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SHG MODEL FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING FOR AUTONOMOUS
EMPOWERMENT

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Abstract

There are many profitable methods and projected methods of teaching English. Many of these cannot be carried out successfully inside the classroom due to time constraints. Finishing the syllabus and preparing the students for examination gain more importance than actual learning. In spite of increase in English language learning among students, unfortunately, still we have very large sections of the student community struggling to pick up elementary control over the English language. The present paper takes a cue from the field of Socio-economic studies for helping the lesser advantaged students to come together in a free and friendly manner and integrate their latent energies and abilities so that they can learn the language to a reasonable level. Here, learning happens because of the participants and their use of available resources. 'Official teacher' is removed from the system.

Keywords: Methods, implementing, Self-Help-Groups, Mutual aid, group learning

We have more or less equated progress and modernity with the west and English language. Clearly, this cannot be a monolithic truth. There are countries that have achieved progress without English. Even in Europe, many countries have their local languages as medium of instruction. Only England, Ireland, Malta teach in English. But, in a way, English has become more indispensable in India which has many regional languages than Europe. We, as a nation have not grappled with the issues of English effectively and freely. The choices around English always entail tension, enthusiasm, hurry, over expectation, fear of its bulldozing strength or 'quality of panacea', its power of overlapping socio-cultural identities, gaining new equality, lack of wider perception, political orientations etc. English is perceived differently in different countries and communities. Its uses have to be reckoned but not over estimated. It need not grow in isolation devoid of the culture of the soil. English is one of the important tools of progress for a country like India. But just it

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is not everything. Perfect language policies, the role of mother tongue, English in education, language of administration are serious issues and usually the popular governments have failed to address them efficiently. Effective working groups should constantly work on and evolve a better leadership for handling these aspects.

In the mist of all, English is accepted well and taught in colleges for many positive reasons. But in spite of many methods, we have failed miserably in teaching English to the rural and non English medium students. It is not the failure of methods, but it is the difficulties in implementing the methods that fail us. We talk of method after method vociferously knowing well that they cannot be enforced for reasons of constraints of time and syllabus. Majority of students in India are taught in poor linguistic environment. The class size, teaching-learning strategies, interfering blue prints of first language etc. have bearings on the pedagogical paradigms. The size of the class rooms is another hurdle. The teacher has to do a lot policing rather than actual teaching. In this context, it is important to take the learning-teaching of the English language beyond the class room. This process should happen without any stress on the part of the learner.

There are many useful methods and projected methods of teaching English. But many of these cannot be carried out

successfully inside the classroom due to time constraints, as already said, and the teachers are left unsatisfied. Finishing the syllabus and preparing the students for examination gain more importance than actual learning. In spite of increase in English language learning among students, unfortunately, still we have very large sections of the student community struggling to pick up elementary control over the English language.

The present paper takes a cue from the field of Socio-economic studies for helping the lesser advantaged students to come together in a free and friendly manner and integrate their latent energies and abilities so that they can learn the language to a reasonable level. Here, learning happens because of the participants and their use of available resources. 'Official teacher' is removed from the system.

Self Help Group (SHG) is a remarkable concept doing wonders in the area of Socio-economics. Its ideology needs to be incorporated for learning English in special and varied ways. The SHG model of English learning could be a kind of modified forms of group work, adult education, crash course, intimate *gurukula*, *counseling* that is flexible and extended programme in time.

The genesis of SHGs could be traced to "Mutual Aid" in Indian village community. In traditional rural societies,

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self-help takes various forms. Activities like housing/ farm operation which have to be completed within stipulated time depend upon such arrangements. Likewise, people share implements required in agricultural production, sharing of irrigation, water/bullocks necessitates a management based on self-help group. However in the west, the theoretical approach to collective action was developed by Olson and he says that people will participate in collective action when they are organized in small groups. When the expectation in small groups exceeded private benefits from the collective action exceed the expected private costs of participation.

The existence of traditional saving groups has been well documented and has a long and success full history in India. Informal credit functions are not a new phenomenon⁴ some forms of credit instruments were in operation even before 1904 when the co-operative credit societies act was passed. Credit instrument such as *nidhis* and *chit funds* were popular, especially in south India. They had several distinguishing features, such as encouraging thrift, mobilizing small savings and including in the members the habits of punctuality and planning for future. The usual role played by these instruments in the rural areas is they act on as important source of credit to people with moderate needs.

