

# English Language Teaching: Challenges and Strategies from the Indian Perspective

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## Abstract

English, an extensively used language of today, has often been mentioned as 'global language'. It is the lingua franca of the current era and the same is taught and learnt as a second language around the world. In India, English is used not only for communicative purpose but also serves as a link language for inter-state and intrastate coordination as the nation is found with the great ethnic and linguistic diversity. Though modern technology has started playing a considerable role in imparting and acquiring the language in schools and colleges especially in the small towns and rural areas is rather inadequate and unproductive. The students studying English at school and college level manage to get through the exams without making enough attempts to either understand the language or learn to appreciate the utility of language. This article highlights the significance of using English as a tool to fulfill the interminably increasing requirements of the competitive corporate world. The tasks before educators in the contemporary day ELT and strategies to overcome are considered in this paper. The method by which the learners can put their knowledge into real daily practice is to fulfill their real-world necessities to gain an expertise over the language is emphasized.

**Keywords:** ELT in India, received standard english, linguistic imperialism, linguistic globalization, language acquisition.

## 1. Introduction

It is evident that in India, for the last three decades or so, people in general and students in particular have been crazy about speaking English. It is still wonder that the crazy is increasingly high with the development of corporate industry and business in the era of scientific and technological innovations. No doubt, a large number of English Language Teaching Institutes in the name of Spoken English Institutes have been established, mostly private, only to plunder the hard earned money from the aspiring general public. The colleges and universities also organize seminars and conferences at frequent intervals in this regard but nothing useful, encouraging or substantial has emerged out of the exercises. Moreover, what is generally motivated at these institutes is spoken English only and they have very little to do with written English. In the words of R.K. Bansal and J.B. Harrison, "Several books are in the market for those who wish to improve their English pronunciation, correct patterns of accent, Rhythm, and intonation..."

## 2. ELT in India with a Backdrop

It is historically evident that in the forties and fifties in the last century, the study of linguistics was only a distant, remote possibility and did not form a part of syllabi, the course of studies. All that was done in respect of language consisted of lectures on the development of the English language with the borrowings from Scandinavian, Greek, Latin, French and Italian languages. Grimm's Law and Verner's Law, word formation and

degeneration and regeneration of meaning were discussed at length. English could be learnt as a language through literature and not the other way about, and the language was written and spoken correctly and presentably as the senior school students without having any training on linguistics. A scientific study of language is felt for "Language is a type of a patterned human behaviour. It is a way perhaps the most important way, in which human beings interact in social situations. Language behaviour is externalized or manifested in some kind of bodily activity on the part of a performer presupposes the existence of at least one other human participant in the situation".

English Language was meant to be a King's or Queen's English, British English, Received Standard English, etc. The language itself is spoken in a large variety of written and spoken form with the second one dominant. In Great Britain alone, Scottish English is spoken by the highlanders and lowlanders; Irish English is in vogue in and around Wales and Cornwall along with Cockney English. Standard English or Queen's English is used mostly at the universities in the areas around London. In India, people at large speak American English which is different from British English chiefly in three aspects: ideas or decision, accent and spelling. No other form of English like African or Africanized is spoken in India. In fact, the process of navigation is going on steadily for some time now from an era of 'linguistic imperialism' to an age of 'linguistic globalization'.

At this juncture, it would be more apt to cite the most influential model of the spread of English is Braj Kachru's model of World English. In this model the diffusion of English is captured in terms of three Concentric Circles of the language: The Inner Circle, the Outer Circle, and the Expanding Circle. The **Inner Circle** refers to English as it originally took shape across the world in the first diaspora. In this transplanted of English, speakers from England

carried the language to Australia, New Zealand and North America and is now used as a primary language in the United Kingdom, the United States, Australia, New Zealand, Ireland, Canada and South Africa, and some of the Caribbean territories.

The **Outer Circle** of English was produced by the second diaspora of English, which spread the language through imperial expansion by Great Britain in Asia and Africa. This circle includes India, Nigeria, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Malaysia, Tanzania, Kenya, non-Anglophone South Africa, the Philippines (colonized by the US) and others. Countries where most people speak an English-based creole and retain Standard English for official purposes, such as Jamaica and Papua New Guinea, are also in the Outer Circle.

Finally, the **Expanding Circle** encompasses countries where English plays no historical or governmental role, but where it is nevertheless widely used as a medium of international communication. This includes territories such as China, Russia, Japan, non-Anglophone Europe (especially the Netherlands and Nordic countries), South Korea, Egypt and Indonesia. The inner circle (UK, US etc.) is 'norm-providing'; that means that English language norms are developed in these countries. The outer circle (mainly New Commonwealth countries) is 'norm-developing'. The expanding circle (which includes much of the rest of the world) is 'norm-dependent', because it relies on the standards set by native speakers in the inner circle.

There is always a question in the minds of all that should English be decolonized and recourse be taken? The answer should be "No, not at all" if English language learners or students are taken for consideration. It is for two reasons; one, the students have to learn English as a target language keeping in mind the correctness, authenticity and competence as guiding principles, for it is only a person who becomes proficient in the language can make changes or modifications and two, promoting the case and cause of English language has to go alongside the boosting up of regional and local languages.

