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Strategies of Teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) at Secondary Level: A Critical Study

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Abstract:

In this modern era, for being a global language, English acts as a gateway to the world of knowledge. So, each and every ambitious student should learn English language properly from the school level. It has been found from the available sources that in speaking, understanding and writing English as a Second Language (ESL), students are not so expert as English as a First

Language (EFL) students. This type of situation is more pathetic among students from rural areas. So, this study is conducted to discover the existing strategies of teaching, problems faced and probable solutions suggested by the school teachers who teach at rural areas. 30 English teachers from 10 Government schools were selected purposively as sample for this study. Data had been collected through interview and classroom observation technique. The study has found out that maximum teachers followed the Grammar Translation Method and Lecture Method with very little use of teaching aids were listening and speaking skills were totally neglected. Lack of infrastructure, absence of quality management, inadequate faculties etc. are the issues that are responsible for the poor condition of the ESL students particularly in rural areas. Only a sincere concern of all the stake holders can improve the condition and thus, the ESL students can get better scope for enhancing their knowledge in English.

Key words: English teacher, Government schools, Secondary Level, Teaching Strategies.

1. Introduction:

In today's world English language has gradually captivated everyone by giving chance to get a better career, better financial security, better communication. Even in Indian context, this is almost a knowledgeable fact. Behind this drastic change there must be some strong reasons. English language is considered as an international communicative language through which one can easily surf in the internet for the purpose of education, profession, online transaction, entertainment etc. By realizing its importance, each and every state or country should focus seriously on teaching English from secondary level because it is at the advent of their career. If they are taught English language step by step effectively from this level, they can be able to speak correctly and fluently to gain knowledge about the basic elements of English language, to translate common words, phrases or sentences into their mother tongue or vice-versa. In this way, they can build an imaginary ladder for moving forward to their bright future.

But in West Bengal, native language is given first preference where English is considered as a second language at school level and the picture of negligence in teaching and learning English

language is clearly seen both by the teachers and by the students particularly (Banerjee, 2016)¹. So, in order to cater the better future for the students, the teachers should follow interesting and exciting strategies for drawing attention among the students in ESL classroom. In this way, this study can be very helpful in finding a new perspective to teach English effectively as second language.

2. Review of Related Literature:

In order to improve the status of English Language, the main focus should be on the teaching strategies in the classroom. So, many studies related to this area have been conducted during the previous years. Khalique (1994)² found that in order to get an interesting and attractive classroom session, the teachers should apply proper method of teaching English with the help of teaching aids. Dave (1995)³ suggested that Communicative Approach was found to be more effective than Structural Approach for teaching English language at Secondary Level. Bista (2011) in her study in Nepal traced that because of large number of students, most of the teachers followed Lecture Method and Grammar Translation Method. Besides this, student-centered teaching methods, materials, training and structural design were recommended.

Upadhyay (2014)⁴ stated that Grammar Translation Method, Direct Method, Bilingual Method, Dr. West's New Method, Substitution Method each method was suitable for a specific context. Only the teachers could adopt their own chosen appropriate method at the time of teaching different aspects - prose, poetry, grammar and composition in English language. Afrin (2014)⁵ in her study in Bangladesh discovered the teachers unconsciously followed the Eclectic Method. Deelip (2016)⁶ has emphasized on Technology - based, student - focused teaching where teachers followed the Communicative Language Teaching by playing the different roles as

¹Banerjee, S. (2016, August). A Study of Current Status Quo Of English as a Second Language in India. *International Journal of Scientific and Research Publications*, 6(8). Retrieved from <https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&source=web&rct=j&url=http://www.ijr.org/research-paper-0816/ijr-p5664.pdf&ved=2ahUKEwixYrpKMNvAhUYA3IKHWxbCi0QFjAAegQIARAC&usg=AOvVaw2ibRIXHthMP-4vAXagieFp>

²Khalique, M. A. (1994). A Critical Investigation into the Methods of teaching English in the Secondary Schools of Aurangabad District.

³Dave, J. (1995). An Inquiry into the Effectiveness of the Communicative Approach to English Language Teaching at Secondary Level. Rajkot: The Saurashtra University, Ph.D Thesis.

