



## POST- MODERN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING: SOME ISSUES ON PEDAGOGICAL CONFRONTATION WITH OBJECTIVES AND ASSESSMENT

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### ABSTRACT:

English language teaching in the post- modern era has been a challenging task. With the changing learning needs of the of the learners, the objectives of teaching English have become changed. The assessment criterion has also become old fashioned to deal with the learning outcomes. So, in terms of the application of English pedagogies in the classroom, there are two fundamental challenges: first is the reviewing of English teaching objectives as per changing learners' needs and second is to re-examine the current assessment practices to evaluate the learning outcomes. The present paper critically studies the issues of pedagogical confrontation with the English teaching objectives in post-modern period and the contradictory nature of present assessment practices with the post- modern pedagogies.

**Key words:** - *Post- modernism, English language teaching, Pedagogy, ELT objectives, ELT assessment.*

English is considered to be a language of linking individuals, societies, cultures and nations. So, it has received a status of international language; but what is the common perception about English language in the developing countries where English is learnt as a foreign or second language? In India, the state of English is understood as a 'status language' in the social, cultural and educational context. The primary reason is the middle-class progressive mentality of the people which is directly related to the enrichment of financial status and this is connected with the employment opportunities generated through English. On the one hand people try to encash the opportunities created by the knowledge of English and on the other hand they fail to grab these opportunities due to poor basic linguistic skills. The aspiration to learn English is very natural but why people fail to learn English? The most commonly cited reason is its difficultness. It's an irony that people wish to learn a language which they have its phobia in their mind. The fundamental

reason behind the common perception of English as a difficult language seems to be the lack of synchronization between the objectives of teaching English, pedagogies and assessment practices.

In order to have an effective English language teaching- learning process, three components: learning objectives, assessment methods and instructional strategies should be aligned together. Learning objectives help teachers to explore the possible outcomes of the course. Once the outcomes are finalised, instructional strategies are designed to conduct the activities in and out of the classroom for the reinforcement of learning objectives and preparing students for assessment. Finally, the assessment tasks reveal the achievement level of the learners in completing the learning objectives. (Carnegie Mellon University) There is no teaching without learning. If the effective learning doesn't occur, then the whole teaching-learning process could be questioned. Every step in this process, from planning learning

objectives to the assessment criteria should be revised and modified, so that an effective learning could take place.

The beginning of modern education started in India with its acquisition by the Britishers. Initially, they neglected the education sector, but with the expansion of the British empire, Britishers needed to establish a bureaucratic system “with a class of English knowing English urban ‘baboo’- who would be loyal to their masters”. (N. and Lalitha) Macaulay’s Minutes in 1835 paved the way of modern English education by introducing English as the medium of instruction with two prime objectives: first is of creating English learned Indians for administrative purposes and consolidating the position of Britishers and second is to popularise English culture and sciences among Indians. (R.N. and R.K.) The methods of teaching English were aligned with the objectives of teaching. As the objectives were limited to “... to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions who govern- a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect” (N. and Lalitha 31- 32), the teaching methods and the assessment were also aligned with learning objectives.

After independence, there had been no clarity about the status of English in India. All the educational commissions and committees recommended native language as the medium of instruction and English as a subject. “It is interesting to note that most of the recommendations found in the reports written after 1947 are also found in the reports written after 1947.” (...) The first education commission post-independence was the university education commission under the chairmanship of Dr. Radhakrishnan recognised the importance of English “which is rich in literature- humanistic, scientific and technical” (..) The commission says “... students must acquire sufficient

mastery of English to give them access to the treasure of knowledge... no student should be allowed to take a degree without acquiring the ability to read with facility and understanding works of English authors” (117). So, the major English teaching was to develop reading skill and to acquaint the students the major literary works of English writers.

