

## A Brief Historical and Present Perspective of ELT in India

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### Abstract

English language is being taught as a second foreign language in India. For most of the learners in India, English still a foreign language or target language. The study of this language is important to fulfill different kinds of academic and professional requirements. Still, there is a big gulf between demand and supply for which the failure of the system is largely responsible as its main emphasis on to adherence to the foreign curriculum. The government tries to impose this curriculum on English teachers, but, in fact, the curriculum is outdated.

**Keywords:** learner, language, curriculum, foreign, majority.

It is a well-known fact that behind learning English, there are some set objectives as it is learnt either as a foreign language or as a second language. It is very much clear that any language, except mother tongue, is learnt with specific purposes and aims. No doubt, the Indians learn English as a second language or target language from the professional or career point of view. It is preferred as a medium, rather than a subject by a vast majority of parents in India. It is considered as somewhat a long term investment. It is because it determines their future prospective in India or abroad. It is also very unfortunate that there is a vast majority of illiterates in India who think English as a language of foreign countries.

English language in India is the result of a historico-political context. English started in India as not just as a foreign language, but as a much-hated language due to its association with the British colonizers. English today has come a long way from the despised instrument of oppression to the reluctantly adopted lingua-franca and the status symbol of the upper classes and its position today as a second language. But, for some in Indian society, it would not be an aberration to label it as first language. This is the main reason why the whole ELT paradigm also travelled the complete gamut at of modification is that the status of the language underwent constant re-invention.

There is no doubt in denying the fact that the Indian classroom was transformed because of the change in the environment of the learner in the last decades of the twentieth century when English started assuming the true status of global Language.

English as a subject is taught from two angles: general English and English for specific purposes. In the Indian scenario, the general English is offered at the secondary level, while the English for Specific Purposes is at the territory level either as an optional course in the

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arts stream and mandatory in the technical institutions. English for specific purpose (ESP) has a number of sub-division that depends upon the purpose, academic or professional.

The term, professional English, has been used as an umbrella term, which is used for practical purposes. It includes varied purposes- oriented courses that comprise English for international business, for import and export, for banking and international trade, for science and technology, for internet and computers, nursing, pharmacy, the International media and many more.

As far as English Language Teaching in the Indian context is concerned, no doubt, it started accidentally, but at present, it has become so vital and significant that it is impossible to continue without it. Once it was recognized as the official language, but now it is considered as the language of opportunity. People are ready to spend a considerable amount of money as well as energy on coaching and material because of its practical usefulness that is definite and certain.

The beginning of liberalism in Indian economy is the first great factor for learning of English language in India. From the professional job point of view, the whole spectrum in the field of job opportunity has been changed. It can be perceived through those students who have specialized in English even after joining civil services. The call centers in India need some trainers to equip their employees with better communication skills. Besides, there are some multinational companies that are busy in recruiting marketing staff who requires to speak English. In addition to it, the medical transcriptions centers are also in the need of translators and reporters. Those, who want to go abroad, are in the need of professional help for IELTS.

This change was first perceived at various levels such as-social, political and economic. Very soon, the idea that English is the passport to success in India and in abroad. That is why, it is observed that nowadays many people want to opt for English. In the beginning, only a few groups were using English in their everyday life. On the other hand, the middle-class people thought that it should be used only for official purposes. They also wished to use it to leave an impression upon the other classes. The lower classes found it beyond them. But, the government has been trying hard to educate the lower classes through the government school of India, but the lower classes did not have any exposure to this language.

During the 1990s, a change was witnessed in the whole paradigm which was possible only through liberalism in the economy. It resulted in the establishment of some multinationals that were responsible for the varied development such as different jobs and opportunities that focused on fluency of English. The process was facilitated by a number of channels on the television, increase in the English publications and, moreover, for the Indians the international lifestyle was tempting.

There is no doubt in denying the fact that advancement and growth in the field of ELT methodology in foreign countries took a long time to come to India. Like other EFL countries, the growth and development of ELT in India is closely connected with factors other than pedagogic. In the Indian scenario, English cannot be labeled as a foreign language as it was in the past when teaching was to take apprehension of all factors including pedagogic or others. Two components are vital and significant in observing the elaboration of ELT which are different in case of ELT in India and ELT in other countries.

As far as the question of developing the ELT pedagogy is concerned, it developed primarily in the Western countries where the social and political environment was entirely different as the status of English was fixed. But, in the case of the Indian context, the ELT pedagogy relies on the subtle and not so-subtle which the status of English keeps changing all the time. In the case of position of English in Indian society, no diagrammatic manifestation can be complete without taking into account its fluid nature.

In India, ELT took a long time to spread its roots and the reasons for this are numerous. The first and the foremost among these is that English caught the attention of the policy makers, administrations and teachers around the year 1980. So, the significance of ELT in India was realized after the three decades of India's independence. English as a subject was kept only for one year in it. It was for this period that English was part of teacher training for school teachers. The teachers did not get any training when they were newly recruited. In the orientation and the refreshers courses meant for the teachers, ELT does not have any space.