⁴Upadhyay, A. (2014). Techniques in English Teaching as a Second Language in the Kumaun Region of Uttarakhand Past Trends and Future Directions. Kumaun University, Department of English. Retrieved from <http://hdl.handle.net/10603/21589>

⁵Afrin, S. (2014). *Teaching Methods and Approaches in ESL classrooms in Dhaka: a comparative study between English and Bengali Medium schools*. BRAC University. doi:ID 08163003

⁶Deelip, M. K. (2016). Modern Approaches and Methods in Teaching English Language. *International Journal of Research & Innovation*, 2(3). Retrieved from <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/305709368-Modern-Approaches-and-Methods-in-teaching-English-Language>

facilitator, counselor, need analyst in various times. Tare (2016)⁷ suggested some effective innovative teaching and learning methods- Word Bank, Wordsmith (the use of Internet), Games, and use of Newspaper in the classroom, Miming, Quiz Competition, Short Speech, Mind Maps, and Mnemonic Words that could be beneficial in the process of imparting knowledge to the study. At the time of teaching English among the Bengali medium students, it is very obvious that there must be some problems faced by the teachers. As Nath (2016)⁸ identified that in North Tripura District, Pune, the teachers faced that there were unplanned textbook and students were not ready to interact with the teachers and disinterested in learning English during the ESL class. Poothongoen (2006)⁹ found out that there were over population of the students in the classes and for this reason teachers were unable to manage the whole class. Irregular evaluation system also created a big hindrance. Unplanned, large syllabus and lack of teaching aids were also other problems discovered by Vanlafela (2010)¹⁰ as cited in Nath (2016)¹¹ in his study.

In order to resolve these problems some researchers suggested some ideas in this regard. In ESL classroom, for making an interesting session audio-visual aid and for improving better pronunciation Language Laboratory must be compulsory to have in each and every school Nath (2016). A lot of recommendations were also proposed to erase the problems of ESL teachers by Khamari (2014)¹². These were like recruitment of capable faculty with enough qualifications, use of interesting teaching materials, preparation of lesson plan, continuous comprehensive evaluation, and providence of regular homework.

Most of these studies have been developed in foreign countries; less attention is given in Indian perspectives. As far as sources available, it has been found that in West Bengal, very few researches have been conducted on the ESL classroom and they were encircled in discovering the overall method of English as a Second Language, in finding out the techniques of teaching a certain aspect i.e., prose, poetry, grammar and writing in a separate way, in searching the problems faced by the teachers or in finding recommendations to resolve those problems. But here in this present study, all these aspects have been found out from the teachers of the

⁷Tare, A. N. (2016, December). Effective Methods of Teaching and Learning English as the Second Language . *Epitome: International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research*, 2(12). Retrieved from <http://www.epitomejournals.com>

⁸Nath, M. M. (2016). *Problems in Teaching English in Secondary Schools in English in North Tripura District*. Dissertation Thesis, Savitribai Phule Pune University, Department of English.

⁹Poothongoen, W. (2006). *The Problems of English Language in Higher Secondary Schools :a Case Study in Yangtalat District Kalasin province, Thailand*. Ph.D Thesis, Savitribai Phule Pune University, Department of English. Retrieved from <http://hdl.handle.net/10603/142851>

¹⁰Vanlafela, S. (2010). *The Problem of English Language Teaching at College Level in Mizoram*. M.Phil Dissertation, Pune University.

¹¹ Ibid- Footnote-8

¹²Khamari, J. M. (2014, Feb). An Investigation into the Problems of Teaching English at Primary Level. *IOSR Journal of Research & Method in Education(IOSR-JRME)*, 4(1), 30-42. Retrieved from <https://iosrjournals.org/>

Government Secondary Schools in rural area of South 24 Parganas District, West Bengal. Thus, the finding of this study will provide a proper direction and guidance for teaching in ESL class in Government Secondary Schools.

3. Objectives:

- To point out commonly used strategies of teaching English as a second language in Government Schools at secondary level.
- To identify the problems faced by the teachers during the process of teaching English subject
- To find out the probable solutions of the problems faced by the teachers during the teaching of ESL.

4. Methodology:

This whole study is conducted by following this method-

4.1 Method: Descriptive survey research design has been followed in this present study.

4.2 Sample and Sampling: For this present study 30 English teachers who teach English as a Second Language at Secondary level from 10 Government schools were chosen by using purposive sampling from rural areas of South 24 Parganas district of West Bengal.

