



# A COMPARISON OF THE TEACHING STRATEGIES USED BY ESL TEACHERS AT THE SECONDARY LEVEL IN SELECT GOVERNMENT AND PRIVATE SCHOOLS IN TAMIL NADU

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## Abstract:

The teaching strategies adopted by teachers of ESL, at all levels, play a vital role in order to bring the desired output from the learners. However it has been observed that not much research has been conducted on teaching strategies at the secondary level which significantly impact the learning outcomes. A research study was conducted to identify, analyze and compare the strategies used by teachers of English in select private and government schools in Tamilnadu. The article presents and also discusses the implications of the research study.

## Key words:

Teaching strategies, Comparison, ESL teachers, Secondary level

## Introduction:

Teachers of English at the secondary level (VI, VII and VIII) face a lot of challenges which they would not have anticipated during their training period or even before they enter the classroom. One of the major challenges is the heterogeneous nature of the learners in majority of the English classrooms in Tamil Nadu. Teachers need to use myriad yet effective teaching strategies to include all the learners in the teaching/learning process. Effective teaching involves constant and vibrant interactions among teachers and learners, teachers and teachers, teachers and administrators. Interaction among the various stakeholders would enable teachers to suitably modify and share some of the best strategies with their colleagues.

Teaching strategy can be described as various approaches that a teacher may take to actively engage students in learning. These strategies drive a teacher's instruction as they work to meet specific learning objectives. Teaching strategy is a plan of action designed to achieve an overall aim. It requires some sort of planning (Ulya Rosyita, 2011).

Teaching methods refers to the principles and systematic way of instruction given to the students. It also implies an orderly logical arrangement of steps and more procedural. Method is defined as a habitual, logical, or prescribed practice of achieving certain results which accuracy and efficiency, usually in a preordained sequence of steps (Olivia, 2011). There are many methods of learning such as lecture, demonstration, discussion, simulation, laboratory, field experience, brainstorming, debates, symposium, and so forth.

Teaching techniques are steps we follow when we teach. It is a procedure or skill for completing a specific task (Ulya Rosyita, 2011). Teachers use these techniques to better the learning process. Ultimately it is the way to accomplish the task from the students.

A research study was conducted out to identify and examine the effectiveness of the teaching strategies used by ESL teachers in select private and government schools at the secondary level.

### Objectives of the research study:

- To identify the teaching strategies used by ESL teachers
- To examine the effectiveness of the strategies used by the teachers
- To study the extent to which teachers reflect on their teaching practices

### Review of the Literature:

Burton Jill (2006) investigates the idea of reflective practice as a method to examine teaching. The concept of reflective practice and the ways it can be used in language teacher education is evaluated. Dewey (1938) analyzed the difference between routine and reflective action and identified three essential teaching qualities as open-mindedness, responsibility and wholeheartedness.

Schon (1987) assess the difference between reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action. Teachers' draw upon 'theories in use' when reflecting in action which is nothing but they represent patterns and behaviors' that teachers accumulate in their daily work. Teachers' draw upon 'espoused theories' when reflecting on action where the models for behavior that teacher-learners are generally taught. **Schon mentions that reflection-in-action might instantly lead to a change in the teaching strategy. Reflection-on-action expresses and reframes a familiar action and creates more systematic and personal evaluative structures.**

Thus he highlights the effect of reflective practice on teaching which in turn marks a difference between the expert teacher who actively seeks to become a better teacher and the teacher who is more experienced than the novice teacher.

Richards. C.J (2010) focuses on the goals, skills and qualities that the language teachers should possess. The author tries to analyze these attributes by examining ten important aspects in Language teaching, which includes language proficiency, content knowledge, teaching skills, contextual knowledge, language teacher identity, learner-focused teaching, specialized cognitive skills, theorizing from practice, joining a community of practice and professionalism. He further raises issue on the examined aspects mentioned above and suggests a solution through scrutinizing view points of various people's personal experiences shared by various teachers belonging to different culture, native and language. He also illustrates the ideas and gives out the implications of the examination conducted and finally presents his own style of teaching strategy which is, to reflect on the beliefs and assumptions that shape the way to understand the nature of teacher knowledge and teacher development for language teachers. He suggests this strategy to be adopted by the Language teachers for the further development of English language teaching and teacher education programmes.

