



## **THE CHALLENGES OF TEACHING-LEARNING OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN MULTICULTURAL CONTEXT IN INDIA**

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### **Abstract**

*This paper presents the challenges of teaching English in multicultural context in India. Teaching English to the Indian students is the biggest challenge. Though enough awareness is prevailing among the students, parents and society, the majority of our students struggle a lot to acquire the language. It presents a brief history teaching English in India. It highlights factors of teaching-learning of English language in the multicultural context in India. There is an urgent need to teach English language in order to communicate outside our own language group for any practical purpose like business, tourism, cultural exchange, administration and social work. The increasing awareness of importance of English in the present moment demands to learn the language for special and specific purposes and for widening our intellectual horizon.*

**Keywords:** *Teaching English, Multilingual context, India*



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### **Introduction**

India is the land of multiple languages. This multiplicity of language is an important source of cultural enrichment. Languages are to be learnt not only for the sake of instruction but also as an instrument in inter-state, national and international communication and as medium of exchange of ideas, news and views. India is a classic example of a multicultural multi religious country following a policy of multilingualism. It has twenty eight states, seven union territories, 22 national languages, 1162 other languages and dialects.

### **Multicultural context**

Co-existence of many languages, races, cultures, and religions has been the essence of Indian heritage. Indian multilingualism dates back historically to ancient times when ethnic groups and races came in contact with one another through migration from one region to another. Due to this, India continues to manifest a high degree of multilingualism. India developed as a pluralistic nation, in terms of ethnicity, culture, language and religion. In India, linguistic diversity is not by accident, but it is inherited in the process of acquiring the composite culture of the nation. It is an integral part of the Indian composite culture. Although political compulsions and social re-structuring might have contributed a little to its growth,

multilingualism in India was largely a product of close contact between the four language families from the earliest recorded history. The Government of India has given 22 "languages of the 8th Schedule" the status of official language. The number of languages given this status has increased through the political process.

India is a classic example of a multicultural, multi religious country following a policy of multilingualism. Indian culture has always been an integral part of India's education system. Therefore, teachers and learners need to have awareness regarding the issues of cultural diversity between English and the local languages.

### **A brief History of Teaching English in India**

In 1765 English education began in India, when the East India Company became the political power. The first six decades of English education in India did not witness any remarkable progress. However, in 1835 the spread of English was accelerated by the declaration of Macaulay's famous minutes and the founding of the first three universities on the model of University of London.

Macaulay explained that, "English stands pre-eminent among the language of the west, whoever knows that language has ready access to all the vast intellectual wealth which all the wise nations of the earth have created." (Sharma. K.L. 1970:2) Thus, Macaulay realized the importance of English education in India. Many Indian and patriots like Raja Ram Mohan Roy also preferred English education. Macaulay's policy was further endorsed by Lord Bentinck and Lord Auckland who diverted all funds for the development of English educational institutions. However, Macaulay's expectation of anglicising India was not fulfilled. But this policy resulted in the adoption of English as the official language of English which led to stimulate a new consciousness among the Indian.

Article 346 of the Indian Constitution recognises Hindi in Devanagari script as the official language of central government India. The Constitution also allows for the continuation of use of the English language for official purposes. The constitution of India in 1950 laid down that Hindi could be the official language of the union of India and it laid down a period of 15 years for effecting the change over from English to Hindi. Hence, for 15 years English had to function as an associate language. In 1959, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, the Prime Minister assured the non-Hindi people that English would continue as an associated language. There were mass agitations and violence regarding the issue of Hindi and non- Hindi. However, in 1967 the act was amended and restored English to its pre-independence status.

## **The challenges of Teaching English in multicultural Context**

In a multicultural setting of India, English has been playing a crucial role in strengthening our unity and making Indian aware of the strong currents of world culture. In India, the importance of English language is ever growing in this age of globalization and cut-throat competition.

The multicultural education may be an alternative way of improving the cultural awareness in the process of English language teaching. English language is important in order to be able to communicate with people from other cultures. It is a medium to form a picture of society. By applying this multicultural perspective in the practice of English language teaching and learning, the learners will acquire attitude, knowledge, and skills needed to function within their own culture, mainstream cultural and the global community.