The SHG is defined as an important source of credit to people with moderate needs has been well recognized. The SHG is defined as a voluntary group valuing personal interactions and mutual aid as a means of altering or ameliorating the problems by most of its participants. These groups are voluntary associations of people formed to attain certain collective goals that could be economic, social or both. The self-help groups (SHGs) are voluntary associations of people formed to attain a collective goal. People who are homogenous with respect to social back ground, heritage, caste or traditional occupation come together for a common cause to raise and manage resources for the benefit of the group members.

The process by which the group of people with a common objective are facilitated to come together in order to participate in the development activities i.e., savings, credit income generation, etc., is called group formation. Although the SHGs can be formed for any development activity, for the financial institutions to used them as a conduit for banking activities the SHGs should be practicing thrift and credit and be familiar with money management.

Generally, SHGs encompass several activities of men and women but the Indian focus is on financial aspects of SHGs, in addition to India, this financial SHG concept

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is being promoted in Bangladesh, Indonesia, Thailand, Philippines, Nepal, Sri Lanka, etc. The salient features of SHGs are

1. Homogenous in terms of economic status, interest and affinity group.
2. Small in size and their membership per group range from 10 to 20 people.
3. They are non-political, voluntary and follow democratic culture.
4. They hold weekly meetings and mostly during non-working hours.
5. They have the transparency among themselves and they have the collective accountability of financial transactions in the group.

The socio-economic concerns that we find here can be profitably replaced by English learning in the remodeled SHGs for pedagogic ends. Having deep level targets, we can have varied forms of surface level strategies. The aspects of group work, pair work, whole class activity, assignments, projects work, crash course, counseling, mentoring, remedial teaching, higher grade teaching etc. leading to holistic approach can be suitably adopted and customized for each SHG-English. This leads not only to learners' autonomy but also learners' authority on methodologies. By bringing the needy learners closer and removing their psychological blocks, many wonders can be achieved. A free and friendly space for the disadvantaged learners is a real scientific and energetic platform where true learning

of language can happen to a considerable measure. The process of learning in English language SHGs is achieved along with many interdisciplinary advantages. Personality Development, Public Speaking, Amateur Journalism, Media Studies, Photography, Information Technology, Sociology are a few areas which come into play that help us achieve the goals.

The SHGs for English learning can work for regular general students, Technical and Medical students, general public, and re-learners etc. It is a well known fact that many candidates with excellent skills fail to meet the requirements of English language. For such people this method could be very helpful. ESP (English for Specific Purposes, EST (English for Science and Technology) etc. in colleges are not fully helpful in practical terms because of various constraints. In such cases the interested aspirants can form their SHGs and learn English as required. Any suitable method/a few suitable methods/ all methods can be tried for success of the group learning. The Grammar-Translation Method (GMT), West's New Method (NM), The Direct Method (DM), Dodson's Bilingual Method (BM), Communicative Movement (CM), Community Language Learning (CLL), The Silent Way (SW), Suggestopedia, Total Physical Response (TPR), Task Based Language Teaching (TBLT), The Natural Approach (NA), Cooperative Learning (SL), Content-Based Language Teaching (CBLT)

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are some of the methods tried over a period of time in varied conditions. The SHGs for English learning can choose one or many of these with necessary modifications for effective results.

This method is sure to win as a socio-academic agenda and serve as an eternal opportunity for learners beyond the constraints of institutional strait-jackets. Its unassuming nature, easy accessibility, Bilingualism, do/fix-it-yourself options, hop-in and hop-out freedom, equal participatory scope, no fear of examinations, freedom to choose the levels are some of the very useful and winning features of the SHG model for English Learning. Advantage of this method is that it easily takes care of the negative strength of hegemonic under currents of English language in the postcolonial contexts in India. English becomes just another language bared of pseudo authority for the SHG participants. Even if the participants do not completely reach the target for some

reason they can understand the social aspects of the language in its face value. They can gain a healthy position of no hatred-no infatuation for English which is more important from social and psychological angles which over weigh the linguistic angle per se.

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