Kothari commission was appointed in 1964 to prepare a voluminous report covering all the aspects of education. It recommended that “English should be continued as a library language and a channel for international communication. A reasonable degree of proficiency in English was to be stipulated as essential for the award of degree” (125) The report also talked about the inclusion special units for teaching English as a skill subject apart from teaching literature. Though Kothari commission emphasises on developing reading ability, it also recognises English as a skill subject and underlines its importance for international communication.

The status of English in post- independent India was changed from the language of rulers to the language of upper class. For commoners, it was still a foreign language. Constitutionally, it was given a status of Associate Official Language, as per the act of Parliament in 1963 even after the resistance of Hindi- speaking states. The resistance gradually collapsed as the common Indians understood the importance of English in obtaining social status and employment. The significance of English never decreased even after the independence because of “two important legacies of the British rule... the full-blown bureaucratic network and the educational institutions within the well- established framework of the Macaulayan system of education, English continued to be the dominant language even after 1947.” (N. and Lalitha 139)

Contrary to the politically and culturally motivated English teaching objectives in India, post-independence English teaching objectives have been recognised to meet the needs and aspirations of the new born nation. After independence, the policy makers acknowledged the importance of English as a global link language and continued to be studied in high schools and universities despite the resistance from Hindi dominated state leaders. It has been given the constitutional status of Associate National Official Language under the article 343. Post- independence English language teaching continued to treat English as a library language. It focussed mainly on the reading and comprehension. To fulfil the objectives of reading and understanding great English writers, Grammar- translation method was the most common in Indian classroom. Due to widespread dissatisfaction of many language teaching experts with this, it was considered to be a 'no method, but a kind of bilingual work with focus on grammar rules and literary texts' (125). Out of this discontent, Direct method emerged and advocated for teaching English as a second language. As it left no scope for the use of mother tongue or translation into native language and teachers were not trained to deal with this method, the method couldn't be rooted in India. With the advent of structural approach in the west, the structural syllabus was prepared by London school and introduced in the Madras region through Madras English Language Teaching (MELT) campaign in 1952. All these methods were aligned with the teaching objectives of developing basic reading and writing skills with comprehension. Even the assessment practices were designed to test these objectives through tests and examinations.

The teaching objectives are formulated on the basis of content to be taught. As teaching is a meaningful and purposeful activity, its objectives are to be determined carefully and

consciously before the commencement of course of a course. "The teacher can identify his or her teaching objectives with the help of his subject knowledge and understanding of educational objectives" (D. N.) After determining the teaching objectives, a question arises about the suitable method or approach to deal with the objectives. Whether the established methods should be used or to innovate new methods? "From this ... historical perspectives... the concerns that have prompted modern method innovations... on how to teach foreign languages. Change in language teaching methods throughout history have reflected recognition of changes in the kind of proficiency learners need." (Richards and Rodgers) The traditional objective of learning a foreign language "is to learning a foreign language in order to read its literature or in order to benefit from the mental discipline and intellectual development" (Richards and Rodgers 5) To fulfil this objective, grammar and translation factors used to be focussed in a method. First the learners are taught the analysis of grammar rules which is followed by the textual translation and explanation in native language using grammar rules. Vocabulary is also explained and interpreted in the mother tongue of students. Reading and writing skills are majorly focussed and no proper attention is paid to listening and speaking skills. Vocabulary is taught through the prescribed reading text. The use of bilingual dictionaries, memorisation of words and translation exercises are the common practices in second or foreign language classroom. Accuracy is emphasised than fluency while using grammar and translation. (Richards and Rodgers 6) The practice of this Grammar-translation method has been still used by majority of teachers even in the post- modern period, which substantially fail to fulfil the ELT objectives.

In the modern era the focus was on teaching so the objectives and methods of teaching English

were teacher Centric. The objectives adopted by western policy makers for their educational conditions were replicated in developing countries like India. The objectives of teaching English in modern era were standardized. It didn't consider the social, financial political, cultural and other factors. The economy of India was a mixed economy mostly controlled by the government so there were not enough employment opportunities directly related with the knowledge of English but in post-modern era, the economy was liberalized, privatised and globalised and it provided scope for private sector to grow and flourish. So in the post-modern period, there is an open economy and English plays a role of a link language in global context.