Factors of teaching English are as follows

### **1. Teaching English Language as a tool of progress and connectivity**

It has become an important tool of progress and connectivity. Moreover, it serves two distinct purposes. First, it provides a linguistic tool for administrative cohesiveness of the country, causing people of different ethnicity to become united. Secondly, it serves as a language of wider application and communication. Thus, teaching English is used among Indian as a link language and it is the first language for many well educated Indian.

### **2. Teaching English language for the integration of people into Indian society**

It serves as a linguistic bridge between the major countries of the world and India. Furthermore, English has a special place in Indian parliament, judiciary, broadcasting, journalism, and in the education system. Learning English language has become popular for business, commerce and cultural studies. The integration of ICT in English language teaching has stimulated a huge expansion of internet related activity, establishing the future of India as a cyber-technological super-power. English has become an effective means of promoting Indian view of life, and strengthening our culture identity in the world. Hence, it is essential to have positive attitude to English language for the integration of people into Indian society.

### **3. Awareness regarding the issue of cultural diversity between English and the local languages**

After independence India adopted a federal form of government to provide a certain degree of autonomy to the states to formulate their own laws and policies which would assist the different linguistic groups to protect and promote their language and cultural. Moreover,

Indian cultural is a thing of pride with its flexibility, assimilation and preservation of the best practices prevailing in the contemporary society. Indian cultural has always been an integral part of India's education system. Therefore, teachers and learners need to have awareness regarding the issue of cultural diversity between English and the local languages. They need to consider the fact that their students come from different cultural background, have different level of proficiency, speak their first language and also may have different social, religious and economic background. Hence, it is essential to enhance teachers and students' interest in incorporating multicultural approaches into educational setting. The multicultural education maybe an alternative way of improving the cultural awareness in the process of English language teaching.

#### **4. Socio-cultural context of teaching English Language**

Learning second language play an important role in paying respect towards one another's culture. Thus, English language is important in order to be able to communicate with people from other cultures. It is a medium to form a picture of society. Moreover, learning language assists to gain certain issues and ideas about the thinking, background and cultural elements of speaking community. It was Saussure who first said that language is a social phenomenon. It is a network of relationship in which the value of each aspect ultimately depends on the value of the other. Hence, language and culture are integral parts of each other. They are inseparably separable discipline of human world. In this context, JuriLotman remarks in McGuire that, "No language can exists unless it is steeped in the context of culture ; and no culture can exists which does not have at its centre, the structure of natural language." (Tirumalesh: 126) Hence, language and culture are intertwined. It is not possible to teach a language without culture and culture is the essence of culture teaching.

#### **5. English Language develops sociolinguistics competence**

A human society needs language for internal communication between its members as well as for external communication with other societies and to express and record its culture. It is also important to understand the functions which cultural elements perform in the language. As we aware of the fact that the influence of mother tongue is always present in second language acquisition. It is necessary to investigate the importance of learner's first language which makes an impression on a second language. Hence, teaching and learning second language without its socio-cultural context may mislead the communication. The knowledge of second language enlightens and deepens the understanding of teachers and learners as

well. Moreover, second language learning involves efforts to acquire sociolinguistics competence which enriches the appropriate use of language. As John Schuman observed, “the most important influence of L2 learning is the relationship between the social group of the L2 learners and the social group of the speakers of the target language. Successful learning means ‘acculturation’ becoming part of the target culture.” (Vivian: 169)

#### **6. Improve multicultural awareness**

Multicultural education deals with the ideals of social justice and education equality in which all students reach their full potential as learners and as socially aware and active beings, locally, nationally, and globally. It is an education that enables all learners regardless of their gender, ethnicity, race, culture, social class, religion, have an equal opportunity to learn at school. By applying this multicultural perspective in the practice of English language teaching and learning, the learners will acquire, attitude, knowledge, and skills needed to function within their own culture, mainstream culture and the global community. Therefore, it is important to improve multicultural awareness among students. Moreover, teachers should use content from diverse groups. This will enable the students to understand how knowledge in various disciplines is constructed. The teachers should develop positive intergroup attitudes and behaviours, and modify their teaching skills so that students from different racial, cultural, language, and social- class groups will experience equal educational opportunities. An education system should be such that it can create a new generation of individual who believe that all human beings are brothers and that difference of caste, religion, community have no significance.

