

# Understanding of Methods and Techniques among Primary Teachers of English in Satara District

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## ABSTRACT

*This study reports a small survey that was undertaken to understand problems and prospects of teaching English at the primary level in Satara district of Maharashtra. The purpose of the study was to explore the real state of teaching and learning of English in the primary schools. There are several problematic issues as well as inspiring practices associated with the teaching of English at the primary level in the district. The questionnaire designed to collect data from teachers comprised thirty objective as well as open-ended questions. This paper presents an analysis of the responses to the questions pertaining to teaching methods and techniques.*

**Keywords:** Methods and techniques in ELT; ELT practices; primary teachers of English.

## Introduction

The quality of English learnt by students has been the prime concern of all the teachers and experts in the field. When given a deep thought, language teaching appears to be a very complex process, as it involves emotional, physical, behavioural, cultural, political, historical, and practical elements. A teacher has to take them all into account while teaching any language, though the preferences may differ according to the teaching conditions. Methods and techniques used for imparting language skills play a key role in the process. "Methods serve as a foil for reflection that can aid teachers in bringing to conscious awareness the thinking that underlies their actions" (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011, p. xi). Imitating how our teachers taught us has been one of the predominant trends in our classroom teaching. "By exposing teachers to methods

and asking them to reflect on the principles of those methods, actively engaging with the techniques, teacher educators can help teachers become clearer about why they do what they do" (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011, p. xi).

Exposure to different methods enables them to choose the appropriate method for their classroom situations. It attracts them to a particular method, which can be used most effectively, apart from making them aware of other methods in practice. This also has a visionary aim of enabling individual teachers to practise a particular method that they feel is most effective. This would ultimately enable them to reject any method imposed on them by the higher authorities or submit to a top-down model. Where there is no single method prescribed, teachers would have an array of methods or techniques to choose from according to the

demands of the situation.

### **Problem of the Study**

The government of Maharashtra introduced English as one of the compulsory subjects in the lower primary classrooms in 1999. A period of two decades has passed since the introduction of this revised policy about teaching English. Improvement in the quality of English learnt by students was the main concern of the policy. The expected outcomes are still not in sight. It would be interesting to study different aspects of teaching English at the primary level. Particularly, it is important to study the methods and techniques practised by teachers in the schools for imparting language skills.

### **Rationale of the Study**

The syllabus and textbooks have been revised only twice in the last twenty years. The teaching method recommended by the syllabus committee is the Play Way Method in addition to the Lexical Approach. Teachers are not allowed to teach grammar, which was the primary focus of teaching English before 1999. Many teachers insisted on teaching grammar but could not, because of the change in policy. This has seriously affected the classroom teaching strategies and the quality of English learnt by students. In view of these imposed changes, it becomes essential to

study the methods and techniques adapted by teachers for teaching English in the primary classes. The study also explored certain unexplored practical aspects of the implementation of methods in the classrooms.

### **Area of the Study**

Satara is a district located in the western region of Maharashtra. This has been a district of utmost importance historically and politically, as it served as the capital of the Maratha Empire during the period of Chh. Shahu, the grandson of Chh. Shivaji. It is also a major agrarian district of the state producing the best quality groundnuts, thus adding to the state revenue substantially.

### **Procedure**

A survey was conducted to achieve the aims of the study. Based on a random selection across the district, 350 teachers were given the questionnaire. However, only 86 teachers responded. The questionnaire consisted of only two questions pertaining to methods and techniques. The first question was an objective type question. Teachers were required to choose or name the method or methods they use. The second question was intended to know what exactly they practise in the name of a particular method they have mentioned in response to the first question.

**Responses to Question 1:** Table 1 presents the responses of the teachers to the question.

\* Every teacher was free to mention more than one method.

Method Used*	No. of Respondents	Percentage to the Total (86)	Separate	Combined
Direct Method	23	26.74	3	20
Grammar-Translation	16	18.60	4	12
Communicative Approach	41	47.67	1	40
Audio-Lingual Method	26	30.23	1	25
Situational Language Teaching	32	37.21	0	32
Total Physical Response	14	16.28	0	14
Eclectic Approach	38	44.19	10	28
Constructivism	36	41.86	7	29
Co-operative Language Teaching	27	31.40	1	26
No Grammar Approach	5	5.81	0	5
Any Other	9	10.47	0	9
No Response	3	3.49		
Invalid Responses	21	24.41		

Only 3 teachers ((3.49%)) did not respond to the question. Forty-one teachers (47.67%) use the Communicative Approach for teaching English either separately or in combination with some other approach which appears to be the most useful approach for classroom teaching. However, it is surprising to note that 44.19 % and 41.86 % teachers claim to use the Eclectic Approach and Constructivism respectively for teaching English in the classroom. Through interactions with the teachers during the survey, the researcher came to know that most of the teachers prefer to use

constructivism for teaching English, as they find it conducive to the classroom situations. It was also observed that only 27 teachers (31.39%) use only one approach for teaching English in the classroom, which means that 69.61% teachers find combinations of different approaches and methods suitable for teaching English.

