



Teaching and Learning English Language in India: Issues and Challenges

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33545/26648717.2021.v3.i1a.123>

Abstract

English is a widely used language hence referred as the 'Universal Language'. Being the language of the present age, it is taught and learnt as a second language worldwide. In India, English is known both as a language of communication and a medium of coordination for being a great ethnic and linguistic diversity. Of course, modern technology plays a significant role to bestow and acquire language in schools and colleges though it is inadequate in rural areas particularly. At school and college level, the students learn English as well as prepare themselves to get through the exams, however, they don't make much effort to recognize the language or realize its usefulness. The paper focuses at the importance of English Language Teaching (ELT) and the challenges the teachers as well as the learners encounter while teaching and learning. It also defines the strategies and suggests the ways to overcome these problems.

Keywords: Language, Communication, Diversity, Challenges, ELT

Introduction

Language being a medium of communication plays an important role in human life. However, one cannot properly communicate without knowing the structure and the proper usage of a language (Catford). Learning of mother tongue doesn't require much labour but to learn another language is a hard and a challenging task. To learn a language one should be able to read, speak, write and understand it. Nowadays, many language teaching institutions have been developing that ensure people to learn a language within a few hours/days (Bansal and Harrison).

To educate a beginner, the language differ from the mother tongue, is a big challenge and high end risk for both the facilitator and the learner. The challenges that come across in ELT classrooms provide the creative and innovative techniques, to make the students recognize and comprehend what they learn. They are also used as replacing tools which would establish a better way of learning. In the teaching and learning process, there are always challenges for the learners and the teachers and they have to face these challenges in their own way (Sheldon). A teacher of language has to be objective oriented and to begin with the fundamentals whereas a student while acquiring a language indites a second identity. Teaching of a language is rather boring in comparison to literature as it stresses on grammar, structure and the four skills. For this confined opinion, language teaching takes sturdy grounds to express it to the learner. Therefore, English language teaching consists of different types of challenges for both the teachers and the learners.

Challenges for the teachers

- a) Teachers generally fall short of persuading the learners in person and aim only to complete their syllabi.
- b) Their central point is merely on the classroom teaching not beyond it.

- c) They have to teach the students who face intrinsic fear to learn English despite their lack of interest.
- d) They have to deal with the students having their own ego towards the target language.

While discussing the challenges that a teacher comes across in an ELT classroom, it is observed that he is looked upon as a propagator of knowledge and a person who enlightens the students in every facets of life. The role of a teacher goes far beyond simply imparting knowledge (Dudley-Evans and St John). While teaching might seem straightforward on the surface, it indeed involves a multitude of challenges, both within the classroom and beyond. There are many challenges experienced by a teacher in an ELT classroom. First one is that being a language teacher is not necessarily to be a native speaker of the language. It becomes a challenge for a teacher of language that he has to acquire a thorough command over the subject as the students imitate their teachers (Ewer). The students should be taught meticulously the structure of the target language because they are well acquainted with the structures of the source language. A language teacher has to define the differences; however, it is not an easy job as the students are well absorbed in speaking, listening, reading and writing their mother tongue. Next the teacher should be as much capable and intelligent to bring out their students from their ignorance and fear. The students face morbid fears in learning a new language and as far as English is concerned it is very intense. In India, for most of the students, English is very difficult to learn hence they cannot develop a love for it. They also face an ego in learning another language. The teacher should nourish the students by positive comments to motivate the students. As motivation is an abstract factor which will effectively aid the learning skills of the students if it is done in the right

