
**ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING (ELT) AND EVALUATION AT HIGHER
SECONDARY LEVEL**

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ABSTRACT: *Evaluation is the important phase in the process of teaching learning of English as a Second language. It provides feedback to both the teachers and students. But it is a neglected area in our teaching learning process. Our syllabus is completely silent on method of evaluation. The teachers are left to evaluate in their own way which is often affected by individual teacher's personality, approach and attitude. Teaching mode is a dominant aspect in our teaching learning process. Because of teaching mode our teachers evaluate what the students have not learnt and try to find out errors made by the students so that there will be a scope for teaching. This negative approach to evaluation demotivates our learners and the teaching mode prevents our teachers to switch over to other method of teaching/learning according to the feedback received from evaluation. So there is a need for effective teacher training programme to make the teachers aware of the objectives of evaluation and the method to be followed to evaluate the language skills of the learners.*

KEY WORDS: teaching mode, negative evaluation. feedback, language skills. teacher training.

INTRODUCTION

Evaluation in Our ELT Situation

Evaluation has never been considered as an important phase in teaching learning of English as a second language (ESL) in India. Rather it is seen as a routine and monotonous work for the teachers. Not only in India but also in global perspectives, for a long time, the evaluation was paid less attention in comparison to syllabus design, material preparation and teaching methodology. Shaw (1977) in his survey article of foreign language syllabus developments excludes evaluation at the level of syllabus design. It is surprising that majority of otherwise excellent publication in the area of syllabus design and Communicative language Teaching (CLT) rarely address issues for evaluation in any details (Hewitt 1974, Wilson 1975, British council 1977, Brumfit 1980, Littlewood 1981, Johnson 1982).

Robinson's (1980) useful reference book on development of ESP has only 4 articles cited under the heading of test and evaluation. The role of testing and evaluation is seldom made explicit in any systematic and integrated way in hand book for teachers. Recently there have been some developments in the approaches to evaluation at the global level. The syllabus designers, textbook writers and class-room teachers work in their respective areas keeping in mind what the students will be evaluated at the end and try to bring changes in the different areas according to the feedback they obtain from evaluation. But the evaluation has not been given so much

importance in India. The traditional method of evaluation which is peculiarly an Indian method and not related to any established method of teaching is still followed in our teaching learning process from standard one to P.G. level. The method is very old and deep rooted in our culture. Teachers do not need training to learn the method. They inherit the method from their teachers. The outcome of evaluation is, mainly, determined by mood, personality, attitude and the depth of learning of the individual teacher-evaluators. The objectives of the syllabus, materials used in the class-rooms and the students' teaching learning environment are not taken into account at the time of evaluation. It is often seen that the students are able to secure more than 50 percent of the marks without having the basic language skills. Even some of them secure more than eighty percent of the marks but fail to use the language effectively when they need it in various socio-academic situations. So the existing method of evaluation does not lead us to the target of evaluation at the secondary and higher secondary level. Rather the outcome gives a distorted picture of teaching learning of ESL in our situation. In view of this it is necessary to analyse the present method of evaluation followed in our situation.

Focus on evaluation in our syllabus

Our syllabus, at all levels, is virtually silent on the objectives and method of evaluation. It is a neglected area in our syllabus. It is neither elaborate nor specific. The syllabus provides only a scheme of evaluation which helps the teachers and the students know the patterns of the questions and the mark each question carries. The analysis of syllabus reports that evaluation has never been considered as a specialized work in our teaching learning process. It is everybody's cup of tea. Anybody, if a classroom teacher, is picked up for this assignment and is given to evaluate without training or without being made aware of the objectives and the methods. In other word the syllabus has left the teachers to evaluate in their own methods and they are considered undisputed authority in all the matters relating to evaluation. Similarly, there is hardly any scope for the teacher in the existing teacher training courses to know anything about evaluation. The syllabus is also silent about the role of the learners in the process of evaluation. They are only the passive receivers of numbers and grades given to them.

