

***The Spirit of Post-Methods Era Produces Innovative
Methodologies and Successful Learners***

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I. Introduction

As the world is shrinking, English is emerging as the world's link language. This new reality has immense potential for us in India.

Throughout India, there is an extraordinary belief, among almost all castes and classes, in both rural and urban areas, in the transformative power of English. English is seen not just as a useful skill, but as a symbol of a better life, a pathway out of poverty and oppression. (Graddol, 2000, p. 120)

On one side, number of English medium schools in the urban areas is exponentially increasing but, in the rural areas where the majority live, is another story.

A. English in Rural India

Due to the agrarian background, 75% of learners come from rural background. The government runs most of the schools in India. English is the official link language in India. The learners begin to learn English when they are eight years old. They study English language as just another subject and for one hour a day, merely want to pass an examination by memorizing few questions. Listening and Speaking skills are totally neglected in these schools. Reading skills, to certain extent, is encouraged. Of course, writing skills are given priority. But, writing skills are limited to memorizing and reproducing some pre-prepared answers. They are taught by teachers, who themselves do not or cannot speak in English. There is a vast divide between the rural and urban learners of English. Urban learners of English seem to have better exposure to English.

Such sorry state of affairs has its effects on the learners, when they join the tertiary level of education. In India, 90% of tertiary level of education is in English. The English proficiency among learners joining higher education is far from being satisfactory. In fact, it is miserable.

... Our average Undergraduate cannot speak a correct sentence in English, write Curriculum Vitae, or even read an English Daily. There is no exaggeration. Complaints such as these are voiced all over the country. Parents, teachers, examiners and employers complain our learner's poor achievement in English. (Sood, 1995, p. 167)

These learners in the college, lag behind in studies, get discouraged and some are even driven to take the extreme step of ending their life. Not that these rural learners are intellectually inferior to others, rather, they have not had enough exposure to English. Their numbers are huge. Some immediate bold steps are a must.

B. Methods Used to Teach English

When the outside world is using English for international and intercultural communication and technology purpose, universities and college in India still follow the Macaulayan syllabus and teach English as a subject. The aim of teaching English in India must be to help learners to acquire practical command of English. The age

old, Grammar Translation and Bilingual Methods are still being used in teaching English.

When academicians and language practitioners wanted to improve the quality of English in India, naturally they turned to some of the so-called brands. These brands are the numerous Approaches and methods put forth by English Language Teaching and Learning power houses. All most all of them are from the English Speaking counties. Teachers in India and other places are merely asked to follow these successful methods, without critically evaluating them for suitability. Teacher's own discretion is not given any room.

Teachers are not mere conveyor belts delivering language through inflexible prescribed and proscribed behaviors. They are professionals who can, in the best of all worlds, make their own decisions. They are informed by their own experience, the findings from research, and the wisdom of practice accumulated by the profession. (Larsen-Freeman, 2000, p. x)

Empowering English language teachers and taking them on board will certainly lead to successful language teaching and learning. This is in short 'the spirit of post-methods era'.

II. The Spirit of Post-Methods Era

More than 60 percent of today's world population is multilingual. Therefore, it is not an over statement to say that throughout history, foreign language learning has always been an important practical concern. A look into the history of language teaching deems fit.

A. One Method Era

Till about 500 years ago, Latin was the widely studied foreign language in the world. Latin was the dominant language of education, commerce, religion, and government in the Western world. This hold loosened in the sixteenth century as French, Italian and English gained in importance as a result of political changes in Europe (Richards, 2001, p. 3). Still, Latin was studied by the pupils to study the classical works in Latin. An analysis of Latin grammar and rhetoric became the model of foreign language study from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries. Textbooks had grammar rules, lists of vocabulary, and sentences for translation. Speaking the foreign language was not a goal and oral practice was limited to learners reading aloud the sentences they had translated. This method came to be known as *Grammar Translation Method* and was the only method of foreign language learning.

B. Methods Era

In the mid- and late nineteenth century, opposition to the Grammar Translation Method gradually developed in several European countries. This reform movement laid the foundations for the development of new ways of teaching languages. Increased opportunities for communication among Europeans created demand for oral

proficiency in foreign languages. Linguists emphasized that speech, rather than written word, was the primary form of language (Richards, 2001, p. 9).