Richards. C.J (2013) examines the assumptions and practice underlying three different curriculum design strategies that he refers as forward, central and backward design. He represents the components of curriculum in three different ways which are input, process and output and associate input to syllabus, process to methodology and output to learning outcome in forward design, in the central design it starts with process, input and output and backward design starts from output, process and input. The author illustrates these processes with pragmatic examples and raise an issue as to which approach would be the best among the three to be followed for the betterment of teaching-learning process. Forward design approach may be preferred where the curriculum is mandatory and teachers have to pursue this curriculum which are designed centrally rather than individual teachers, central design approach may be preferred where syllabus is not mandatory and teachers are given autonomy over teaching-learning process and backward design approach may be preferred where skilled well-trained individual teacher or a group of skilled teachers are held responsible and accountable for designing the curriculum and prepare materials to meet the requirement of the learner. Finally the author concludes and gives the answer to the issue raised, and explains that all the three approaches might work out well in different circumstances and situations as mentioned above.

Penny.U.R (2013) investigates on the challenges and problems faced by the teacher when ELT methodology, in particular the (TBLT) Task Based Language Teaching method is practically implemented in the classroom. Since these methods adhere to a set of rules and theories which lead to many common issues in the class room like lesson planning, motivation, classroom management, monitoring, participation etc... which cannot be pursued within the stipulated period. The author comes across a solution to these issues raised by implementing a new methodology called 'Situated methodologies' which proved to be effective. She further claims that this methodology helps the teacher to be confident and effective in the classroom and brings out effective result in the promotion of English Language Teaching.

Hyland Ken and Wong Lillian (2013) analyses the research process of innovation and change in various areas of English Language Education. They also demonstrate the themes on strategy, evaluation, language curriculum, teacher education, teaching practice, the challenges and successes of innovation in this book 'Innovation and change in English Language Education'. The authors analyze the change at diverse point, examine the obstacles faced and give out solution through implementing the change in the innovation. Practical case studies at a variety of contexts are portrayed to improve the teaching quality of English teachers.

Gabriel.R (2016) discover the evolution of quality teaching, according to Rachael quality teaching is personal she describes it more precisely that quality teaching is individual, one to one accomplishment between teacher and student. The author also explores various resources and the views on quality teaching and she states that degrees and certification has little to do with the quality teaching rather the focus on the meaningless mistakes and put an end to it, contributes towards quality teaching. She also express that the innovative strategy that the teacher adopt in the classroom do not appear on most statute and which are not considered the best may be the best approach for quality teaching. The author therefore puts forth four questions for teacher evaluation:

- A) Is the teacher's goal for instruction is of value to the school or community?
  - B) How does a teacher decide to accomplish the goal for instruction: on what belief, knowledge, intention and assumption a teacher drives his/her decision?
  - C) What does the teacher know about the students, and how do they use it in their instruction?
  - D) What evidence can be gathered for others to see and proclaim that her instructional goal was achieved?
- Eventually Rachael adds a last question as a teacher when she thinks about quality teaching, she says that these questions holds and forces her to be accountable for knowing how and when her goals are met, she concludes on a positive note that these questions would stimulate her to set predetermined methodology to give out good performance and prove to be the best for the students even if it is not in the list.

The objective of the review is to study the different teaching strategies adopted by the teachers in various contexts for the betterment of the teaching-learning process. The zeal of any Language teacher is to ensure the learners' perception and comprehension of the Language in terms of Listening, Speaking, Reading and writing. The teachers when they utilize these valuable resources and investigate it in their classroom would surely, lead to a drastic improvement in the field of Language teaching and in turn make a difference in the teaching-learning process.

Astuti and Sri Puji (2015) explore teachers' and students' perceptions of motivational strategies. This is a case study research which was done in schools in a small town in West Sumatra, Indonesia. The authors tried to help the teachers of English understand the effectiveness of strategies that motivate their students and the impact of implementing these strategies in their teaching. They grouped these strategies into four phases namely creating motivational components, generating students' motivation, maintaining motivation and encouraging positive retrospective self-evaluation. The authors also state that the use of these strategies aided the students' to promote their learning through motivation.

Abbasi M. Abdul (2011) focuses on the teaching strategies used by English language teachers for the development of linguistic abilities of ESL learners at intermediate level in Pakistan. The author surveyed 40 English language teachers at intermediate level of Public sector and Private sector schools and colleges. He observed that that the ELT teachers of public sector applied the teaching strategies of GTM (Grammar Translation Method) while Private sector teachers used Communicative Teaching Approach Strategies. He further suggests that Public sector teachers need to be trained and motivated through workshops to apply Communicative Teaching Approach Strategies in their ESL context in order to make their ESL learners communicatively competent.

