

Learning English Language in India: Challenges and Opportunities

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Abstract

A study of English teaching-learning process in undergraduate and post graduate classes is quite fascinating and fastidious. In fact both the teacher and the learners are unaware of the effective pedagogical strategies. There are innumerable problems in this teaching-learning process which need to be addressed by the language trainers and learners with care and concern.

My paper would explore the challenges and opportunities available for the teachers and students in India. In order to substantiate my points, the paper would be based on some major issues observed in our practical life. But the fact remains that learning of English is inevitable for success in this globalised world. Indeed, I have drawn my own conclusion that to master English language, self-practice is inevitable, which can never be substituted.

Teaching English Language in Under-Graduate Classes

Teaching English language in under-graduate classes is still a thought-provoking and tough proposition. Though people in general and students in particular are crazy to learn English, this has become a challenging task for both teachers and students. Students are seen going to English coaching centers and tutorials in large numbers to master the desired language, but are often seen lagging behind. Much hue and cry has been witnessed on the issue of how to gain knowledge and skill in speaking and writing English. Examinations and reexaminations have been conducted through seminars and workshops, conferences and symposia on this issue, but

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nothing encouraging and substantial has emerged out of these exercises. Therefore, it is highly essential to delve deep into the root cause of all such issues.

Demand for Instruction in English

It is an interesting fact that pupils of varied class, race, religious and cultural background struggle to undertake the task of learning it. To speak and write presentable English one needs to cultivate the skills such as (a) listening (b) speaking (c) reading and (d) writing.

English language has become an integral part of school and college curriculum. With the sweeping sway of globalization parents are very much eager to put their children in English medium schools and colleges. It is assumed that whosoever speaks English is a learned and intelligent fellow. Of course, it has some sense saying that English speakers are more privileged than the native language speakers in this globalised world. Indians estimate that English speakers are more talented, though they are found to be less scholarly than our native language speakers. Efforts have been made by the institutions as a whole and individuals in particular, to teach and learn English. Predominance of our vernaculars somehow ostracized the promotion of English in India in the past. The challenges that the Indians confront to get a grip over the language need to be addressed with care and concern.

Slow and Weak in the Mastery and Use of Language Skills in English

Today in India the major challenges being faced by the students in schools and Universities are concerning the fact that the students are slow and weak to listen, speak, read, write and understand English correctly and properly.

Major Challenges

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The major challenges are faced by students coming from:

- Rural and Underdeveloped areas
- Tribal background
- Economically backward society
- Uneducated families

It has been recognized that the children of rural backgrounds are less outgoing than the urban children and therefore the rural children hesitate to speak English. The children of tribal backgrounds too face difficulties in learning English because they have to learn other language/s of the state, for example, Odia, Hindi, Telegu, Urdu or any other state language than the tribal language they speak at home. Hence, they learn English as their third language.

Economically backward people are unable to afford to send their children to get educated in English medium schools. Furthermore, the children from uneducated families do not get any academic help from their parents to learn the language, because the parents may not know English and they may even lack literacy even in their own mother tongue or the language/s of the state.

Recognizing the Global Demands

Indeed, it is a good sign that the children of our generation are relatively conscious about the global scenario and, therefore, feel the importance of learning the English language. A close scrutiny reveals the fact that the school and college-going students tend to pick up and use words and sentences to which they are exposed. But they are unable to catch and reproduce necessary and apt expressions, or form correct sentence structures. They speak and write wrong sentences, use improper intonation, faulty pronunciation and commit many grammatical errors. Such errors do not help them to communicate effectively what they want to communicate. These categories

of people with ordinary skills hardly get any success in their graduate and post-graduate careers. In such a situation, it becomes the duty of every teacher to guide and teach the students the appropriate skills, enabling them to speak and write effective communicative English.

