

Prevailing Challenges in Teaching and Learning English from the Perspective of the Higher Secondary School Teachers

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Abstract

Teaching and Learning English as a second language in government schools of Tamil Nadu has been a challenging task both for teachers and students ever since English was introduced as a second language. Hence, it becomes imperative to identify the problems faced by L2 teachers and suggest strategies to tackle them by providing the environment and opportunities to teach and learn the basic LSRW skills in the classroom within the stipulated time. The areas in which the schools function, the number of students in a class, the background of the students and other problems which arise in the teaching process are some of the factors that determine the nature of the problems faced by the teachers. With this perspective in mind, the objective of the study, namely, exploring the prevailing problems of the English teachers at Higher Secondary school level has been defined. Therefore, a questionnaire was framed consisting of 15 items and administered to 40 samples in four districts, Ariyalur, Chennai, Erode, and Kanchipuram and the data was analysed with the help of the Excel Sheet. The interpretation of the data has revealed that certain practical solutions are to be given to the L2 teachers while they strive to accomplish their tasks of enhancing LSRW skills.

Keywords: L2 Teachers, Problems of Teachers, LSRW Skills, Higher Secondary Level, Teaching English

Introduction

English language plays a vital role in the realm of communication today. Geringer stated that "... qualified teachers can create the best environment for learning". (373-375) Therefore, teachers who teach English as the second language should be open minded to change and equip themselves with the latest techniques of teaching and be adept in the use of the techniques of learning English as well. Teaching English, the link language which has made the world a global village differs from place to place, and thus makes it a challenging task in every part of the world. In Tamil Nadu English is taught as a second language in schools, yet the point to be considered is whether it is correctly learnt as per the requirement by the students. A valuable observation made with regard to this fact is, "Learning a second language for 95 hours per year for six years will not lead to functional bilingualism and fluency in the second language. Expectations must be realistic". (Archibald et al. 3) Though students at the Higher Secondary level study long hours in English classes for many years, they are not confident enough to use the language. However, teachers with adequate qualification who teach English in government schools are facing insurmountable difficulties to teach the target language. Now, the question which arises is whether teachers are given the correct tool, evaluation, text books, method, technical assistance needed for language learning.

Inevitably, the problems and challenges faced by the teachers have to be identified first and if their problems can be rectified that will enhance the process of teaching and learning the second language.

Significance of the Study

This study will be beneficial for Higher Secondary English teachers, students, government officials and educationalists as it helps in:

- Recognizing the challenges and problems of the Higher Secondary English teachers
- Analysing the needs of the teachers in the teaching learning process of L2 language
- Knowing the present situation of language learning in government schools, and
- Spotting the recommendation and solutions for the problems of the teachers, so that teaching and learning English at the Higher Secondary level can be positively upgraded.

Statement of the Problem

Teaching English as a second language in the government schools of Tamil Nadu has been a challenging task for teachers ever since English was introduced as a second language. Hence, it becomes imperative to identify the problems faced by L2 teachers and suggest strategies to tackle them by providing the environment and opportunities to teach and learn the basic LSRW skills in the classroom within the stipulated time.

Objectives

- To study the problems of government school teachers in handling English as a subject.
- To identify the challenges of teachers in teaching English.
- To analyse the needs of the teachers to enhance language learning.
- To ascertain the methods used by the teachers to use skills
- To find out the attitude of students in learning English.
- To spot out the reality of English classes in government schools.

Research Questions

1. Do higher secondary school teachers face challenges in teaching English?
2. Do higher secondary English teachers need technology based instructional materials to make the students excel in language?
3. Does the education system need some refinement to achieve enhancement in language learning?

Methodology

Data Collection

The researcher interacted with the Higher Secondary School teachers in Ariyalur district and gathered information for the study. Based on the information a questionnaire of 15 questions consisting of the five-level Likert scale with the options, strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, strongly disagree were used for data collection. 40 teachers included in the sample population of four districts Chennai, Kanchipuram, Erode and Ariyalur who willingly participated in the survey, selected the options which related to their opinion about the questions asked and the data was analyzed with excel sheet.