The articles reviewed above have not been explored much by the researchers earlier as the major focus of the research is about the teaching strategies adopted by the teachers of English in government and private schools a comparative study. The review of studies is based on different contexts. The research gap is to find out the reason behind the poor admissions in the government schools and the rapid increase of admission in the private schools. Therefore this research is unique and tries to identify the gap as mentioned earlier.

### **Methodology of the Study:**

Both qualitative and quantitative methods were followed. Data was elicited by the following methods listed below.

1. Classroom Observation
2. Questionnaires
3. Informal interaction with teachers and students

The researcher carried out a field study to examine the significance of the teaching strategies adopted by the teachers of English in select government and private middle schools in Tamilnadu. Two districts were chosen for the study namely Chennai and Tiruvallur. The researcher visited almost thirty government and private schools together out of which three classes in each school, from 6<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> standards were observed by the researcher and the data collected were taken into account to find out the findings.

The researcher observed the English classes handled by the concerned English language teachers of various standards as mentioned above. The reason to observe these classes was to find out the specific teaching strategies, commonly used teaching strategies by the teachers of English. The methodology the teachers adopted in order to bring out the desired output from the learners and other areas pertaining to teaching like the linguistic resource of the teacher, the syllabus they follow and the activity learning methodology the teachers followed. The researcher also observed the learners interest, response and their level of comprehension.

The researcher further interacted with the learners and teachers personally, also administered questionnaires to the teachers to find out the teaching strategies adopted by teachers of English in government and private schools which helped to enhance in the teaching / learning process. The format of the questionnaire was the 'closed-form' or the 'restricted type', with a provision for marking "yes" or 'no' which was easy for the

teachers to mark the answers. The closed-form was chosen considering the teachers convenience as it was the objective.

Totally 16 questions were asked with a view to find out the opinion of teachers on using the teaching strategies in the classroom, to obtain information on the syllabus prescribed, to know about the significance of teacher training programmes that are conducted periodically, to find whether the feedback obtained from the learners about the teaching process was helpful and the availability of English teachers in school and to find out the importance of teachers role towards the setting of syllabus.

The Sample conversation presented below is between the teacher and the student from both private and government school

**Private School:**

Teacher: What does the bear eat?

Student: Apricots, plums and pumpkins

Teacher: Where does the bear live?

Student: Hills

**Government School:**

Teacher: How did Helen Keller learn the language? (Translated in Tamil)

Student: By touching and feeling (thotum, unarndum)

Teacher: What did you learn from the lesson? (Translated in Tamil)

Student: Everything is possible by hard work (kadinamaga uzhaithal nadakum)

**Findings**

- Teachers in both private and government schools ask follow-up questions to ensure comprehension.
- Specific teaching strategies commonly adopted by ESL teachers (both government and private) include using prompts, assigning role-play activities relating the theme of the lesson to a general concept (from the known to the unknown), by providing examples from real- life situations.
- Prior to teaching the lesson teachers in almost all the private and in a few government schools activate the background knowledge of learners by asking questions relevant to the topic of teaching.
- A few of the teachers in government schools use new teaching strategies like singing and dancing to teach grammar and poem.
- Some of the teachers in both government and private schools use innovative strategy like playing games in order to increase the language skills of the learners.
- Majority of the teachers in government school use the regional language Tamil to ask follow-up questions.
- The number of teachers with limited linguistic resources is equally proportionate in both government and private middle schools.
- Teachers in government schools largely use the bilingual method of teaching.
- In almost all private and government schools teachers who have not taken English as their major subject are entrusted with the job of teaching English.

**Implication on the findings of the research:**

The intention of the teachers to ask follow up questions is to ensure the comprehension of the students. This strategy further enhanced the learners to develop and to acquire the language skills in terms of listening and speaking. The teachers themselves reported that this particular strategy is strictly followed in all the classes especially with the subject English as it is their Second Language. They also mentioned that this aids them to find out the learners level of understanding and to analyze the teaching skills of the teacher as well.

Another important teaching strategy commonly used by the government and private school teachers is to make the learners comprehend from the known to the unknown. This strategy is used to bring out the learners' prior knowledge in order to make the learners' understand the preview of the lesson and then to be taught. This strategy helps the teachers to modify their teaching wherein they can allot more time to the areas

they require and cut short on the area they already knew. Teachers adopt different techniques or methods to use this strategy effectively.

