

Teaching English language in the ITIs of Odisha: An Experimental Study

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Abstract:

Any well-designed language teaching curriculum can remain lifeless and ineffective if it is not properly implemented in the classroom by the teacher. A teacher needs to use appropriate techniques to negotiate learner-centered, task-based teaching materials. The communicative language teaching which has been adopted at all levels more or less has failed to achieve its goal, i.e., developing communicative competence in the learners, due to various factors. One major factor of this is the improper, inadequate, and uninspiring teaching techniques used by the untrained, underexposed teachers at various levels. As a practicing teacher at the Secondary and Higher Secondary levels, this researcher has experienced the difficulties faced by teachers for implementation of communicative teaching techniques in the classroom. The ITIs of Odisha, which have also adopted a Communicative Language Teaching curriculum for their students seen to have failed in achieving the stated goal. Therefore, an endeavor shall be made to study the impact of implementation of some innovative learner-centered techniques for teaching English language to the learners of the ITIs of Odisha.

Keywords: Communicative Language; Language Teaching; Language Learning; Language Curriculum; English.

It is a pedagogical belief that a teacher who has a repertoire of teaching techniques is more likely to succeed in imparting language skills than those who do not have. How far is this applicable to the ITIs of Odisha? It has been observed by teachers in the Engineering Colleges that the students of the Polytechnics who are entering the Degree Engineering course through lateral entry lack proficiency in English. English language competence is the mainstay of any technical course because all academic activities are conducted in English, textbooks are in English, and medium of instruction is also English. Researchers like Bhaskar Nair, (1991), J.D. Dave (1996), and Rafik Ali Mohammad (2000) who have investigated various aspects of the ELT scenario in various Technical Colleges in India, have lambasted the classroom practices in the ITIs. Their observation is that most of the teachers fail to use the learner-centered techniques effectively and hence the well-formulated syllabus fails to achieve its goal. Hence, this researcher intends to devise, innovate and formulate a set of learner-centered ELT techniques or strategies to be tried out in live/real sites of teaching/learning in sample ITIs in Odisha.

The principal aim of this experimental study is to devise, try out, and evaluate a battery of innovative learner-centered techniques and strategies for teaching English language to the learners of the ITIs in Odisha.

The ancillary objectives related to the main aim of this study are:

- to assess the entry level English language competence of the learners of the target groups;
- to suggest and try out a set of well-devised techniques and strategies to hone the learners' proficiency in English;
- to assess the impact of the implementation of the techniques / strategies devised, tried out and perfected in live sites of teaching/learning;
- to assess the techniques used for organizing, sequencing, and presenting various language activities; and
- to spell out the constraints on the ELT techniques such as group work, language games, role play, and information gap activities in the English classes.

This survey is based on the following hypotheses:

- The learners of the ITIs need the 'Threshold Level' competence in English, which they do not possess.
- Most of the teachers in the ITIs are not implementing the learner-centered teaching techniques.
- The use of interactive materials is limited.

- There is no proper scope for implementation of language activities such as role play and language games,
- The main problem in implementing ELT techniques lies in the mindset of the teachers and learners.
- And the external problems, affecting the ELT scenario in the ITIs may be solved through proper teacher educating programmers.

This status survey has the following scope:

- assessment of the entry level communicative competence in English of the learners taking admission in various ITIs of Odisha, through a test;
- analysis of the English language needs of the target group learners through questionnaire;
- analysis of the role and functioning of the English teachers and their language background; and
- analysis of the techniques used for:
 - management of learner participation in activities,
 - the use of authentic materials for carrying out language tasks,
 - organizing communicative tasks such as group work, language games, information gap activities, and role play, and
 - experimentation with a vast array of innovative techniques of teaching English, and
 - evaluation of the achievement of communicative skill at the end of the course.

The scope of this study is delimited to:

- the ITIs of Odisha,
- the survey of the teaching techniques used only in the English classes, not in any other subject classes, and
- the target group learners coming from vernacular medium schools only.

This experimental study shall follow the standard procedure of educational and social research. The methods of investigation would include the following:

- conduct of a standard competence-based test in English for the new entrants of some sample institutions,
- distribution of questionnaires to a random sampling of learners and teachers of the chosen institutions, observation of English classes in different institutions for at least two sessions, and
- contrastive and evaluative analysis of the proficiency achieved by different groups of learners taught English language in the
 - traditional method in the cotemporary ITIs in Odisha and
 - by using and implementing a vast array of well devised innovative techniques and strategies of ELT.

To be specific, in each sample institution two heterogeneous groups of students shall be chosen by the teachers concerned. For the sake of clarity, they may be identified by TG1 and TG2 (TG = Target Group). TG1 shall be taught by the teachers who follow the teacher-fronted methods of teaching English language to the learners in the ITIs. TG2 shall be taught by a host of teachers following the learner-centered strategies and techniques devised and innovated by this researcher. Through FGD (Focused Group Discussion) and Exchange of Ideas, the teachers to teach the students of the TG2 shall be exposed to the finer aspects of the innovative techniques / strategies of teaching English Language. Learners of all the TG1s and TG2s shall be subjected to the uniform (skill- based) test with a view to assessing the impact and efficacy of the innovative techniques and strategies which have been tried out in real and living sites of teaching/learning in the ITIs of Odisha.