#### **7. Crucial role in strengthening unity**

English has been taught in India very extensively in schools and colleges for many decades. Today English has entered the fabric of Indian culture. Now English occupies the status of associate official language. It is used widely as a link language in offices and among the educated elites in our country. It is not only a compulsory subject in our schools and colleges but is also the medium of instruction to the large extent. It has become the language of education, advancement, jobs and a symbol of self-improvement. In other words, in a multicultural setting of India English has been playing a crucial role in strengthening our unity and making Indian aware of the strong currents of world culture.

The role of English in a multicultural and multilingual country like India is beneficial as it helps people of various ethnic linguistic groups to be united. Considering the above fact,

learning English as a second language becomes inseparable branch as also unavoidable in Indian education system. There is an awakening in society towards the learning of English. Government too has awakened to the importance of English in education curricula. Unfortunately, despite many recommendations by different education commissions constituted by the government of India, the place of English in the curriculums and methods of teaching have always been in a state of flux.

In the present scenario, India has two national languages for central administrative purpose. They are Hindi and English. Hindi is the national official and main link language in India. English is an associate language. The Indian constitution also officially approves twenty two regional languages for official purpose. In present time, English serves two purposes. First, it provides a linguistic tool for the administrative cohesiveness of the country, causing people who speak different languages to become united. Secondly it serves as a language of wider communication, including a large variety of different people covering a vast area. Generally, English is used among Indians as a link language and virtually it is the first language for many well educated Indians. It is the second language for many, who speak more than one language in India. The English language is a tie that helps bind the many segments of our society together. Also it is a linguistic bridge between the major countries of the world and India. Now it has a special national status in India. It has a special place in the parliament, judiciary, broadcasting, journalism and in the education system. One find surrounded by English everywhere. The importance of the ability to speak or write English has recently increased significantly because English has become the defected standard. Learning English language has become popular for business, commerce and cultural reasons and especially for internet communication.

Modern communications, videos, Journals and newspapers on the internet use English and have made knowing English indispensable. In this way we can say that English language has become as an ; official language‘ associate language‘, associate additional language‘, library language‘, tool language‘, compulsory language‘, optional language‘, additional optional language‘, language of wider communication,‘ language of need filling‘. According to an estimate, in 1989, one third of all the published books in India, and one fifth of the periodicals are in English. According to the 1981 census, the literacy rate in India is 32.23 percent, and the English literacy rate may be about 6.5 percent; this will roughly mean about 25 to 30 million users of English in the country.

## **8. English Learning Attitude**

The idea of learning English to the non-native English speaker can create a great deal of both havoc and potential inspiration and means for success in a person's life. Specifically, it takes a lot of courage, dedication and a positive attitude to create a positive personal space for English learning. Attitude factors aside, the work that is involved in learning English is great, and without at least a sense of what will happen at the end of the long road of studying English, the learner could potentially grow frustrated and give up the effort to learn English.

Teaching English is an important task that produces a number of powerful rewards. In present situation English language Learners are a diverse collection of immigrants, businesspeople, students, and artists who share a dedication to the English language and a love of learning. Teaching English as a second language to these students is an honor and a privilege, one that we as educators share with all of those who strive to give student the tools they need to take on new enterprises and reach for their dreams. The gift of a second language is a window onto a new world, bringing into focus a wealth of conversation, information, and understanding that would otherwise be forever closed to the students who seek to learn a new language. Teaching English as a second language is a noble calling, empowering students to take their places in the global community and become active participants in the global conversation .There are very few countries in the world where English is taught on such a massive scale as in India.

### **Conclusion**

There are very few countries in the world where English is taught on such a massive scale as in India. As a language teacher something must be done to attract and satisfy the needs of the students and enables them to acquire the English language. For this, we have to create the situation in such a way to enable the students to enjoy the skill oriented language drill and at the same time learn the peculiarities and the techniques of language. Moreover, it is imperative to adopt a culture sensitive curriculum. This would facilitate the enhancement of critical culture consciousness among teachers as well as learners. It would promote social integration, preserve local culture and change the way by which the people in these cultures engage with issues of diversity.

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