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The English Language Teachers' Association of India was registered on August 7, 1974 by the late Padmashri S. Natarajan, a noted educationist of our country.

## Periodicity

*Journal of English Language Teaching (JELT)* is published six times a year: in February, April, June, August, October and December.

## Contributions

Articles on ELT are welcome. Share your ideas, innovations, experiences, teaching tips, material reviews and resources on the net with your fellow professionals.

Length: About 2000 words maximum

There should be an abstract in about 100 words at the beginning and all the necessary information about all the references cited.

Please send a short note about yourself. You may give your name as you want it to appear in the Journal.

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## Objectives of the Association

- To provide a forum for teachers of English to meet periodically and discuss problems relating to the teaching of English in India.
- To help teachers interact with educational administrators on matters relating to the teaching of English.
- To disseminate information in the ELT field among teachers of English.
- To undertake innovative projects aimed at the improvement of learners' proficiency in English.
- To promote professional solidarity among teachers of English at primary, secondary and university levels.
- To promote professional excellence among its members in all possible ways.

The Journal is sent free to all the registered and active members of the Association. Our Literature Special Interest Group brings out a free online quarterly journal, *Journal of Teaching and Research in English Literature*.

Our consultancy services include teacher training and bi-monthly meetings on current ELT themes relevant to the Indian context.

We host annual, national and international conferences and regional programmes on specific areas relevant to ELT today. Delegates from all over the country as well as from outside participate in them, present papers and conduct workshops.

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# ***JOURNAL OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING***

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**Our Founder Editor & Publisher: (Late) Padmashree S. Natarajan**

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## EDITORIAL

*I deem it a privilege to be editing this issue of JELT which has a rich collection of scholarly articles. I thank the ELTAI for providing me this opportunity.*

*This issue carries in it a total of nine articles. Six of these have been exclusively written for the present issue, while two of them are regular columns which we have been carrying for quite some time now. One of the contributions is a prize winning essay in a competition conducted by the ELTAI. Here is a quick glance of the contents to facilitate your reading.*

*In the first article, Venkat Reddy argues for developing socio-cultural skills among language learners. This is well in place, and while tracing the origins of social competence he introduces two terms linguaculture and languaculture. Elaborating the subtle differences between these terms, he establishes the need for developing social competence in preference to lexical and grammatical competence. He also provides a neatly laid out lesson plan for designing such language teaching lessons.*

*The article by Lalesh Nand delineates the features of academic writing. In his analysis he provides samples of different parts of an essay and emphasizes the need to go beyond syntax into the realm of discourse to master writing skills.*

*Rathore, in his write-up on how English came to India, explores some of the less known facts from history, especially the developments in the pre-Wood's Dispatch days. He reasons out how economic and administrative demands ruled over academic demands in ushering in English into India.*

*Bhaskaran Nair takes a non-conformist view on developing reading and takes a fresh look at the Schema theory. He argues for the need to go beyond vertical thinking and develop critical and lateral thinking among our learners. He*

*provides illuminating illustrations to prove his point and says that 'break the norm' should become our norm while teaching.*

*Banerjee in his article discusses novel strategies of teaching spoken English. He devises five language games which have been tried out over a period of time with positive results. Each language game is described appropriately and adequate materials are given to try these in different situations.*

*Kiran Shetty presents a nostalgic view on teachers, their role in shaping our careers and pays a wonderful tribute to the conceptual Guru. Saraswathi in her regular column 'Grammar Guru' demonstrates how various body parts are used in language with newer meanings – as adjectives, as verbs, and in idioms. This provides a new perspective on not only learning grammar but also developing vocabulary. In another of the regular features, Elango discusses how slower reading is virtuous. He mentions how on many an occasion faster reading results in loss of grasping the vital information. Slow reading is essential when there are references which need to be weighed to understand and proceed.*

*In addition to all these, we are proud to carry a prize winning essay written by Pratima Talwar. Congratulations to Pratima on winning the coveted prize in the competition! In her essay, she discusses how useful reading is and how this skill can be developed by establishing reading clubs. While providing details of starting such a club, she puts the onus on the teacher who has to be a good reader. A teacher should set an example to his/her students by possessing excellent reading habits. Can anyone dispute this?*

*This is the bouquet we have to offer. Hope you will be happy to enjoy its fragrance and also appreciate it for its beauty. Happy Reading!*

**R P Jadeja, Guest Editor**

# Developing Socio-Cultural Competence in ESL Learners: Some Practical Techniques

*K Venkat Reddy*

## ABSTRACT

*The paper is based on Agakar's concept of "languaculture" which states that language, and culture are inseparable units and that teaching one in the absence of the other will render the learning incomplete. Consequently, teaching a language should not be limited to merely imparting LSRW, vocabulary, grammar, and rules of pronunciation. The curriculum should incorporate socio-cultural content to boost cultural awareness. In India, often teaching materials are designed with little attention to sensitizing students about the culture of the English language and, as a result, cultural training remains conspicuously absent in classroom practices. The paper argues that apart from developing grammatical and communicative competences of English, simultaneous efforts must be made to enhance socio-cultural competence. Such an inclusion would foster a broad cross-cultural awareness and understanding in addition to encouraging tolerance for other cultures. In this paper, firstly, I explain the general concepts of language, culture, their definitions, Agakar's concept of 'languaculture', Friedrich's term 'linguaculture', the need, and the how of incorporating the cultural content into the ESL curriculum. Secondly, I identify and present an inventory of 'cultures' that the native speaker routinely experiences, and finally, based on the inventory, I present a few cross-cultural activities to develop socio-cultural competence in Indian ESL learners.*

**Keywords:** culture, 'languaculture', 'linguaculture', grammatical competence, communicative competence, sociocultural competence, cross-cultural communication

## Introduction

In the past language experts believed that all the natural human languages were identical, and one could convey exactly the same meaning in two different languages by accurately translating the vocabulary and grammar. Today, perceptions related to how languages work have radically altered. Research in Ethnography, Sociolinguistics, Cultural Linguistics, and Anthropology, in particular, convincingly point out that

language and its socio-cultural contexts are not distinct categories to be addressed separately, and that they are indistinguishable. For example, the discoveries revealed by Benjamin Lee Whorf, who studied the language of the Hopi people in the United States of America, have significantly changed our views on language. Hopi language had more words carrying shades of meaning for the English word snow because the areas where the Hopis lived were very cold. Whorf also pointed out that the Hopis did not know

how to count time; they did not know how to say one o' clock or two o' clock because, for them time was an indivisible entity that couldn't be split into units, and the language had no past or future tenses. Further, for the Hopi people, there were no words in their language to distinguish seasons such as summer, autumn, and winter as they experience principally only one season, winter. Observations such as these have prompted Whorf to draw conclusions that have revolutionised the way people think about language, society, and culture. Influenced by Whorf's linguistic relativity theory, Rebecca Fong notes:

“Languages are different and not just in the way they sound, or the words they use. The customs of a language, its grammar, the words themselves, are a product of the way the people of a culture experience the world. And we do not all experience the world in the same way. This means that accurately translating words from one language to another may not be enough for us to understand the cultural meaning that lies behind the words.”

Expanding on Whorf's observations, Kress (1985), Paul Friedrich (1989), and Michael Agar (1994) concluded that the socio-cultural aspects and language cannot be understood as separate units. In fact, they are two sides of the same coin; they are one and the same, and one cannot be understood without the other. Langacker (1999:16) describes language as “an essential instrument and component of culture, whose reflection in linguistic structure and use is all pervasive and quite significant”. He suggests that language and culture are two sides of the same coin; inseparably intertwined to the

extent that one cannot be understood without the other. He goes so far as to say that even the structure of language is not devoid of the cultural content.

### **‘languaculture’ Vs. ‘linguaculture’**

The term ‘*languaculture*’ was coined and disseminated by the American Anthropologist Michel Agar through a book that he had written and published in 1994: *Language Shock: Understanding the Culture of Communication*. The purpose of creating this term is to make minor adjustments to a similar sounding term, “*linguaculture*”, coined by Paul Friedrich, the American Linguistic Anthropologist. The purpose of both these terms is ‘to define the essential tie between language and culture’. Agar was of the view that in Friedrich's “*linguaculture*”, there is more of Linguistics than natural language. Although Linguistics uses language as material for the study, it is not language proper, it is about language, a subject that uses language as subject for a systematic study. Agar therefore corrected this mistake by changing the vowel from ‘i’ to ‘a’ thereby coining ‘*languaculture*’ making language sit next to culture.

Both these terms focus on culture in language or the cultural dimension of language. Agar states that language users draw on multiple things besides grammar and vocabulary such as past knowledge, local and cultural information, habits and behaviours as they negotiate ‘*languaculture*’. When Agar talks about the ‘*languaculture*’, he defines it as the necessary tie between language and culture. He stresses that languages and cultures are always closely related, and it is not possible to distinguish languages from cultures.

Therefore, you cannot really know a language unless you have an informed understanding of the culture of that language

Thus Agar gave us a novel way of describing language and culture. This paradigm of conceptualising language as '*languaculture*' does not reduce language to its mere instrumental function: as an instrument of communication. But it also recognises that besides performing the instrumental function, each language communicates its culture. When language and culture are closely related, how can we teach one without looking at the other as a reference point? Teaching ESL/EFL should not be limited to equipping learners with lexical, grammatical, pronunciation and communicative competences alone. Alongside these abilities, cultural competence should also be developed for an appropriate use of language. That is precisely why we need to find ways and means to offer a sense of the cultural context in language learning situations.

### **Definitions of Culture**

The term 'culture' is a complex term filled with numerous connotations. Kaplan (1986, taken from Thanasoulas, 2001) points out, "we do not have good definitions for either culture or language; because we are enmeshed in both, it is hard to get outside of them enough to try to define them". This complexity is further compounded by the fact that certain manifestations of culture are visible and explicit, while others are implicit. Harris sees this through an analogy of an iceberg saying *lifestyles, food, music, artefacts, architecture, forms of discourse, routine, leisure activities* and so on are explicit or visible forms of culture and

*attitudes, norms, values, customs, basic assumptions and beliefs* are implicit or deep structures of culture.

An inclusive and comprehensive definition suggests that culture is an amalgamation of ideas, values and assumptions about life. It is widely shared among people and directs behaviour and language of the people who are a part of that culture. A practical way of looking at culture is to say that 'culture is the sum total of the way of life of people'.

Against the backdrop of this argument on the nature of language, as language teachers we stand at a vantage point from where we could develop the students' broad cross-cultural awareness and encourage tolerance as well as acceptance of members of other cultures, while "at the same time, as an intrinsic part of language teaching, we need to make students aware of how cultural elements can affect communication in a foreign language" (Harris, 2008).

### **Diverse Competences**

The word 'competence' is an important word in formal as well as applied linguistics. It is mainly used to discuss the aims and procedures of teaching a language. It is appended to a number of crucial terms in diverse disciplines: lexical competence, grammatical/linguistic competence, discourse competence, phonological competence, communicative competence and now socio-cultural competence. Its use is normally associated with Chomsky, who proposed a classic distinction between competence and performance. "By 'competence' Chomsky (1965) meant 'the monolingual speaker-listener's knowledge of

language' and by 'performance' he meant 'the actual use of language in real situations'.