Findings and Interpretations

Table 1

NO	DISTRICTS	NO OF RESPONDENTS	QUESTION 1				
			Teachers face challenges in teaching English for higher secondary students.				
			SA	A	N	DA	SD
1	CHENNAI	10	4	5	-	1	-
2	ARIYALUR	10	6	4	-	-	-
3	ERODE	10	3	6	1	-	-
4	KANCHIPURAM	10	4	3	1	2	-
TOTAL		40	17	18	2	3	-

From Question 1, it has been found out that out

of the 40 respondents, the majority of 18 preferred Agree, 17 stated Strongly Agree, 2 chose Neutral and 3 favoured Disagree. Hence it is clear that teachers are facing challenges in teaching English for Higher Secondary students.

Table 2

NO	DISTRICTS	NO OF RESPONDENTS	QUESTION 2				
			Activities in prescribed books certainly help the students to improve their language.				
			SA	A	N	DA	SD
1	CHENNAI	10	4	3	-	2	1
2	ARIYALUR	10	1	6	-	2	1
3	ERODE	10	1	3	-	6	-
4	KANCHIPURAM	10	3	4	-	3	-
TOTAL		40	9	16	-	13	2

From Question 2, it has been found out that out of the 40 respondents, the majority of 16 preferred Agree, 9 stated Strongly Agree, 13 favoured Disagree and 2 chosen Strongly Disagree. Hence it is clear that Activities in prescribed books certainly help the students to improve their language.

Table 3

NO	DISTRICTS	NO OF RESPONDENTS	QUESTION 3				
			Teachers are able to conduct language enhancement activities within the stipulated time.				
			SA	A	N	DA	SD
1	CHENNAI	10	-	1	-	5	4
2	ARIYALUR	10	-	3	-	4	3
3	ERODE	10	-	3	-	5	2
4	KANCHIPURAM	10	-	5	-	4	1
TOTAL		40	-	12	-	18	10

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From Question 3, it has been found out that out of the 40 respondents, the majority of 12 preferred Agree, 18 stated Disagree and 10 favoured Strongly Disagree. Hence it is clear that Teachers are able to conduct language enhancement activities within the stipulated time.

Table 4

NO	DISTRICTS	NO OF RESPONDENTS	QUESTION 4				
			Teachers pay more attention to make students get a better score, rather than making them enhance their language skills.				
			SA	A	N	DA	SD
1	CHENNAI	10	3	3	-	2	2
2	ARIYALUR	10	4	2	-	4	-
3	ERODE	10	3	4	1	1	1
4	KANCHIPURAM	10	1	5	-	3	1
TOTAL		40	11	14	1	10	4

From Question 4, it has been found out that out of the 40 respondents, the majority of 14 preferred Agree, 11 stated Strongly Agree, 1 chose Neutral, 10 favoured Disagree and 4 selected Strongly Disagree. Hence it is clear that Teachers pay more attention to make students get a better score, rather than making them enhance their language skills.

Table 5

NO	DISTRICTS	NO OF RESPONDENTS	QUESTION 5				
			The government schools have the facilities like a language lab to improve language learning.				
			SA	A	N	DA	SD
1	CHENNAI	10	-	1	-	6	3
2	ARIYALUR	10	-	-	-	9	1
3	ERODE	10	-	-	-	8	2
4	KANCHIPURAM	10	-	1	-	9	-
TOTAL		40	-	2	-	32	6

From Question 5, it has been found out that out of the 40 respondents, the majority of 32 preferred Disagree, 2 stated Agree and 6 favoured Strongly Disagree. Hence it is clear that the government schools do not have the facilities like a language lab to improve language learning.

Table 6

NO	DISTRICTS	NO OF RESPONDENTS	QUESTION 6				
			Teachers have the satisfaction of teaching English and the techniques followed at present is apt for L2 language learning.				
			SA	A	N	DA	SD
1	CHENNAI	10	-	4	-	5	1
2	ARIYALUR	10	-	1	-	8	1
3	ERODE	10	-	2	-	6	2
4	KANCHIPURAM	10	-	2	-	5	3
TOTAL		40	-	9	-	24	7

From Question 6, it has been found out that out of the 40 respondents, the majority of 24 preferred Disagree, 9 stated Agree and 7 favoured Strongly Disagree. Hence it is clear that Teachers are not satisfied in teaching English and the techniques followed at present is not apt for L2 language learning.

