

CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT OF PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS IN ENGLISH IN SELECTED PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN WEST BENGAL, INDIA

TAPAS KUMAR SARKAR¹ & KHANDOKAR ANOWARUS SADAT²

¹Lecturer, Itachuna Govt.-Sponsored Primary Teachers' Training Institute,
Itachuna, Hooghly, West Bengal, India

²Principal, District Institute of Education and Training, Government of West Bengal,
Rajhat, Hooghly, West Bengal, India

ABSTRACT

This paper reveals the methodology used in capacity development programme of Primary School teachers in selected primary schools in West Bengal, India. Main objective of this programme was to provide the primary students with access to English from very beginning of school life so that they can develop the ability to receive and produce English first fluently then accurately. To ensure this change, efforts have been taken to empower Teacher's ability to develop better classroom practice. This work is a continuation of the previous study based on the Capacity Building Programme. A total of 903 primary school teachers were trained and assessed based on the English syllabus of Class - IV. Observations recorded on the capacity development of the teachers in both written and oral mode after receiving the training. The development in the oratorical skill based on oracy, oral fluency and oral accuracy of the participating elementary teachers were tested through self introduction, informal talking, presentation and different activities based on the English syllabus of class IV. It reveals that the development of the elementary teachers is more or less satisfactory in respect of oracy and oral fluency and knowledge of grammar through language. However, regarding oral accuracy the elementary teachers need to practice more.

KEYWORDS: United Nations Development Programme, Activity Learning Method, Activity Based Learning

INTRODUCTION

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) was one of the forerunners in developing an understanding of capacity building or development. Since the early 70's the UNDP offered guidance for its staff and governments on what was considered "institution building." In 1991, the term evolved to be "capacity building." The UNDP defines capacity building as a long-term continual process of development that involves all stakeholders; including ministries, local authorities, non-governmental organizations, professionals, community members, academics and more. Capacity building uses a country's human, scientific, technological, organizational, and institutional and resource capabilities. The goal of capacity building is to tackle problems related to policy and methods of development, while considering the potential, limits and needs of the people of the country concerned. The UNDP outlines that capacity building takes place on an individual level, an institutional level and the societal level ^[1].

Capacity-building on an individual level requires the development of conditions that allow individual participants to build and enhance existing knowledge and skills. It also calls for the establishment of conditions that will allow individuals to engage in the process of learning and adapting to change ^[1]. Programme based on Capacity Building of

elementary teachers may leads to the Capacity Development.

English has become a link language in West Bengal as well as in India. Present English teaching is offering a modified approach to the elementary level students in West Bengal. For a greater oral fluency, present English syllabus is carefully graded^[2]. Strong emphasis has been given on the development of reading through 'Activity Based Learning' (ABL) and 'Activity Learning Method' (ALM). These methods have been introduced in response to poor learning level as both of these are based on 'Learning by doing'. The present study is a continuation of the earlier work on 'Capacity building of primary school teachers in selected primary schools in West Bengal, India^[3].

THE OBJECTIVE OF THIS PROGRAMME

- To provide the primary students with access to English from very beginning of school life so that they can develop the ability to receive and produce English first fluently then accurately.
- To ensure this change, efforts have been taken to empower Teacher's ability to develop better classroom practice.

METHODOLOGY USED

As it is thought that the students can be able to understand and produce English clearly in communication if it is taught through interactive process, they were provided with pair/group interaction in the classroom.

Language is more than just communication; it is the primary method by which we do things together. Language is the accumulation of shared meaning of common ground. Feedback is needed to improve the communication. As it is considered that 35% of language learning is achieved through speaking and 45% through listening, more emphasis is given on the listening as the vital part of language learning. Children get the opportunity to listen English through copying parent's repetition. Biological and psychological needs make a child to speak. Teaching is a performing act and the development in the skill as well as competency in the learning of English as the second language in the elementary level in West Bengal is considered to be achieved through 1) Communication (One way communication / message sent), 2) Conversation (Two – way communication / both side feed understood), 3) Collaboration (Thinking / planning) and 4) Co-creation (Joint activity, making / doing). Keeping these parameters in mind, reading through 'Activity Based Learning' (ABL) and 'Activity Learning Method' (ALM) have been introduced in response to poor learning level.

THE COMMUNICATIVE BASIS OF ACTIVITIES

Communication involves the transfer of information between participants. If a teacher asks a pupil: How many hands have you? -the teacher is not involved in communication neither is the student. This is because the teacher already knows the answers to the questions. What the teacher is doing in this case is showing how the language system works, not how it is used for communication. There is 'only communication' when new information is transferred, that is to say, when a gap between participants is bridged through language. Communication is bridging the information gap, opinion gap and attitude gap between participants. The role of a good primary language teacher is to create the conditions for classroom communication and provide support for the pupils during this process.

THE MAIN MESSAGE

If children are exposed to English in situations which they understand, they will learn English and if they are encouraged to use the language in contexts which they understand, they will become fluent.

Language learning is a skill; language learners also require extensive practice in order to develop that skill. Children first become fluent, and then they become accurate.