### **Grammatical Competence**

Grammatical or linguistic competence in the L2 situation constitutes the ability of a learner to produce and receive grammatically well-formed sentences as well as the ability to distinguish them from the unacceptable ones. The learner knows the rules that form words and how these words string together to construct phrases, clauses, sentences and larger texts. In addition, the learner also knows the rules of pronunciation. Such an ability equips a learner to apply such knowledge and skills for better understanding to grasping the literal meaning.

### **Lexical Competence**

Lexical competence in a second language can be described as the ability of the learners "To recognize and use words in a language in the way the speakers of the language use them. Lexical competence includes understanding the different relationships among families of words and the common collocations of words" (Thanasoulas, 2001). The learners of English need to be able to recognize the concept of *chair* and what makes it different from a *stool*, a *sofa*, or a *bench*. They need to know that a *chair* is a piece of *furniture*, and that there are various kinds of *chairs*, including *easy chairs*, *deck chairs*, *office chairs*, *rocking chairs* and so on. They also need to understand how *chair* is used in an extended sense for what used to be termed a *chairman*, especially when referring to a woman, as in *Malini is the chair of the committee*.

Elaborating on this, Meral Ozturk further comments that there is a general agreement in the literature that knowledge of vocabulary is a continuum between receptive knowledge and productive knowledge. Having receptive knowledge of a word entails "understanding the most frequent meaning" (Laufer & Paribahkt, 1998) of the word when encountered in written or spoken language. Productive knowledge is "the spontaneous use of a word in a context generated by the user" (taken from Thanasoulas, 2001).

### **Communicative Competence**

Dell Hymes coined the term in the 1970s. The term 'communicative competence', like the other terms discussed above, is composed of two terms, 'communication' and 'competence'. Together these words stand for 'competence to communicate' or 'ability to communicate'. From its original use by Hymes (1971), there have been numerous attempts by Canale and Swain (1980-81), Widdowson (1983), Bachman (1990), and Bachman and Palmer (1996) to clarify what the term actually signifies in second language pedagogy. Bagaric and Metodika (2007) provide an inclusive, non-complex definition: "tacit knowledge of language (rules of word formation, grammar, pronunciation) and an ability to use it appropriately in a communicative event" (taken from Thanasoulas, 2001).

For some time, there has been a surge of interest in teaching English the communicative way rather than through the mechanical learning of vocabulary, grammar and the structure in isolation from social contexts. Through the inclusion of contextualized communicative functions in

the English curriculum, critical attempts have been made to develop a general communicative competence or fluency. By teaching English through communicative activities in conjunction with the communicative functions of the language, it is hoped that the learners will not only acquire context-driven, function-driven vocabulary, structures, segmental and supra segmental features, but also learn what language is to be used where, when and how. While summing up these three predominant abilities that mainstream scholarship is preoccupied with in foreign language learning, Dimitrios Tanasoulas says that grammatical and lexical competences underscore the conviction that language is merely a code and, once mastered – mainly by dint of steeping oneself into rules and some aspects of social context in which it is embedded - “one language is essentially translatable into another” (Kramch, 1993).

“To a certain extent this belief has been instrumental in promoting various approaches to foreign language teaching-pragmatic, sociolinguistic, and communicative-which have certainly endowed the study of language with a social ‘hue’; nevertheless, paying lip service to the social dynamics that undergrid language without trying to identify and gain insights into the very fabric of society and culture that have come to charge language in many ways can only cause misunderstanding and lead to cross cultural miscommunication” (1993).

### **Cultural Competence**

Language is a social product wherein a society’s symbolic practices are conditioned by its verbal repertoire. English speakers cannot think and give expression to their

thoughts in more meaningful ways than what their vocabulary permits. Similarly, Indian speakers’ linguistic action is limited by the stock of words their vernacular language possesses. Learning the other tongue with the help of cultural content is essential to avoid miscommunication. To define cultural competence, we need to go back to what we have said about communicative competence. Cultural competence is precisely ‘plus communicative competence’ or ‘communicative competence PLUS. The plus element is ‘the socio- cultural’ aspect of the language.

As Trisdo (1996) suggests, a learner to become culturally responsive needs to acquire the knowledge of the culture, history, traditions, values, and family systems of culturally diverse people. These in turn have an impact on behaviour, attitudes, values (personal and professional) and lifestyles. They also influence the language, speech patterns and communication styles. Hanley (1999) defined cultural competency as “the ability to work effectively across cultures in a way that acknowledges and respects the culture of the person or organization being served.”

Attempting to teach one competence in the absence of the other makes the broth half cooked. This paper argues that these two competences, though essential, should be made available to ESL learners only in proper socio-cultural contexts. That is why the emphasis on teaching cultural competence must necessarily be maintained in ESL contexts. By cultural competence, I mean the aspects of culture and society that would embody linguistic expression. Social

contexts, customs, traditions, beliefs, values, histories, habits, world views, daily routine, leisure pastimes, entertainment activities (which are different to each language community) are factors that come into play in expressing context-appropriate meaning.

Gaye (2000) says that teaching cultural competence is to take cultural knowledge, prior experiences and performance styles of the heterogeneous group of students into account to make learning more effective and appropriate. Such a holistic approach, an approach that integrates cultural contexts (the culture of the target language and the culture of the learners) into the structural and the communicative aspects of language use must find its way into ESL learning spaces stating that learning a language involves, apart from several linguistic categories, learning the culture, traditions and the social aspects of the language. Lamentably, a large portion of ESL activity displays a serious lack of understanding of this phenomenon. As a result, most of the ESL teaching materials, methodology, teachers and learners in India are far from being inclusive of the socio-cultural phenomena that is vital to produce verbal expressions and make them meaningful native-like speech.

From the above discussion, it can be concluded that grammatical competence that includes lexical competence is the basic layer of learning a language. The next layer is communicative competence that makes learners context-sensitive wherein learners develop sensitivity to the responders, their levels of language competence and the contexts in which they speak. The last layer is the socio-cultural competence where learners are to be culture-sensitive in addition

to being context-sensitive. Though each layer appears distinct, together they produce the intended communication which redeems the chances of communication failures or miscommunications.

### **Why Teach Culture in the Language Classroom?**

To answer this question of ‘why to teach culture in the language classroom’, we must turn to Tomalin & Stempleski (1993). They say that we should be aware of the reality that if we teach language without simultaneously teaching the culture in which it operates, we are teaching meaningless symbols or symbols to which the learner attaches the wrong meaning.

“We should be mindful of the fact that if we teach language without teaching at the same time the culture in which it operates, we are teaching meaningless symbols or symbols to which the student attaches the wrong meaning” (1993).

Thanasoulas (2001), while quoting earlier works (Seeley, 1988; Tomalin & Stempleski, 1993) offers seven goals of cultural instruction:

- To help students develop an understanding of the fact that all people exhibit culturally-conditioned behaviour.
- To help students develop an understanding that social variables such as age, sex, social class, and place of residence influence the ways in which people speak and behave.
- To help students become aware of conventional behaviour in common

situations in the target language.

- To help students increase their awareness of cultural connotations of words and phrases in the target language.
- To help students develop the ability to evaluate and refine generalisations about the target culture, in terms of supporting evidence.
- To help students develop necessary skills to locate and organise information about the target culture.
- To stimulate students' intellectual curiosity about the target culture, and to encourage empathy towards its people.

### **How Much Culture?**

Language teaching involves teaching the four skills of LSRW and elements such as grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation. Will culture in the English classroom be the fifth element? Kramsch's (1993) observation should not go unnoticed in this context.

“Culture in language learning is not an expendable fifth skill, tacked on, so to speak to the teaching of speaking, listening, reading, and writing. It is always in the background, right from day one, ready to unsettle good language learners when they expect it the least, making evident the limitations of their hard-won communicative competence, challenging their ability to make sense of the world around”.

Kramsch maintains that to learn a foreign language is not merely to learn how to communicate but also to discover how much flexibility the language allows members to

manipulate grammatical forms, sounds, and meaning, and reflect upon, or even flout, socially accepted norms at work both in their own and in the target culture.

While the cognitive aspects of learning a language involves the above-mentioned grammatical and communicative competences, the affective domain (Krathwohl, Bloom and Masia,1973) includes emotions, feelings, values, appreciation, enthusiasm, motivation and attitudes that should support the cognitive learning of an individual, language learning in this context. In other words, the social competence of an individual is dependent on the linguistic competence in addition to cultural and emotional aspects. As seen above, culture and language are tied together. It needs to be acknowledged that language is not just a tool to help people from the same culture communicate effectively.

### **Developing socio-cultural competence**

There are many subtle but complex issues which the teacher has to keep in mind while giving training in socio-cultural competence. In the Indian context, the cultural variations are wide and divergent. The culture of people speaking different languages varies (from that of the target language culture) along with different socio-economic constituents, though there are striking similarities as well. In addition, if a 'foreign' culture has to be carried into the classroom by the teacher, the teacher has to equip herself/himself with a sense of the 'foreign' culture to make it a part of classroom discourse and enlighten the learners of a multi-cultural classroom on cultural variations they inherit.

If a learner has to be culturally competent, then s/he has to first identify the qualities of his/her own culture. This includes recognizing the unique features of one's culture, the way relationships are defined, along with the language nuances in dealing with different contexts and people. Second, the learner has to be able to analyse, understand and accept other cultures, appreciate their qualities and be responsive to them.

### **Classroom Activities to Enhance Cultural Sensitivity**

The study follows the 'comparative study of cultures method/model' suggested by Kramsch (1993), and Tavares and Cavalcanti (1996) to devise the learning activities. In this context Kramsch says: "putting the target culture in relation with one's own", and Tavares & Cavalcanti announce, "The aim of teaching culture is to develop their (learners) curiosity towards the target culture and their own, helping them to make comparisons among cultures".

There are numerous activities (Harris 2008; A sample activity

**Stage I.** Class plan will be prepared well in advance; when prepared, it will look like this:

| <b>S. No.</b> | <b>Item/Function</b>             | <b>Explanation</b>  |
|---------------|----------------------------------|---|
| 1             | Skill                            | Speaking  |
| 2             | Sub skill                        | Dialogue  |
| 3             | Cultural component               | Complimenting   |
| 4             | Grammar item                     | Use of adjectives   |
| 5             | Vocabulary/formulaic expressions | <i>Good dress, nice bag, look pretty, look fresh etc.</i> |
| 6             | Pronunciation                    | Contractions  |
| 7             | Activity                         | Pair work   |

Gill, Cankova, and Maley, 2001) proposed by various textbook writers/materials producers and classroom practitioners that could make the learners socio-culture sensitive. Group work/discussions, role-plays, case studies, critiquing culture-based stories and films are some of them.

'Culture in everyday life' must be the content of the curriculum because all other forms of cultures are cultures written with a big 'C' and non-accessible to all and sundry. That is why I am using everyday activities as cultural forms/themes around which learning activities are built in a comparative format. I borrow these socio-cultural themes from an E-book *Oxford Basics: Intercultural Activities* edited by Alan Maley (2001). The themes and language functions that can be used to compare and contrast with the learners' own language habits are as follows: *Greeting, apologising, complementing, appreciating, thanking, leave taking, enquiring, narrating, describing festivals and leisure activities, routines* and many others.

**Stage II.** The teacher explains that members of the pair are not strangers but known to each other very well. One member of the pair compliments the other saying “nice dress”. The other will have to say, ‘thank you’.

**Stage III.** Learners are told to check if the practice of complimenting is there at all in their culture. They are encouraged to list out the occasions and the language used to respond to a compliment. They are also encouraged to study who in their culture is socially entitled to compliment whom and for what effects.