Table 7

NO	DISTRICTS	NO OF RESPONDENTS	QUESTION 7				
			Teachers need special technical training to teach English for helping students excel in learning the second language.				
			SA	A	N	DA	SD
1	CHENNAI	10	3	5	-	1	1
2	ARIYALUR	10	5	5	-	-	-
3	ERODE	10	6	4	-	-	-
4	KANCHIPURAM	10	4	3	-	2	1
TOTAL		40	18	17	-	3	2

From Question 7, it has been found out that out of the 40 respondents, the majority of 18 preferred Strongly Agree, 17 stated Agree, 3 favoured Disagree and 2 selected Strongly Disagree. Hence it is clear that Teachers need special technical training to teach English for helping students excel in learning the second language.

Table 8

NO	DISTRICTS	NO OF RESPONDENTS	QUESTION 8				
			Students hesitate to speak English and they find it difficult to acquire the L2 language.				
			SA	A	N	DA	SD
1	CHENNAI	10	3	2	-	3	2
2	ARIYALUR	10	5	4	1	-	-
3	ERODE	10	6	3	-	1	-
4	KANCHIPURAM	10	3	2	-	2	3

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TOTAL	40	17	11	1	6	5
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From Question 8, it has been found out that out of the 40 respondents, the majority of 17 preferred Strongly Agree, 11 stated Agree, 1 chose Neutral, 6 favoured Disagree and 5 selected Strongly Disagree. Hence it is clear that Students hesitate to speak English and they find it difficult to acquire the L2 language.

Table 9

NO	DISTRICTS	NO OF RESPONDENTS	QUESTION 9				
			Teachers feel that the workload has increased and it is difficult to handle.				
			SA	A	N	DA	SD
1	CHENNAI	10	2	2	1	3	2
2	ARIYALUR	10	3	3	1	2	1
3	ERODE	10	2	3	2	2	1
4	KANCHIPURAM	10	3	4	-	2	1
TOTAL		40	10	12	4	9	5

From Question 9, it has been found out that out of the 40 respondents, the majority of 12 preferred Agree, 12 stated Strongly Agree, 4 chose Neutral, 9 favoured Disagree and 5 selected Strongly Disagree. Hence it is clear that Teachers feel that the workload has increased and it is difficult to handle.

Table 10

NO	DISTRICTS	NO OF RESPONDENTS	QUESTION 10				
			Teachers need additional hours to teach language skills.				
			SA	A	N	DA	SD
1	CHENNAI	10	3	4	1	2	-
2	ARIYALUR	10	5	5	-	-	-
3	ERODE	10	6	4	-	-	-
4	KANCHIPURAM	10	4	3	2	1	-
TOTAL		40	18	16	3	3	-

From Question 10, it has been found out that out of the 40 respondents, the majority of 18 preferred Strongly Agree, 16 stated Agree, 3 chose Neutral and 3 favoured Disagree. Hence it is clear that Teachers need additional hours to teach language skills.

Table 11

NO	DISTRICTS	NO OF RESPONDENTS	QUESTION 11				
			The evaluation system has to be refined for learning English as the L2 language, priority should be given to enhance skills rather than obtaining marks in exams.				
			SA	A	N	DA	SD
1	CHENNAI	10	6	4	-	-	-
2	ARIYALUR	10	5	5	-	-	-
3	ERODE	10	4	6	-	-	-
4	KANCHIPURAM	10	5	5	-	-	-
TOTAL		40	20	20	-	-	-

From Question 11, it has been found out that out of the 40 respondents, 20 preferred Strongly Agree and 20 favoured Agree. Hence it is clear that the evaluation system has to be refined for learning English as the L2 language, priority should be given to enhance skills rather than obtaining marks in exams.

