are graduates without a professional degree.
- Out of 26 teachers selected from the urban Secondary schools, 9 teachers are Graduates, 11 teachers are Graduates with B.Ed. degree, 3 teachers have a Post Graduate degree without a professional degree and only 3 teachers have a Post Graduate degree with B.Ed.

(ii) METHODS AND SKILLS USED FOR TEACHING ENGLISH BY THE SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHERS:

- All the teachers used mother tongue in the class.
- The writing skill was given more stress than speaking and reading skills.
- Students were passive listeners.
- Deductive method was used to teach grammar.
- 60% in urban and 89% in rural areas used the Translation Method to teach English.
- Majority of the teachers never used Teaching Learning Material (TLM) in the class.
- The teachers used the mother tongue in the class because it was a common language which the pupils and teachers understood.
- Only 15% of the rural teachers and 30% of the urban teachers planned their lessons.
- Majority of the teachers felt that A-V aids were not required to teach English.
- While teaching listening skills, the teachers were found to be active speakers. The students were passive listeners.
- While teaching speaking skills, the students wanted more opportunities to speak in the class. The teacher is the only speaker in the class.
- While teaching reading skills, the students wanted more opportunities to read. The teachers used to read in the class.
- While teaching writing skills, it was observed that though the teachers helped the students to write summaries and reports, the students were less interested to write.
- Majority of the teachers said that the schools do not provide Teaching Learning Materials to the English teachers.
- Teachers sometimes or never gave home assignments to the students.
- Most frequent errors made by the students were in grammar and vocabulary. Majority of the students disliked grammar. Students were found to have problems in the use of verbs and in the construction of sentences. Deductive method was used to teach grammar.
- Activities conducted by the English teachers were debates and extempore speeches. The debates and extempore speeches were conducted in the mother tongue of the students.
- The teachers gave feedback to the students by marking or through a generalized talk. Giving feedback was not common in the class.
- Students were found to use the school library for books. However, the students did not have an access to the library.
- Students were evaluated through Half Yearly and Annual Examinations. Very less number of weekly/monthly tests were conducted by the teacher. No activity was undertaken by the English teacher in the class.
- Majority of any age group used Teaching Learning Materials (TLM).
- Students' pronunciation and fluency needed to be improved.
- Students of age group 30-40 years needed to improve while those between 40-50 years were satisfactory in the use of English.
- Students of age group 30-40 years were poor while those between 40-55 years are found to be satisfactory in the use of English.

Findings on Triangulation:**Convergent findings:**

- The teachers used the Translation Method in the class.
- The teachers used the mother tongue in the class because it is a common language which the pupils and teachers knew.
- Only 15% of the rural teachers and 30% of the urban teachers planned their lessons.
- Majority of the teachers felt that A-V aids were not required to teach English.
- While teaching listening skills, the teachers were found to be active speakers. The students were passive listeners.
- While teaching speaking skills, the students wanted more opportunities to speak in the class. The teacher was the only speaker in the class.
- While teaching reading skills, the students wanted more opportunities to read. The teachers used to read in the class.
- While teaching writing skills, it is observed that though the teachers helped the students to write summaries and paragraphs, the students were less interested to write.
- Majority of the teachers said that the schools did not provide Teaching Learning Materials (TLM) to the English teachers.
- Teachers sometimes or never gave home assignments to the students.
- The most frequent errors made by the students were in grammar and vocabulary. Majority of the students disliked grammar. Students were found to have problems in the use of verbs and in the construction of sentences. Deductive method was used to teach grammar.

Divergent findings:

- The activities conducted by the English teachers were debates and extempore speeches. The debates and extempore speeches were conducted in the mother tongue of the students.
- The teachers gave feedback to the students by marking or through a generalized talk. Giving feedback was not observed in the class.
- Teachers were found to use the school library for books. However, the students did not have an access to the library.
- The students were evaluated mainly through Half Yearly and Annual Examinations. Very less number of weekly/monthly tests were conducted by the teacher. No activity was undertaken by the English teacher in the class.

Discussion on the findings based on Triangulation:

- Since the teachers used the Translation Method in the class, the students never got an opportunity to listen to or speak in English.
- Writing is given more stress than listening, speaking or reading skills.
- Students never got an opportunity to converse in English in the class.
- TLM facilitates both teaching and learning but no teacher was observed to use TLM in the class.
- Planning of lessons leads to quality teaching but very less number of teachers are found to plan their lessons beforehand.
- A-V aids help teachers to support their teaching but teachers think that A-V aids are not necessary for teaching English.
- Students can be encouraged by many ways other than by only marking them or through a generalized talk.
- Grammar can be taught through many interesting activities. It can be taught in context by the teachers.
- Debates and extempore speeches which are conducted in mother tongue can be conducted in English in order to improve the proficiency of the students in the language.
- Home assignments are essential as it makes the students regular in their studies.
- Reading habit of the students can be developed through libraries.
- Students should be evaluated continuously through continuous and comprehensive evaluation.

c) COMPETENCY OF TEACHING ENGLISH BY THE SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHERS:**Competency based on knowledge: Age (Urban Areas)**

- No teacher of any age group used TLM.
- All the teachers' pronunciation and fluency needed to be improved.
- Teachers of age group 30-40 years needed to improve while those between 40-50 years are satisfactory in the use of vocabulary.
- Teachers of age group 30-40 years were poor while those between 40-55 years were found to be satisfactory in grammar and usage.