When they compare the socio-cultural act of complimenting between English and their first language, Telugu learners of English find out to their utter dismay that ‘complimenting as a phatic formulaic communicative act’ is absent in their socio-cultural terrain. The comparative learning of ‘language-culture’ helps these learners understand that complimenting is an important element of speech in the English culture.

### **Conclusion**

In this paper I worked on the premise that language is not a transparent medium that acts as an innocent tool of communication. On the other hand, I have shown that language is an inflected tool with culture certainly being the most noteworthy inflection. A language learning curriculum must indispensably create a space for thinking about culture. I propose that ESL teaching activities be activated against the backdrop of the proper cultural content in a comparative manner for a more inclusive inter-cultural communication.

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# Writing Academic Essays

Lalesh Nand

## ABSTRACT

*The article discusses ideas and teaching tips on academic essay writing based on classroom practice. Often, students pay more attention to the content and less to the structure, including introduction, thesis statement, paragraphing, paraphrasing, mechanics of language, conclusion, and referencing. Students describe, rather than build, a sustained argument with critical analysis. An academic essay is sustained writing that answers a question, introduces a thesis, then expands it with reasoned arguments. The thesis is supported point-by-point with evidence from academic texts and credible sources. A salient pedagogic approach in developing these skills generates better academic essays.*

**Keywords:** Academic essays; essay writing; teaching tips for writing.

## Introduction

Writing academic essays is a challenge for students and teachers. Models such as PEAL (Point, Explanation, Analysis, and Link) and TEEES (Topic sentence, Explain, Elaborate, Evidence, and So what) provide frameworks for essay writing. Essay writing involves developing dual key skills: the ability to write analytical points within a paragraph, and the ability to structure a sustained argument in response to a specific statement. An essay must focus on and develop a central thesis and each paragraph must have a focus point to support the thesis or argument. An effective essay has a clear introduction, structure and format, mechanics of language, appropriate and adequate referencing, and a clear conclusion reflecting the thesis.

## Writing the Introduction

The introduction is the key paragraph that clearly provides the focus and scope of the essay. It includes the topic, the focus points,

the thesis, and a concluding sentence.

## What to write in the introduction

- Write a thesis statement (a single sentence), including the topic and the key focus areas, and the scope of the essay.
- Thesis statement – A thesis is a position statement either for or against a topic or problem. Adhere to the thesis statement throughout the essay; do not reverse your stand. The thesis is stated either as the first or the last sentence of the introduction.
- Do not include details on the topic (data) and any in-text citation in the introduction. Do not ask rhetorical question(s) in the introduction, for example, ‘Should medical cannabis be legalised?’ Instead, make a statement ‘It is imperative that medical cannabis be legalised for health and well-being.’ Rhetorical questions are not asked anywhere in an academic essay.

- Use the present tense, for example, ‘This essay examines, argues, analyses, etc.’ Do not write ‘This essay will examine, argue.’ However, the tense can change in the body of the essay depending on the arguments and context.
- Include a concluding sentence in the introduction, which will be expanded in the conclusion of the essay.

### ***A Sample – Introduction***

*Research and clinical tests have been an essential part of developing safe and effective vaccines and administering vaccines is essential to safeguard health and wellbeing and thus vaccination should be mandatory as it has been proven to minimise the spread of disease. (Thesis) This essay examines vaccination (Topic) with an emphasis on societal fear of vaccines and risks (focus point 1), the research and advancement in vaccines, (focus point 2) and the essential role vaccines play in health of society (focus point 3). Various studies and research have argued that vaccination is an essential medical practice for better health and well-being. (Concluding sentence) (Kibin, 2018).*

### **Structure and Format the Organised Paragraphs**

A constructive structure and format provides a consistent flow of ideas, sustained argument, and comprehension. Structure and format include constructive paragraphs with an idea, use of appropriate linking devices (words), indented paragraphs, topic sentences, explaining and elaborating topic sentences with evidence, and providing a concluding statement to each idea in the

paragraph. For effective paragraphs, follow the TEEES model.

### ***Sample paragraph (using the TEEES model)***

*First, vaccine safety and serious adverse effects are critical concerns for parents. (Topic sentence). Pockets of vaccine objectors, including those who delay vaccination or adopt a selective vaccination schedule, pose a risk to the community by threatening the circles of protection created by herd immunity. (Explain the topic sentence). Danchin and Nolan (2014) argued that for optimal and effective herd immunity, vaccine coverage above 90% is generally required and with the help of vaccination programs, this percentage can be achieved. (Elaborate and give evidence, use in-text citations). Lack of knowledge on developing immunity among the wider demography is a national concern in administering vaccination. Societal knowledge on vaccination needs to be enhanced. (Conclude by summing up the paragraph and introduce the next paragraph). Furthermore, there is still controversy whether parents should immunise their children for benefit to society or withhold vaccines for personal reasons. (mylearningadvisor, 2013)*

The format or structure of the essay includes the introduction, body, and conclusion. A general rule is to write a FIVE-paragraph essay. The three focus points stated in the introduction of the essay (paragraph 1) are examined, argued, and analysed in the body of the essay (paragraphs 2-4). The focus points argue the thesis supported with research evidence using in-text citations. The conclusion is the fifth paragraph.

The five-paragraph essay:

Paragraph 1 – **Introduction**

Paragraph 2 (focus point 1)

Paragraph 3 (focus point 2)

Paragraph 4 (focus point 3)

Paragraph 5 – **Conclusion**

**Body** 1+3+1 = 5 paragraphs

(Taylor, 2012)

### **Conclusion**

The concluding paragraph is a short summary that reflects and confirms the thesis and the key focus points. It has no new ideas or in-text citations, but rather has a few strong objective statements that support the thesis.

#### ***A sample concluding paragraph***

*In summary, research evidence argues for the safe development and the effective use of vaccines. Mandating laws on vaccination manifests progress, welfare, and safety of society. Such laws need to be instituted and implemented, stipulating that vaccines are necessary to help children and adults with medical issues or immunodeficiency disorders. Vaccines save lives. Societal fear of vaccines persists, but development and advancement in vaccines with further education and information protects individuals, families and community, and helps protect future generations by eradicating diseases.*

Furthermore, the structure and format includes layout. The layout includes appropriate font and paragraph formatting: font size (12), font theme (Times New Roman), and paragraph (double space,

indented, justified), which gives the whole essay a clean, crisp, polished edge.

#### ***Structure and format:***

- Indent all paragraphs with one space except the introductory paragraph.
- Use a topic sentence at the beginning of each paragraph (new idea or extension of the previous idea in a following paragraph). Explain or elaborate the key idea in the body of the paragraph including facts/figures and provide reference (in-text citation). Finish the paragraph with a concluding sentence on the idea expressed. (Write paragraphs using the TEEES model.)
- Begin a new paragraph with a linking word. The use of linking devices will depend on the context of the new paragraph. For example,

Open the introductory paragraph – *The current debate regarding..... / It is often argued...*

Introduce another viewpoint – *Although... / On the other hand...*

Show cause and effect – *As a consequence*

*of... / Influence by...*

To show significance of something – *Indicates... / Exemplifies...*

Use comparative conjunctions – *However... / Nevertheless... / On the contrary...*

Use of additional conjunctions – *Moreover... / In addition...*

Conjunctions which exemplify and show results – *For example... / Therefore... / As a result...*

Use of temporal conjunctions – *Now... / Previously... / On another occasion...*

Causal conditional conjunctions – *Consequently... / Shaped by...*

Ways to sum up or conclude – *It would seem that... / Thus, in summary... / There are many reasons...*

- Paraphrase all information to avoid plagiarism. Include in-text citation for all information, including paraphrased statements, concepts, technical terms, and historical information used verbatim with reference cited.
- Use statistics (data) within paragraphs to support arguments and evidence. Express statistical information in a short summary within the text and avoid details. Provide reference immediately after the statistical evidence.

### **Mechanics of Language**

The mechanics of language ensures effective communication and makes the essay comprehensive and meaningful to the reader.

Correct mechanics of language includes:

- Correct use of spelling and grammar
- Sentence structure
- Paragraph and punctuation
- Using appropriate tone and register
- Linking ideas effectively through coherence and cohesion
- Using literary devices, for example, similes, metaphors, and so on
- Using a combination of simple, compound, and complex sentences
- Using appropriate tense
- Using full words and not contractions, like *cannot* instead of *can't*, *would not* instead of *wouldn't*.

### **Bibliography / Reference**

Writing bibliography and reference is an important skill to develop. Academic essays use ideas from other sources as evidence to support arguments. Other sources help to make a point, add details, provide evidence, and demonstrate informed and scholarly writing. Acknowledge all sources used.

What do bibliography, reference, in-text citations, and annotated bibliography mean? Bibliography is a list of sources read or consulted during the research. It is a comprehensive alphabetical list of all sources browsed during the research of the topic. Reference or reference list includes only those sources closely read, referred to, and used in writing the essay. A referenced source is one used to delineate the information from the writing. In-text citation is a short reference to the author and year in the

paragraphs. An annotated bibliography is a short description for a reference, explaining the accuracy, validity, authenticity, and usefulness. Use a recommended referencing convention like Harvard or APA (American Psychological Association) (TAFE NSW, 2017).

### **Convention on Bibliography/Reference**

- In-text citations need consistency. Use only author's surname and year, for example, (Smyth, 2018). Include the full stop after the citation and not at the end of the sentence. The citation is included as part of the sentence. Use corporate authors if the source has no individual author(s), for example, (The Guardian, 2020).
- Use full name of corporate author for the first time (in citation) and then use abbreviations, for example, British Broadcasting Corporation and then write BBC in subsequent citations of the same. Positioning in-text citations in the paragraph is a useful skill. Insert in-text citations at the beginning, middle or at the end of a paragraph, as appropriate. Varying the position of the in-text citations adds flow, sustains good academic convention, and gives a good scholarly rigour to the writing. Most essays include in-text citations at the end of every paragraph, making the essay monotonous. For example, in-text citations at the *beginning* of the paragraph: *Smith (2017) argued that higher education should be accessible to all.* In the *middle* of the paragraph, *Investment in public education is essential (Smith, 2017) as it enhances literacy.* At the *end* of a paragraph, after writing the

information... *(Smith, 2017).*

- For a direct quote, in-text citation follows immediately after the quote, including the page or paragraph number. For example, Smith (2017, p.6) stated "*investment in education is essential...*" Or Smith (2018, para 12) stated that "*investment in education is essential*". (NOTE: paragraph number is used if the publication has no page number, especially in an on-line publication).
- All references used need consistency following the required convention; references should be alphabetical.
- Use diverse sources to write the essay, rather than one or two sources from the bibliography. Use good academic, researched, and reputable published sources.
- For annotated references, comment on currency (when published, updated), relevance (usefulness), authenticity (who wrote it, correctness, truthfulness), and purpose (why is it written – to inform, argue, to show bias, to point out a fact, to share an opinion).

### **More Tips**

- Do not use headings, subheadings, or bulleted list of points.
- Do not use personal pronouns (*I, we, they,* etc.) and slang/colloquialism.
- Do not use excessive punctuation, especially commas. Avoid it if not sure where to use.
- Do not ask a rhetorical question and

answer it.

- Avoid plagiarism.
- Edit and proofread for logical structure and use of information (content).
- Be prepared to accept constructive criticism.
- Incorporate feedback from teacher/ assessor.
- Read the assessment conditions and marking criteria.