Activating background knowledge is one of the important strategies used by the teachers of both government and private schools. "Background knowledge includes all knowledge that a reader brings to the text" (Anderson, 2009) the past life experiences of the learner, information relevant to the topic, educational knowledge which the learner brings to mind to comprehend the meaning of the text. This knowledge the teacher activates in the learners before teaching the lesson in order to enhance the teaching learning process.

The researcher observed a new teaching strategy of singing and dancing together to teach poem. This was quite interesting which was followed only by few teachers of government schools in Tamilnadu and adopted this in the classroom. They followed in order to make the learners more active and to take away the tediousness from them. This further enhanced to improve their memory skills and in turn aided them to memorize the poem easily. In some of the schools this strategy is also used to teach the basic concept and the rules of the grammar which helped the learners to learn without any difficulty. However this innovative strategy was neither followed in many of the schools nor the government did emphasize to make it mandatory, which to a larger extent would have benefited the slow learners and there by enhance the teaching learning process. The other few teachers followed the strategy of singing and dancing together which to a greater extent supplemented the learners to involve them completely and to break the monotony way of teaching the poem.

The researcher also personally interacted with the teachers who followed this method. They stated that this strategy did help them largely in their teaching process and mentioned that even the slow learners in the class memorized the poem very easily. One of the teachers further explained that, the concept of grammar registered deep inside them and never ever erased from their memory. For instance: The teacher of class VI took the guitar and sang the 'be' forms of the verb as a song, the whole class sang back through which the concept and the basic rules of the grammar reached even the slow learner population easily.

The strategy of playing games pertaining to the development of language in the English class is another way followed by some teachers of both government and private schools to make the learners acquire the language in an easy way. The learners' too showed more interest and actively participated in the games conducted. This increased their language skills through which they gained more confidence and developed their proficiency in Language. Thus this strategy is slowly acquiring its importance in the field of teaching especially in the heterogeneous class room where the teacher can stimulate the language easily to the learners.

The strategy of using Tamil to ask follow up questions is to find out the learners level of understanding. But the reality is that this strategy did not help the learners to acquire the language skills in any way as the whole conversation takes place in the regional language only. The true fact which cannot be concealed is that, majority of the learners are from Tamil medium background therefore the teachers in government schools had no other way but to use the regional language Tamil to ask follow-up questions.

The researcher observed that the teachers with limited linguistic resources are equal in number in both government and private schools. The real scenario is being presented here, unlike the general notion that people have about private schools. The private school teachers too have the same problem; even there the teachers do have limited linguistic resource. The reason behind this problem is that their specialization is not in English language but in other languages, yet they are forced to teach the language English to the learners.

The English language teachers are not appointed to teach the language English instead the schools allow any other subject teacher to teach English, both government and private schools are of the same opinion that English language can be taught by any other subject teachers. For instance: The researcher observed even music teacher, Telugu teacher, geography teacher and science teacher handling the subject English.

This observation was made by the researcher and found that this major drawback persists not only in government schools but also in private schools. The subject English is not considered to be an important subject by the management or by the school authorities, therefore they do not appoint teachers who are specialized in English to teach the language English rather they entrust the job of teaching the language English by any other subject teachers. This creates a great impact not only on the learners but also with the teaching and learning process on the whole.

The teachers who are specialized in other languages and other subjects are allowed to teach the language English and hence they find it difficult to explain the lesson in English, teach basic grammar rules and give instructions in English. This affects the learners to a greater extent and the language English is losing its value. There is no point in blaming the teachers but the educational institutions and authorities are held responsible for this problem.

The strategy of using bilingual method is commonly followed in almost all the government schools; the researcher observed that, majority of the government school teachers use this method to teach the language English. The teachers though have a good intention to make the learners' develop and acquire the language skills; but practically the learners find it difficult to comprehend the lesson if completely taught in English. This is the reason why the government school teachers opt to use this bilingual method to teach which has become one of the vital strategies in almost all the government schools. This strategy is being implemented for the benefit of the learners.

Teachers try adopting different kinds of strategies by following various techniques and methods to make the learners comprehend what they teach, yet the factors which they largely depend on obstruct their proficiency in teaching. To Synthesis, this article highlights the facts pertaining to the teaching strategies adopted in government and private schools. This article involves some of the pertinent issues and challenges which the teachers come across however it also highlight the excellent aspects of adopting new and innovative strategies at the school level education.

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