



English language challenges: learning and teaching in India

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Abstract

One of the reasons for declining standards of English is the fact that people are not ready to accept it, which has multiple reasons. The consciousness or lack of it, the wrong perceptions, mental blockages inter alia various other reasons. Everybody knows, for better part, that the study of a language is not an end in itself. It just means the development of one's knowledge about a language and power of expression that could be conquered by mastering a language. English is being treated as a world language because of its vast presence and acceptance all over the world. But in India, this language is still struggling to reach people, the mass. Appropriate and adequate remedial measures are cited for the successful rectification of these challenges.

Keywords: language, english, learning, teaching

Introduction

English is one of the most or rather the most used language all over the world today. The knowledge of English has become an essential, sort of, requirement as it is used worldwide in almost all the fields under the Sun and beyond it. If we care to see the perspective with a bit seriousness then English is a commonly used medium to write exams, to give/take interviews, for admission to various courses and to various places, even in seemingly odd places and stages like beauty pageants this language has its very clear imprints. So basically we observe that English has become a kind of necessary requirement.

To bring to light the basic point we ought to go to the origin of this language and we will have to rewind a little, coming from the old age to the new ages. English could be categorized into 4 eras, broadly. Old English (500-1100 AD), Middle Age English (1100-1500AD), Early Modern English (1500-1800 AD), Late Modern English (1800 to present). All the four eras have got different significance and characteristics. In connection to India, The Late Modern English has more significance as it was the one that was introduced here in the very beginning of the British arrival on our shores. Moreover the Britishers introduced that English in India. Now a days if we see, the introduction of various histories of literature has made the Early Modern English that was used during 1500 to 1800 AD also pretty common and has been in news, views and use from quite some time now. Early modern era is also known as the Shakespearean era. As we realise, that period of time has a great contribution to the literature in particular and to the language in general, which are still being read and followed by people around the world.

English has always been treated like the world language for the simple reason that it has a vast presence all over the world. With context to India, the rural India specifically, English has somehow caused a phobia, sort of, amongst the students. There is a great amount of uneasiness that English causes amongst the students. Which in turn results in the complication of learning and teaching English. So there comes

the challenge of learning and teaching English Language in India.

English in India is a symbol of people's aspiration for quality in education and a fuller participation in national and international life. The visible impact of this presence of the language is that everyone is dominating today it at a very early stage of schooling. The English teaching profession has consistently recommended a relatively late introduction of English and this is reflected in the spirit of policy documents. The level of introduction of English has now become a matter of State policy to respond to people's aspirations and making almost irrelevant an academic debate on the merits of a very early introduction. The Education Commission 1964-1966 has identified English as a "Library Language" and felt that it would continue essentially in higher education. Therefore, the commission recommended that English should be started from 5th standard onwards.

There are various reasons that cause the problems that English has become the mental blockage that brings the uneasiness to learn it and vice versa. If people are not ready to learn it, it becomes a reason for the problems of teaching it.

First among all is the problem of the psychological blockage. It is a widespread misunderstanding amongst the learners that English is the most difficult language. This already existing belief leads them to get scared of the language even more. Hence most of the learners look at the language with a prejudiced vision and bear the fear through the year. This psychological blockage leads to more parting away with the language.

Poor literacy the pursuer of the language has also become a barrier to the economic empowerment of many people in the developing world. English is the second language in India. For complex reasons schools are often not effective as vehicle for second language learning. The learners are usually skeptical of formal education and of cultural differences they encounter in learning remote languages in particular. Localization of language is an important playing factor to make language relevant to them and to encourage them to adopt it.

The social issues are one more factor. English language in Indian minds has become the symbol of better education, better culture and higher intellect. In areas it has become an element of show off. The accents are used in a fake manner and used as a status symbol. In high societies English is the common tongue these days and preference is given on communicating in English than in Hindi or the mother tongue. In present times, English is the most preferred language. The Indians and the Indian English Language press use many words derived from Indian languages and Indian accent is sometimes difficult for non-Indians to understand. Actually English has co-existed in the Indian sub-continent along with thousands of local languages. It has remained in the heart of the Indian society.