### Basic Problems of ELT

First, the ELT in India, particularly in the north of Vindhya, suffered a sharp decline with a sickening disorder on account of extra academic factors. Nearly a half century or so ago, there was literally a turmoil all over the country on Hindi-English issue. In north, the advocates of Hindi or Hindustani wanted the complete removal of English from courses of the school and college studies. Interestingly, in the south, the anti-Hindi activists launched prolonged and vigorous agitations and campaigns in favour of English. According to the constitution of India, a federal structure of democratic polity, education is a concurrent subject controlled by both the governments. As the result of continuous and persistent agitation, English Language Teaching in some of the states in north India was altogether stopped so that even today tens and thousands of people who, otherwise competent in their late fifties and sixties, have absolutely no knowledge of English and feel handicapped and helpless in their day to day life. Though the situation has improved now with considerable interest put in, the problem still exists in sizable section of the Indian population which look upon English Language Teaching as a colonial and imperialist legacy. Only a little realize that English is not only

merely a link language in India but also a language of global necessity.

Second, ever since Independence, the Indian educational system has encountered a large number of commissions and committees set up for the ostensible purpose of introducing new policies and bringing out reforms in the existing policies in the education system. The commissions and committees so set up have submitted and are still submitting their reports to the government and the recommendations so made have been considered or adopted for making changes in the system of education including the ELT. It is noteworthy; regrettably, that the sudden and unwarranted, uncalled for changes have also been made in the curriculum from time to time with the result adhocism and improvisation continues to be the hallmark of the education system and policy in India. What the need of the hour is the right kind of education, whether language learning or teaching demands elaborate and careful planning with utmost regularity, continuity, consistency and stability. Education is a discipline that should be taken care of and should not be toyed or trifled with for the mere sake of experiments.

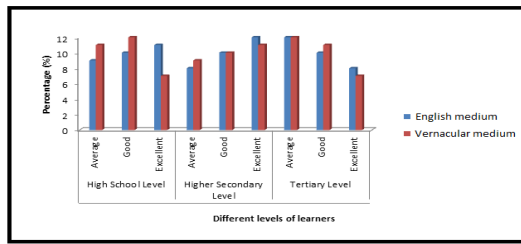
Third, as a sequel to the second one, the ELT is delicate because it involves all the three human components: the child, the adolescent and the adult. In a country like India, there is hardly any coordination at all between the primary and secondary education on the one hand and higher education on the other. In other words, there is not even a semblance of coordination between primary education and secondary education. These three levels of education form separate categories, bodies or entities and are independent. It is regrettable that the system leaves hardly any scope for a proper screening of the students to be done in view of their age, aptitude, motivation, factors among others governing the process of language learning or acquisition. All these are deplorable and have an adverse and deleterious effect on the ELT in India.

Last, this problem is too difficult to understand and appreciate as the nature and importance of governing bodies concerning the system of education. The various boards of education and State Councils of Education and Research Training (SCERT), the University Academic Councils (UAC), the University Grants Commission (UGC), the Department of Education at state level and the Ministry of Human Resource Development are keen on improving and updating the courses of studies in all disciplines from time to time. In this process of doing all these, the ELT is also sought to be improved, updated and rationalized as far as possible. It is disheartening to note that the whole efforts if taken have been thwarted because of an attitude of unhealthy rivalry between the language and linguistic people on the one hand and the people who pose to advocate the cause of literature on the other. The two camps are distinctly divided and the division is maintained so well that it causes damage to the study of English language and literature.

In order to strengthen the point highlighted and to have a better understanding of the language proficiency of the students, an analytical survey based on the data collected from the tertiary level students from the regional medium backup and students with English medium backup was taken. The following table indicates the categories and the specifications of analysis. The respondents have been selected on the basis of random sampling with varied caste and creed.

**Table 1:** Communicative Capability of Students

Categories of Respondents	High School Level			Higher Secondary Level			Tertiary Level			Total
	Average	Good	Excellent	Average	Good	Excellent	Average	Good	Excellent	
English Medium	9	10	11	8	10	12	12	10	8	30
Vernacular Medium	11	12	7	9	10	11	12	11	7	30



**Figure 1:** Communicative capability of students

Among the thirty respondents from the English medium, especially from high school level, nine students are average ten are good whereas only eleven candidates excel in good communication. When it comes to the communicative capability level of students belonging to vernacular medium, there has been a steady rise in proportion as seven present themselves in an excellent manner as compared to the other twelve and eleven who are good and average respectively.

When higher secondary students belonging to the above mentioned categories of respondents are analyzed, it is observed that there has been a slight improvement in their overall performance. Though eight students are mere averages, ten students are good and show betterment and on the other hand almost half of the respondents, twelve students are better. Vernacular medium students also almost share the same quality in this regard as nine are average, ten are good and eleven are excellent.