Continuing Paucity of Well Trained and Skilled English Language Teachers

Historically for practical reasons, India chose to teach English mostly using the services of native teachers. But, unfortunately, even now India does not have adequate number of teachers, proficient in English to deliver the programmes now being embarked on. Indeed, the English teachers of schools and colleges of rural areas are not quite competent and proficient in teaching the English language as most of them are from vernacular mediums. Thus the rudimentary stage of the students' career becomes very shaky. The untrained (in English) and unskilled (in English language teaching) teachers have less credibility and are unable to nurture the career of the learners properly.

Neither Fluent Nor Apt Grammar and Vocabulary

The teachers of the category that we are talking about are even not sound in grammatical usages: the appropriate use of verb (tense) form, appropriate use of words such as noun, pronoun, adjective, preposition, conjunction, adverb, article, phrases and correct sequence. Their gestures, posture and the body language are also not quite impressive. The teachers, therefore, need to be extra careful in all these matters and there by cater to the needs of the learners.

Poor Student Performance

It is often seen that these students commit common mistakes because of confusion and lack of conceptual clarity. Hence the foundation of English learning should be strengthened at an early stage of learning.

Even in higher classes the students are not up to the mark due to the weak foundation at the primary stages of their education. So it is worth prescribing that the learners start learning English along with their native language so as to be able to master it later.

Regional Variation in the Attitude to Learn and Use English

In the northern part of the country it has been noticed that English has not been given much importance. Some people consider English language teaching and learning as colonial, British legacy. They do not hesitate to inflict ill-mannered remarks on attempts made by the learners to speak English. They do not wish to upgrade themselves with the fast-moving global pace. It is disappointing and discouraging. This is probably one of the possible reasons for our backwardness.

On the contrary, people of the south are much better in English than those from the north because they accept English and consider it as a global language and as something that has filled a global need.

Consider the Advantages

We must not forget that by learning English we are learning, science, technology, literature, culture, tradition and many more. So, Indians should rise above limiting ideas, for the furthering of their knowledge and education through English.

Paucity of Materials and Infrastructure in Educational Institutions

Deficiency of basic minimum infrastructure and standard teaching materials create a great hindrance in the teaching-learning process. Poor intervention of technology in language teaching class rooms also does de-motivate the learners.

New Generation, New Ideas and New Opportunities

In spite of all the challenges, the learners of our generation are privileged because of the fact that there are numerous English medium schools and colleges coming up these days to cater to the needs of our learners. These institutions can play a pivotal role in enriching the teaching-learning process.

School and college curriculum have been changed considerably. Soft skill and communicative English courses have been introduced in the syllabus so as to promote language learning.

In addition to these welcome additions, television channels help promote language learning through their attractive and fun learning programmes. Our children are fond of these channels as adequate amount of fun is involved in the programmes. Internet also contributes a great deal to the learning of the English language. Through Facebook, Twitter, Google, mail and chatting, etc., one can also improve upon their English language learning.

Similar kinds of programmes are also presented in radio which really help promote the learning of the English language. Listening to radio is a great experience. A learner can enrich his English language speaking to a great deal if he regularly listens to different English programmes. Pronunciation and intonation can be refined and tuned by way of attentive listening to the radios.

Newspapers and magazines too supplement language learning to a great extent. Children from rural areas are able to read newspapers and magazines of their choice, which can benefit them in the learning English language.

Translation is a medium that helps learning language to a large extent. Government Agencies like Central Sahitya Academy and State Sahitya Academy encourage translators to translate various Indian classics into English and thereby draw the attention of the readers all over the country. This is probably one of the greatest opportunities of language teaching and learning.

Competitions like English Olympiads at the school level, Chairman's cup and Chancellor's cup speech and writing competitions at the college and university levels and many other competitions of a similar kind create opportunities for the students to train to do much better in English.

Our children are privileged that they are provided with digital classrooms fitted with LCD projectors and modern equipments. These classrooms really give them a different feeling and make their learning enjoyable. Even the readymade language CDs and DVDs available in the market these days are of great use for our learners.

Continuous Endeavour Called for

Most of all, our learners should realize the delicacy of learning a language and should put in much endeavour to master it for a better future and a better tomorrow. Self-practice can make language-learning quicker. Thus practice with interest and motivation is an independent exercise and has no substitute.

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