As applied linguists and others sought to develop principles and procedures for the design of teaching methods and materials, drawing on the developing fields of linguistics and psychology to support a succession of proposals for what were thought to be more effective and theoretically sound teaching methods. The quest for better methods was a preoccupation of many teachers and applied linguists throughout the twentieth century (Richards, 2001, p. 1)

The most active period in the history of approaches and methods was from the 1950s to the 1990s. The 1950s and 1960s saw the emergence of the Audiolingual Method and the Situational Method, which were both superseded by the Communicative Approach. During the same period, other methods attracted smaller but equally enthusiastic followers, including the Silent Way, the Natural Approach, and Total Physical Response. In the 1990s, Content-Based Instruction and Task-Based Language Teaching emerged as new approaches to language teaching as did movements such as Competency-Based Instruction that focus on the outcomes of learning rather than methods of teaching. Other approaches, such as Cooperative Learning, Whole Language Approach, and Multiple Intelligences, originally developed in general education, have been extended to second language settings (Richards, 2001, p. 15)

All these approaches and methods have in common the belief that if language learning is to be improved, it will come about through changes and improvements in teaching methodology. So, there was a constant quest for the 'best' method of teaching a language or more effective ways of teaching second or foreign languages.

C. Post-Methods Era

By the 1990s, many applied linguists and language teachers moved away from a belief that newer and better approaches and methods are the solution to problems in language teaching. By the end of the twentieth century, mainstream language teaching no longer regarded methods as the key factor in accounting for success or failure in language teaching.

The major criticism made of the approaches and methods are:

1. **The 'top-down' criticism:** Teachers have to accept on faith the claims or theory underlying the method and apply them to their own practice. Role of the teacher is marginalized; his or her role is to understand the method and apply its principles correctly. There is little room for the teacher's own personal initiative and teaching style. The teacher must submit to the method.
2. **Role of contextual factors:** These approaches and methods believe one 'size fit for all'. These are often promoted as all-purpose solutions to teaching problems that can be applied in any part of the world and under any circumstance. The cultural, political, local institutional, teachers and learners contexts are ignored in applying these brand-methods.
3. **The need for curriculum development processes:** Curriculum planners view teaching method as part of a broader set of educational planning decisions,

such as, the teaching objectives, trial use in similar institutions, assessment of the methods and feedback from the stack holders. Choice of teaching method cannot, therefore, be determined in isolation from other planning and implementation practices (Richards, 2000)

4. ***Lack of research basis:*** Approaches and methods are often based on the assumptions that the processes of second language learning are fully understood. We know well that current knowledge is tentative, partial, and changing. Many of such claims and assertions have not been tested enough.
5. ***Similarity of classroom practices:*** It is very difficult for teachers to use approaches and methods in ways that precisely reflect the underlying principles of the method. Many of these activities are similar to each other and so there is nothing distinctive to demonstrate each approach or method. (Richards, 2001, p. 247-250)

Approaches and methods have played a central role in the development language teaching and learning. They will continue to be useful for teachers and learner teachers to become familiar with the major teaching approaches and methods proposed for second and foreign language teaching.

D. The Spirit of Post-Methods Era

Experts in the field of ELT have proved beyond doubt that there is no ‘one size fit for all’, with regard to any particular approach or method. An approach or a predetermined method, with all its activities, principles, and techniques could be a good starting point for an inexperienced teacher. As the teacher gains experience and knowledge, he or she will begin to develop an individual approach or personal method of teaching, one that draws on an established approach or method but that also uniquely reflects the teacher’s individual beliefs, values, principles, and experiences to fit the realities of the classroom. Teaching is more than following a recipe. The decisions that teachers make are often affected by the existing conditions of a classroom rather than by methodological considerations (Larsen-Freeman, 2000, p. xi). Thus, the spirit of post-methods era places in the teacher at the centre of language teaching and learning process. It is the teacher who decides what to teach and how to teach.

Other principles form the collective body of the Spirit of post-methods era as pointed out by Bailey:

- Engage all learners in the lesson
- Make learners the focus of the lesson
- Provide maximum opportunities for learner participation
- Develop learner responsibility
- Be tolerant of learners’ mistakes
- Develop learners’ confidence
- Teach learning strategies
- Respond to learners’ difficulties and build on them
- Use a maximum amount of learner-to-learner activities
- Promote cooperation among learners
- Practice both accuracy and fluency
- Address learners’ needs and interests. (1996)

An individual teacher may draw on different principles at different times, depending on the type of class he or she is teaching. Using various approaches and methods can provide teachers with an initial practical knowledge base in teaching and the same could help exploring and developing teachers' own beliefs, principles and practices.