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### AN IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENT

The General Body meeting is being postponed until next December in view of the prevailing pandemic and the resultant disruption in normality. Consequently, the present office-bearers of ELTAI will continue until the end of December 2021.

Members may access the current as well as some of the past issues of the journal on the Web by clicking on the relevant link given on the Home page of ELTAI's website: [www.eltai.in](http://www.eltai.in).

They may also get to know their membership details by clicking on 'Member log in' on the Home page of ELTAI's website and entering their Membership ID. If required, they may send an email to: [eltai\\_india@yahoo.co.in](mailto:eltai_india@yahoo.co.in) OR [indiaeltai@gmail.com](mailto:indiaeltai@gmail.com) for relevant information.

# How English Came to India: Language Education Policies in Colonial India

*Chhayankdhar Singh Rathore*

## ABSTRACT

*In an increasingly globalized world, English has emerged as one of the primary languages of global communication. The influence and dominance of English are evident in the realms of popular culture, media, science and technology, and commerce, to name a few. In this context, India is considered to have an English advantage over countries such as Japan, China, and even parts of Europe, as it has 125 million speakers of the English language as a first, second, or third language (Krishnaswamy & Krishnaswamy, 2006; Times News Network, 2010). How did a country which is defined by multilingualism and linguistic diversity come to speak a language that does not originate in the Indian subcontinent? This paper attempts to understand the answer to this question by conducting a historical analysis of the introduction of English language education in India during the colonial period and the language policies in the education system of India at the time.*

**Keywords:** English in India; colonial India; English language education in India.

## Introduction

Linguistic diversity and multilingualism have long been considered an identifying characteristic of India. While the 1961 Census of India reported that a total of 1,652 self-reported mother tongues are spoken in India, the Constitution of India, under the Eighth Schedule, recognises 23 of these languages as scheduled languages, enabling federal-level official administration and education to be conducted in any of these languages and obligating the Government of India to promote and preserve these languages (Mohanty, 2006; Jha, 2010; Bhatia & Ritchie, 2012). However, two of these languages, Hindi, as written in the Devanagari script, and English, have been accorded the position of official languages of India under Article 343

of the Indian Constitution (Hall, 2002; Mohanty, 2006). Over time, multilingualism in India has evolved to a point where often one of these two languages (and sometimes both) is spoken by a large section of the Indian population. The 2001 Census of India reports that there is a total of 125 million speakers of English in India who consider English as their first, second, or third language (TNN, 2010). India and Indian English are increasingly becoming the centre of the international conversation on World Englishes (Bolton, 2012). A key feature of World Englishes is that it not only focuses on English as spoken and learnt in largely monolingual speech communities or in “mother tongue varieties of the language” (Kachru, 1996, as cited in Higgins, 2003,

p. 618), but also in communities and countries where English is spoken and learnt along with other languages in a multilingual context. A crucial factor behind this phenomenon is not only the history of colonisation that most of these countries have but also the language policy in their education systems. This paper will analyse the history of language policy in the Indian education system in the colonial period, which has resulted in a sizeable anglophone population in India.

### **Language Policy in Education during the Colonial Era**

The introduction and extensive propagation of English in India was essentially a colonial project that began after India became a British colony. The colonial history of India can be divided into two phases: 1757-1858 when colonial India was ruled by the East India Company and 1858-1947 when colonial India was ruled by the British Crown (Mukherjee, 1974).

### **The Orientalist Period**

Unlike the widespread assumption, the East India Company (henceforth referred to as the Company) did not intend to introduce English-language education to India from the onset of the colonial rule. In fact, from the Governor-Generalship of Warren Hastings (1773-85) until the beginning of the Governor-Generalship of William Bentinck (1828-35), the Company was opposed to the introduction of English-language education. The reasoning behind this was that such an action would diffuse Western knowledge and ideas, which might wield a subversive effect on traditional Indian society and culture. Consequently, the very first occasions of British involvement in the educational

landscape of India were concerned with the promotion of Oriental learning in Sanskrit, Persian, and Arabic. This concern was exemplified in the establishment of the Calcutta Madrasa (also known as the Arabic College) by Governor-General Warren Hastings in 1781 and the establishment of the Sanskrit College of Benaras by Jonathan Duncan in 1794 (Spear, 1938; Evans, 2002). Evans (2002) explains that these actions of the Company represent the prevailing policy of Orientalism, which was considered the official policy of the Company from the Governor-Generalship of Warren Hastings (1773-85) until that of William Bentinck (1828-35).

The term Orientalism, for most parts of the 18th and 19th century, was used to represent a sympathetic view of the languages, culture, laws, customs, religions, literature, art, thoughts, and society of the East, and even a desire to protect the eastern civilisations from the high-handed European notions of cultural supremacy (MacKenzie, 1995).

The beginning years of colonial rule in India were viewed as a period when British power had a fragile basis in India (Evans, 2002). Consequently, the Company believed that there was a political need to bring together Indians and the emerging British Raj. Attempts were made at building bridges between these two groups through the presence of acculturated British officials. These officials would use their knowledge of Indian laws and customs to rule India in an approach that was similar to that of traditional Indian rulers (Evans, 2002). As a result, the Company believed that its educational mission, if any, was the improvement of Oriental studies of the elite

classes of India, leading to a revival of the Indian civilisation and not its replacement. Nevertheless, the Company still believed in the superiority of the European arts and sciences, which were to be imparted through a policy of ‘engraftment’ onto traditional Indian education, for the elite learned class who would eventually become intermediaries between the British and the Indian masses (Evans, 2002).

### **The Occidental Period**

The early nineteenth century witnessed the decline of Orientalism and the rise of Occidentalism. The younger generation of Company officials believed in Occidental ideas of the supremacy of British power, religion, and culture. This generation held the opinion that the mission for Britain was the transformation of Indian society and culture through English language and Christianity, as these would provide the Indian masses with “direct access to the superior arts, philosophy, and faith of Britain” (Evans, 2002, p.264). Additionally, the Occidental group advocated that introducing English as the language of governance and education would assimilate the conquered group with the conquerors – a departure from the hitherto Orientalist argument of having Company officials assimilate with the Indian masses (Evans, 2002).

This move towards Occidentalism was represented by the appointment of William Bentinck as the Governor-General in 1833. One of the primary responsibilities entrusted to Bentinck was to cut the administrative costs (Spear, 1938; Evans, 2002). To this end, Bentinck proposed replacing British expatriates in the judicial and administrative branches of the government with Indians. This provision was included in the Charter

Act of 1833, which was followed by Bentinck’s Resolution of March 7, 1835, that made some crucial declarations. Firstly, the goal of the British government was the promotion of Western (European) literature and science. Secondly, all funds were to be devoted to English education alone because the classical languages (Sanskrit, Arabic, and Persian) were considered too distant from the masses. At the same time, the vernaculars were considered too crude to be appropriate vehicles of knowledge. Thirdly, Persian was replaced with English as the official language of administration and courts of law. Fourthly, the “principle of percolation of knowledge from above to the masses was adopted” (Spear, 1938, p. 95). Consequently, educational funding was concentrated on encouraging higher education and English education, instead of elementary education (Spear, 1938). Following the resolution, in 1844, an official policy of giving preferential treatment to English-educated Indian applicants for public-sector jobs was introduced, and this was successful in making the educated Indian population desire English education and view such education as beneficial to them (Evans, 2002).

At the same time, support for English-language education was growing within pockets of the Indian elite classes as reflected in the establishment of the Hindu College in Calcutta in 1816 and the rise of private English tutorial schools in Madras (Evans, 2002). This small but influential group was led by Ram Mohan Roy, who advocated the revival of Indian culture while eradicating the social evils through not only the teaching of the English language, but more importantly, the content of English education (Spear,

1938).

The policy change in favour of English-education in India led to the growth of an English-speaking secretarial and professional class who eagerly learned the English political principles and became the core of the Indian National Independence Movement. The legal, medical, and secretarial classes that emerged as a result of these changes continued to exist (Spear, 1938).

### **Wood's Dispatch: The Most Important Policy**

The most critical educational policy for colonial India came in the form of a dispatch by Charles Wood, the President of the Board of Control of the Company, to Lord Dalhousie, the Governor-General of India in 1854. Wood's dispatch became the foundation of British educational policy in India and entailed the following points. Firstly, he restated that the primary goal of British policy in India was the propagation of European knowledge. Secondly, he clarified that the aim of British policy was not to substitute the vernaculars with English. Thirdly, he recommended that a balance be struck between English education and education in the vernacular languages by using English as the medium of instruction at secondary and tertiary levels, while using vernacular languages at the primary level (Evans, 2002).

The dual-language system of Wood's dispatch was endorsed by the Indian Education Commission's landmark report in 1883. Over time, there was an increase in English-medium schools by state-assisted missionary societies and a strong demand for English-medium education, especially in

urban areas (Evans, 2002). The primary reason behind this popularity was the awareness that even a mild proficiency in the English language could open avenues for employment with the government and other European organisations.

### **Impact of Colonial Education Policies on the Current Indian Educational Landscape**

The impact of Wood's Dispatch can be seen in what is known as the Three Language Formula (TLF) – the single-most important policy regarding language education in India. The TLF was recommended in 1956 by the All India Council for Education and underwent many modifications. These modifications eventually led to its final form in 1968 when it was codified in the National Policy on Education.

The TLF recommends that the mother tongue or regional language should be the first language of instruction and this should be followed by the teaching of Hindi or a regional language and English (Mohanty, Panda, Pal, Menken & Garcia, 2010). The TLF provides that "all school-going children will have first, second, and third languages by the time they complete secondary school" (Vaish, 2008, p. 14). Laitin (1989) refers to India's language education policy as the *de facto* 3 + 1 language policy, which refers to the fact that although the TLF espouses to impart three languages to the students, depending on the similarity or dissimilarity between their mother tongue and the regional language or Hindi, some speakers might learn two languages while others may have to learn four languages. The TLF not only highlights the bilingual education policy of the school system in India, but also

reflects the state's agenda of encouraging multilingualism while equipping Indians with English – the language of globalisation (Vaish, 2008).

More than two centuries after the beginning of British rule in India, English has transformed from being just the language of colonial power to being an integral aspect of the linguistic landscape of India. As a result of those policies, today, India is a country with not only one of the largest English-speaking populations, but also with English-speakers who are becoming essential cogs in the machinery of a globalised economy and education system.

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## Grammar Guru 10

*V Saraswathi*

As children in primary school, we have enjoyed learning the nouns referring to the different parts of the body. We have faithfully repeated sentences like the following:

*This is my nose.*

*These are my eyes.*

*I have two ears and one nose.*

Well, if you say these sentences now people will look askance at you and wonder what has gone wrong with you.

Words referring to different parts of the body serve different grammatical functions. Let us look at some compound nouns where the parts of the body function as adjectives:

*I hate flights which don't provide enough legroom.*

*Diamond earrings would look beautiful on you.*

*Other such examples: head-start; eyeliner; mouthpiece; fingerprint; tongue-twister, etc.*

Body parts are also used as action words or verbs.

*Don't mouth words when you are reading silently.*

*Vinay is shouldering the entire burden of his family.*

Metaphoric use of body parts is quite common.