Rural areas are a major area of concern when it comes to learning or teaching English. Rural areas are less developed areas in terms of reach and infrastructure. Rural areas are mainly dominated by the primary activities like farming, rearing, etc. The overall education level as it is low there. The recently developing education web that has been spreading has led to opening of various schools which include Convents as well. But it has neither helped in raising the level of the students, nor made them learn English as a language. The infrastructure of such schools is weak. Some teachers have good accent, but they do not possess a good command over the language. Now in the rural and semi urban areas, study of English language begins at an early age, from the KG level it continues up to Senior Secondary or Degree level. Even in the professional courses, the teaching of English as a communication skill is an integral part of the curriculum or the course obligation. It is quite unfortunate that whatever the English language teachers gain in the completion of their Course or education as eligibility for seeking a job or an employment, it stays there and the teaching and learning stagnates. The process of teaching is not updated even after the passage of full many years. So much so, as the experience shows in many cases, they have no idea of good dictionaries meant for the students or for themselves or even for the office managers or administrators. It may be pertinently mentioned here that to cater to the tremendously growing demand for English language teachers there exists various ways and methods. Students of the rural areas do not realize the importance of English as a language of communication whereas this is the most important aspect of this global language. They lack the confidence to speak in English; expression in the language is weak. First reason is that they have been taught English through grammar translation method. Many think English as the most difficult and many call it unnecessary to learn it. The teachers should make efforts to eradicate the socio-psychological problems of the students by motivating them.

Somehow the dependency on mother tongue is a lot. Most of the problems arise due to the interference of mother tongue in speaking English. Both the teachers and the students are very fluent in talking their own mother tongue. But they forget the essence of pure language. When mother tongue is being used, English words become a common thing to hear amidst. They forget that every language differs in stress, intonation and pronunciation. English not being a Phonetic language - that English is pronounced in a very different way from almost all

other languages of the world-is also a part of the challenge. In various English speaking regions of the world the way of pronunciation for various words and accents vary. India being a huge geographical area and having various regions the accents and language changes from place to place. This causes confusions.

- While learning a foreign language requires motivation. Not only just foreign language but also any second language. The drive force of learning the language in an individual is a playing element. It is known as a complex phenomenon and involved energy and various components. People may not be willing to devote that much in learning the language.

Most of the mistakes are made unknowingly that is when making a mistake becomes habitual. We keep making the same mistakes even without realizing it. If we study this in a scientific manner, by trying to know what is the actual cause behind making those mistakes repeatedly we would be able to avoid it.

The primary aim of teaching English should be the focus on the fundamental skills of the language ability of the student. More focus is given to written exams and marks but English, as a language cannot be just defined by marks. It needs to be understood and expressed. There are cases where English is being taught to student, the student learn and write which results in good marks may be but English is now a shallow subject which is just dependent on marks. The basics of the grammar should be clear. English should be explored like an art and expressed like an emotion and not just be crammed. The fundamentals skills of the language ability is listening, speaking, reading and writing. It is of paramount importance that the teacher should know what his task is and what he is trying to achieve by teaching English. They go on with their job of teaching without knowing the difficulties of the learner. The teacher should be fully aware of the fact that his student's proficiency in English is not up to the mark owing to the deteriorating standards of teaching in schools, etc. The objective of teaching English should be practical. There should be methods to improve the skills of reading, writing, speaking and listening. Even the teachers face a serious problem of concretizing the abstractness of novels, poems, etc and face difficulty in transferring it to the nascent minds of the students. Generally the poems and the older literature that are being taught are of complex words and have inner meanings. Maybe the rush of completing syllabus is more than the want to make the understanding level high.

Language could be mastered by practising all the four abovementioned skills. The surroundings at times do not allow one to practice. Even an individual might not be willing to do so. Without practising it can not be very efficient. The lack of audio-visual tools also adds in the problem of lack of practice. Many teachers are unable to teach English effectively because they face lot of problems due to the lack of teaching aids. There are very few audio-visual aids available and it is insufficient for the teachers to use it effectively. Some are so costly that the colleges can only afford to buy few.

One more reason must be discussed here that at times creates a problem to teach or learn English. As we know India was under the British rule, and they introduced the English

language in India. The idea that Britisher had been pretty much cruel to Indians and India had to face a lot of hardship because of them, many people, keeping this as a point do not want to learn English at all. The past of India has made many people hate everything brought by the British, English including.