III. Innovative Methodologies

The post method era is indeed a paradigm shift. If the methods era belonged to the experts and specialists in ELT, the post method era belongs to the teachers. The teacher is empowered to decide on the method(s) to be used for the learners. The teacher knows and understands the level and needs of the learners; and ultimately decides on 'what to teach', 'how to teach', 'when to teach', etc. The spirit of post-methods era places the responsibility of language teaching in the lap of the teacher. This newfound freedom and confidence invested in the teacher unleashes the creative potential in the teacher and innovation takes its wings. Following account is that of the researcher, who was invested with the responsibility of evolving an innovative methodology:

A. Process Followed by a Teacher

The actual setting and objectives should be stated clearly first and then an actual ground level analysis of the situation must be carried out.

Setting and problem: The learners from vernacular medium are joining the college to pursue various Undergraduate courses via English medium. They have very poor communication skills and are incapable of coping with the lessons in English language.

Objectives:

To make the learners to become reasonably proficient enough in English, to pursue their respective courses

To enable the learners to communicate fluently in English within three months' period

Analysis of the situation by the teacher: Before embarking on an innovative solution for the above stated problem, a detailed analysis of the ground realities was undertaken by the researcher.

The learners are of 17 to 20 years of age. The learners have studied English for 10 years, from the age of eight to seventeen. They have studied English as a subject and not as a language. So, they are not at zero level, thus, we need not start from zero level. They know some English already. Hence, we need to build on their previous knowledge. Listening and Speaking have been completely ignored at the school level. Reading has been given very little importance. The available time for classes is just three months. They need to communicate fairly well

They need to follow their lessons in English. The learners would be available for five hours every day.

The teacher, who is also the researcher, puts together a plan, using the experience and knowledge of the learners, for an innovative methodology to impart communication skills to these learners.

B. Innovative Methodology: An Intensive Language Teaching and Learning Method

We need to redesign the existing curriculum and adapt methods to teach English language proficiency. One such proposed and tested method is ‘Intensive Language Teaching and Learning Method’.



Figure 1: Successful Methodology –An intensive ELT Method

Intensive English learning is as an enrichment of the program by the creation of a period of intensive exposure to English, which enables the learner to receive 3 or 4 times, the number of hours of instruction normally devoted to English. The program has the following characteristics:

- an intensive period of study
- use of the target language as a means of communication
- focus on language learning only

Learners who are exposed to a period of intensive study of English show greater progress than learners exposed to the same number of hours of instruction but spread over a longer period of time (the so called “drip-feed” method).

1. Intensive Curriculum

Reorientation of the Existing Curriculum - As the objective of learning English is focused completely on the communicative skills and the practical use of the language; regular English text books are not used. A new set of materials are prepared for this special intensive program.

In a normal communicative English program, the four language skills are taught and learnt in progression, i.e. listening and speaking skills are introduced first and reading and writing skills are introduced later but, in the reoriented Intensive curriculum, all the four basic components of a language are taught and learned concurrently.

a. Listening

Children learn their mother tongue by listening before they speak; the same is true of immigrants. Learners from rural backgrounds do not have enough opportunities to listen to English. So, the teacher has to consciously compensate for the lacking opportunities. Among the many possible uses of English in the classroom are:

Greetings and Farewells ('Good morning. How are you today? See you tomorrow.'). Similarly, *Instructions, Enquiries, Feedback, Chat, etc.* (Davies, 2000, p. 6)

By establishing English as the main classroom language, the learners are given meaningful, authentic listening practice. BBC audio content can be effectively used to improve listening skills.