There are riddles relating to such usage:

*What has an eye but cannot see? Needle*

*What has teeth but doesn't bite? Comb*

*What has an ear but cannot hear? Corn*

In the case of idioms, body parts have done yeomen service. Idioms are special to each language and cannot be translated word for word. Take, for instance, the idiom **to fight tooth and nail**. It means 'to fight bitterly,' not fight with teeth and nails! Thus, an idiom may be difficult to understand because its meaning is different from the meaning of the separate words in the expression. Here is an example for the idiom:

*A lady manicurist had a date with a male dentist. They liked each other a lot. But, finally, they*

*decided not to marry on the grounds that, if they married, they would be sure to end up fighting tooth and nail!*

Would you like to enjoy one more instance of a delightful play with the literal and the idiomatic meaning of a phrase?

*Do you know what the Eskimo girl did to her boyfriend?*

*What?*

*She gave him the cold shoulder!*

The origin of some of these idioms is quite interesting. Animals like pigs use their snout to sniff for food. This has given rise to various phrases to do with curiosity or 'nosiness'. e.g., **to keep your nose out, to poke your nose**.

The expression '**get your teeth into something**', meaning working productively and energetically on a task, paints a picture of a ferocious animal gnawing hungrily on a carcass. Other examples: **with your eyes open; out of hand**.

Would you like to unravel the meaning of the idioms below?

1. The funny thing about going to a psychiatrist is that you have to lie down to learn how to **stand on your own two feet**.

2. I once knew an acrobat who **fell head over heels in love**.

3. A robber was recently arrested for stealing a painting from an artist's studio. The painting was still wet and he was caught **red-handed**.

**Dr V. Saraswathi**, (Formerly) Professor of English (ELT), University of Madras.

**[Editor's Note: This is part of a series of articles contributed by the author and published earlier in The Times of India, Education Times from May 2008 to May 2013. We are thankful to the author for permit us to publish those articles in our journal.]**

## The English Teacher's Role of Permanence

*Kiran Shetty*

As I pen this article, my mind wafts back to all my English teachers who I can see so vividly in my mind's eye. Today, several decades later, I have the unique privilege as a parent and teacher to regard the role of the English teacher in a whole new light – a role which has a lasting impression on a young learner's mind, and a stamp on a lot of life skills required to succeed.

In India, the term 'English teacher' is limiting and yet the role is so encompassing. Going back to my mind's eye, I have ever since come to realise that teachers, and many English teachers in particular, were our *de facto* parents in school who looked out for you, above and beyond the call of just teaching the subject. In fact, many English teachers to this day continue to be class teachers. And that very role makes them 'the mother hen' and the facilitator of a life long journey of skills acquisition.

For a lot of children where English is the second or third language, the English teacher's window of teaching exposes a child to the world outside. As the teacher regales her students with stories from faraway lands while at the same time teaching grammar, phonology and prosody, she also takes care of whatever else is happening in the co-curricular and extracurricular activities. She (and I use the term to be interchangeable in gender) is the go-to person if you need your bow straightened or face made-up for the Annual Day; she has to develop a script for your science fair, and yes, for all the

preparatory work for Debates, Dramatics and Elocution competitions.

Reams of paper have been devoted to the spread of English and the need for English speakers in global and international contexts has been discussed in linguistic, educational, economic and social forums. However, the impact of English on learners' wider lives is seldom researched.

That trend is changing. A study published by the National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER) in 2011 (USA) and authored by Raj Chetty, Harvard University and others, amplifies some key findings on the role of English teachers.

Omana Antony's paper, 'The Role of the English Teacher: An Overview', in the *International Journal of Social Science & Interdisciplinary Research* (October 2012), discusses at length the transition of the teacher's role from that of a 'house of knowledge' or 'Guru' to that of a 'Facilitator/Mentor/Guide' in a learner's journey to developing a personality with humanitarian values.

The British Council's *Teaching English Report* (2014), states, "as interest in the affective domain of second language acquisition grew, literature in this area increasingly reported on the role of self-concept and related concepts. Two papers from psychology seem to be the keys to bringing these constructs to the attention of researchers in second language acquisition

(SLA): Self-concept: The inter-play of theory and methods by Shavelson and Bolus (1982) and Possible Selves by Markus and Nurius (1986). Various terms are used to refer to this set of factors in SLA: self-confidence, self-efficacy, the L2 self, and self-esteem, to name a few.”

A more recent report authored by Susanna Loeb of the Brookings Institution, 2017, and referencing in part, the study conducted by the NBER, sought to measure the ‘Impact of Instruction on Student Achievement’ wherein 2.5 million students were part of the study in the United States. The research highlighted two key findings:

? An English teacher who raises students’ reading test scores by the same amount as a math teacher raises students’ math test scores has an impact on long-term life outcomes approximately 1.7 times that of the math teacher.

? The benefits of good English teachers are seen in students’ achievement in future years, not only in English, but in other subjects as well.

Closer to home, at Trinity College. London, we have worked closely, hand-in-hand, with English teachers over the years – through CBSE’s ASL project, educational institutions directly and so many teachers that send up their students for assessments. We see first-hand the ever present and growing role and influence of the English teacher. We see learners developing proficiency not only in

the subjects but also in the development of key skills like critical thinking, decision making, presentation, negotiation, and conflict resolution. While working with students in LSRW, we have seen the positive correlation in the development of a learner’s life skills. These skills include summarising, speed reading, deducing meaning, self-correction and reflection, researching and synthesising, discourse and socio-linguistic skills.

As I end this article and tip my hat at all our English teachers, I think it is befitting to quote the late Maya Angelou, who describes the role of her teacher in helping her regain her voice after going mute for five years on account of a traumatic experience:

*This is the value of the teacher, who looks at a face and says there’s something behind that and I want to reach that person, I want to influence that person, I want to encourage that person, I want to enrich, I want to call out that person who is behind that face, behind that color, behind that language, behind that tradition, behind that culture. I believe you can do it. I know what was done for me.*

**Kiran Shetty**, the India Head of the Academic Team of Trinity College London; a Fellow of Trinity College London in Education Studies; and a Fellow of London College of Music in Speech, Drama and Communication Skills.

# Mismatches in the Contents of Reading and Writing Tasks: Revisiting Schema Theory

*P Bhaskaran Nair*

## ABSTRACT

*In writing in a second language, learners encounter two problems: generating content and finding adequate linguistic means of presenting the content. If the former is taken care of by the teacher-text duo, will the learner be able to help himself by using the necessary language structures with the appropriate vocabulary? This article tries to answer this question by proposing a suggestion for a reading-writing class. This proposal has its springboard in controlled writing, as it has been known in traditional writing instruction. Then, it proceeds to use the pedagogic principle of scaffolding so that the learner develops some degree of autonomy in writing.*

**Keywords:** Reading and writing tasks; Schema theory in reading and writing; controlled writing and scaffolding.

## Introduction

The validity of classifying reading as a receptive skill, along with listening skill, by traditional applied linguistics needs to be questioned in the wake of new awareness in the field of research and theorisation. It was in the 1970s that we were drawn to schema theory and the ways it would help us in understanding the intricacies of comprehending messages. Earlier we had been looking at reading as an act of lifting or filtering the writer's messages from the text—a simple and linear process with very little role for cognition to play. In the first quarter of the 21st century, however, we are surrounded by a great number of theories on reading, both in literary theory of reading and interpreting higher order texts and the pedagogic theories related to teaching reading at the foundation level. In either case,

reading is no longer merely a business of decoding messages; it is now viewed as complementary to writing. That is to say, writing becomes more or less complete or finite only when the reader starts negotiating with the written text. One may argue that there lies on the part of the reader a responsibility of fulfilling the intention of the writer. In the act of meaning-making, there is a flow of negotiation running among the writer, the text, and the reader. Schema provides the force for the flow of negotiation.

## Schema Theory

In 1781, the German philosopher, Immanuel Kant, proposed the word “schema”. He defined it as a frame, script, or background knowledge (Kramsch, 1993), which was long rooted in philosophy and psychology. Cognitive psychologists used the notion of

schema to explain the underlying psychological processes while acquiring knowledge. British Gestalt psychologist, Sir Frederic Bartlett, is regarded as the first person who used the term 'schema' in pedagogic contexts. To him, 'schema' means an active organisation of past reactions, or of past experiences, which must always be assumed to be operating in any well-adopted organic response (Bartlett, 1932).

Later, schema was introduced in reading by Anderson in 1977, and subsequently from 1978 onwards. Schema, in the general sense, refers to "background knowledge of the formal, rhetorical organisational structures of different types of texts" (Carrel and Eisterhold, 1983, p. 79). Schema, thus, functions as a macro-structure on which our newly accumulated knowledge is erected. To quote Rumelhart, schema is "a data structure for representing the generic concepts stored in memory" (1980, p. 34).

Schemata were broadly categorised, following the studies by Rivers and Temperly (1978), Carrel and Eisterhold (1983), and Urquhart and Weir (1998). Schemata are grouped on the basis of text type, content, culture, and language. The first, known as formal schemata, is defined as follows:

Different kinds of texts and discourses (e.g., stories, descriptions, letters, reports, poems) are distinguished by the ways in which the topic, propositions, and other information are linked together to form a unit. This underlying structure is known as formal schemata (An, 2013, p. 130).

The second type of schemata based on content provides the reader with the

background knowledge in terms of the larger context of the topic, the specific situation, the action, participating people, time, locale, and so on. It is this aspect of reading experience that we are going to focus on later in this study.

The third category embraces the overall cultural background that links the reader with the content of the text. Our attitude to a person or event, the value we attribute to thousands of ingredients which form our experience in the world around us, all come under the sociocultural schemata.

The fourth type has its base in, as well as orientation to, language. The decoding of the writer's message depends heavily on the proximity of the reader's linguistic schemata with that of the writer. Writing is one concrete activity in which we get the concrete manifestation of schemata, whereas in other language and cognitive skills the presence is strong, but not felt clearly as in writing. Moreover, writing involves many faculties drawn from kinaesthetic, psychic, cognitive, and neuro-muscular systems. What impact the newly constructed and activated schemata has on our mental development can be deciphered to a great extent from our writing.

### **Linking Content Schema with Linguistic Schema**

This paper proposes to pursue the intensity of the link between content and language in a given text, looking at it from a writer's point of view. The research question is whether optimal content knowledge can scaffold inadequate linguistic competence and enhance the latter to some extent for future use.

Content schema refers to the “background knowledge of the content area of the text” (Carrell and Eisterhold, 1983, p. 80). It contains conceptual knowledge or information about what usually happens within a certain topic, and how these happenings relate to each other to form a coherent whole. It is an open-ended set of typical events and entities for a specific occasion (An, 2013, p. 131).

In a second language, the writer suffers from the inadequacy of both content and linguistic schemata. It is presumed here that if the former is well taken care of by the teacher and the text, the latter is likely to get enriched. For example, in a story once made familiar to the class by the teacher, the content knowledge with the theme, plot, characters, and development of action, climax, and catastrophe has become part of the learner’s schema. The conventional writing task given to the class is to reproduce the same story in the learner’s “own sentences”. However, what usually happens is that instead of the learners, it is the teacher’s own sentences that are reproduced, as (rightly?) expected by the teacher. This activity does not contribute much to the learner’s language use, because though the schema has been built, it is not activated.

### **Schema Activation and Construction**

Activating the old schemata and constructing new ones, though mutually related, have different features. In one sense, good education must result in both. As Bransford (1985) points out, schema activation and schema construction are two different functions. While making the learner familiar with a new topic, it is possible to activate

existing schemata. But, it need not necessarily follow that a learner can use this activated knowledge to develop new knowledge and skills, or apply this new knowledge to solve problems. Problem solving lessons and activities can provide learners with situations that aid in the construction of new schema, which includes critical thinking. While engaged in critical thinking, the learner can either compare and contrast available possibilities, select from alternative interpretations, dismiss others, make a decision to evaluate multiple possibilities, or accept the information as being reasonable (Alvarez and Risko, 1989).