In recent years, only the programmes like CELTA and other have been introduced by British council. But, the fact is that these programmes are costly and that teachers do not want to spend money on them. The other main reason is that the examination system makes an emphasis on achievements rather than performance. This system does not strongly advocate its focus on the issue of fluency or proficiency, but the main concern is grading and positions. Consequently, the role of a teacher in the classroom has been reduced to merely of a facilitator of examination instead of linguistic or communicative proficiency.

It goes without saying that English Language Teaching in India, despite its slower rate of advancement, has been widened in its approach and methods. As a result of this, more and more are intend to reach the end of ELT. Despite the slow growth of ELT in India, it is now in step with the rest of the world today. ELT can be seen emerging in three transient stages as for as the question of methodology is concerned according to the different levels of Paradigms.

The first level refers to those situations which are run by the government, especially primary, secondary and high schools. The main aim of these is to impart education at reasonable and subsidised levels to the public, so ELT and learning cannot be kept at the widest end. The main reason behind it is that teachers do not have the latest facilities of research as well as the materials for economic and geography reasons. In the rural and remote areas, these institutions are the only sources to fulfill the basic requirements of people. There is a difference in the urban area as their institutions are many towards up gradation through teacher training, improved resources and syllabus modification. In a couple of decades, the level of ELT is going to be more communicative in nature integrated fully with language and literature.

The semi-government institutions can be included at the second level as are assisted through government funding by private managing bodies. The undergraduate and post-graduate colleges, and universities can also be assimilated into the semi-institutions. These teachers are conscious of what the learners want. They can use other methodology by a harmonious blending of interaction and communication in the classrooms. The lectures based on the talk-chalk are mostly teacher- oriented. The main advantage of this is that the present teachers are seeking alternate methodology as they are trying to change their teaching

practices because of the mixed bag of teaching practice, the institutions can be seen ranging from indifferent to private.

At the third level, we can include the pure private sector where the students are charged a fixed amount of money to make them proficient in English learning for a particular period of time. As they have only particular tenure of time in which they complete the syllabus, they use the latest equipments including multimedia, software and interactivities. Since in these academic fields, the jobs are few, which compel an increasing number of qualified teachers to rush these places. As regarding the question of methodology, the teachers' profile gets younger and younger that result into the increasing amount of experimentation and innovations.

On the one hand, the teachers belonging to the first level are satisfied, whereas the teachers of the second level are considerably influenced by the third level in order to get clear IELTS, as they are in the need of employment. For this, they generally join academies in addition to their undergraduate classes.

The young teachers, after joining academies, try to make the full use of the latest teaching aids and materials in order to gain fluency as soon as possible. Their teaching methodology undergoes a change at their place of work. It is because they tend to use the interactive, task-based and communicative methods in comparison to the usual lecture methods. In India, parents of learners form a significant and vital part of the teaching paradigm. In the beginning, any kind of change in the teaching methodology would cause some opposition from them, but the age-old practices are recommended by the administrative body. The parents, in the midst of the changing winds, accept the global status of English. As a result of that, at present, parents encourage innovation and experimentation in the classroom.

After comparing the situation of ELT in past, the learners can be found in search of such stimulation while attending their regular classes. It is to be observed after when they attend interactive classes at the academy. These are some radical and drastic changes that one can perceive in the absence of the right context. The Communicative Language Teaching was an utter failure with its advent in India for the first time in 1980s. But, at present, this context has gained momentum that has made all the learners receptive who are the source of inspiration for more and more learned-centred classes.

Since 2000, socio-economic factors have played a significant and vital role. The result of this is that we find a big and drastic change full of dynamism. The mindset of the English learners has changed due to the liberalisation in the Indian economy. There is a dire necessity for English learning at call centers, shopping malls and trade fairs as their priority is of young and vibrant learners who are fluent in English language. The continuous emergence of the institutes and academics in the third category offer the whole-range of proficiency in English language from clearing IELT speaking fluently. Moreover, by giving a wide-range of exposure to English, internet has played a significant and vital role. These factors, have paved the way for the deadlock that CLT found in recent years.

Communicative Language Teaching has its origin in changes that occurred in the field of linguistic and psychology of learning in United States during the mid 1960s. At the same time, when the linguistic theory underlying audiolingualism was being defied in America, the theoretical assumptions underlying situational language teaching in Britain were also

being questioned. Naom Chomsky's Syntactic Structure (1959) demonstrated the inadequacies of structuralists linguistics.

It also highlighted the uniqueness and creativity of individual utterances. Around the same time, British Applied Linguists emphasised the functional and communicative potential of language. The result of this revolutionary idea was a shift from focus on language teaching from mastery of structure to developing communicative proficiency. The strong advocates of this view such as Christopher Candin and Henry Widdowson drew on the works of British functional linguistics like Halliday and the philosophical works of John Searle as well as John Austin provided the further impetus.