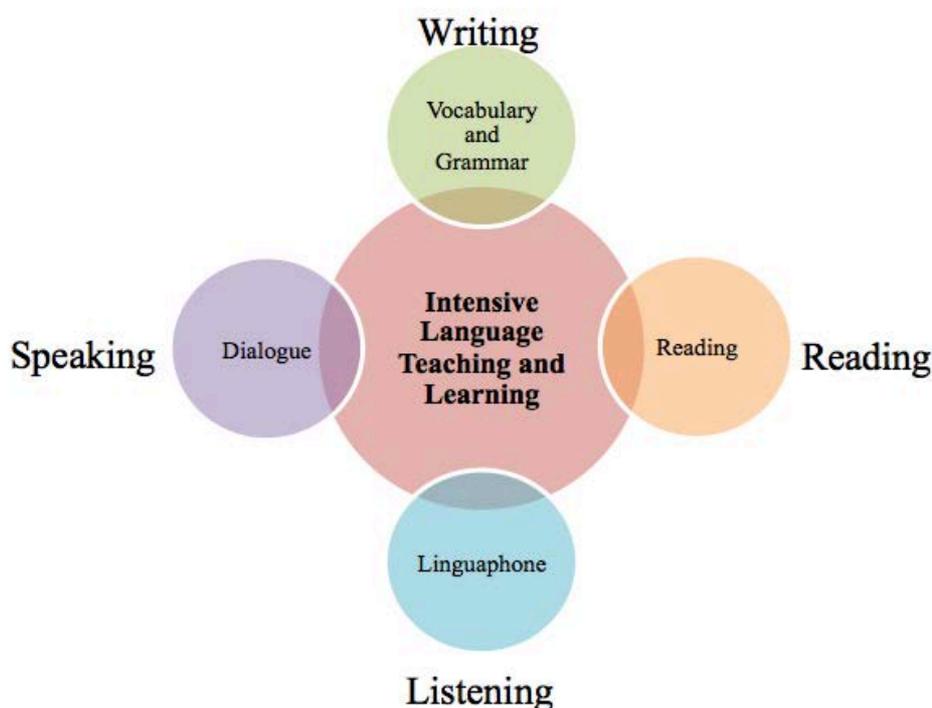


Figure 2: Proposed Components for Intensive Language Teaching and Learning

b. Speaking

The best way to learn spoken English is, of course, to speak English as often as possible, with as many people as possible, and in as many varied situations as possible.

One of the most influential personalities behind the communicative-style, Stephen Krashen says,

Language acquisition is very similar to the process children use in acquiring first and second languages. It requires meaningful interactions in the target language-natural communication-in which speakers are concerned not with the

form of their utterances but with the messages they are conveying and understanding. (Krashen, 1982, p. 1)

According to Littlewood

Activities that involve real communication promote learning.

Language that is meaningful to the learner supports the learning process.

According to Johnson,

Activities in which language is used for carrying out meaningful tasks promote learning (Richards, 2001, p. 161)

Dialogues, set in daily concrete situations, are the best to engage the learners in meaningful and authentic language use. For example, greetings, requesting, offer help, congratulating, apologizing etc., are practiced with different types of substitutions in the class. The class gets alive and fully engaged, when interesting and funny situations are presented and enacted boosting their confidence.

Because of the increased responsibility to participate, learners may find they gain confidence in using the target language in general. Learners are more responsible managers of their own learning (Larsen-Freeman, 2001, p. 130).

c. Reading

Reading comprehension consists of scanning, skimming and intensive reading. There are three stages to make reading intensive:

Pre-reading: prepare the learners for what they are going to read.

While-reading: scan, skim and go more thoroughly to understand.

Post- reading: help learners to connect what they have read with their life.

Lexical knowledge is now acknowledged to be central to communicative competence and the acquisition and development of a second language . . . vocabulary continues to be learned throughout one's lifetime" (Schmitt, 2000, p. 4).

The individual learners are assisted by the teachers, to choose from the graded Reading Cards (developed by CIEFL, Hyderabad, India) according to their ability. Learners progress at their own pace in intensive reading.

The Reading Cards are used in practicing loud reading, in producing correct pronunciation, articulation, intonation, stress and rhythm and allows teachers to evaluate learner's reading ability, and it prepares individuals for effective silent reading. In the words of Krashen,

A very large vocabulary required of a high-school learner for academic purposes is not acquired in an all-or-none, "taught" manner, but built up gradually and incrementally through reading (Krashen, 1982, p. 105).

d. Writing

Writing has a strong relationship with Vocabulary and Grammar.

[1] Vocabulary

The rural learners are made to speak and write using simple vocabulary. The initial vocabulary taught is the list of 50 words most frequently used in written and spoken English. (Troike, 2006, p. 139). Then, nouns and verbs related to the immediate surroundings and day-to-day activities are taught. Such knowledge builds confidence in the learners and encourages them. Extensive reading increases one's vocabulary.