To cite an example, the geographical location and the climate of a region near the North or South Pole in a geography class may make the learner inquisitive of the life there—whether human beings live there, how people live, what they eat, how often they see the sun, whether they catch illness because of the extreme cold climate, and so on. A descriptive or narrative paragraph in the second language class activates the schema gained from the subject class. Similarly, while reading the newspapers, parents tell their child about a theft in the neighbourhood; the child’s schema starts functioning. The child develops the image of a thief: an adult male, not working or earning, but stealing others’ money, working at night with tools, breaking into a house or shop, taking money and anything valuable, not loved by the society, and so on.

### **Schema Reversal: Suggestions for the Classroom**

When the new knowledge runs counter to the earlier one, what could happen in the learner?

Of course, many possibilities are there: confusion, ambiguity, doubt, self-check, and critical thinking, too. If it is the last, then the sceptic question “How can it be?” may be countered by “Why can it not be?” as well. If the second language teacher is resourceful enough, he/she can capitalise on all these possibilities and finally lead the learner to the last one—critical thinking. Look at the following example. Here, the linear thinking process which moves in a single direction, turns into a recursive process.

*“Once there was a thief in Travancore, now the southern part of Kerala. People in general were afraid of him, except the poor. Why? He used to steal money, gold, and other valuables from the rich, and with that money he used to help the poor.”*

While reading is in progress, there is tension in the story, as far as the child is concerned. (*Tension in poetry* is a highly celebrated critical essay by Allen Tate). The new information does not match with the schemata so far accumulated in the child. This mismatch sharpens the child’s cognitive skills. The child engages in critical thinking, and for the first time a new schema is constructed: Among thieves, there are good ones, too. Now, the child too is forced to love that thief. Here ends the content schema provided by the teacher or the text. Let each learner work out in detail what that thief did one night and during subsequent nights. One night he stole; in subsequent nights he helped the poor anonymously. Here, the learner has to work on many levels of schemata simultaneously. For example, the various ways of stealing, the various things being stolen, the means of escaping uncaught,

identifying and helping the poor but not in broad daylight—all these have to be worked out.

A second language teacher can guide the young minds to come out of the fetters of stereotypes in their schema by this reverse process. There is no harm in having a wise and gentle fox or jackal, a strictly vegetarian lion, a tortoise who has some mysterious power with which she (not he) defeats the arrogant male hare in a race, a crow though not thirsty breaks an earthen pot which is full of water, just for fun, and so on. For the adult mind, these may appear silly, but the child who is assigned to weave an impressive story around these ‘non-conventional’ characters or anti-heroes has to work out the problem solving activities.

The added advantage of these types of tasks is that they develop critical thinking skills. There is no point in asking a young learner to write stories about those familiar characters. Their writing will be modelled on the schema inherited from past listening and reading, whereas critical thinking demands the learner move in other directions, sometimes in the exact opposite direction too. Thus, a vegetarian lion king can be approached by all the subjects in the jungle without fear of being killed; accordingly, the narration has to find new avenues to proceed smoothly. Linguistic schema consists mainly of appropriate language structures with in-built vocabulary. In the presentation of the new characters or the new versions, the learner has to look for antonyms: perhaps the *cruel* lion is to be replaced by a *kind-hearted* one, the *crooked* fox is to be replaced by a *gentle and honest* one, and so on.

## Conclusion

Top-up recharge, as in the case of mobile phones, does not do much good in the case of constructing new schemata. The former is a machine, whereas the latter is the human brain. Just by accumulating schema one on top of the other is not likely to lead to knowledge; it amounts only to gathering and storing information, as in the case of entrance examinations for admission to Indian professional courses. The information so far collected needs to be processed and, when the new piece of information is added through classroom instruction, the present must be fused with the past. In this process, what works as a catalytic agent is critical thinking. Any classroom writing, with this type of challenges in the content, is likely to result in an original written product.

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# Teaching to Speak without Materials: Some Techniques

*Arkapravo Banerjee*

## ABSTRACT

*Indian classrooms are generally found to lack 'Teaching Learning Materials' (TLM), be it schools or colleges. Teachers often complain about the lack of resources in the classroom. This paper attempts to show how, using the creativity of a teacher, classroom activities can be made more learner-centric, without the help of any TLM. This paper tries to trace how teachers can step in with their creative techniques and help the students overcome their lack of confidence and fear of being judged. To find out the effectiveness of creative techniques, a study was conducted in 2016 on 75 students from the first year Computer Science Engineering department. The following were the techniques applied: 'Description-Nostalgia-Dream', 'Cornered', 'Divide & Reward', 'Story Telling', and 'Each One Teach Everyone'. The results showed that using creative and out-of-the-box techniques, a teacher can deal with the problem of lack of TLMs in the classroom.*

**Keywords:** Teaching-Learning Materials (TLM); developing speaking skill.

## Introduction

Indian classrooms remind us of our childhood: how we almost always wanted to go to school so that we could play with our friends or how we would stay back at school even after the final bell had rung, just to spend more time with our friends. However, not everything about school life was rosy. Some of us can never forget the horror of those English classes where the teacher would ask us to speak in English to give an account of ourselves in the classroom. We used to be nervous and shy, knowing well that even our classmates were not good at speaking in English.

## A Problem Teachers Face

Some English teachers often point out the heterogeneous nature of the classroom or

complain about the lack of Teaching Learning Material (TLM from here on) in the classroom as the reason for the lack of involvement of the students. Be it a government school or college or a private institution, the lack of TLMs is a harsh reality. Let us look at the definition of 'Teaching Aids'. According to Merriam Webster, a teaching aid is "an object (such as a book, picture, or map) or device (such as a DVD or computer) used by a teacher to enhance or enliven classroom instruction." According to Collins, a teaching aid is "any device, object, or machine used by a teacher to clarify or enliven a subject". Now what if the teacher does not have any 'device' or 'object' at his/her disposal? Can s/he still 'enhance' or 'enliven' classroom instruction? Possibly, s/he still can, by being creative.

## **Creativity**

Creativity is a special trait that is necessary for both the teacher and the students to possess. It helps the teacher pose intelligent problems to the students. The students can then come up with solutions to those problems using their imagination and innovation. Creativity can pave way for greater things to come as both the teacher and the learner need to adapt quickly to the daily goals and needs of a language classroom. Teaching is mostly common sense, with creativity taking up the most of the pie. This paper explores how any teacher can use his/her creativity and presence of mind to good effect and develop techniques to instruct students in the absence of teaching aids.

## **Research Design and Population**

This study was done by the researcher at Saroj Mohan Institute of Technology (Degree Division), in the year 2016, on 75 students from the Computer Science Engineering Department. All the students were from the first year and the study was carried out over five months. The researcher used to be an Assistant Professor of English Communication back then and was in charge of those students. They were from different walks of society and were mostly straight out of State Board schools; their 'First Language' was anything but English. Most of them were shy when asked to speak in English and even if some of them did try to overcome their shyness, they were preoccupied with the fear of being judged and mocked at. So, keeping that in mind, the researcher had to come up with ideas which would accommodate all their needs and interests. Given below are

five techniques, which systematically and gradually catered to the needs of all the students.

## **Techniques Used**

***Description-Nostalgia-Dream:*** This is a tripartite structure. In the first phase of this structure, the teacher would ask a student to describe an object first. Be it a chair or a blackboard, the student had to describe its physical features. In the next phase, the teacher would ask the student to talk about his childhood days or days at school. In the last phase, the teacher would ask the student about the latter's dreams or future goals.

Apparently, the whole process looks simple, which it really is, but underneath it there is a pattern. The 'Description' part deals in the present tense while the 'Nostalgia' part brings the past tense into play. When the student reveals his/her future plans and goals, s/he is practising how to speak in the future tense, which is the 'Dream' part. The whole process is controlled by the teacher as the students are beginners at this stage. Hence, the students get 'controlled practice', where the teacher intrudes (not interrupts) quite often as the students generally stammer and stutter at this stage due to lack of confidence and knowledge of grammar.

***Cornered:*** In this technique, students would be asked to go to each corner of the room and then communicate with each other. One student can ask another student, who is standing at another corner of the room, to give an account of himself/herself or ask general questions.

This innovative technique works well both

as a ‘confidence booster’ and as an ‘ice breaker’. Also, what helps is the fact that the students need to raise their voice in order to be audible from the other side of the room. As we often notice, beginners tend to keep their voice low as they are always preoccupied with the thought of making a mistake and do not want to be audible. The students are still getting ‘controlled practice’, but their role has increased significantly. The teacher is a ‘mediator’ to a certain extent at this point.

**Divide & Reward:** In this technique, students are divided into different groups and then asked to go through a brainstorming session. The session should be spontaneous and the teacher should try to keep himself/herself out of it. The session could be on which topic to discuss in the classroom or a particular topic can be given on which the brainstorming session could take place. Then debates over the topic(s) can be started among groups or even within a group. At the end, the best speaker or the best group is declared the winner by general consensus or by what the majority of students think. Then the teacher asks the group which has not done well to reward the winner by clapping and praising them so that the former can get the motivation to perform better.

This creative technique brings in a sense of competitiveness to the fore as almost all of them want to get noticed. By now, most of the students must be capable of making meaningful sentences and speaking their mind, to a certain extent. The teacher here has less to do as this practice is ‘semi-controlled’ in nature.

**Story Telling:** Using this technique, the

students are asked to complete stories with minimum clues at their disposal. The student with the most unique idea and style would be declared the winner. The teacher can start a story and finish it abruptly to give his/her students a chance to continue as they like.

For example, *Ravi opened the door and he was shocked to find out...*

Also, the teacher can give the students enough clues to develop a story.

For example, *Ravi was a rich man... He was proud of his wealth... He lost his family in an earthquake... He was still rich but heartbroken.*

This technique is helpful because by now most of the students have learnt to string a few meaningful sentences together. It also induces some creativity among the students. The students feel the need to improve their vocabulary as well in order to embellish the language used while telling a story.

**Each One Teach Everyone:** In this final technique, the teacher would ask a student to use the blackboard and teach. The student can deliver a short talk on any topic s/he likes, but preferably, the teacher would ask the ‘student-teacher’ to deliver a short talk on a topic known to him/her and then over time, difficult topics can be discussed as s/he gains confidence.

This technique tests the confidence of a student, since, to teach, one needs to have a certain command over both the content and the language. The talks can go from ‘known’ topics to ‘unknown’. The best thing about this technique is the variety of topics which can be discussed in the class. With this, the

teacher gives the students ‘free practice’ in which minimum or no intrusion from the teacher is needed. The students, most of them at least, are confident by now.