way. Motivating a class as a whole will not help effectively but a teacher should spare time to motivate the students individually. A teacher's most important challenge is to know the cultural background, linguistic competency and their emotional status. The foremost challenge a teacher confronts, in ELT classroom, is while recognizing the caliber of every student and designing the curriculum, he has to follow the teaching techniques as per the scheme (Hutchinson and Waters). As performance of a single student does not define the performance of the whole class hence it is difficult for the teacher to implement such a lesson plan which may enable the students of diverse abilities. It is clear that a class is a combination of potential students as well as slow learners thus for a teacher it also becomes a challenge to get in pace with the learning speed of each and every student. While teaching, a teacher should keep in mind that he should not prepare the high caliber students by repeating the drills and thereby making the class monotonous and also should not speed up as it will put the slow learners in a difficult situation. Language being a primarily speech, it is challenging to teach the learners correct pronunciation and spell out the right word. Since language is ambiguous so the teacher should make the students much aware about the different meanings of the same word. As far as writing is concerned, the challenge is again due as the teacher has to make the students to recognize the dissimilar audience for whom they write. Teachers should realize the students to avoid the mixing up the existing innate structure of their mother tongue with the target language's structure (Jordan). Since speaking in English is practiced only in English class, the teacher has to encourage the students to use in other classes also. For the teachers only teaching is not sufficient, but they should also provide their students abundant exposure to use the language (Kachru *et al.*). To provide such opportunities, requires creativity and diligent endeavor of the teacher. The language teachers should teach their students, from different disciplines, drawing references from their respective discipline so that they may learn every concept in an easier way. There is always a stark line between the language teachers and the subject teachers but they should cross their lines to make the learning and teaching process easy in classroom. A language teacher should be creative to blend his classroom teaching with activities involving the students also. Though some language games are impractical to implement in a classroom yet a teacher has to sort out some alternative ways to involve the students in his teaching (Lewis and Gough). Language teachers should be unlike those obsolete subject teachers who claim the passiveness of the students. A teacher should implement student-centered approach and try to cater his students' requirements. In classroom teaching, a language teacher should deny using the source language, however, it is a threatening task as it is difficult for the students to identify themselves with certain abstract ideas and concepts of the target language.

Challenges for the Learners

In ELT classroom, the challenges are not faced by the teachers only but the students also face the same while learning an alien language. The students feel comfortable when they communicate in their mother tongue whereas the process of learning an alien language subjects them to fear and often makes them feel inferior (Lightbown and Spada).

Due to these burdensome things they cannot keep on learning a language which results in a failure. They also have a fear of making errors for being shy. But a learner should come out of this fear and even try to improve himself in the process of learning to face all the challenges. In India, a learner is in a habit of using his mother tongue and its structures, so it is difficult for him to imbibe the new structures of the target language which often leaves him in confusion (Robinson). Most of the learners use translation method to realize English, though in a long run it will not be helpful for them. As whenever they are supposed to speak in English, it will take a longer time because first they will think in their mother tongue, translate it and after that they will speak. Thus learners encourage themselves to think in English rather than their mother tongue and this will also improve their learning skills. Regarding students' thinking in English is aptly defined by John Keats, "To think is full of sorrow" but a student should practice it. The slow learners never be discouraged and feel shy bad for committing errors in learning process because "Learning is not being successful but becoming successful" (Keats). A student should always focus on his goal rather than discourage himself by the temporary failures. A student should try to learn from his errors and never feel hesitant to clear his doubts.

In a way English language teaching and learning can be encouraged through the cultivation of level-wise skill based habits such as group discussion and proper language training in a supportive environment with the active and enthusiastic collaboration of the parents (Scrivener). The learners need to recognize the delicacy of the process of learning hence they should cultivate, organize and develop their own skills in speaking and writing, independent with the guidance provided if any. It should be practiced for as long hours as possible because there is no substitute of regular practice and self-study. At initial stage, pronunciation should need not be given as much importance as it is given by native people as far as communication is concerned (Shimazu). To cap to all, human factor of the individual trial and initiative is the one that ought to be given the highest priority, innovative and sophisticated technology may creep in afterwards.

Conclusion

In India, English language teaching is a challenge for both the teacher and the learner. After discussing the various challenges faced during the English language teaching, it is concluded that classroom learning is a mutual process which involves both the teacher and the learner to enhance and enlighten each other. For this, a teacher should teach in a simple and easy way and make the students to get the essence of his thoughts. A teacher has to know the level of the students and teach them accordingly. On the other hand, a student has to respond in a proper way and should try to follow the thought. It is a responsibility of the teachers to facilitate their students by finding a way to widen their arena through the innovations made in this area. They should not take themselves as an authoritative power and the students should also develop an aspiration rather than fears to learn English. The challenges in ELT classrooms bring the student and the teacher out of their own precinct and put them in a space to confront with it thereby shaping them for the betterment. Challenges always bring out new

innovations which open portals for novel methods of learning and also make learning more interesting and effective instead of a tedious and a prosaic task.

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