4.3 Tools used for data collection: Interview and classroom observation technique had been used to collect the information from the English Teachers of Secondary schools. All the questions were related to the medium of instruction, methods of teaching prose, poetry, grammar and writing, strategies to improve students' learning, assessment techniques, problems faced by the teachers and the probable suggestions in order to improve the existing situation. In order to get instant data and see the real-life situations of the classroom, 50 classroom observations were done by the researcher from 10 schools where the arrangement of English classes and the activities of the teachers during the class were observed minutely.

5. Data Analysis & Interpretation:

From the interview of the English teachers and from the classroom observation by the researcher a scenario of English language classroom had been found. Maximum teachers followed the Bengali language as the medium of instruction, only reading of textbook and writing the board work or the given task were focused. The duration of teaching was 40 minutes in 1st half and 35 minutes in 2nd half of the total school hour. In majority of the schools, English subject was taught almost 5 days in a week in various aspects i.e. Prose, Poetry, Grammar and Vocabulary, Writing Skills, Dictation arranged by the concerned teachers. Somewhere English language was given importance by considering it as the first class of the day. Other necessary

information was analyzed quantitatively and presented here according to the objectives in the following:

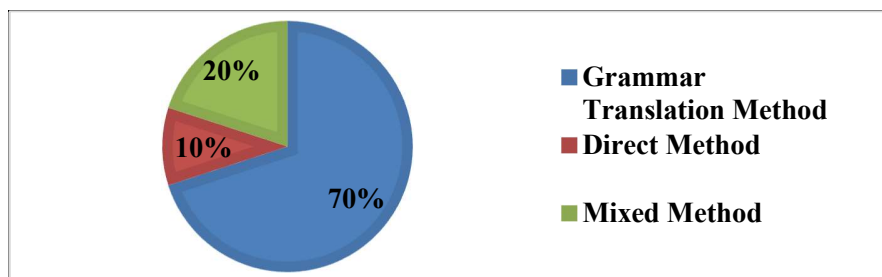


Figure 1: Used Methods in ESL Classroom

According to most of the teachers (70%), they used Grammar Translation Method where they translated English text into the students' mother tongue i.e. Bengali and even other instruction was also done in Bengali language. 10% teachers used Direct Method i.e., the whole classroom activities were conducted in English language because they felt that this is the best process to make the students experts in English. 20% teachers used Mixed Method where they used both Direct Method and Grammar Translation Method according to the necessity. Sometimes they spoke thoroughly in English; if students could not make any sense, they translated that in Bengali for their better understanding.

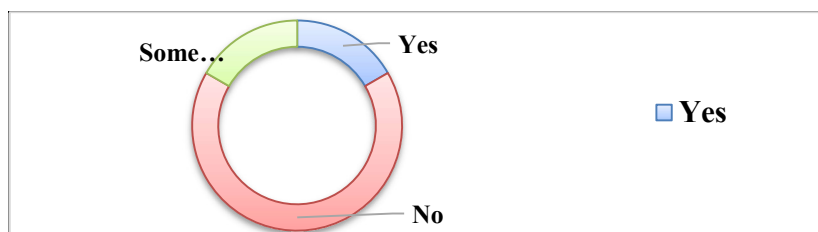


Figure 2: Use of Teaching Aids (Traditional and Modern)

Maximum teachers (66.6%) mentioned that they didn't use any modern teaching aids flash cards, projector, audio-visual aids etc. During the class, they only used traditional teaching aids like textbook, white chalk, blackboard. 16.6% informed that they used both traditional and modern teaching aids on a regular basis in order to grasp the attention of the students. Another 16.6% teachers asserted that they sometimes used such types of teaching aids in realizing the necessity of the content.