## **Results**

The whole experiment spanned over five months. The author had to consider the holidays and other co-curricular activities which intermingled with the regular classes. By the end of the fourth month, 73% of the students started to display a remarkable change in the way they spoke English. Though they were not uttering grammatically correct sentences, they became more fluent. By the end of the fifth month, 65% of the total number had gained confidence to speak with each other in the classroom. The author noticed a sense of elation among the students as they grew confident in speaking English. Eighty-seven per cent of the total number of students were participating in classroom activities more often and they were the ones who were coming up with new topics to discuss in the classrooms. Fifteen per cent of the students went ahead and delivered speeches on the occasion of ‘Teachers’ Day’ and 8% of the total number of students continued to soar higher and mustered the courage to participate in the debate competitions held at the college and outside. Overall, nervousness regarding speaking in English was gone and what took over was the zeal to explore further. Thirteen per cent still could not develop either fluency or accuracy and needed more time and care. Though the whole process tried to include all the students, 4% of them kept skipping the classes initially, but over a period of time, their attendance picked up.

## **The Role of a Teacher**

So far, what we have discussed mostly concerns the students. It is the learners who are at the forefront. But the teacher also has a role to play at every step of the whole process. “There’s nothing wrong with teachers getting involved, of course, provided they don’t start to dominate. [...] Sometimes, however, teachers will have to intervene in some way if the activity is not going smoothly” (Harmer, 2007, p.132). Initially, s/he functions as a guide and intrudes in the learning process quite often. During the ‘controlled practice’, s/he guides the students with pertinent questions and tips at every step. While doing the ‘semi-controlled’ practice, the students are more in charge and the teacher works as a mediator. During ‘free practice’, the teacher takes a passive role, as the students are more in command; therefore, the ‘student-talking-time’ increases and the ‘teacher-talking-time’ decreases over time. Throughout the process, the teacher has to bank on the teamwork of the students. In any language classroom, gadgets and TLMs are great for the initial part, but what sustains is the bonding among the students. According to Scrivener (2011, pp. 15-17), ‘Rapport’ is important in order to attain a sustainable teaching-learning process. The rapport between the teacher and a student also matters as the whole process needs patience from both.

## **Conclusion**

In this paper, the researcher has mentioned only five techniques, whereas there can be 100 more if a teacher is creative. TLMs cannot replace teachers, as teachers are capable of more innovations. Nothing

'programmed' can ever completely replace a teacher, as it can hardly cater to the needs of all the students in a heterogeneous classroom. Therefore, it is up to the teachers to shoulder the responsibility and be confident enough to inspire the students to explore their limitations and overcome them.

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### Letter to the Editor

*As a reader of the journal, I have been fascinated by the contents which are notes on action research done by the authors more than otherwise. This issue [Vol.62, No.3, May-June 2020] particularly deserves my appreciation and congratulations for the special vocabulary used in connection with Covid -19, which forms a summary of the new words coined by all concerned compiled by the author ['Social crisis and lexical innovation: The context of the Covid-19 crisis' by Arun Behera]. Hats off to the author and to the editor and publisher too, as a humble reader presenting compliments.*

*As a person who joined ELTAI after having been associated with Prof. Rajagopalan and Prof. Elango, I feel proud of you all and the progress of ELTAI. May this trend continue forever!*

*Best wishes,*

**M. Mahadevan**

*(Retd. Principal KVS, formerly Gen. Sec. AMTI)*

# Exploring Opportunities of Authentic Engagement in the English Classrooms

*Nidhi Kunwar*

## ABSTRACT

*English language teaching in Indian classrooms seems to be a tedious task. Though children express great motivation and interest in learning the English language, their proficiency in this language is not up to expected standards. The present article focuses on the real classroom context and analyzes a routine classroom discourse. It highlights how English is taught as a subject in classrooms. Further, taking examples of two exemplary English classrooms, the nature of pedagogical approach is discussed and analyzed. Focusing on the active role of students and the constructive vision of the teacher, the article highlights the need for creating opportunities for students' authentic engagement with the language.*

**Keywords:** Authentic student engagement; ESL classrooms; classroom observation.

## Introduction

English language is an official language of our country. English, as a language, not only assists us in communicating with others but also enables us to access several available resources, services and opportunities. Widely used at several places in our country, English indeed turns out to be a significant medium of communication. The NCERT position paper on the teaching of English (2006) highlights the importance of English language by describing it as “a symbol of people’s aspirations for quality in education and a fuller participation in national and international life (p. 1).” However, irrespective of its multiple use in multiple avenues, the teaching of English language in schools is generally found to be a tedious task. Teaching and learning English are largely seen as challenging and students’

competence in English language is often unsatisfactory.

The present article is based on my experience as a teacher educator who has observed several English language classrooms in government schools and witnessed the struggle of both school children and their teachers in learning the English language. This article is a result of several hours of observation of English classrooms and associated reflections. The article is divided into three sections. The first section will discuss the pedagogy observed in several regular English classrooms. The second section will report the experience of two exemplary English classrooms have observed, specifically focusing on the nature of resources used. The last section will discuss the need for student engagement in English language classrooms.

## A Regular English Classroom

I have been observing English classrooms for almost a decade. One significant factor that I have observed in most of the schools and across most of the grades is the ‘fear’ involved in English language learning. This fear associated with English can be identified as the fear of speaking incorrectly, the fear of committing mistakes, the fear of being punished by teacher, or the fear of being mocked by fellow students. This factor is in children’s mind because somehow the pedagogy of English followed in our classrooms is problematic and students tend to focus on avoiding errors rather than on engaging with the language.

The significant, and regrettably the only, resource I have observed in most of the English language classrooms is the textbook prescribed by “competent authorities.” The textbook is assumed to be the sole resource available and hence the entire teaching-learning of English revolves exclusively around the textbook. The objective of an English classroom is several times limited only to completing textbook chapters and associated exercises.

A common routine I have observed in most of the English language classrooms is as follows:

1. Teacher gives instructions for opening a specific chapter or page in the English textbook.
2. Reading of the textbook chapter is generally done in the classroom in two ways: first, teacher reads and students read the same lines together in chorus after her,

or second, selected students read one by one and others follow by finger tracing. Noticed errors, if any, are corrected immediately.

3. Line by line explanation of the English text is given in Hindi or any other language which is the medium of instruction. For instance, I observed a classroom where the teacher read the line ‘I am planning to visit my parents in the coming summer season’ and explained ‘*Lekhika (author) ne apne abhivhavakon (parents) se garmi ke mausam me milne ki yojna banayi*’.
4. The moral and summary of the chapter are given by the teacher.
5. Textbook questions are answered. Most of the time, answers are written on the board and students are expected to copy them down. Several times I have observed teachers using guidebooks and help-books for writing the answers of the questions given in textbooks.
6. Similarly, other textbook exercises are done, such as word meaning, fill in the blanks and ‘who said this to whom’.
7. Notebooks are corrected with exclusive focus on mechanical aspects of writing, such as handwriting, spelling and grammatical errors.

The above description clearly highlights the dominance of the Grammar Translation Method in our English classrooms. It is assumed that the students will not be able to understand the text in English on their own and hence line by line translation of the English text in Hindi has to be provided by the teacher. It is also assumed that

students cannot answer any question on their own and, as a result, use of guide books is legitimized. The dominant pedagogy justifies the passive role of the students, who are merely expected to follow the teacher's instructions; otherwise, they may commit errors. The students' mistakes or errors in spelling and grammar are assumed to reflect the inability of the students to acquire the language and thus is an indicator of failure.

If we analyze the above classroom routine closely, we will find that the opportunities of authentic engagement with the English language text for the student are almost nil. The textbook is the 'only' resource used in the classroom, but even this 'only' resource is also not completely explored by the students. The explanations are given by the teacher and answers for textbook chapter exercises are provided by guidebooks, thereby leaving no space for students even to attempt to understand the chapter on their own. The fixed, ritualized structure of such classroom work can never create space for true language learning. Such classrooms can only result in three things: dependence on adult confirmation, fear of failure, and avoiding engagement with the language.

### **Some Different English Classrooms**

In this section, I will be sharing examples of two English language classrooms, which were observed in some government schools. These examples show how the teachers identified the significance of 'authentic engagement' and how they designed tasks which focused on student's engagement with the tasks.

### ***Example A***

It was a Grade VI classroom in a government boys' school. The teacher had brought a collection of articles on mobile phones mentioning different models and details about the processor, camera, memory, and so on. The students were given these articles and the details were shared. Then the teacher gave them the task of deciding which model mobile phone would be best for her. They were also required to write why they decided a particular model was best so that she could buy it. She told them that in their written responses she would not be focusing on mechanical errors but would focus more on the shared ideas.

The assignment generated tremendous energy in the classroom as soon as it was given. The students were reading the article and making comparisons based on various parameters. They were discussing their ideas and also asked the teacher questions such as whether she liked photography, or whether she downloaded games on the mobile. The written responses were submitted to the teacher. She read the responses and wrote elaborate notes thanking the students for the advice.

### ***Example B***

The teacher collected interviews and articles on significant achievers, such as Kalpana Chawla, Malala Yousafzai, Priyanka Chopra, Virat Kohli, Sachin Tendulkar, Shahrukh Khan, APJ Abdul Kalam, Aishwarya Rai, and Mary Kom. Five copies of each reading material was kept in the classroom. Students of Grade VII were instructed to read any three articles or interviews and share which one

they found the best. Adequate time was given for reading the stories and, later on, discussions were held in the class.

In the discussion, exclusive focus was on understanding the stories and associated thoughts. The students were asked to participate freely without focusing on their errors or pronunciation.

These two classrooms were observed for a period of three months and remarkable changes in the students' competence and confidence were noticed. It cannot not be said that the students became completely fluent in the English language, but what was surely noticed was that the students' fear was getting overpowered by enjoyment and authentic engagement in learning the language.

These examples highlight a few basic principles of practice.

1. The reading material must be according to the interest and level of the students. Hence, the teachers selected reading materials on mobile phones and popular achievers, which were according to the level of the students.

2. Students must be given opportunities to engage with the text on their own. Unless students take an active role in reading, comprehending, writing, and sharing their views about the text, they cannot acquire competence in the language.

3. The teacher should play the significant role of a facilitator and introduce students to the designated activity. The teachers in the classes observed did not provide the answers, but rather assisted the students to read the texts on their own and

attempt the required task on their own.

4. In these classrooms, the primary focus was on expression and thinking rather than highlighting the mistakes of students. When teachers value thinking, students value it, too. They try to think on their own and express their ideas. We define language as an expression of ideas, thoughts and views. These classrooms focused on nurturing the students' ability to think, reflect and express themselves in the English language.

5. Errors in spelling and grammatical structures are not to be perceived as failure or the student's inability to understand the language. Errors have to be seen as students' attempt to engage with the language. Though in the classes observed mechanical aspects of students writing were discussed, these discussions by the teacher were done later. Students' ideas were given the centre stage rather than their errors.

6. The materials used by the teachers were not some specialized, graded, high-priced English language learning kits. The materials used were collected by the teachers from their surroundings. The teachers collected the material from daily newspapers and some magazines. The teachers chose the texts which they thought would be easier for the students to read and designed the tasks accordingly.

### **Discussion**

Cambourne (1995) described engagement, employment, approximation and feedback as significant factors of language learning. According to him, engagement with language involves, "active participation by the learner,

which in turn involves some risk taking” (p.185). Teachers must encourage students to take this risk and must not sacrifice it for the sake of accurate mechanics. Approximation must be accepted. The presence of errors is not a symbol of failure; rather, it indicates that the student is making an attempt to understand the language. Hence, it must be valued as a window to their thinking. As teachers, we often feel that unless and until we correct the students, they will not learn the correct language. This understanding is entirely false. When children engage with language, they make hypotheses about the language. Sometimes, the hypothesis can be correct or incorrect. Children are active learners and hence, they soon identify the problem and correct it. However, this correction happens when children get opportunities to use language freely as active learners. Lastly, the nature of feedback is extremely important for a language learner (Atwell, 1987; Calkins, 1986). The quality and direction of feedback provided by the teacher will determine what students will focus in their work. If the feedback is limited to errors and grammatical mistakes, then students will also be restricted by these parameters.

