

## **Situating English Language Teaching in India within the Framework of Post Method Pedagogy**

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### **Abstract**

The horizontal expansion and vertical percolation of English language in India has been uneven primarily because of the lack of concerted efforts by the different stake holders. One of the main reasons has been the unfiltered imposition of Anglo American or Eurocentric teaching methods for the teaching of English which have failed to produce the desired results. The use of imported methods has not only sidelined the teachers but has also taken the whole teaching learning process as its hostage. Consequently unlike urban areas where due to the exposure to media and social networking, students are relatively proficient in the use of English, the students of the rural and tribal areas in India are having a very low proficiency in English which becomes a main cause of their exclusion from the higher education and the job market. The marginalization of the indigenous educational traditions and practices and promotion of the western educational traditions without any scrutiny has put the teaching and learning of English in India at the cross roads. The University Grants Commission of India in its Learning Outcome based Curriculum Framework (LOCF) of English also advocates use of local resources and teacher innovation for the teaching of English in India. Keeping the unproductive use of method oriented pedagogy in India and the recommendations of LOCF in mind, the present paper builds a case for using Post Method pedagogy which unlike the so called methods is a bottom up approach and is based on the experiential knowledge of the practicing teachers and takes the local social, cultural , administrative and educational exigencies into consideration.

*Keywords:* Methods, Post Methods, LOCF, Eurocentric, ELT,

Despite being taught for the last 186 years (Macaulays' minutes came in 1835), English language education is yet to reach all sections of Indian society. The lack of clarity and the failure to set the objectives and learning outcomes, both at the level of policy making and implementation, are among the many reasons that have led to the poor proficiency of Indian youth in English language. Additionally regional conflicts and lack of political will in the country have also contributed to the unproductive pedagogy used for the teaching of English. Mulayam Singh Yadav, Chief of the Samajwadi Party promised to ban English during 2009 elections and again demanded "there should be a ban on English address in Parliament" (BBC News, 19 November 2013). It is again ironical that in spite of being in the service of the nation, both pre and post independence, English is yet to get accepted as an Indian language. Nobel laureate, Amritya Sen, pleads for accepting English as an Indian language. He says that, "An Indian language would be

that which is in use in India and English has been in use for quite a long time.”(NEWS 18, 20 April 2009). Perhaps the most important factor that has led to the present impasse is the blind adoption of euro centric language teaching approaches and methods that do not fit into the Indian language learning/teaching ecosystem. Different language teaching methods like the Structuralist method, the Audio lingual method or even Communicative language teaching method that emerged in the west due to local exigencies were slavishly imposed in India in total disregard to the educational, social and administrative dynamics of an Indian classroom. The hyped discourse around the notion of methods resulted into an erroneous notion that the use of a particular method is a panacea for all problems related to the teaching of English in India. According to Pennycock (2004,p278), it also led to the prioritization of the Anglo –American English language teaching theories, methods and practices at the expense of traditional teaching practices and the knowledge and experience of teachers. Moreover such straitjacketing has put the spotlight of language teaching on methods and has made the whole discussion “reductive” as it seldom reflects what happens in the language classroom. Taking cognizance of the situation the University Grants Commission of India in 2019 has come up with LOCF for English that advocates moving away from ‘Anglo-centric core’ and developing among the students ‘ the ability to think and write clearly about ones’ role as a located Indian citizen of the world”. The LOCF empowers the teachers by encouraging them to “make suitable pedagogical innovations” (UGC Document on LOCF English: 2019). The realization of the unproductive use of straitjacketed methods for the teaching learning environment in India, and the recommendations of LOCF for using local resources, call for a strategy for the teaching of English that not only builds upon the framework provided by LOCF but also looks beyond the current method oriented pedagogy. In this context the “Post method Discourse” (Akbari, 2008) or “Post method era” (Kumaravadivelu; 2003, 2006, 2012) needs to be studied seriously as it suggests the use of local context and banks upon both the academic and experiential knowledge of the teachers. The present paper is an attempt to look at the drawbacks of using Anglo- American methods for the teaching of English in India and instead suggests using Post method pedagogy as it suits the Indian teaching learning environment.