Competency based on knowledge: Sex (Urban Areas)

- Both male and female teachers never used TLM in the class.
- Both male and female teachers needed to improve their fluency and pronunciation.
- They were never observed to explain the theme before starting the chapter.

Competency based on knowledge: Educational qualification (Urban Areas)

- Graduates, Graduates with B.Ed, Post graduates and Postgraduates with B.Ed never used TLM in the class.

Graduate teachers were satisfactory in grammar and usage.

Graduate teachers with B.Ed were satisfactory in using understandable vocabulary in the class.

Pronunciation and fluency of Graduates and Graduates with B.Ed needed to improve.

Competency based on knowledge: Age (Rural Areas)

Teacher used TLM.

Teachers of age group 30-40 years are poor; 40-45 need to improve while those between 45-55 years were satisfactory in grammar and usage.

Teachers of 30-40 years need to improve while those in between 40-55 years were satisfactory in using understandable vocabulary in the class.

Teacher is found to possess good pronunciation and fluency.

Teacher engaged the students in pair/ group work; engaged the students in a dialogue, or related the subject with the students.

Competency based on knowledge: Sex (Rural Areas)

50% of the male teachers were satisfactory while 50% of the female teachers needed to improve in using understandable vocabulary in the class.

Male and female teachers were satisfactory in guiding the students to write summary on their own.

Male teachers needed to improve while the female teachers were poor in grammar and usage.

Male or female teacher was found to use TLM in the class.

Competency based on knowledge: Educational qualification (Rural Areas)

Graduate and Graduates with B.Ed needed to improve in grammar and usage.

Graduates needed to improve; Graduates with B.Ed were satisfactory in using understandable vocabulary in the class.

Graduate teachers were poor while the Graduates with B.Ed needed to improve their pronunciation and fluency.

Teacher was seen to engage the students in pair/ group work.

Competency based on profession: Age (Urban Areas)

Teachers of age group 30-40 years were satisfactory while those between 40-45 years needed to improve in taking interest in his/her profession.

Teachers of age 30-40 years needed to improve while in between 40-50 years had satisfactory command over the content of the subject.

Teachers of 30-35 years were poor; 35-40 years needed to improve while those in between 40-45 years were satisfactory for coming well prepared to the class.

Teachers were not observed to motivate, checked home assignments, arranged the sitting arrangement or gave attention to the students.

Teacher planned lessons beforehand. They were also found to be poor in their awareness of the Secondary School curriculum.

Competency based on profession: Sex (Urban areas)

Male and female teachers needed to improve in taking interest in his/her profession.

Male teachers needed to improve while female teachers were satisfactory over the content of the subject.

Male and female teachers needed to improve in coming well prepared to the class.

Teacher was observed to present the lessons through interesting activities.

Teacher planned their lessons. They were also found to be poor in their awareness of the Secondary School curriculum.

Teacher used movements or gestures or evaluated the student well in the class. They did not give individual attention to the students.

Competency based on profession: Educational qualification (Urban Areas)

Graduates, Graduates with B.Ed and Post graduates were satisfactory in taking interest in his/her own profession.

Graduates and Graduates with B.Ed needed to improve while Post graduates and Post graduates with B.Ed had satisfactory command over the content of the subject.

Teacher was found to present the lessons through interesting activities.

Graduates needed to improve, Graduates with B.Ed and Post graduates were satisfactory while Post graduates were good in coming well prepared to the class.

Teacher planned their lessons. They were also found to be poor in their awareness of the Secondary School curriculum.

Teacher used movements or gestures or evaluated the student well in the class. They did not give individual attention to the students.

Competency based on profession: Age (Rural Areas)

Teachers of age group 30-40 years needed to improve in taking interest in his/her own profession.