The English Language Text Books in West Bengal – Underlying Principles

The English language text books^[2] promote unconscious acquisition or assimilation as well as conscious or focused learning. The students do not acquire the mother tongue by studying grammar books or sitting in class. They acquire it by interacting with family members. Students are exposed to samples of language (good visuals and clear gestures from teachers) in a context which they understand. Language items are presented in different contexts. The use of ‘metalinguage’ (part of the language that contains grammar) is kept to an absolute minimum. A great deal of emphasis is placed on students following classroom instructions by providing pair-work and group-work opportunities where children can interact orally. The predominant focus is on developing first oracy (ability to produce English orally), then oral fluency (ability to communicate orally in English), then oral accuracy (ability to communicate orally in English without making mistakes which impede comprehension). The materials are so structured that the children first meet familiar contexts before meeting unfamiliar contexts. The content of the English text books present different geometrical shapes after the students meet them in their mathematics book. They have come across these shapes in class one when they were asked to shade with colors. Grammatical items are presented in their contexts of use. Students are exposed to these contexts extensively before they learn what they are. Vocabulary is presented in lexical sets, beginning with common words. Extensive use is made of rhymes and songs and rhythmic sentences because children learn these by heart and so produce them, thus developing their oracy and building up their confidence. The basic skill of writing is developed through first offering practice in developing psycho-motor skills, then through copying letter shapes and word shapes, then finally through writing the letters and words without support. The notion of scaffolding (supporting the child’s efforts to produce language through structured support) is central to the methodology underlying the text books. The ‘Alphabet sentences’ (e.g. Albert has an ant on his arm) are used to expose the children to the sound of each letter before they learn the name of each letter. This helps in developing their ability to sound out words in order to understand and read them. The sentences having same structure and rhythm can be easily memorized by the children and helps them in developing their oracy. Sentences begin with a person’s name help the students to associate capital letters with names. Each sentence contains at least two examples of the small letter-form which helps the learner to acquire the shape of these letters through familiarization. The text books from class I to IV are deliberately aimed at children from less-privileged backgrounds, who may have much less learning support available to them. The text books of these four classes are designed to serve as a ‘language bath’ to equip the children with basic interactive skills/oral fluency, extensive exposure to a range of contextualized grammatical items, a stock of rhymes and chants which they have learnt by heart, basic reading & writing skills and the confidence to respond to/use English in a range of familiar contexts by providing enthusiasm for learning English.

OVERVIEW OF THE TEXT BOOK OF CLASS IV

As listening activities are specially designed for Classes I and II and a number of rhymes are included in Classes I, II and III these are not present in Book IV. The main activities that are present in Book IV are Odd man out, Word grouping, Correct the mistake, Arrange the words to make sentences, Ordering the sentences sequentially, Table to make sentences, Identify the true/false sentences, Write the sentence, Chanting and Reading stories.

Story - Nature, Selection and Telling Quality

In brief, stories are enjoyable and can be motivating which involve the imagination to make holistic discourses that can create an emotional world and allow children to be more creative.

Out of a total of eleven chapters, seven chapters are based on stories in Book IV. The selected stories are suitable for the age group and the linguistic contents of the stories match with the level of learners. The stories contain dramatic moments and there is ample scope for the learners to build up a range of emotions. The stories can create mental images with listener's minds and sensitizes the learners on certain values.

Regarding the capacity development based on storytelling quality of the teachers, the parameters taken were: slow movement, movement with clarity, voice modulation, drama, creation of ambience with meaningful sounds and meaningful gestures.

Capacity Building Need of the Teachers to Effectively Examine Student Work

As teachers begin to collaborate on the end products they are responsible for producing, they will quickly identify areas in which they need to build and develop their capacity. They may recognize they need capacity building in understanding a content standard indicator or in reaching consensus on defining proficiency. They may need help in writing good assessments, analyzing data, or in diagnosing student performance.

In the present time learning is an effective professional development strategy for this kind of capacity building by embedding the professional development in the context of the process. For example, someone else with expertise in these areas, might facilitate the data analysis or examination of student work discussion so the teacher understands what the discussion looks like. Anyone may ask a district or school content expert to sit with the teachers to answer questions about an indicator.

ASSESSMENT OF THE PARTICIPANT TEACHERS

The capacity development of the participated teachers were assessed and evaluated based on the questions supplied to them to know their views in written mode and the activities they performed in the orientation course. The development in the oratorical skill based on oracy, oral fluency and oral accuracy of the participating elementary teachers were tested through self introduction, informal talking and different activities based on the English syllabus of class IV.

The questions supplied to them to test their knowledge are as follows:

- *Do you consider that the Capacity Building Programme is essential for teaching-learning process in English?*
- *Is the teaching of English in English is needed for the development of oral fluency in primary school students?*
- *Are the English text books from class one to class four for the primary school children in West Bengal is written sequentially? If not, why?*
- *Which method do you think mostly suitable in English teaching?*
- *How far you are satisfied with the development of your students in English?*

Regarding answer of question no's 1, 2, 3 & 5 if it is yes then provide your opinion in percentage.

The collected data were processed and it is found that almost all of the participating teachers expressed that, the Capacity Building/development Programme is essential for teaching-learning process and English should be taught in

English by following direct and eclectic approach. They were also consistent in their conviction that the English text books from class one to class four for the primary school children in West Bengal is written sequentially. Regarding satisfaction of the teachers with the development of their students in English learning, the average percent value is 75. About the selection of methods, 80 % of them optioned on direct method and rest on bilingual, activity based, play way and grammar through language method. The participating teachers performed a total of nine different activities through functional and joyful method. The activities were applied to them from the English text book of class four or of similar standard.

EVALUATING CAPACITY BUILDING

In 2007, David Watson, developed specific criteria for effective evaluation and monitoring of capacity building. He argues that evaluating capacity building should be based on a combination of monitoring the results of the activities and also a more open flexible way of monitoring that also takes into consideration, self-improvement and cooperation. ^[4]

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, it can be said that this work reflects only the capacity development of the elementary teachers in English with respect to the transaction of the curriculum in Class IV in West Bengal. However, how far they will be eligible to apply the strategies learnt in the training courses to the little kids in primary schools for the improvement of their language learning and how far the students will be capable in developing their English fluency and accuracy is an another important study which is yet to be done.

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