

TEACHING ENGLISH AS A SKILL

DR.R.MANJULA

Abstract: The traditional methods of filling up the minds of the children with a lot of information are useless now. The learners sitting passive in the class are not considered good students. Teaching-learning is a bipolar process. Both the teacher and the students should remain active. The more the activity of the children, the better is the teaching-learning process.

“Spoon feeding in the long run teaches us nothing but the shape of the spoon”

According to John Dewey

“Education and life are two different names for the same phenomenon. Education which does not prepare the student for life is meaningless.”¹

In the process of learning and teaching, a method of teaching is very important.

According to W.F.Mackey,

“A method determines what and how much is taught (Selection), the order in which it is taught (Gradation), how the meaning and form are conveyed (Presentation) and what is done to make the use of the language unconscious. Thus we find that a method deals with form of things that is selection, gradation, presentation and repetition.”²

If we go back to the old days, we find that nobody was so particular about the method of teaching. But this does not mean that at time no method of teaching was being used. They followed certain methods surely. But a method has become a problem in this age of scientific approach. The questions, what should be taught and how it should be taught, are intimately connected.

“Methods are meant for us and not us for the methods. The methods are to serve us in our teaching process and hence to be our servants and not our master.”³

Translation Method: The translation method is better known as the Grammar-Translation Method. It is also called the classical method of teaching English. In the teaching of English as foreign language, it has enjoyed a great reputation in the past. At present also, many teachers prefer to teach English by this method. In the past Greek, Latin, French German, etc., were taught by this method. Translation method means teaching the target language by translation it into mother tongue-may be Hindi or Punjabi. Here each phrase or sentence of English is taught by translation it into mother tongue. Direct Method: This method came as a reaction against the translation method. It is also called the natural method of teaching. This method eschews the learner's mother tongue and advocates the use of the target language in developing all the four skills-listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The main philosophy behind this method is that the learner

learns a foreign language in the same way as he learns his mother tongue. Bilingual Method: Bilingual Method means a method where two languages i.e., the mother tongue and target language are used. Here the mother tongue is used to achieve the target language. This method is based on the similarities and differences which exist between the two languages. The similarities and differences may be of situation, sounds, vocabulary, structure, etc. If these differences or common things are known well, then learning of a foreign language is facilitated considerably when the child is learning his mother tongue, he becomes familiar with the situations and picks up the language correctly. While learning the foreign language, the situations are created again in order to make the child learn the foreign language. The advocates of bilingual method believe that it is merely wastage of time as there is duplicity of, the same thing. Of course, mother tongue equivalents he told but there is no need of re-creating the situations. It is suggested that the time thus saved may be utilized for giving practice in sentence patterns. Communicative method: Communicative language teaching or CLT considers language both as communication and for communication. The goal of language teaching is therefore to develop ‘communicative competence’. This term was coined by Dell Hymes, an American anthropologist, to provide a contrast with Chomsky's theory of competence that characterizes a native speaker's capacity to produce grammatically correct sentences.⁴ Hymes maintained that a native speaker did not only possess the knowledge of the language but also the ability to use that knowledge for communicating in the society in which he lived. So the aim of language teaching should be to develop communicative competence, i.e. the ability to use language effectively and appropriately in social contexts and situations. Learning and Teaching of Language: Teaching learning of a language is a matter of practice. The language teacher can teach the language any way he likes. But the knowledge and application of certain principles help him to teach the same language effectively. While teaching, the teacher must keep in mind the learner, his capability and capacity to learn and above all his environment of learning. Some teachers knowingly use difficult words of English

while teaching. They forget the mental ability and the grasping capacity of the learners. That type of teaching is not good. Effective teaching of a language is based on certain principles. Some of the basic principles for teaching the language effectively are explained below:

Imitation: Learning of any language is based on the principle of imitation. In fact, imitation is natural to man. From childhood, language is best learnt through imitation. It is especially true in the case of small children. Whatever they see all around them, they imitate those things in the same way. Sometimes even the wrong habits of the teachers are carried on by the small children. If a teacher has poor pronunciation, his students at the early stages of learning the language will pick up the same poor standard of pronunciation from him. The bad handwriting of the teacher may also have adverse effect on the learners. **Practice and Drill:** Learning of language is a habit formation process. Habits are formed through repetition. Continuous practice and drill work are needed for it. All aspects of language learning i.e. listening, speaking, reading and writing can be acquired after a lot of practice. They should learn to use the language correctly though they may not know the rules of grammar. Robert Lado says,

“To know the language is to use its patterns of construction with appropriate vocabulary at normal speed for communication.”⁵

Practice makes a man perfect. Learning a language is more a matter of skill rather than of knowledge. Robert Lado rightly says, “The student must be engaged in practice most of the learning time. This principle has a psychological justification since other things being equal, the quantity and permanence of learning are in direct proportion to the amount of practice.”⁶ In this regard, Fries recommended eighty four percent of time be devoted to practice and fifteen percent time be utilized for explanation and commentary.

Thompson and Wyatt writes in their book ‘The Teaching of English in India’.

“The power of expression in a language is a matter of skill rather than of merely meanings or rules.”

In the learning of a language the students require a lot of practice and drill work. Only then they will be able to learn it properly. Language learning or teaching is not a knowledge subject, it is rather a skill subject like swimming, dancing painting, etc., so the learner will have to repeat and revise things in order to have mastery over the language. The various skills of language learning i.e. listening, speaking, reading and writing will be properly-learnt through practice and drill work. Otto Jespersen says,

“He who gets the tip of his finger dipped in the water three times in twenty weeks will never learn, how to swim.”

There is need of continuous practice for acquisition of every skill. **Oral Approach:** Language is more connected with ears and tongue than with eyes. So in the teaching of English, oral work should be given topmost priority. If a student is good at spoken language, he will automatically be good in reading and writing of the language. Moreover, whatever is learnt orally is remembered better. So due emphasis should be laid on this aspect of the language.

Motivation or Interest: Motivation or interest is of great importance in the teaching-learning process. Language is learnt quickly if interest is created in it. So the language teacher should make use of different types of aids for this purpose. Some interesting methods like activity method play way method can also be used. Thus the learners remain captivated and learn things in their minds for a longer time. **Natural Way of Teaching-Learning:** Natural process of learning the language should be followed. Listening and speaking should precede reading and writing. The teacher should lay more emphasis on the first two aspects i.e., listening and speaking. Then the learners will automatically be good at reading and writing of the language. Language should be Learnt in Context and Situation: Language is taught so that the learners are able to make use of it in their day-to-day life situations. Different language items-say vocabulary structures etc. should be dealt with in the context of some appropriate situations so that the learner may find them very near to life. In the words of Eugene A. Ninda

“Language learning means plunging headlong into a series of completely different experiences. It means exposing oneself to situations where the use of language is required.”

It is therefore, very essential that vocabulary items should be learnt in the context of a sentence or sentences and the sentences should be learnt in situations. Only then teaching-learning will be more effective and meaningful. Teaching is rewarding experience. As Prof. I.V.Chalapathi Rao says “Teaching is not a profession. It is Mission. There is no end to learning. It is a continuous and life-long process.”⁷ As Prof. Viswanadham says,

“A Teacher should remember that today’s children are tomorrow’s citizens. A teacher should lead them from darkness to light”.

“You are fortunate and blessed If you have the privilege of Serving the children of the Lord “Treat it as Worship”⁸

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References

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Asst Professor in English
JNTUA College of engineering
Anantapur
reddivarimanjula@gmail.com