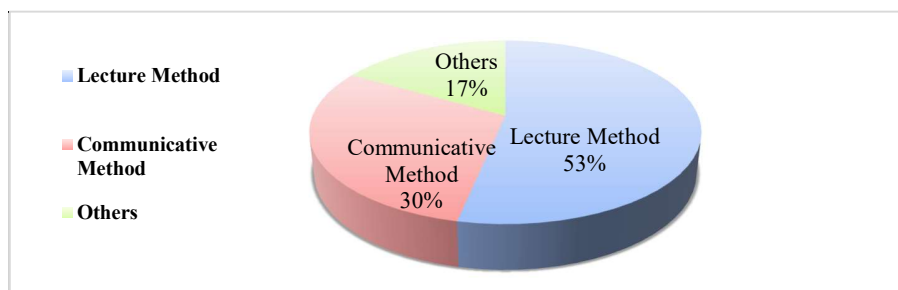


Figure 3: Used Methods for Teaching English Prose and Poetry

At the time of teaching English Prose and Poetry more than half of the teachers (53.3%) followed the Lecture Method. They first used to give a brief introduction of the writer. Then, loudly read the text and later translated that into Bengali. Thus, they explained the theme of the content and finally summarized the class. Other teachers (30%) used Communicative Method where first the students were asked about their previous knowledge related to the topic. After that at the time of explaining the text, teachers continuously communicate with the students by raising questions or answering the students' questions. Almost all the teachers used these types of methods for teaching Prose and Poetry, but some of them (16.7%) acknowledged that they did not follow any kind of specific method or strategy for teaching prose and poetry. According to the theme of the content, they discovered their own developed method in the ESL classroom.

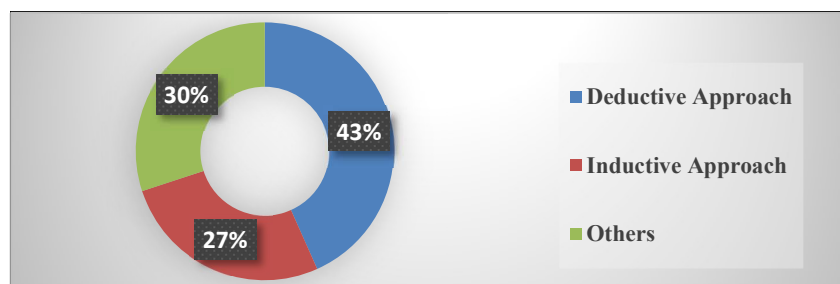


Figure 4: Strategies of Teaching Grammar and Writing Skills

According to many teachers (43.3%) they used the Deductive Approach for teaching English Grammar and developing Writing Skills. At first, they used to give an idea about the basic rules of a particular topic and after that for better clarification they gave examples. 26.7% teachers informed that at the time of teaching English Grammar they used Inductive Approach where they first gave examples and then concluded the discussion by pointing out the rules and definition. Others (30%) asserted that they did not follow any kind of specific Approach for teaching Grammar and developing Writing skills. They adopted their suitable method by realizing the topic of discussion.

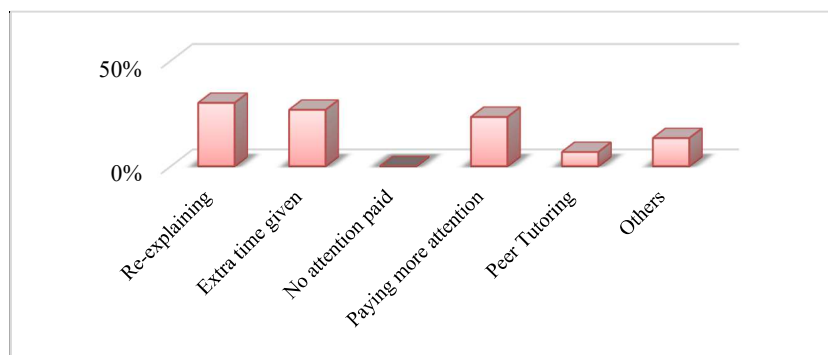


Figure 5: Teachers' Strategies to improve Students' Learning

Teachers informed that when students failed to grasp any idea taught by them in the classes, no teachers ignored them. After asking about the uncomprehend portion by the students, almost all the teachers were eager to make the students understand. They tried to re-explain (30%) the content, give extra time (26.7%) by arranging remedial classes, pay more attention (23.3%) by praising the students, organize the classes for peer tutoring (6.7%) and other teachers (13.3%) managed in their own ways.

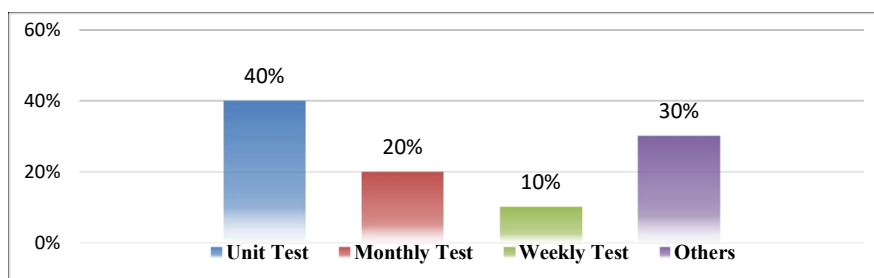


Figure 6: Assessment Techniques

It had been informed by the teachers that at the time of taking classes, students were assessed from different levels like reading, writing, grammar and writing skills. If there needed any kind of modification, teachers corrected that portion instantly during the class. Besides this, maximum teachers (40%) conducted Unit Test after the completion of every topic or unit. A very few teachers (10%) took Weekly Test of the students.