India is rapidly developing itself on the verge of post-modern society. From 1991 onwards, it has been shifting gradually from modernism to postmodernism. With the adoption of Liberalization, Privatization and Globalization (LPG) policy in most of the sectors promoted the use of Information Communication Technology (ICT) which is the core of post-modern society. (India and postmodernism) The impact of postmodernism has different dimensions on the diversified sections of Indian society, but it is certainly visible through rapid growth of ICT, increasing employment opportunities in private service sector, consumer friendly environment etc. One more pointer towards post-modern society is "the rise of popular culture is in India. The popular culture is very much evident in the mass communication discourse in the country. Its imprints are found on advertisements, TV serials and Bollywood cinema etc." (India and postmodernism)

In post-modern period, Indian society has been witnessing some major changes and trends in the context of the employment of English language. The scope of English has been expanding among all the sectors and strata of

society. It is used by more people for different purposes. According to David Graddol, there are three main drivers in India working towards the increasing use of English, namely education, employment and social mobility. (Graddol) The fourth driver influencing the whole ELT process is ICT. All these drivers are interconnected and contribute towards the greater use of English. This demand for English education is directly and indirectly related to employment opportunities in organised sector, which require basic language skills and advanced language skills to some extent. Education and employment are linked to social mobility. As the rising Indian middle class crossing the geographical boundaries for higher education and employment opportunities, English has been serving as the link language within and beyond the country. Technology is the factor which has changed the nature of other drivers and the ELT itself. The knowledge of English is crucial for the use of ICT. It has been playing an important role in education, employment and social mobility.

With the changed scenario, the role of English has not been limited to 'library language' as it used to be before in modern period. The communicative English skills are required and demanded by the post-modern society. This demand is primarily for education, employment, mobility and ICT. In the present post-modern context, India needs qualified and professionally skilled work force to cater the local and demands in different sectors, particularly in the service industry. To become a global power, it is imperative for India that more people should shift from unorganised sector to organised sector and English could contribute a major role to achieve this objective. (Graddol) Hence, English teaching objectives of modern period need to be reviewed in the post-modern period.

As the conventional English teaching methods are aligned with the teaching objectives, the

assessment practices have also been synonymous with traditional testing system. In the recent years with the changing learners' needs and the emergence ICT in English teaching methods, it is imperative to re-examine the role of present assessment practices in the post- modern scenario. Primarily there are two assessment approaches- summative and formative. Summative assessment is prominently used by teachers in the classrooms to evaluate the performance of learners usually at the end of a teaching unit or semester. Formative assessment is useful for monitoring the learning and providing feedback; it could be conducted through the session. The primary goal of any assessment is to give qualitative and quantitative feedback about the learners' performance and make them aware about their strengths and weaknesses. The present assessment of English deals with the quantitative feedback and ignore the qualitative aspect. It has been prepared to test the knowledge of reading, writing, grammar and vocabulary in a rigid manner. It fails to evaluate the objectives of teaching English in post-modern period. It is important that the assessment practices should be aligned with objectives and pedagogies adopted in the post-modern context.

The changes in the field of ELT had been very slow up to the decades of nineties, but due to the growing demand of English in all the sectors of society, a transformation is witnessed in all the aspects of ELT, particularly teaching-learning objectives, pedagogies and assessment. In post- modern period, the objective should be to design a curriculum which is learning centred, need based and socially relevant.(Saraswathi) In modern period, the teaching objectives and approached used to be standardised and uniform, but the post- modern era believes that the change is the only constant thing in this world. Hence the practice of

reviewing the teaching objectives, methods and assessment needs to be established, which should strike a balance between the loal and global needs.

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