EXISTING METHOD OF EVALUATION

The existing method of evaluation, in our teaching learning process is to a larger extent, a negative evaluation. Though the objective of evaluation is to find out how much learning of language has taken place in learners, the teacher-evaluators religiously look for different errors and mistakes in learning and indirectly point out what the learners have not learnt. They also expect the students write more scholarly than the materials provided in their prescribed texts and discussed in the class rooms. It has been revealed during discussions with the evaluators that the learners are given less marks for not writing some ideas stored in the teachers' mind or mentioned in the books meant for the advanced learners. On the other hand, the evaluators are hesitant to award more marks to the learners writing everything correct and brilliant as that may send a message to the learners that they have nothing more to learn from the teachers. When learners understanding and interpretations of any topic is almost same as that of the

teachers, many of the teachers take it as a threat to their intellectual status. They meticulously look for errors and mistakes in language use, errors in the spelling and other problems at lexical and syntactic levels. They never ignore the local and global errors even the slips in order to prevent the learner from securing higher marks which only the teachers are expected to be credited with. The teacher-evaluators forget which aspects of grammar have been prescribed and need to be tested as part of learning. Rather they frame questions comprising certain rules of grammar which have not been included in the prescribed textbooks. Similarly, the evaluators deduct marks for some correct words written illegibly. They consider it as doubtful cases and choose to deduct marks. Keeping aside the defects in the materials and the typical teaching learning environment, the teachers religiously deduct marks for each error which is a sign of negative evaluation. More red ink is spent in the answer scripts to highlight the errors. The correct answers are, often, eclipsed by few unimportant errors. The evaluators try to assess what the learners have not learnt or have learnt wrongly. This negative approach is one of the aspects of teaching mode which our teachers adopt to safeguard their status in socio-academic sphere. Most of our teachers are in teaching mode for various reasons and the tendency to teach is very powerful in them which is spontaneously expressed when they interact with students directly or indirectly. Even in absence of the students (during evaluation) they discover more errors and deduct marks even in case of brilliant answers in order to justify that the teaching is always indispensable for learners. But a few teachers award marks, sometimes more than expected and sometimes less as their approach to evaluation is partly positive and partly negative. They swing between teaching mode and learning mode without being aware of it. In many cases teachers have no problem in awarding fewer marks but they raise many questions when higher marks are awarded. Very few teachers are happy with the students writing everything correct. On the other hand, many teachers feel satisfied with their own scholarship and merit when they are able to find out the errors and ignorance in the students' learning.

Cultural Roots of Present Method of Evaluation

The present method of evaluation has its origin in our ancient system of education. The method of teaching learning during Vedic age was mainly teacher-centred. As there were no books available to the learners, the lines from the Vedas were first pronounced by the teachers and repeated by the learners. But the attention of the teachers was constantly required for the modification of the accents. The teachers were the only source to explain and correct until the lines were correctly memorized by the learners. Unless the first line had been correctly memorized, the second line was never taught. The teacher played important role in evaluation of students' learning. They even taught and corrected the learners' errors when there was scope outside the classrooms. This system of teaching learning continued in an unbroken tradition for more than twenty-five centuries which made our teachers adopt the teaching mode. Besides, the analysis of our culture reports that teaching mode is an important part of Indian culture. It is an inherent attitude of people to teach others in various walks of life when the situation arises. The aged people as head of the family, people as religious preacher, people as classroom teacher," people acquiring status by the help of education, wealth and position in power-hierarchy" {M Kundu, July'1991} have the tendency to teach in their respective areas. The

teaching mode, being a societal mode, is also reflected in our teaching learning situation. Like the ancient days the present ESL teachers point out both the errors and ignorance of the learners so that there will be scope for correction and justification for teaching in syllabi, textbooks and classrooms. The teaching mode does not allow Indian teachers to change their traditional approach to evaluation. When they evaluate, the teaching mode guides and controls the process of evaluation. Though the present discussions have been confined to higher secondary level, the practice is same in other levels of teaching learning. Like the ancient practice the present method of evaluation is purely teachers' private affair. It is directed and controlled by the teachers. Except receiving the numbers or grades the learners have nothing to do in the process of evaluation. It is strictly confidential for them. They have no access to the process of evaluation and so less scope to learn from their errors. At present the students in some cases are given to see their evaluated papers but they are never given scope to explain their points of view. The teachers' decision often remains unchanged. It has been culturally accepted that the teachers are the best source of all knowledge and the learners will always learn from the teachers. Even the best ones have to learn everything from their teachers.

