

ENGLISH TEACHING STRATEGIES IN THE TEACHER EDUCATION INSTITUTES OF ASSAM

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Abstract: It is universally acknowledged that education is an effective means for social reconstruction and to a great extent it offers solutions to the problems a society is faced with. Again, a good knowledge of English is imperative for getting access to modern scientific and technological knowledge. Since the teachers play a major role in the education of the students, their own teaching strategies become a matter of vital concern. The Teacher Education Policy in India has evolved over time and is based on various Educational Commissions and Committees. Though the legal framework of Teacher Education is provided by the Central Government yet the implementation of various programs and skills are largely undertaken by the State Governments. It has been observed that there has been considerable deterioration in the standards of the teaching and learning of English at the school and college levels in the last twenty five years. The professional training of teachers of English and their command over the English subject have been called in question. Thus, this study has been undertaken to evaluate the methodology of teaching English in the Teacher Education Institutes of Assam and to offer some suggestions to improve its scenario.

Key words: Methodology, micro teaching, teacher education, teaching English.

Introduction: Enlightened, emancipated and empowered teachers lead communities and nations in their march towards better and higher quality of life. They reveal and elaborate the secrets of attaining higher values in life and nurture empathy for the fellow beings. Teachers are the torch bearers in creating social cohesion, national integration and a learning society. They not only disseminate knowledge but also create and generate new knowledge. They are responsible for acculturating role of education. No nation can even marginally slacken its efforts in giving necessary professional inputs to its teachers and along with that due status to their stature and profession.

It is universally acknowledged that education is an effective means for social reconstruction and to a great extent it offers solutions to the problems a society is faced with. These problems may be economic, social, cultural, political, moral, ecological and educational. Since the teachers play a major role in education of children, their own education becomes a matter of vital concern. Teacher education must, therefore, create necessary awareness among teachers about their new roles and responsibilities.

The Teacher Education Policy in India has evolved over time and is based on the recommendations of the Kothari Commission (1966), the Chattopadhyay Commission (1985), the National Policy on Education (1986/92), Acharya Ramamurthi Committee (1990), Yashpal Committee (1993) and the National Curriculum Framework (2005). Though the legal framework of Teacher Education is provided by the Central Government yet the implementation of various programmes and skills are largely undertaken by the State Governments. Education of teachers needs to be strengthened and stressed upon the main

attributes of a profession, such as, the systematic theory, rigorous training over a specified duration, authority, community sanction, ethical code and culture, generating knowledge through research and specialisation. It is acknowledged that formal professional training on continuous basis is necessary for becoming a good teacher as it caters to the development of one's personality and sharpening of communication skills and commitment to a code of conduct. Thus, to improve the learning achievements of the school children, the impetus is to prepare the teachers for the school system (pre-service training) and to improve the capacity of the existing school teachers (in-service training).

It has been observed that there has been considerable deterioration in the standards of the teaching and learning of English at the school and college levels in the last twenty five years. Men, Methods and Materials are either individually or collectively responsible for this setback in standards. The professional training of teachers of English and their command of the English have been called in question.

Microteaching, which is a teacher training technique, is based on the principle that teaching can be analysed into limited and well defined components called "teaching skills" that can be taught, practiced, evaluated, predicted, controlled and understood. This training has been tried out in the training of teachers and has been found effective (Das, et al 1976). However, its application in the training of teachers of English has so far not been tried out.

A good knowledge of English is imperative for getting access to modern scientific and technological knowledge. Though the position of English in Assam is not very different from what it is at the national

level, the knowledge of English is still very poor among a large majority of students due to the negligence of language teaching in schools where the medium of instruction is other than English. In most of the schools, the teaching of English is in a chaotic state. This is largely due to the fact that there is dearth of qualified and trained English teachers in the latest methods of teaching a foreign language.

Thus, this study has been undertaken to study the methodology of teaching English in the Teacher Education Institutes of Assam. The investigator has selected 8 teachers teaching English Method in four governments and four non-government teacher education institutes of Assam.

Methodology: The investigator has employed the semi-structured interview schedule to interview 8 teachers teaching English Method in four governments and four non-government teacher training institutes of Assam. The data was analysed with the help of percentage.

Teaching English in the Teacher Education Institutes: For teaching at the secondary stage, the qualification most sought after is one year B.Ed. However, at present, there are several variations for first degree level qualification which are also available. These include B.Ed. (Elementary); B.Ed. (Special Education); which too are programmes of one year duration; B.Ed. through correspondence or distance education mode which is now of two years duration. There are certain other variations in the form of vacation courses or part-time courses which were available before NCTE norms came into force. In addition, there are four-year integrated courses for elementary stage and also for secondary stage.