### **Objectives**

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- To critique the use of euro –centric methods for the teaching of English in India.
- To discuss the implementation of LOCF for English
- To discuss the use of Post –method pedagogy for the teaching of English in India.

### **Literature Review**

The inadequacy of the methods to globally resolve the language teaching problems have been discussed by many scholars. Andon and Leung (2013) discuss how there is no evidence available that one method is better than the other. Nunan (1991), Apple (1986), Pennycock (1989) underline how methods create a hierarchal divide between the theorists and practising teachers. Johnson (2016), Kumaravaiedelu ( 2003, 2006,2012) and Akbari (2008) advocate the use of

teaching methodology that exploits the experiential strengths of the teachers and builds upon local context and situations.

## **Discussion**

Even though the proficiency of Indian youth in English language has improved considerably in the past few decades but its horizontal expansion and vertical percolation has been uneven. Due to the wider access to media, particularly social media, the youth of urban areas have somehow grown fluent in English but the situation in the rural and tribal India is not that rosy. Although throughout India people do not just believe in the transformative power of English but they also see it “not just as a useful skill but as a symbol of better life, a pathway out of poverty and oppression. Aspiration of such magnitude is a heavy burden for any language and for those who have the responsibility for teaching it, to bear” (Graddol, 2010, p10). The fact is that we have failed to rise up to the challenge of providing universal access to English which has led to the exclusion of the large majority of Indian youth from higher education and job avenues. Amritya Sen writes, “one way of excluding people from doing English is to keep the division between English speaking haves and non-English speaking have-nots” (NEWS 18, 20 April 2009). The students of the rural and tribal areas due to their inability to speak English well find themselves in the category of “non-English speaking have-nots”. National Knowledge Commission (2006) notes that “school learners who are not adequately trained in English as a language are always at a handicap in the world of higher education”. The Commission recommends that the effective teaching of English “would provide a far more equal access to higher education and employment opportunities”. Prior to the National Knowledge Commission many other Committees and Commissions like Curriculum Development Centre (CDC,1989) and NCERT (2006), put forward recommendations to bridge the gap between the “English speaking haves and non-English speaking have-nots” but unfortunately due to the lack of will and concerted efforts things on the ground level have remained largely unmoved.

One of the main reasons behind the prevalent lack of direction in the pedagogy of English is the obsession of Indian academia with the language teaching methods imported either from America or Europe. During the last 75 years, we have tried the Direct method, the Audio Lingual method, the Structural method, the Communicative Language Teaching but none of these approaches could produce any palpable results on the ground. In fact the sheen of methods lured language educators across the globe and they sought “to solve the problems of language teaching by focussing attention exclusively teaching method” (Stern, 1983, p452). In India, the teachers of English have been disempowered by forcing these methods down their throats. Experts and Resource Persons during the teacher training programmes present either one or the other method as a solution to all language teaching problems. The adoption of these methods without being adapted as per the classroom exigencies frustrates both the teachers and the students. The issues crop up when the method as a concept or approach is put into practice. At the conceptual or ideational level it may seem quite lucid but from practical point of view it later leads to the conflict between the theorists (methodologists) and practitioners (teachers). Nunan (1991, p3)