Every problem has a solution to it. True that learning and teaching English language is facing many challenges in India, there are various remedies to it. And the methods and remedies are very simple, just that they need to be done or acted upon.

Explaining is the first step. English is not a subject where formulas have to be used or logics are the most important part. If in maths $2+2$ equals to 4, in English grammar $2+2$ could be 5 or 6 or any number. The language has a flow and has to be adjusted from place to place. From the basic levels only English need to be explained, and dealt with such manner that it becomes meaningful which also includes connecting one point to another that may make the language easy to be understood. The fact is that anything that is well understood is the thing that stays for long in our brains. Hence explanation of this language is the most essential part.

Generally in our country, more importance is given to a written approach as has been pinpoint ed above. Judgment of who is good in English and who does not have a good English is mainly done on the basis of the marks one has been getting in the subject. It is absolutely, to put pure emphasis, the wrong thing to do. Importance should be given more to the ORAL APPROACH. People shouldn't only be taught English, they should be trained to communicate using English. Communication in the medium of English should be increased. Even in schools and colleges more importance should be given to Extempore, Declamation, Debate, Symposium, etc.

The Most important task to make English reach to people is to remove the mental blockage that people have in their minds regarding this language. Many think that English is the most difficult language and many call it unnecessary to learn it. Efforts should be made to eradicate these social-psychological problems. It should be made clear that it is not like climbing a mountain, neither it is a social status, nor does it only belong to and for the people of the convent schools or the elite. Nor it is a social symbol. The things that make people conscious should be removed. It shouldn't be shown or taught in such a manner that it causes peer pressure, or brings stress to someone. In many cases, it can be seen that the English-speaking peoplenot knowing how to speak English are taunting the non- English-speaking people. Not knowing English does not mean one is illiterate or uneducated. It is obviously better to know English, but not something of like a do or die situation.

Special efforts should be made to ensure that teachers get proper teaching facilities, including teaching aids, space, proper books,etc. Good journals should be subscribed. These small efforts should be taken for improvement in teaching facilities.

Building confidence amongst the learners is again one remedy that could be used. One teacher could start with the simplest of English and then go to further levels step by step. English learning has to be made interesting and then taught likewise.

How can someone grab it if he/she is not interested in it? Initially everybody makes mistakes in speaking English, which is not something that should be laughed at. Mistakes should be handled with care. Many teachers as a second language make the mistake of beginning with the alphabet. This is wrong. When you train them to ask questions, the learners will definitely show off these questions to their folks. And their interest in the language will be built. This will bring the spirit of learning more on the language learning skills than the portion completion.

Different, specific and innovative methods of teaching should be applied. New techniques should be used instead of the old ways. With the passing years, there have been growthof various things. The audio-linguist methods, communicative language teaching, directed practice, learning by teaching, oral approach are few of the ways. Emphasis should be given on reading newspapers, listening to English news. This audio way helps to grab more of English. The grammar translation method, series method, the direct methods are few more methods to learn or teach English. Use of appropriate method for teaching various topics accordingly helps to enhance the effect of teaching language.

English in India is a question of linguistic centralism while the other Indian languages lead to linguistic regionalism. A foreign language existing so firmly and distinctly has posed a problem to the country. From Macaulay to Modi we have seen many reports and commissions but these have only focused and taken attempts to improve the position of regional language. Yet the language problem has become more complicated without any practical solution in sight. It has developed into a very serious problem as no solution has been offered. The growing modernization and internationalism in the world prevented us from doing away with the English language. Besides, Indian languages are often associated with traditions and are understood to be anti-modern. Therefore a complete switch over to the Indian languages would lead to educational chaos and total isolation from the developments on the international arena. The thoughts did not want to risk this because of cultural, social, political and economic reasons. Hence the situation needed an urgent solution. And the only possible way out that could be thought of was the coexistence of English with Indian languages. English is the second official language in India, But Still It Is Not Much Wide Spread as Much It Should Have Been.

English language teaching and learning in India has suffered a lot, so much that the basic knowledge of English is also lacking. It maybe because the emphasis in surroundings has always been on the conceptual content and stylistic content has been neglected so far. What will be the future of English vocation and evocation in India, only time will tell. But to trust on it, definitely, the creative writers will come up with various creative solutions to solve this problem. And last, not the least as they say, only challenges have the seeds of solutions, hope must not be lost.

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