To the greatest amazement of everyone, learners at the tertiary level show an indifferent response which highlights that there has been a steady fall in performance with regard to their language skills. Among the English medium learners, a few numbers of eight learners alone are excellent unlike the other ten, who are good and a sumptuous number of twelve who are average. Concerning the communication skills of the grown up learners who have their education through their mother tongue, there is a close proximity to the English medium respondents sharing an equal number of twelve each. In this regard, eleven learners are good at communication skills followed by seven who are excellent.

As the general observation goes, learners differ in their caliber and capability. All are not the same. Everybody does not share a common quality. As a result, their choice and selection varies depending upon their maturity level and capacity. The category of respondent are divide into two – English medium and Vernacular medium, of which three levels of students have been chosen for survey. The interpretation of the data and depending upon the conducted survey a , with a three grade point scale of average, good and excellent reveals that most of the students, lose their grip over their second language as they grow old and tend to bring in much of their mother tongue. This poses a serious threat to the learner's enrichment of language skills. It is immaterial to bring to light the medium of instruction but it is evident that students at their tertiary level of earning could not fare well as they used to be during their school days. This is a change in their attitude which has got serious repercussion in their future unless it is checked in time.

### 3. Hypothesis

During all these years, there had been several approaches and methods; theories and techniques to impart the English language skills. Though, there are diverse ways and means of teaching and learning, the language continues to be elusive, especially in a country like India which is both multi lingual and multicultural. For the benefit of the contemporary learners and the posterity as

well, specific challenges are to be identified which in turn needs to be followed by selective strategies. In accordance with the demands of the current generation, through precise modes, teaching could be made the most interesting experience both for the teacher and the taught. The present study is an attempt to highlight the fact that there is a sea of difference between the students opting for different mediums of instruction and it proves that the same yardstick should not be observed for diverse learners. At the same time, it is also noted that the language acquisition of the learners at various stages is not the same but undergo changes owing to educational, economical and socio-cultural set ups.

The above discussed basic problems need the researchers and analysts to take due cognizance of certain issues relevant to the prevailing challenging situation as follows:

- i. There should not be a row between literature and language.
- ii. The educationists should ever try to make an honest and comprehensive assessment of the number and quality of students who are really willing to learn English as a language.
- iii. The factual position must be displayed with regard to the number and quality of trained teachers appointed or to be appointed for teaching English as a language along with the ratio.
- iv. The institutions should have state-of the art language laboratories with sophisticated gadgets and experiments.
- v. The teachings on linguistic concepts and theories that deal with morphology, phonology, phonetics, syntax and semantics about diachronic and the synchronic approach to the study of the language have any impact on the ELT.
- vi. Saussure, Levi Strauss, skinner and Noam Chomsky are well quoted and cited but why not Panini, the first grammarian, besides Katayan, Patanjali, Bhartirihari and Hemachandra taken for the purpose.
- vii. English language learners in India, unlike their counterparts in western countries, never speak English always and they speak their dialects, local or regional languages most of the time. So it is seldom possible to consolidate whatever they receive from their English language teachers.
- viii. Finally, s socio-cultural and linguistic awareness is always needed for fruitful language teaching and learning where the direct involvement of students, teachers and parents should be there.

### 4. Strategies

It is high time the problems needed to be addressed and redressed with the following strategies.

- i. Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU), uses the latest technology besides world class materials. The support of the apex university should be accessed and taken by all the other colleges and universities providing regular stream of education apart from universities offering distant programs.
- ii. The efficacy and value of translation need to be considered as a rigorous linguistic exercise. It demands, rendering of the source language text into target language text irrespective of its size, a persistently increasing awareness of at least two languages, of the appropriate and effective use of words, idioms, nuances of feelings, cogency and significance of ideas. Translation is one of the most potent strategies of language learning and teaching. At the same time,

- dynamic equivalence and formal equivalence are two dissimilar translation concepts and it is to be observed that eminent linguist like Eugene Nida discarded the terms literal translation and free translation.
- iii. The importance of all innovations and experiments that have been carried out and are being carried out in the field needs to be borne in mind. The armpit of the familiarity with every new thought should be broadened. It may be harmful if mindless pursuit of everything new is practiced. Spoken form of English is needed but the written form should not be neglected at all.
  - iv. It is evitable that new and suitable strategies have to be evolved for striking a workable balance between traditional and the new mode of language teaching and learning. The very basic grammar and compositions cannot be ignored but given less prominence while motivation to speak in English is practiced in the language classroom.

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## 5. Conclusion

The case and cause of English language teaching and learning can be promoted through the cultivation of level-wise skill based habits such as group discussion and proper language training at home in a conducive ambience with the active and willing cooperation of the parents. English should be practiced for as long hours as possible. The language learners need to realize the delicacy of the process involving the language learning and so they have to cultivate, organize and develop their skills in speaking and writing as well on their own, independent with the guidance provided if any. Self education and practice of language are autonomous exercise and have no substitute. At the same time it is also equally important to keep in mind that one should never be finicky or extra-fastidious about the language. Pronunciation is something rooted in metabolism and so it need not be given as much as that is given by native people as far as communication is concerned. To cap to all, human factor of the individual trial and initiative is the one that ought to be given the highest priority; innovative and sophisticated technology may creep in afterwards.

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