Teacher education programme at this stage, like at all other stages, will include the theory, practice teaching in schools, and practical work in the light of contexts, concerns, profile of teachers and general and specific objectives.

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. In Assam, the teacher education institutes have not given much importance to the methodology of teaching English. Consequently as the student teachers pass out their B.Ed course they could not perform well.

Most researchers in this field agree to the fact that to a large extent language is a skill subject and the more the learner practices it in meaningful contexts, the better is the mastery of it. Welga Rivers (1970) calls a language learning a 'skill getting' and 'skill using'

activity. A language can be learnt without the learner being given a linguistic description of the language, whereas a content subject cannot be so learnt.

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 does not pose any problem to the learners. The teacher is able to handle the selected material, well while teaching in schools.

Findings of the study:

The findings of the study are as follows:

- Only 2% of the non-government institutes and only 9% of the government institutes use Direct Method of teaching English.
- The Teacher Education Institutes use the Bilingual and the Translation methods of teaching English.
- Most of the teaching is done in lecture method.
- Only 22% of non-government institutes and 27% of the government institutes use discussion method in the class.
- Classroom teaching is only based on lecture or discussion and not on activities.
- Less number of assignments was given to the student teachers.
- 69% of the government and 73% of non-government institutes use mother tongue in the English class to explain certain concepts.
- Majority of the government institutes spend 58% in writing skills while only 7% is spent in speaking skills. In non-government institutes 6% is spent in speaking while 62% in writing skill.
- Both the government and non-government institutes spend very less classroom hours in pair/group work and in story telling activities.
- Only 8% of government and 3% non-government institutes have micro teaching classes for the teaching of English skills.
- Both the government and the non-government institutes use charts, models and flash cards as teaching aids for teaching English. Only 2% of the government and 1% of non-government institutes used tape recorder, TV or projector to aid teaching.
- Evaluation of the student teachers is mostly based on theory and practical methods of teaching and not on the teaching of skills or English teaching methodology.
- Evaluation of the student teachers is done on the basis of class tests, terminal and term end examination only.
- Both the government and non-government institutes use seminar, projects, practice teaching and field visits as the practical methods of teaching English.

- The student teachers use more of reference books and less of journals, newspaper and magazines in the institute library.
- According to the student teachers of rural and urban Teacher Education Institutes the methodology to be followed in their respective schools will be Bilingual method.
- Only 12% of the teachers from government institutes and 6% in non-government institutes are likely to follow the Direct Method of teaching English in school.

Discussion: It is to be noted that both the government and non-government Teacher Education Institutes used both the Translation and the Bilingual Method of teaching English. This is the reason that the student teachers used more of the translation method and less of the Bilingual Method of teaching English. This practice goes on in the Secondary Schools as well where the teachers are more at home with the Translation Method than the Bilingual Method. No college was found to use the Direct Method of teaching English.

Both government and non-government Teacher Education institutes used teaching learning materials like the charts, models and flash cards.

Majority of the colleges did not use the micro teaching to develop the teaching of skills of the student teachers. This is reflected in the methodology of teaching English in the schools where the teachers give more attention to the writing skills than to listening, speaking and reading skills.

Classroom teaching is only based on lecture and not on activities and so this was followed in the schools thereafter.

Suggestions: For effective teaching to take place in the class, a good method must be adopted by the teacher education institutes. A teacher has many

options when choosing a style and a method to teach by. The teachers may write lesson plans of their own, borrow plans from others or search online or within books for lesson plans. A teacher will need to consider the students' background knowledge, environment and learning goals while deciding what teaching method to use. Teachers should know that all students learn and retain information in different ways. So, teachers should use techniques which cater to multiple learning styles to help students retain information and strengthen their understanding of the subject. Micro-teaching, a teacher training technique currently practiced worldwide provides teachers an opportunity to perk up and hone their presentation and reinforcement skills. Besides these, a variety of strategies and methods can be used to ensure that all students have equal opportunities to learn. According to Carl Rogers (1969), "The teacher should first forget that he/ she is a teacher. Instead he/ she must possess the skills of a facilitator of learning and genuineness, prizing and empathy".

Owing to so many reasons, best persons are not being attracted to the teaching profession. So there is a decline and steep fall of standards in education and also in the general ways of living in people. It is indeed the hour for teachers to undergo self-criticism, to introspect and to find out the reasons for this state of affairs and to know how far teachers are responsible for the deplorable state of affairs.

If teachers acquire commitment, dedication, love and other essential competencies, and if they are enabled and empowered to perform multiple tasks in the classroom, school as well as in the community in a genuinely professional manner, then a chain reaction can begin with a sound teacher among students in cognitive, affective and psychomotor areas of development.

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