

Challenges in English Language Teaching

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ABSTRACT

Although, English Language has been adopted as an official language many decades ago in India, the learners still face difficulties learning it for many reasons. A chief reason is the fact that every Indian is endowed with his or her mother tongue but compelled to learn in second language or English. Obinna (2010) states that second language refers to the language a person learns on top of his first or natural language. Although in some situations, the second language may be learnt almost simultaneously with first language, generally it comes at a later stage in the process of social formation. Second language usually serves as a truce in a multilingual setting. Dada (2006) states that India happens to be one of the 22 most linguistically diverse countries in the world. In India today, according to the 15th edition of the Ethnologue report for India, there are about 22 languages co-existing with one another. It is interesting to note that apart from the many indigenous languages, which are of course the mother tongues of Indians, non-indigenous languages such as English, French, Arabic, German and Russian also exist. English has become a second language in India, while Pidgin English, with probably the largest number of speakers, has also emerged as a result of the contact of English with the indigenous languages. India, no doubt, is a nation that has witnessed a cross-current of linguistic activities due to her inherent multilingual nature coupled with her colonial experience under the British. Dada further opines that the issue of language contact and language conflict exists at three distinct but interrelated levels viz: the social, psychological and linguistic axes of the contact situation. The social aspect is concerned with issues like language choice or language use, the psychological aspect has to do with language

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INTRODUCTION

Problems facing the learners of English language

Learning a foreign language may not be butter and bread experience due to languages peculiarities and distinctiveness. No matter the similarities, two languages are not utterly the same thing. Learners of English as a second language find its learning difficult because sudden break from a familiar language to a non-familiar one can be difficult thus various errors ranging from phonetical error to syntactic, morphological to semantic errors etc. are committed. Some of the problems are highlighted below:

Problems of Immediate need

According to Kannan (2009:2), students learn basic grammar at school level for the purpose of passing only in the tests and in the examinations and not to face any real life situations. Application-oriented advanced grammar is not taught in schools. Furthermore, adequate practice is not given to students to learn a language. The writer of this paper totally aligns with Kannan opinion. It is obvious that students only read to pass English language but are not totally committed to its mastery; probably because learners are only taught and expect to regurgitate the experience rather than allowing them to self - discover the intricacies involved in English Language.

Problem of shortage of specialist teachers in English

Another problem which English learners encounter is staff shortage. Shuara (2010:18) explained that there are academic staff shortages across board particularly in the critical areas of science and technology; Over 60% of the academic staff in the Indian University System is in the category of Lecturer I and below. These shortages are compounded by inter- and

intra-sectoral brain drain. It further revealed that Colleges of Education has staff shortfall of 56.9%, Poly/Monotechnics 56.9% and Universities 39.1%. These have implications on the quality of teaching and learning especially at tertiary level. In my opinion, there should be one lecturer to between 20 and 50 students; however, what obtains in our higher institutions is the opposite. Most of the lecture halls where General courses are taught are usually overpopulated and since listening which is the first foundational skill cannot be done in a noisy and rowdy environment, learning is hampered. Moreover, facilitators easily lose control of the class except in situations where colleagues assist in class control.

Lack of basic and necessary equipment

Lack of basic facilities and equipment is a challenge that hinders effective teaching and learning of English Language. Most schools and colleges in India lack essential equipment which could have strengthened learners' skills. Most schools do not have language laboratory and well equipped libraries.

According to Oluwole (2014:123-124) other challenges confronting the teaching and learning of grammar in India are:

Language transfer (Interlingua). Language transfer according to him gives rise to interlingua errors which are based on the interference theory. The transfer of learner's first language patterns into those of the second language constitutes one of the bases for interlingua interference. When this transfer has a negative effect on the second language, then there will be problems.

Intralingual Errors in this category reflect general characteristics of rules of learning. E.g. Over-generalization or faulty application of rules, thereby *producing* incorrect forms of analogy. Learners make inductive generalizations about the target language system based on the data to which they are exposed. As a result of the restriction based on the data, learners who are ignorant of the exceptions to certain rules of grammar generalize and produce incorrect forms by analogy. This makes learners to commit plural error, tense error, error related to abstract noun etc

Faulty instructional materials and instructional techniques

Some problems such as the aforementioned arise mainly from faulty instructional materials and the pedagogical shortcomings of the teacher.

