

Challenges in Learning English as a Second Language

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Abstract

English is the language brought by British to our country. Though they left us, English language is still with us because it has occupied its place in global level. It has become necessity to learn such a language. Learning a second language is not an easy one. Learning English as a second language is even less easy because it is not the official language in our country. The paper is an effort to bring out the major difficulties that our students face while learning English. It also suggests remedial measures for the said barriers and problems. The paper focuses on the teaching methodologies and learning atmosphere prevalent in English classrooms.

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Learning is started from childhood whether it may be sign or spoken language. Children are tempted to learn the language or languages used around them. This is the first language learned by the children which doesn't need any special teaching. A scientific explanation of language acquisition was given by Skinner (1957). He is one of the pioneers of behaviorism who explains the language is developed by means of environmental influence (Ambridge & Lieven, 2011).

The problem really starts when the child enters into a school. In our country we have different types of schools, Government, Matriculation, CBSE, ICSE, Exceed and so on. Each follows different method in teaching the subjects and language. For example TN government has announced Samacheer Kalvi syllabus should be followed in all the schools. That means there should not be a matriculation at all. But to keep up their standards they included some more subjects in their syllabus. It may be a burden to the children. Children faced so many difficulties in CBSE, ICSE, and Exceed method of teaching.

In schools the language English is taught as a subject not as a language. Since English is the dominant language in the present scenario, it becomes necessary to learn and mastery over such language. It is a global language which is used in the international communications, science, information technology, business, seafaring, aviation, entertainment, radio and diplomacy.

In Tamilnadu, English is learned as a second language but it plays an important role in the life of an individual as well as in the society. Though Hindi is the national language, people prefer English than Hindi. Hence it becomes compulsory subject in schools.

In schools (State Board) English is introduced only at the first standard. But the students used only Tamil before they are entering into a school. They have acquired the basics of Tamil not as a formal but as an informal spoken. Naturally they use their mother tongue to learn a second language. It is very difficult to learn a new language in the class with limited hours. Sometimes the English teachers are using bilingual to teach English for ease of the students. This is the main drawback in teaching the second language.

One more fact is that both in the Government and Private Schools, most of the teachers who teach English at the primary level are not a graduate of English literature. In many schools, it is a one man show where one teacher handles all the subjects. This affects the quality of teaching as well as learning. Primary schools are the base for high schools. So the students studying in the abovementioned circumstances carry with them inadequate or defective knowledge of English. Without understanding the concept, they memorize everything including theories, concepts and even histories. When they reach high schools and collegiate level with the same knowledge, they depend upon readymade notes. The students those who scored more than 60% in English are failed to use the language efficiently. In short, they know about English but do not know English.

A student who started to learn English face five basic problems: spelling, pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary and sentence formation. Spelling is not easy even for the native speakers because of many reasons. There are 26 letters in English which have 44 sounds. Spelling and pronunciation do not match sometimes. For example homophones and words having silent letters often confuse the students. English Grammar is the most difficult one to remember and use it logically. Though the rules and regulations of grammar are being taught at school, it is up to the capacity of students to use it while communicating with others. Practicing regularly and constantly one can avoid the grammatical mistakes while speaking.

The numerous words in English make the student feel edgy in some situations. It is one of the common difficulties faced by non-English speakers. The various forms of a single word, regular and irregular verbs, and tenses are confusing students. Some of the students from Matriculation are struggling a lot in making correct sentences. Some of the common challenges faced by students are in the fields of conjunctions, concord, punctuation marks and position of adverb and adjectives.

Exercises related to identifying the parts of the sentences and tenses will help the learners get to know about simple sentence formation. Dividing the sentences into clauses will promote the understanding in sentence construction. Grammatical transformation of the forms of the sentences and identification exercises related to all the grammatical categories will help the learners to understand the forms and functions of the grammatical categories involved in sentences.

Students must be encouraged to speak in English and the teacher have to insist everyone to speak in English, not only in English classes but during school hours and whenever and wherever possible. This should be

followed not only in the English medium schools but also in the Tamil medium schools. It should be made as a very firm rule but subtly implied that there will be no other language spoken in your class other than English. Insist them to think in English. This a mammoth task, and can be achieved only after some weeks or probably months of teaching.

Grammar and its usage in everyday communication should be taught to them with appropriate illustrations so that the learners can retain the basic rules in mind and hence produce correct sentences. They should be brushed up often to prevent them from forgetting what has been taught and learnt already.

The teacher while teaching English should employ the different methods of teaching English to the students. The teacher can also make use of the language lab. Using suitable method for teaching various topics will enhance the effect of teaching. Some of the methods of teaching English are as follows:

1. The grammar translation method.
2. The direct method.
3. The series method.
4. Variation of direct method.
5. The oral approach/situational language teaching.
6. Audio lingual method.
7. Communicative language teaching.
8. Directed practice.
9. Learning by teaching.

Instead of teaching how to make a conversation in English, the teacher may converse with the students on day-to-day things and happenings in and around them. It may be started in simple English. So that students can learn when they talk. When the students are talking, the teacher must listen and correct them in pronunciation and sentence formation. Videos of simple conversation with captions may be shown to the students.

The large number of students in the classes is the main drawback in learning in which the teacher fails to concentrate on the slow learners. The number of students in a classroom must be limited whereby the teachers can give individual attention. The language classes must be made interesting. It is only in the hands of the teacher to make them interesting.

Lack of motivation on the part of the learners is another reason for not paying much attention to the language. The intention of just passing the examination must be wiped out and effective learning should take place with the help of the teachers who teach the language.

It is in the hands of the teacher to make the students learn the English language in an effective manner. Students' part is the main where they have to feel free to come up correct their mistakes and make the learning successful.

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