says that all methods “...assume that there is a single set of principles which all determine whether or not learning will take place. Thus they all propose a single set of precepts for teacher and learner classroom behaviour, and assert that if these principles are faithfully followed , they will result in learning for all”. Richards and Rodgers (2001) also mention that effective English teaching has come to mean the correct use of a method with all its principles and techniques. The idea of prescriptivism and hierarchy embedded in methods often negates the contextual influences and personal beliefs of teachers and treats them as a conduit through which skills will flow from the language methodologist to the language learners. According to Johnson (2016,p121-122) teachers are considered to be” doers” than “thinkers” and doing of teaching was understood as successful implementation of instructional behaviours that lead to the maximum learning of the students, regardless of the institutional or local context. The linguistic, social and institutional context of India is quite different from the places where these methods are conceived. The socio-political attitudes to English, large and diverse class size and ill equipped classrooms often become an obstacle in successful implementation of the principles prescribed by methods as they implicitly prioritise one-size-fits all, “scientific” or disciplinary knowledge over teachers’ own social and contextual knowledge and “ultimately de-skills” teachers who are supposed just to enforce the ideas of others (Pennycock, 1989). Thus besides marginalisation of teachers and not allowing chance for their “own personal judgements and teaching methods, the use of method pedagogy also treats learners as “passive recipients of the method (who) and must conform to the procedure” (Richards and Rodgers, 2001, p274). In fact methods are constructed for idealized contexts and ignore “institutional, political, contextual and social restrictions teachers face” ( Clarke,1994). Kumaravadivelu (2003,p541-544) presents a critique of method based pedagogy from several dimensions: From scholastic dimension he says that methods are insensitive to local knowledge and promote Western knowledge, from linguistic dimension he holds that the methods advocate the use of English only in the classroom depriving learners and teachers from using their first language linguistic resources and from cultural dimension, he says that methods promote Western culture. Besides from pedagogical perspective, as stated by Andon and Leung(2013, p157), methods have failed to “solve the problems of language teaching; and there is little evidence in favour of one method over another”. The failure of methods to yield the desired results owing primarily to their insensitivity to the local contexts and marginalisation of teachers in countries like India , teachers and language teaching experts have proposed Post methods pedagogy that is not only sensitive to the needs of a particular group of learners within a particular institution , but also puts the teacher at the centre of the learning process. Given the profile of English language learners in the rural and tribal areas of India and the deficiencies of physical and human infrastructure the Post method pedagogy has the potential to be a game changer in the ELT scenario of the country. Moreover the recommendations of the LOCF for English by UGC that pleads for the faculty to “make suitable pedagogical innovations” and advocates use of local resources synchronize with the broader conceptual and practical aspects of Post method pedagogy.

Regarding “Post method era” Kumaravadivelu (2003, 2006, 2012) or “Post method Discourse” (Akbari,2008), it is to be borne in mind that it is not an “alternative method but an alternative to method” (Kumaravadivelu,2003, p32). It provides an opportunity to English language teachers to critically evaluate their own teaching situation and build up a theory of their own. The methods constructed this way reflect teachers’ beliefs, values and experience (Richards and Rodgers, 2001). The Post method pedagogy offers teachers autonomy to analyse their teaching situation and to make decisions. Such teachers are reflective as they observe their teaching, evaluate the results , point out the issues , look for remedies and try new strategies. Kumaravadivelu (2012:p12-16), points out three pedagogical principles of Post method pedagogy which make it different from the concept of method: particularity , practicality and possibility. Particularity is explained by Kumaravadivelu as a pedagogy that “must be sensitive to a particular group of teachers teaching a particular group of learners pursuing a particular set of goals within a particular institutional context embedded in a particular socio-cultural milieu (Kumaravadivelu; 2006, p171). By practicality , he means that any teaching theory that cannot be practiced is useless hence teachers theorise from their own experiential knowledge and practise their own theories. Possibility means that the pedagogy be appropriate socially, culturally and politically. Any discourse on Post methods is incomplete without adding that it does not disregard the insights provided by the methods because they help the teachers to understand and evaluate their own teaching and providing inexperienced teachers with some valuable initial knowledge(Richards and Rodgers;2001). Moreover in a case study of Andon and Leung (2013), it is mentioned that experienced teachers discuss their own teaching principles and approach by referring extensively to methods. Hence methods provide teachers the knowledge of professional discourse and language needed and “conceptual tools” (p174).

### Conclusion

The inherent prescriptivism and top-down approach of methods takes away the initiative and creativity of a teacher and also limits the possibilities that learners can explore in a classroom. An Indian classroom, especially the one located in the rural and tribal areas , is certainly not a place where colonial constructs of methods can yield positive results. The teachers of English need to be given freedom to collaborate with the learners and engage in the possibilities that emerge in the classroom. Kumaravadivelu (2006,p178) states that “Post method pedagogy recognises teachers’ prior knowledge as well as their potential to know not only how to teach but also how to act autonomously within the academic and administrative constraints imposed by the institutions, curricula and textbooks”. Since Post method pedagogy is not eclectic but involves the application of certain frameworks, the teachers in India need to be familiarised with this approach to teaching.

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