Table 12

NO	DISTRICTS	NO OF RESPONDENTS	QUESTION 12				
			Teachers constantly motivate the students to communicate in English.				
			SA	A	N	DA	SD
1	CHENNAI	10	5	5	-	-	-
2	ARIYALUR	10	6	4	-	-	-
3	ERODE	10	4	6	-	-	-
4	KANCHIPURAM	10	6	4	-	-	-
TOTAL		40	21	19	-	-	-

From Question 12, it has been found out that out of the 40 respondents, the majority of 21 preferred Strongly Agree and 19 favoured Agree. Hence it is clear that Teachers would like to constantly motivate the students to communicate in English.

Table 13

NO	DISTRICTS	NO OF RESPONDENTS	QUESTION 13				
			Students are able to clear the English exam yet they are lagging behind in developing LSRW skills				
			SA	A	N	DA	SD
1	CHENNAI	10	3	2	2	3	-
2	ARIYALUR	10	5	4	1	-	-
3	ERODE	10	6	4	-	-	-
4	KANCHIPURAM	10	5	5	-	-	-
TOTAL		40	19	15	3	3	-

From Question 13, it has been found out that out of the 40 respondents, the majority of 19 preferred Strongly Agree, 15 stated Agree, 3 chose Neutral and 3 favoured Disagree. Hence it is clear that Students are able to pass the English exam, yet they lag behind in developing LSRW skills.

Table 14

NO	DISTRICTS	NO OF RESPONDENTS	QUESTION 14				
			Government schools need to provide language learning facilities to introduce L2 language.				
			SA	A	N	DA	SD
1	CHENNAI	10	6	4	-	-	-
2	ARIYALUR	10	4	6	-	-	-
3	ERODE	10	5	5	-	-	-
4	KANCHIPURAM	10	6	4	-	-	-
TOTAL		40	21	19	-	-	-

From Question 14, it has been found out that out of the 40 respondents, the majority of 21 preferred Strongly Agree and 19 favoured Agree. Hence it is clear that Government schools need to provide language learning facilities to introduce L2 language.

Table 15

NO	DISTRICTS	NO OF RESPONDENTS	QUESTION 15				
			Teachers are ready for learning methods or techniques that will improve language learning of students				
			SA	A	N	DA	SD
1	CHENNAI	10	6	4	-	-	-
2	ARIYALUR	10	4	6	-	-	-
3	ERODE	10	5	5	-	-	-
4	KANCHIPURAM	10	4	6	-	-	-
TOTAL		40	19	21	-	-	-

From Question 15, it has been found out that out of the 40 respondents, the majority of 21 preferred Agree and 19 favoured Strongly Agree. Hence it is clear that Teachers are ready for learning methods or techniques that will improve language learning of students

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made to the government, teachers and students.

- Government should provide the necessary language learning facilities like language lab, language learning forum, Audio – Visual aids for schools, that will facilitate students to learn the L2 language.
- The government should offer special training programs for English teachers to enable them to teach as effectively as teachers whose first language is English.

- Language Teachers need to give equal importance to enhance language skills as well as the scoring of good marks in the exams.
- Though teachers have to fulfil many requirements, they have to improve and educate students to meet their needs.
- Students should have the willingness to learn L2 language and make use of the opportunity to learn the second language.

Conclusion

The results of the study reveal that teachers need to enhance both skills and knowledge in teaching the target language. “In order to be a great ESL teacher, one must not only teach, but inspire and empower. The goal is to excite the students about learning, speaking, reading, writing, and comprehending”. (Davis) Moreover, Teachers are ready to learn methods and techniques that improve language learning of student and government also should take initiative to offer compulsory training session for the teachers. Notably, “the Thailand Education Reform implemented between 1996 and 2007 enforced that for every two years teachers would be offered continuous training with some form of training such as attending seminars, workshops, or conferences”. (Wiriyachitra 4-9) To a greater extent, government should provide the necessary language learning facilities like language lab, language learning forum, Audio – Visual aids for schools, that facilitate students to learn the L2 language.

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