5.1 Problems Faced by the Teachers during the Process of Teaching English Subject

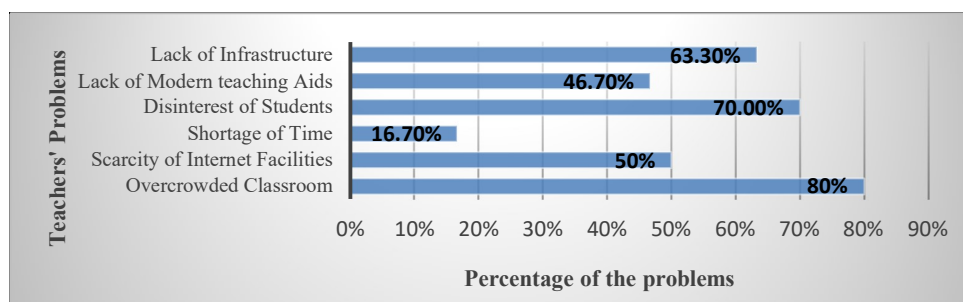


Figure 7: Problems faced by the ESL Teachers

From Figure 7, it is clear that many teachers faced more than one problem in a school. During the class, most arising problem is that teachers (80%) confronted difficulties to manage the over-crowded classroom where a lot of students had to attend the classes in a short span of classroom. The least problem faced by the ESL teachers (16.7%) in the classroom was shortage of time where they could not complete chapter properly because they spent much time in managing this huge classroom.

5.2 Probable Solutions of the Problems Faced by the Teachers during the Teaching of ESL subject:

Teachers suggested their point of view in regarding the probable solutions of the problem. According to majority of the teachers, in order to bring interest among the students the content might be taught in an interesting way i.e., by using teaching aids, games, quizzes, debates etc. for which they need proper training for professional development. Private tuition should be totally banished because it was one of the reasons behind the disinterest of the students. Recruitment of adequate teachers, enough funds and their proper implementation, availability of infrastructure for ICT integration, etc. should be taken care of by the Government. Arrangement of remedial classes, continuous in-service teachers training programme, collaboration of parents and teachers should be there for improving learners' English language skills.

6. Findings and Discussion:

- i) Most of the teachers followed the Grammar Translation method with the very little use of modern teaching aids in the ESL classes and Bengali is used as the medium of classroom transaction also. But very few mainly young full-time teachers sought for a change in this matter by using Direct Method, Bilingual Method, Audio-Visual aids etc.
- ii) For teaching Prose and Poetry, majority of the teachers used Lecture Method and Communicative Method where Deductive and Inductive Approach were used to teach English Grammar and Writing Skills. A few teachers did not follow any particular method or approach; they adopted their own way of teaching by realizing the theme of the content.
- iii) In ESL classroom, reading and writing were practiced to a certain extent, but listening and speaking in English were very much neglected. Teachers himself read the text and ordered to let the text read by the students. The classroom activities were sometimes written in the blackboard by the teachers and students had to write down that portion. Thus, maximum schools were teacher-centered and autocratic, rather than democratic.
- iv) Teachers themselves suggested that they had to adopt such strategies in realizing the circumstances of the surroundings. Thus, there are no prescribed particular methods for ESL classroom; teachers have their own rights to choose any method for better understanding of the students.

- ## 7. Delimitation of the Study:

- Only 10 Government Secondary Schools of West Bengal Board of Secondary Education (WBBSE)
- Rural areas of South 24 Parganas district, West Bengal.
- 30 English Teachers at Secondary Level
- 50 Classroom Observations of the classes of the teachers teaching English as a Second Language at Secondary Level.

Finally, it can be remarked that teachers have the main roles to moderate the ESL classes. They should apply such strategies so that students could not feel bore at the time of learning a foreign language like English and could better understand the concept and if they face any doubts, they could freely raise their questions and the teachers could help them out. In order to erase the problems faced by the ESL teachers during the classes, the joint co-operation from the parents, school authority as well as the Govt. was strongly needed. If these recommendations implement properly, like EFL students, the ESL learners can also achieve mastery in understanding, speaking and writing English language. In this way, they can establish a better future not only for them and their society but also for our country itself.

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