[2] Functional Grammar

From the 1980s, the traditional notion of grammar is replaced by functional grammar.

‘The term functional should be considered in the broad sense of providing learners with the skills and abilities they need to take an active and responsible role in their communities, in their workplace and in educational settings. It requires learners to be able to communicate in ways that make them effective and involved as citizens, operate confidently and convey their ideas and opinions clearly in a wide range of contexts.

According to Crown, for example the British companies are looking for people who can:

- articulate clearly
- take and pass on messages
- deal with customers effectively
- read, understand and follow a wide range of documents
- write fluently and accurately, using accepted business conventions of format, spelling, grammar and punctuation. (p. 21-22)
-

English language teaching must reveal how English is used in actual life situations. Though the learners are already aware of the eight grammatical parts of speech, a general outline of the same with examples is taught systematically.

B. Intensive Method

Intensive Method exposes the learners to the target language for several hours each day and also the entire curriculum is designed towards authentic communication. It is achieved by creating a concentrated block of time in one semester of the academic year devoted primarily to learn English.

There are five key principles of Intensive teaching and learning Method:

- Active participation and emotional involvement of learners with the teacher and one another are pre-requisites for successful learning.
- In all tasks, learners should be motivated through the role-playing. The role-plays should be relevant to the intellectual level of the learners and of 'real life-situations'.

- The organization of group actions in pairs or more, leads to the inner mobilization of the learners. Basically, it denotes that the learner learns not only from the teacher but also through group dynamics by communicating to and with the group at both a conscious and an unconscious level. This is a key principle on which the Intensive Method is based.
- Through intense learning, large amounts of material can be absorbed by the learner (up to 5,000 words per course).
- Every communicative task solves several aims at one time in a hierarchical sequence for every level of teaching. Communicative training, for example, uses grammar, vocabulary and phonetics. (Byrne, 2002, p. 84-85)

C. Intensive Success

In Intensive teaching, learners are immersed in the language and authentic life situations and learn much more than they would in shorter bursts. The following are the key points about this method that indicate success:

- The learners found the method attractive and positive; the teacher was particularly well liked and respected;
- Learners established a strong group dynamic and developed ways of supporting each other, this effect remained even long after they left the college;
- Learners enjoyed both written and oral projects;
- In spite of individual differences, all of them performed well;
- Self-confidence and self-esteem rose among the learners, even among those who had previously been reluctant;
- Produced oral proficiency and accuracy as well as fluency;
- In two months' time, the rural learners were able to converse in English reasonably well;
- The learners are well placed and appreciated in the IT industries and many are in technical writing industry;
- Visitors, especially from institutes of higher education are highly impressed by the language ability of the learners; Some of them have implemented this method in their institutions with a reasonable success;

Confucius says, "Tell me, and I will forget. Show me, and I may remember. Involve me, and I will understand". Intensive Method involves the learners in the learning activities. The table below gives an insight, as to why intensive method is successful:

Table 1: Retention, Method, and Learning styles

Percent Retained	Method	Learning Style
10%	Reading	Passive
20%	Hearing words	Passive
30%	Looking at pictures	Passive
50%	Watching a movie	Passive

50%	Watching a demonstration	Passive
70%	Giving a talk	Active
90%	Doing a dramatic presentation	Active
90%	Simulating a real experience	Active
90%	Doing a real thing	Active

Source: Adapted from Dale (qtd. in Bender).

IV. Conclusion

The situation of the rural learners from vernacular backgrounds entering the colleges to pursue various undergraduate courses in English is a cause of great concern. It is because, the objectives of studying English in schools are not oriented towards language learning, rather, English has been treated as a subject to be passed. 'A one size fit for all' mindset is seen in the method thrust down by the education department. In this connection, the spirit of post-methods era, opens the flood gates of creativity and innovation by empowering the teachers to design their own methodology in language teaching. Teachers know the best, as they are close to the learners and understand their needs and capabilities. They also have a clear understanding of the institution and its objectives, social and cultural demands. Teachers who are in control of the situation are the best to judge to decide on what to teach and how to teach.

The researcher, with the spirit of post-methods era, accepted the challenge of taking up the responsibility of designing own methodology to address the problem at hand. The designed methodology has been tested and found efficient. The best method is one, which responds best to the situation. Open to the situation, with the spirit of post-methods era, with total commitment and the best interest of the learners at heart, produces innovative methodologies and successful learners.

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