The inconsistency in the orthography of English

Spelling has been identified as a problem related to the nature of English. This is a problem area to both speakers of English as a second language and the native speakers of English.

However, most teachers are not adequately prepared to teach students where English is the language of the country but not the mother tongue of the pupils. In addition, there is a problem where the mother tongue of the pupils differs from English in both orthography and directionality. As a result of these international issues, it seems essential that determining ways of addressing the problems of (1) diverse populations and (2) multilingual and multicultural settings become integral to curriculum and instruction in teacher education.

Theory versus practice

As in so many fields, developing a bridge between theory and practice is a persistent problem. In the field of foreign language teaching, Swaffar (2003) suggests that practice has substituted for theory and the result is a resounding emptiness and a discipline in crisis. It has become clear that we need something other than a recipe approach to teaching skills, grammar, and vocabulary; we must acknowledge that teaching language teaching cannot be effective without content: "If language teachers do not even begin to have some understanding of educational and applied subject theory, they will be mere technicians and feel themselves to be such" (Lawes, 2003:27). Thus, there is a need to re-define professional practice in light of a new type of teacher education (Cochran-Smith, 2005). The 'scientist-practitioner approach' (Berninger et al. 2004), in which teachers study their own practice against a backdrop of relevant research represents one way in which teacher education might evolve.

Teaching Reading Proficiency

Another important issue that needs to be addressed relates to fluency and proficiency in reading. Teaching reading has become the focus of teacher education in recent years as increasingly research is being carried out on effective instructional

practices. In the area of bilingual education, Cohen and Horowitz (2002) suggest that knowing how bilingual learners acquire literacy in two languages will influence the field of reading comprehension instruction. They ask the question, “What should teachers know about bilingual learners and the reading process in order to prepare effective teachers for the new century?”

A similar question is being asked regarding the *foreign* language situation. What is it that teachers need to know and do in order to succeed in teaching reading processes that consist of both decoding and comprehension? Now that second language reading instruction has gained in impetus, a research base must be established “that can facilitate productive innovations in second language reading instruction”(Koda, 2005:3). Of primary concern are issues such as the place of memory in learning to read and write and in the enrichment of vocabulary, the complexity of reading comprehension and writing, and the storage and retrieval of facts. Thus, it has become evident that language teaching should now be geared to understanding how language is processed in the brain (Schumann et al. 2004; Berninger & Richards, 2002).

Recommendations

The paper highlights the challenges which English Language learners face and equally proffer solutions. Essentially, effective teaching and learning of English will be realistic only when both the learned and learner demonstrate readiness to pay the sacrifices for its attainment. It is therefore recommended that

- a. English learners must be extensive readers.
- b. Teachers must reward efforts of learners so as to motivate their struggle to acquire the language skills.
- c. Government as a matter of priority should make available necessary facilities that will empower teaching and learning of English.
- d. Parents should arouse the interest of their wards by providing needed materials and conducive learning and studying environment at homes.

CONCLUSION

Assessment of teacher performance, curriculum development and research-supported instruction in teaching practice is still underway. While we can argue that many boundaries between disciplines have been broken down and that our graduates will go into the field as leaders and implementers of new ways of teaching, it is still too soon to make such claims. Further research assessing the program, implementing and monitoring the students’ performance in the field is necessary. The ultimate goal of the program described in this paper has been to raise standards of teaching and teacher preparation to meet the challenges of education in the new global setting. In this paper, I described five projects as part of a new model in which the teaching of English as a foreign language is based on a concept of evolution that requires a dual approach to teacher education. The first part of this approach calls for new methods for pre-service teacher education and continuing professional development; the second part calls for an understanding of the nature-nurture interactions in learning, the complexities of assessing language proficiency and the importance of understanding the diverse abilities of the student populations. Our intent and goal in adopting an the interdisciplinary approach like that described above is that new teachers in the field will not only know the target language, but they will also be able to adapt their knowledge to the heterogeneity of the classroom, understand diversity and be able to cope in the complex, fast world of the present.

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