Evaluation and different stages of teaching learning process

The teachers utilize all the stages of teaching learning process to teach the students, be it syllabus design, text-book preparation, class room methodology and evaluation. In syllabus, the textbooks and the classrooms the teaching mode is expressed in form of instructions, explanation and the teaching without the teachers being aware of it. But the teaching mode is expressed in completely different way in the process of evaluation. Here the teacher- evaluators do not have scope to teach the students directly as they do in notes and glossary provided in the text-books and during the exploitation of different texts in class-rooms. So they point out the errors and problems in learners' learning in order to indicate that there is need for teaching in the classrooms. On the other hand, the teachers, being in teaching mode, are of the opinion that they have nothing to learn from the evaluation as they have nothing to learn either from the learners or from their text-books. Most of the teachers are not aware of the fact that the feedbacks obtained from evaluation equip them with new information to make teaching learning of ESL more effective. The feedbacks also provide useful clues to modify the text-books and the classroom methodology. For example, some students are seen writing 'graze' instead of 'gaze', 'gamble' instead of 'gambol' in the answer scripts because of less acquaintance with the words. The teachers during text exploitation go on accepting the fact that the students have rightly understood and correctly noted down everything they express in the class-rooms. Only during evaluation, the teachers come to know that certain words like gaze, gambol have been wrongly written by many students. The errors in spelling make the teachers realize the fact that the new, confusing or less known words or loaded sentences are written on the blackboard to help the learners learn correctly. But the black board is rarely used in our ELT classrooms as the teachers remain busy in teaching and explaining everything to the learners. It has never been thought when and how to use the blackboard in classroom as an important technique of teaching learning. The teachers traditionally use the blackboard to highlight some important words or ideas they are interested to talk about as part of their

discussions. Only during evaluation, the teachers have scope to know about specific problems of the learners that can be solved through the use of blackboard. As our classes are teaching centered, the teachers rarely use the blackboard to give students scope to write everything correctly from the blackboard. Similarly, the students are not given scope to write in the class room nor encouraged to write at home on the topics discussed in class rooms. The teaching of writing skills is a neglected one in our teaching learning process and the students are left to learn how to write on their own. During evaluation it comes to our notice that many students have not acquired the skills of writing and they have different problems related to learning of writing skills which we need to take care of in order to help them learn how to write correctly and effectively. For example, it is found that they use appropriate words in incorrect spelling like ‘Inspiration plays important role in writing’ is written as ‘Inspiration pays important role in writing’. ‘confronted’ as ‘Comforted’, ‘shatter’ as ‘Setter’. Besides during evaluation, it is revealed that most of the students have failed to answer some questions from particular subjects which are matter of concern for the text book writers. As some of the evaluators are text book writers, they need to look into the problems of such texts and incorporate some new texts instead. Because of dominance of teaching mode in our classrooms we never feel that our teaching materials are required to be tried in real classroom situations before it is handed over to the teachers and learners to be utilized for teaching learning in class rooms. In such situation the evaluation is the only stage where we will be able collect information regarding the problems in our textbooks so that the right materials are included in the new ones. Similarly certain questions are wrongly answered by majority of the students. In such cases the teacher –evaluators punish the learners for their inability to understand the text correctly but never analyze the problems in the texts or the defects in their methodology. We have a tradition of making the learners scapegoats for all the defects elsewhere. So the evaluation makes our teachers realize that some topics are unsuitable for language learning and need to be replaced by the new ones. The evaluation also reminds our teachers to adopt different topics in order to help the learners learn from all kinds of texts including the unsuitable ones.

Traditionally our classrooms are not learner friendly. The teachers dominate the teaching learning process. So the learners are reluctant to express their learning problems in class room situations. On the other hand, the teachers often leave the class-rooms with the Impression that everything discussed in the classrooms has been learnt by the learners. But the learning problems of the learners as well as the truth behind the effectiveness of the teachers’ methods are revealed in the answer scripts which the teachers are often not aware Of. The evaluation also provides them with feedbacks relating to what the students need to learn more, what modifications are needed in syllabi, textbooks, and in methods and approaches. The feedbacks of evaluation, if taken into account, will enrich the teacher training-courses and will ultimately help in the process of teacher development.

CONCLUSION

The outcome of evaluation is often de-motivating for average learners. The negative Approach to evaluation creates impression in our learners that learning English as a second language is

not easy. Instead of loving the language the learners are afraid of it. One cannot learn a language unless she/he loves it or is encouraged to learn. on the other hand, the outcome of evaluation also gives false sense of learning to many learners who fail to use the language when they need in different socio-academic situations.

Evaluation has to be used as a means to help the learners in learning the language by utilizing the feedback in material preparation and in class-room methodology but not as an opportunity for the teachers to show their learning and punish the learners for what they have not learnt or learnt wrongly.

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