To conclude, it must be emphasized that providing opportunities of authentic

engagement is the key for generating students’ interest in the English language. Our pedagogical approach must value the active role of students, the appropriateness of resources, and the constructive vision of the teacher.

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# Promoting the Habit of Reading English Books in College Students

*Pratima Talwar*

*[Editor's Note: This essay was awarded the First Prize in the essay writing competition announced by ELTAI in July 2020 on 'How can we to promote the habit of reading English books among our college students?' – three cash prizes were announced.]*

## **“Reading is dreaming with open eyes.”**

We read so many articles, posts, and inspirational quotes on how reading can improve our life. Most of us seem to agree [with them] as well. There is a whole community of readers and authors that apparently seem to be growing. Reading is prescribed in every other English medium school.

Then why is it that students struggle the most in reading books? Reading, something so basic and deeply ingrained into our consciousness, ends up being a challenging task for many budding minds. The primary purpose of this essay is to address and find the best solution for the lack of motivation to read among the youth of today. Research suggests that students who read a lot in school fail to read so much in college. The pressure that college puts on the students deters them from reading English fiction or non-fiction books for leisure. One faces the difficulty in keeping their eyes open long enough to read even when they acquire some free time for themselves, the reason being that they are mentally exhausted.

The young people seek their dopamine release from being lost in the world of social media, binge-watching series, and video games. Today, in this fast-paced world,

people would preferably seek instant gratification than a delayed pay-off. What they do not realize is that the common practice of seeking instant gratification is what is lowering the attention span of our youth. This, in turn, is the main reason that students do not have the patience to enjoy a book.

Now that we have addressed the issue, let us look at some solutions that can help with the lack of reading interest among the young adults.

## **Reading Club**

Reading should be made a shared intellectual experience for the students. Emphatically, Reading Club should be a whole experience in itself. The students could discuss their emotional experiences, their thoughts, opinions, and various points of analysis among their peers and their teachers. If students associate the Reading Club with positive experiences, they will be more inclined to see reading in a renewed light. The whole point of leisure reading is to enjoy it.

Furthermore, humans are inherently social, so if they feel like they belong to a group that respects their opinions and supports them, and would want to keep being a part

of the said group, they would actively participate in the activities of the group. If all the members of the group are reading and discussing actively, the non-readers will also be motivated to read to contribute to the discussions and become a more active member. There shall be no judgments on their thoughts on the books they have read. They can read comic books or classics, and both would be treated equally in the Reading Club. They can freely express themselves, and in doing so, they will feel accepted by their peers and professors. From the comics of DC and Marvel universe to classics of Leo Tolstoy, all literature is literature. Literature should be revered as such.

Activities like making a small but engaging book report recommendation for everyone in the college to read can inspire students out of the reading club to partake in reading activities as well. Additionally, it will give the students a platform to share their love of book with others. Digital blogging or making an account on social media can engage the students in the way that students can genuinely enjoy. Many books are made into movies and series. Students can watch them and make a comparison between them and the book. This task will validate them as they enjoy watching such media.

The seating arrangement should not be like a classroom. In a classroom, there is minimal space for a free form of communication, where people are not even facing each other. It should be in a round-table or a horse-shoe formation, which will increase the chances of face-to-face communication. This way, the students will be much more comfortable, and it will not feel like a formal environment. We

see these seating formations in libraries, so conducting the meetings there could be a great idea.

Additional provisions like light snacks and biscuits while the discussions are happening are likely to enhance their positive association with the act of reading and discussing their latest book selection with the group.

### **The Reading Teacher**

Children do not learn what we tell them; they learn what they see. Similarly, college students also idolize their professors like they did their school teachers. If we want to create a culture of reading, it will not happen if their teachers themselves are not familiar with the literature.

The students have seen their school teachers go into the classroom, read what the textbooks taught, and explain it the best they can. Those teachers did not encourage students to go beyond the textbooks because they did not go beyond the textbook. Naturally, the responsibility now falls on their professors.

If they want their students to read independently, they ought to set an example for the students. We ought to read books, poems, short stories, and even comic books. We cannot just tell our students how critical reading is; we have to show them how amazing it is. The teaching staff have to familiarize themselves with an array of young adult, contemporary, and diverse literature, and become a recommender, not a prescriber.

A friendly competition between the faculty and the students can also be a great idea. A reading challenge encourages them to

enhance their reading [of] English books. The teacher can call for a quick poll of the favourite books of the students and then read the most voted-for book. Then give the review of the book. This will give the students an opportunity to engage more with the teacher and share their love for books. This exchange of recommendations will give a boost to the rapport between them both.

When the faculties show how passionate they are about reading, the students are sure to follow suit. When they discuss openly with their students and with other teaching staff what they felt like when they were reading some book or story, the students will also open up about their own emotions, and it will allow both of them to connect reader-to-reader.

### **College Literature Fests**

College students these days do not have a high attention span thanks to the quick endorphin release by the technology at hand. They would instead engage in something that gives them immediate satisfaction, whereas, reading is a slow burn.

College fests are great fun for students where they can let loose and enjoy a rather informal environment. Festivities like slam poetry, creative writing workshops, writing competitions, and many more have the potential to engage students in the world of English literature. It can give them a platform to express themselves in front of the public.

They connect with professional authors, listen to their stories, writing experiences, and how reading made a significant impact on their lives. They find inspiration, and they

find a diversity of genres. They are then able to see that [they] no one expects them to read just one sort of book. Whichever genre they desire, there is always some author to provide a fantastic book for it.

They get the stage to talk about a book that has inspired them or has left a deep mark on their hearts. Readers can share their love for books with other readers, and that is how the reading community will grow reader by reader.

### **A Final Word**

Reading for leisure is not just desirable; it is necessary for students to learn effectively. It aids their critical thinking skills and makes them reflective individuals. Reading makes them emotionally intelligent and empathetic towards others. It gives them recognition because they relate themselves with the characters in the story. It teaches them that they are not alone in the world. Books provide some emotional support of sorts.

To make reading more attractive to students, the teaching faculty has the most significant role to play. The college should also make provisions for students and give them more autonomy over it. Books have the capacity of flowing in the veins of students. It grounds them to reality, yet it allows them to escape to a new world.

The reading speaks to the aesthete inside, and once that aesthete is awake, it can never go back to sleep.

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**READING ACTIVITY**  
**Slow Reading\*: A Virtuous Strategy**  
*K Elango*

*“A book can be simple but not a book reader.”*

- Objective** : To make readers realize that slow reading has its own values as to enable them to develop all the cognitive skills enumerated in Bloom’s taxonomy. Although fast reading is to be encouraged it is the content that determines the reading speed.
- Participation** : Individual
- Material** : Any text, densely worded, from any domain of knowledge. For instance, I stumbled upon the following site: <https://www.vox.com/culture/2020/4/5/21208629/essays-life-during-coronavirus-arundhati-roy-david-byrne>, wherein the writers record their life during the coronavirus pandemic, one of which I went through was Simon Callow’s essay.
- Preparation** : Deliberately slowing down the speed whenever a reader wishes to reflect on what is being read.

**Procedure**

***Context***

- Having identified the essay at random (one of the reasons was its brevity – only three paragraphs), I decided to read it because of the topical interest. I initially thought of glancing through it rapidly.
- When I started reading, however, right into the second sentence there was a reference to Camus’ *Plague* and I thought of skipping it but came the next reference to Defoe in the same line. Further into the next paragraph, I was bombarded with more references: World War II, pianist Myra Hess, actors Donald Wolfit, Laurence Olivier and Ralph Richardson, and ballet dancers Margot Fonteyn and Robert Helpmann. References continued in the third paragraph as well to IRA aggression and ended with the press conference of Mr. Johnson with Mr. Trump.
- The number of references in the text gave me an option to refer to them or merely to get the general tenor skipping the references. Had I chosen to do the latter, I would have lost the richness of the text. Texts of this kind force one to pause to grasp the meaning by activating the schema and/or by accessing the referencing sources. One cannot speed-read a text of this sort but reading slowly brings rich rewards.

***Points to Remember***

- Choose a text that demands slow reading (not all of them do).
- While reading, pause at the places when the mind is creating a parallel text (imaginative

readers often do – something that reminds them of similar things in their lives, or they could imagine how it would be if they were in such a context).

- One could also generate similar or contradictory ideas to what is presented. And, relating to other texts that are similar or dissimilar – *intertextuality* (reflective readers often engage in such acts), is yet another possibility.
- References that are made to other texts, articles or authors could lead to engaging in reading them (extensive readers keep up this sort of a chain).
- While reading, some of us go word by word (which automatically slows down the speed), paying attention to all possible aspects such as content, style, tone, tenor and background to critique the text (exploratory and analytical readers follow the style).
- When reading a text, if one goes beyond the surface level to unearth the implied meanings to inform others of the same text (reviewers do), the reading speed slows down.

### **Learning Outcomes**

1. Learners understand that a text determines the kind of reading, whether intensive or extensive, and the former requires slow reading to grasp all its meanings. And, instead of reading all texts in a similar manner, learners need to switch styles.
2. Learners recognize that reading intensively (necessarily slow) promotes cognitive skills such as exploratory, analytical, critical, reflective, and so on.

### **Further Reading**

Texts that demand serious attention have to be read slowly to capture all their nuances and richness.

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**\*Slow reading:** It has several positive aspects which fast readers are likely to miss. Speed readers often skim and scan; hence, their understanding is often shallow and there is a lurking danger of misunderstanding.

Slow reading enhances sensitivity to the linguistic and semantic aspects of a text, which, besides deeper comprehension, leads to better writing style as they are interrelated.

“A traveling traveller travels but the non-traveling traveller travels to places with the help of books that opens a traveller’s chapter in the life of a non-traveling yet traveling traveller.”

— **Suyasha Subedi**

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***The Journal of English Language Teaching (JELT) – ISSN-0973-5208***

[A publication of the English Language Teachers' Association of India (ELTAI)]

**Manuscript Submission Guidelines**

**SUBMISSIONS**

*The JELT* is an international, **peer-reviewed journal** published by the English Language Teachers' Association of India based at Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India, but with about 50 chapters in different parts of India. **Please see the front inner cover for details of the establishment and objectives of the association.**

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Each submission will be evaluated for its suitability for publication in terms of the following criteria.

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- Reflect current theories and practices in English language teaching.
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- Be well written and organized, with sufficient explanation and examples to enable readers to apply the ideas and insights in their own classes.
- Discuss the topic in the context of other work related to the topic.
- Be written in clear and concise language,

making it easy to read.

- Be edited for language and style.

***Please see the checklist for reviewing manuscripts, given at the end of these guidelines.***

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3. All pages should be double-spaced with a clear margin of 1 inch on all sides.
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8. The article should use the author-date format for citations and references (e.g., Anderson 1997; Anderson 1997, p.17). *See the Chicago Manual of Style (15<sup>th</sup> edn.) for more details and examples.*
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the date of accessing the source should be given in brackets after the URL.

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1. Does this article present and/or discuss **issues that are important and relevant** to the teaching and learning of English in an ESL/EFL context?
2. Is the **title** clear, short and appropriate for the content of the article?
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