The process of changed thinking in language teaching provided the basis to theorists like D.A. Wilkins to work out a functional or communicative definition of language and devise communicative syllabus for language teaching. All the developments were, later on, consolidated as Communicative Language Teaching. CLT starts from the theory of language as communication. As far as the goals of CLT are concerned, Richards says that the goal of language teaching is to develop what Hymes referred to as Communicative Competence. The major function of language is communication. It is not enough to acquire the skill of putting words together to construct grammatically acceptable sentences. What is much more important is the acquisition of the linguistic competence to achieve results such as successfully 'arguing', 'persuading', 'inviting', 'agreeing' even disagreeing without being 'disagreeable', 'accepting', 'declining' an offer or gift without being impolite or arrogant describing, defining or reporting.

Widdowson has given a detailed exposition to the ideas underlying the concept of Communicative Language Teaching by manifesting the relationship between linguistic system and communicative value in text and discourse. More recently, Canole and Swain in their analysis of Communicative Competence have identified four dimensions of Communicative Competence. They consider these dimensions essential both for theoretical understanding of communication and its practical application to language teaching.

These four components are as follow:

- (a) Grammatical Competence: It includes Chomsky's concept of linguistics.
- (b) Sociological Competence: This refers to an understanding of social context in which communication takes place including roll relationship, the shared information of the participants and the communicative purpose for their interaction.
- (c) Discourse Competence: It refers to the interpretation of individual message event in terms of their interconnectedness and how meaning is represented in relationship with the entire discourse.
- (d) Strategic Competence: It generally refers to the copying strategy that communicators employ to initiate, terminate, maintain, repair and redirect communication.

### **Characteristics of CLT**

In his book, *On Teaching Methodologies*, Stern observed that one of the recurrent features of Communicative Language Teaching is that it pays systematic attention to functional as well as a structural aspect of language. In this method of teaching, learners are engaged in problem solving tasks in groups and pairs. The learners have to communicate within their groups/within the linguistic resources available to them. It is very well realized that there

may be very different kinds of communicative functions. But, what is common to them is that at least two parties are involved in an interaction or transaction of some kind of where one party has an intention or transaction of some kind and other party expands or reacts to that intention. The target linguistic system is made to learn through the process of struggling to communicate.

In the Communicative Language Teaching method, teachers help learner in any way that motivates them to work with the language. Communicative competence is the desired goal and language is created by the individual often through trial and error. Translation may be used where students are in the need or benefit from it. Sequencing is determined by any consideration of content, function, or meaning which maintain interest. Fluency and acceptable language is the primary goal in CLT; accuracy is judged not in terms of the abstract but in context. The role of a learner as negotiation between the self, the learning process and the object of learning emerges from and interact with the role of joint negotiation within the group and within the classroom procedures and activities that the group undertakes.

In CLT, a teacher facilitates the communication process among the participants in each group and between these participants and various activities and texts. It also acts as an independent within the learning teaching process.

There are certain principles that underlying CLT practice and learning theory are illustrated as below:

- (a) Communication Principle: activities that promote real communication promote learning.
- (b) Task Principle: activities in which language is used for carrying meaningful tasks promote learning.
- (c) Meaningful Principle: Language that is meaningful to the learner supports the learning process.

In this way, after making a close and incisive study of both the aspects, ELT and CLT, we can safely and rightly aver the fact that CLT as an approach is marked by the flexibility of procedures which allows individual interpretation, variation and adaptation to different situations. This is what makes it a more reasonable approach as compared to most other methods. This approach is more humanistic rather than mechanical by promoting interactive processes of communication. CLT also appeals as a more productive approach.

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## Author's bio

**Dinesh Kumar** has presently been working as an Assistant Professor of English at Dyal Singh College, Karnal (INDIA) for the last 15 years. Besides, 40 research papers to his credit in reputed National as well as International Journals, his thrust areas of research comprise of Feminism, Dalit Literature, Comparative Literature, Commonwealth Literature, post-colonialism, Linguistic, Eco-feminism, Translation Study and Post-modernism. In addition to it, he has also contributed 20 book chapters on different topics. He has three books to his credit as a sole author-George Orwell's *Social Vision: A Critical Study* (ISBN 978-93-87646-79-7); and *Voices in Literature* (ISBN 978-93-87276-79-6), *Feministic Ethos in Pre-Independence and Post-Independence Indian Literature: A Comprehensive Study from Lambert Publication, Germany* (ISBN 978-620-3-921908). He has also reviewed two books of foreign professors-first, *English Language as Mediator of Human-Machine Communication* by Natalia Lazebna, Associate Professor, Zaporizhzhia Polytechnic University, Ukraine with ISBN 978-81-948672-1-0. and the second is a poetry book, *Drops of Intensity* by an Italian poet, Gerlinde Staffler. Being an active member in the editorial boards of different National and International journals since 2014, he is rendering his services as an editor and a reviewer in national and International Journals