A few of the responses were considered invalid, as the researcher found that the combinations that the teachers had chosen were either not rational or not possible. Hence, those were not considered for analysis.

## Response to Question 2

The second question required the teachers surveyed to explain their method or way of teaching. The question expected descriptive answers based on the strategies adopted by the teachers. Their responses were as follows. (*Responses in the Marathi language have been translated.*)

- 1 Direct Method – Translation - Communicative Approach
- 2 Direct method is compulsory. First, No grammar Approach, then communicative and use of audio-visual aids.
- 3 For 1<sup>st</sup> standard, I do all the activities in front of students and ask them to repeat them. It needs more and more practice. I use audio and visual materials for them.
- 4 Teach in English, explain in Marathi and give easy examples.
- 5 Communicative approach: Students show pictures from the book and teachers give information about the picture.
- 6 Spellings, words, sentences come in sequence in above methods.
- 7 Translation
- 8 By translating in Marathi
- 9 Constructivism: This method is useful in primary education. In this method, there is actual experience, enjoy, activity-based learning.
- 10 First tell in Marathi, then translate in English.
- 11 I use direct method and later explain it in easy language using audio-visual aids, etc.
- 12 Speak directly in English and explain in simple English.
- 13 I give parallel examples of the object and discuss them with students.
- 14 Loud reading, student reading, use of dictionary for meaning/s of word/s, use of words to construct sentences, activity-based participation of students, discussion.
- 15 Read aloud; explain meanings of new words in Marathi.
- 16 While teaching, some basic concepts are to be explained in Marathi as the mother tongue is the best language to understand complicated issues.
- 17 The books of Maharashtra Textbook Production Bureau are student-centred, structural and pleasant in presentation. Hence, I use methods given in the textbooks.
- 18 In constructivism method, students, i.e. learners, actively participate in the learning process. Teacher encourages students to learn.
- 19 Read the text clearly first, then explain it. Give meanings of the words. Use Marathi as per the requirements. Ask questions to get feedback from students about the content.
- 20 I use the teaching method by which students understand easily.
- 21 Eclectic Approach includes all the methods which I use.

- 22 I speak to my students in English only. Sometimes to find out unfamiliar words, I make use of dictionary. I use audio-visual aids.
- 23 As students do not use English at home, they do not understand it when spoken. Hence, I find it necessary to translate content in Marathi. They understand grammar better in Marathi.
- 24 I teach English using discussion method. I ask questions and take feedback from students.
- 25 Motivate students to share their experiences in the class.
- 26 Create situations in the classroom and outside to encourage students to speak.
- 27 Use teaching aids such as cards, charts, PPT. Practise some sentences outside the textbook.
- 28 Make students participate.
- 29 Practise action words, picture description, drilling, etc.

(**Note:** These were the actual responses, and the researcher has not tried to modify them.)

### Analysis

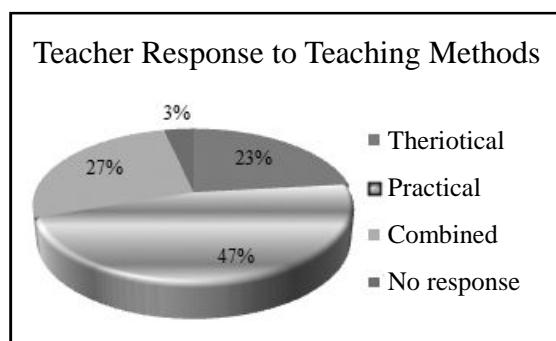
When taken together, the responses create an ideal picture of classroom teaching of English, which is not a fact. This requires further classification of the responses. Accordingly, these responses have been classified into four categories. The first category is **Theoretical Responses**, which means that the respondent teachers had just mentioned the name/s of the approach/es they use for teaching. There are some teachers

who did not mention the name/s of approach/es but gave a practical description of what they do in the classroom. These responses have been recorded as **Practical Responses**. There are some teachers who had named the approach and explained what they do in the classroom. These responses have been classified as **Combined Responses**. There are some teachers who have not responded at all. They have been classified as **No Response**.

**Table 2**

Category	No. of Respondents	%age
Theoretical	20	23.26
Practical	40	46.51
Combined	2	26.74
No Response	3	3.49

Source: Field Work



As Table 2 shows, 40 teachers (46.51%) elaborated their practices compared to 20 teachers (23.26%) who had just named the approach/es and method/s; 26.74% teachers had stated the approach and elaborated what they do while teaching in the classroom. These elaborations by 63 teachers (73.25%) make us think about the relevant and not-so-relevant responses. It was found that 25.58%

teachers gave responses not relevant, i.e. their responses do not match the methods they had mentioned in response to the same question or to the first.

### Conclusion

Primary teachers in Satara district need intensive orientation to methods and techniques for teaching English in the primary classes. Their knowledge is either outdated or they do not want to adapt to changes in teaching techniques in line with the changing situation. Frequent training in newly developed techniques and methods to cater for their needs is one of the best solutions to update teachers' knowledge and improve the teaching-learning process.

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