For the sake of this survey, ITI in Balasore, ITI in Cuttack, and ITI in Rourkela have been brought into the ambit of field study. Accordingly, 20 students and 02 teachers of each one of the aforementioned ITIs have been taken as Primary Respondents. Only one book *The English Reader* has been chosen as the source of learning and teaching activities from among the classes engaged by the English teachers in the ITIs mentioned above, only 06 (six) classes have been visited, and put under the chosen scanner. Before the commencement of each class engaged by each English Teacher (hence forward nomenclatured as Cl₁, Cl₂, Cl₃, Cl₄, Cl₅, Cl₆, T₁, T₂, T₃, T₄, T₅, and T₆, an ELT (Entry Level Test) has been considered to evaluate the learner's English Language competency in general and conversion from "Direct speech" to "Indirect Speech" in particular. To maintain parity, the same set of Direct Speech has been used as the sample text. To lead clarity to the analysis in progress,

this text is called Sample Text No.1 (ST1). Again, each teacher has been specifically requested to concentrate on the set pedagogic agenda to make the classes engaged by them more micro-oriented.

The Sample Text 1 is mentioned below

1. Ram Says to Hari, " I am hungry here".
2. Hari says to Ram, "why?"
3. Ram said, "My mother was ill last night".
4. Hari said to Ram, "what was the cause?"
5. Ram said, "To be born is to be sick".
6. Hari said to Ram, "I will be a doctor after 10 years".
7. Ram said," O.K".
8. Hari said to Ram," what is your ambition?"
9. Ram said "Everybody does not have the skill to ride the white horse".
10. Hari said, "Are you serious?"

The ST₁ mentioned above has been used in each of the six classes engaged by the chosen 06 teachers. After the test, each answer sheet has been checked through peer evaluation. The answer sheet has been checked and re-checked by the students-peer themselves. The results have been tabulated in three separate sheets namely Results Sheet No. 1, RSN2 & RSN3 in respect of the Balasore ITI, ITI Cuttack and ITI Rourkela respectively. The ELT results have been duly compiled. Only because of the constraint of space, none of the RS_s has been tagged, but results have been analyzed.

Among the 60 learners, only 6 students have more than 60% of marks. The students of Balasore ITI have excelled. Out of 06 students, scoring more than 60%, 4 belong to Balasore ITI. Only 17 students out of the 60 respondents, have scored between 30 and 59% of marks. In terms of demographic distribution of these 17 students it can be said that 06,04, and 07 students belong to ITI Balasore, ITI Cuttack and ITI Rourkela respectively. So logically it can be said that out of the 60 Learners who have taken the test, 37 students have scored 29 or less than 29% of marks. Among these 37, 20 belong to ITI Rourkela, 12 belong to ITI Balasore and 05 belong to the ITI, Cuttack.

On the basis of direct observation of the classes engaged by T₁, T₂, T₃, T₄, T₅, and T₆ it is submitted that T₁ and T₄ have used the technique and strategy of loud and mechanical-structural practice by the students concerned without explaining the relevant rules. In the contrast, T₂, T₅, and T₆ have followed the technique of the inter-active method of teaching English Grammar. So, their classes have ben student-fronted, activity-based, creative and engaging. Unluckily, the T₃ has left the students to themselves without trying in any degree and manner, his own teaching skill. He has quite smugly forgotten that he is being paid to teach the students, he has asked one front-bencher to take the floor and to make his class-mates parrot the answers written by the teacher. So, the students have resorted to rote learning. Obviously, the teachers have followed 03 different strategies, namely structural practice, Interactive peer learning in a student-fronted class and rote-learning in its pristine form.

After the engagement of all the classes, a post-hoc evaluation has been conducted. For the sake of clarity, this test is called the Ultimate Test (UT). After evaluation, it is understood that the students who have been taught by T₂, T₅, and T₆ have done very well. Obviously, these students belong to the ITI, Balasore and ITI Rourkela. From among the 40 Learners of these two ITIs, 32 students have scored 60% and above 60% of marks. And no student has scored less than 45% of marks. In the contrast, students of the ITI, Cuttack have brought ignominy upon themselves and also upon their teachers. Though most of the students of ITI, Cuttack have done well in the ELT, they have cut a sorry figure in the Ultimate Test. So, it is clinically proved that choice of the right kind of teaching strategy is essential to have to have the English Language Competency of the students in the ITIs of Odisha.

Thus, on the basis of the clinical study detailed above it is concluded that:

- the use of the interactive method of teaching the English Grammar skill in the student fronted class is the most effective in the ITIs of Odisha,
- most of the English teachers in the ITIs of Odisha are inefficient, dictatorial, and moronic, having no exposure to result-yielding methodology of teaching, and finally
- multipronged evaluation test should/may be conducted in the pre-learning, while-learning and post learning modes to assess the impact of the learning agenda executed in the class.

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