- The teachers of 30-45 years needed to improve while 45-55 years had satisfactory command over the content of the subject.
 - The teachers of 30-40 years needed to improve for coming well prepared to the class. While teachers of 40-55 years were satisfactory in coming well prepared to the class.
 - No teacher is seen to motivate, corrected home assignments, arranged the sitting arrangement, used movement gestures or gave individual attention to the students.
 - No teacher planned lessons.
 - All teachers were found to be poor in their awareness of the Secondary School Curriculum.
- Competency based on profession: Sex (Rural Areas)**
- Both male and female teachers needed to improve in taking interest in his/ her own profession.
 - The male and the female teachers needed to improve in their command over the content of the subject.
 - Both male and the female teachers needed to improve in coming well prepared to the class.
 - No teacher planned lessons.
 - No teacher is seen to motivate, gave home assignments, arranged the sitting arrangement, used movement gestures or gave individual attention to the students.
 - All teachers were found to be poor in their awareness of the Secondary School Curriculum.
- Competency based on profession: Educational qualification (Rural Areas)**
- The Graduates and Graduates with B.Ed needed to improve in taking interest in his/her own profession.
 - The Graduates needed to improve while the Graduates with B.Ed had satisfactory command over the content of the subject. Both graduates and Graduates with B.Ed needed to improve for coming well prepared to the class.
 - No teacher was seen to motivate, corrected home assignments, arranged the sitting arrangement, used movement and gestures or gave individual attention to the students.
 - No teacher planned lessons.
 - All teachers were found to be poor in their awareness of the Secondary School Curriculum.

d) METHODS OF TEACHING ENGLISH METHOD AT THE TEACHER EDUCATION INSTITUTES (TEI):

- Only 2% of the Non- government and 8% of the Government TEI used Direct Method to teach English.
- The TEI used Bilingual and Translation Method for teaching English.
- Classroom teaching was based on lecture/ discussion and assignments.
- Majority of the TEI spent the classroom teaching on writing skills.
- Only 8% of the Govt. and 3% of the Non-govt. TEI conducted micro-teaching.
- TEIs spent less classroom hours on pair/group work or on storytelling.
- Govt. and Non-govt. TEI used charts, models and flash cards as teaching aids.
- Teachers in Govt. TEI planned their lessons while those of Non govt. TEI did not plan their lessons.
- Student teachers would follow the Bilingual Method of teaching in their respective schools.

IV. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The discussion on the findings has been provided based on the objectives and is followed by the conclusion.

- The teacher needs to understand fully the different aims of teaching English.
- The teachers of English should be given training for the improvement of their own English.
- Sometimes a picture is worth a thousand words and this is particularly true when English is taught as a second language.
- Mostly speaking practice in the classroom should be done in pairs and in groups with students interacting with each other.
- The examination system can be improved keeping in mind the aims of teaching English in India.
- There should be correlation of the subject matter with other subjects and life situations.
- The teaching- learning process can be made student-centered.
- Planning of the lessons before teaching makes the method of teaching systematic.
- Since teachers are the most important component in school education, it is necessary to continuously upgrade the quality of teachers through in-service educational programmes and a variety of other measures apart from pre-service qualifying programme for teacher training viz. B.Ed.
- Careful state level planning will be necessary for ensuring adequate number of trained teachers and their continuous enrichment and improvement.
- Teachers should be trained in English teaching methods under in-service intensive training programme.
- Teacher Education Institutes should conduct training for the teachers using ICT tools.

V. CONCLUSION

The teacher of English today is faced with a wide variety of teaching methods like the Grammar Translation Method, Direct Method, Bilingual Method, Audio-lingual method etc. No method can be intrinsically good or bad; it is either effectively used or not effectively used. Thus, every method needs to be tailored to the local situation and the content of teaching. The teachers of English should use a combination of different methods to teach English. In this regard, the Teacher Education Institutes can develop the resources in the form of audio-visual aids and handbooks of micro lessons related to core teaching skills in the context of Indian classrooms and teaching-learning situations. A change is called for in the present approach to English language teaching because in the prevailing practice even after seven to eight years of formal English teaching, the students as a whole find it extremely difficult to actually use the language in normal communication, whether in the spoken or written mode. The language teacher, therefore, needs the right attitude to language learning and teaching, rather than a formal method. Gautam (1977) argued that in order for a particular classroom methods of instruction to succeed, certain minimum essential pre-requisites by way of understanding and attitudes on the part of the teachers and students are to be adequately met, in addition to the administrative/physical inputs such as size of the class, facilities of A-V aids, number of periods allotted to the teaching of English and so on. Dornyei and Thurell (1991) recommended some novel approaches to get the learners to interact. One of them is to practice "nonsense dialogues that consist of entirely of fillers; they may use the names of cities, for e.g. as content words." This is a good way of getting students to get rid of shyness and inhibitions in the first place, so that they can interact with ease in the classroom. There is also need for greater attention to be given to the training of English teachers, both through pre-service and in-service training programmes for training up professionals since "doing the same things with a different awareness seems to make a bigger difference than doing different things with the same awareness." The Teacher Education Institutes should also conduct training of the English teachers using ICT tools because it aids to improve student learning and teaching methodology. Upadhyaya (2006) argued that teachers training programme was found considerably effective in the improvement of self-concept of the pupil teachers irrespective of sex and type of institution.

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