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RESEARCH ARTICLE



PROBLEMS IN TEACHING/LEARNING ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE IN INDIA

Dr. KOTTACHERUVU NAGENDRA

Associate Professor of English, Malla Reddy Engineering College for Women (MRECW)
Maisammaguda, Dulapally, Hyderabad



**Dr. KOTTACHERUVU
NAGENDRA**

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ABSTRACT

Teaching and learning are interrelated. Learning, generally, is understood as acquiring some information or skills and retaining it in the memory, subject to forgetting. It is a change in behaviours that involves some practice and cognitive organization. Teaching on the other hand facilitates learning. It guides the student so the understanding of how the student learns determines the teaching styles i.e., the approach, methods and techniques that are to be used. Besides this, the process of teaching and learning also involves some philosophical and psychological questions. For example, if a teacher believes that the second language learning is a deductive and not an inductive process she presents rules to the students rather than let them discover those rules inductively. Similarly, if the teacher believes in programmed learning, she presents the language in a carefully paced program. In short, this is all to say that, if a teacher wants to realize some learning in a group, she should know the group, the concept she wants to teach and also the method which would be suitable to that particular group. In short, a theory of teaching should be in harmony with the subject and the student. All the three aspects should be integrated; so that, the learning on a given day for an identified group of students is realized despite various constraints- physical, mental, economic or sociological. Thus, a theory of teaching should consider the options of linguists, psychologists and educationalists.

INTRODUCTION

The teaching of English in India has always been difficult circumstances. This is so because of the large population of the country, bleak economic conditions, the cultural and social diversities, insufficient men and material etc. Let us discuss some of these here.

Lack of clear-cut policy

One of the main reasons for the poor standard of English is the lack of a clear-cut policy. There have been frequent changes in the policy of the government towards the teaching and learning of English. Though English is taught as a compulsory subject, only the pass mark is taken into consideration. As the percentage of low achievers has been ever increasing, the Government has decided not to consider marks in English as essential for admission into a university course. The educationalists and politicians differ on the role and status of English in India. If we are to aim at good standards in English, it is high time that the Government takes a strong decision to formulate and implement appropriate policies that promote students' learning of English.

Lack of exposure to the language

Most of the Indian students are exposed to their mother tongues. They do not get adequate opportunities either to listen to or speak in English. They listen to English only in the 'English' class. The teaching of the other subjects is mostly in their regional languages as the medium of instruction is in their vernacular languages. It is only in the cities and urban areas that we find English medium schools. Because of the poor social and economic backgrounds, they neither get enough exposure to English outside the classroom nor enough opportunities to improve themselves in speaking it. This naturally reduces their use of English and results in a poor competence in the language.

Non availability of suitable teaching-learning material

Many teaching-learning materials like – good textbooks, workbooks, handbooks for teachers, TV, radio, charts or other useful visual material- are essential for effective teaching. Unfortunately many teachers and students are not provided with these materials. Hence, sometimes the teaching and learning becomes more imaginative than practical.

Lack of good teachers of English

Good teachers of English are found in very small number in India. Hence, not having a good teacher of English is a common experience of all the students of English. The teachers of English are either not trained properly or they are the teachers of other subjects. Even if they are trained, they are trained by the teachers of English in India but not by the native speakers. Even the materials and methodology used in these training programmes are outdated. As such, it is the same limited experience that is shared. There is hardly any scope to improve intuitive and spontaneous knowledge of the language. Though there are institutes like CIEFL, RIEs and, ELTCs to train teachers of English, they are hardly enough for the large demands of the Indian teacher population.

Defective methods

The methodology which is practiced to teach English in schools is not appropriate. The oral work which is the soul of any method is totally neglected. Writing which is an advanced skill to be learnt is taught right from the beginning. Students are not given exposure to the use of language. Language is taught by the rules and learnt by rote memory. As a result, students fail to achieve any competency in the use of language.

Lack of motivation

As students do not find immediate need for English, their interest naturally slackens. Similarly, as there is no immediate reward for their achievement, the interest decreases. The poverty and the insecure sociological conditions also force them to neglect the language. In addition, learning a foreign language is not an easy task and the much needed exposure and practice are not available to achieve fluency in the use of the language.

Large classes

With our large population we do not find any class where students' number is less than 60. As the students in the class are always heterogeneous, there is hardly any time to pay attention to the weak or creative child. Even the average students do not get enough experience in the use of language. There is no scope for individual attention. This, certainly, hinders the intellectual growth.

Faulty examination system

Generally the methodology of teaching is fashioned on the type of evaluation, though it should be happening the other way. Our examinations of English encourage the students for rote memory because many times the questions are based on summarizing either a poem or a narration. The language skills are not tested to any

appreciable degree. Speech skills are not totally neglected. Teachers also find it very difficult to motivate the students in the class because the students always aim at memorizing the notes from bazaar guides and reproducing them in the examinations.

With all the problems, discussed above, the standard of English in our country is deplorably low. Hence, a lot of responsibility is thrown on the shoulders of the teachers to make their classes interesting and learning of English fruitful. They have to gear up for the situation and successfully perform their duties.

CONCLUSION

This paper has discussed different problems faced by a teacher of English in India. It has also explained the need for a teacher to be resourceful and knowledgeable to meet the grave situation and promote better standards of achievement.

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