**UNIQUE CHALLENGES OF TEACHING ENGLISH IN MULTILINGUAL INDIA**

**Dr.PR Chandra Reddy**

Associate Professor

Department of English

Mother Theresa Institute of Engineering and Technology

Melumoi, Palamaner, Chittoor Dt, Andhra Pradesh, PIN 517408, India

chandrareddy.pr@gmail.com

**Abstract:** English is the voice of science, technology, commerce, law and industry today and it has often been regarded as the global language. For all the countries, it is the lingua franca of the present contemporaries. English is being taught and learnt as a foreign or a second language across the world. In India, English is being used for inter-state communication and even for intrastate communication. It is due to the wide linguistic diversity with almost 780 spoken languages across the country. It is indeed an appalling fact that ours is the second multilingual country in the world. People speak different languages in different states, with different dialects and every state eulogizes its state language is the best of all. And some have no script at all. Though there is a fusion of modern technologies with the advent of electronic gadgets, in educational institutions to teach English effectively, the learners in the towns and rural areas are deprived of this facility. Besides the era being modern, there can be seen the age old practice of traditional teaching and the teachers are reluctant to update themselves. This glaring lapse is found in the schools and colleges of public sector. As a result, the students at schools and colleges are just able to get through the English examinations in some way or the other. They don’t make enough efforts to understand the language or to communicate with others in it. By and large, the situation is grim even in the engineering colleges in rural and semi-urban areas. The teachers of English have to undergo meticulous English Language Training and employ different strategies to make the students learn and practice English for their future. This article throws light on the significance of learning English to be successful in the competitive corporate world today as well as the unique challenges in teaching and learning it against the core multilingual backdrop.

**Terminology:** real-time, standard English, linguistic imperialism, linguistic globalization, language acquisition, multilingual, semi-urban

Of late, some of the states in India have made the medium of instruction is English. Almost all the private educational institutions have already chosen the path of English medium and declared as it is mandatory for the influx. They also make it a point that the teachers should have fluency in English no matter what their subjects are. In some states, the first language can be substituted by the second language or the third language and in that way the vernacular language can be annulled. Apart from it, there is no opportunity to study engineering and medicine or any post graduation course in one’s mother tongue; here the medium is English alone. Besides, if one wants go into job market, minimum command of English is obligatory. In this way the commercial angel escalated the importance of English in India. The teachers who are at 30s, 40s, 50s, still embrace the traditional teaching in their classrooms where the teacher is an active giver and the students are the passive recipients. This way of teaching nullifies the interest of students in English gives no scope to learn it. As a result, students are unable to acquire and use their knowledge in English language in the real-time practice. Therefore English Language Training is necessary for the teachers, but unfortunately it is not done en masse.

When it is viewed retrospectively, it can be said that for the last three decades, parents and their children have become very particular about speaking English. That consciousness has permeated into rural areas too. The parents are worried if their children are not able to speak English. But the student community is, by and large, reluctant to speak English even in the engineering colleges because there is some irrational fear of English. This fear can be dispelled easily at the primary and high school level but it not done by the teachers of public sector in particular. The teachers in private sector are under the pressure of their managements but majority of them don’t know how to make the students speak English. It is because they haven’t undergone any English Language Training. If it is the case of English teachers, the other subject teachers are the great translators, especially those who are in the institutes of public sector; they read from the text and translate into the vernacular language. All the teachers except some who work in some reputed private schools tread the same path.

On the other hand, the demand for communicative English is looming large with the development of corporate industry which offers jobs with sound packages. In addition to that, there are scientific and technological innovations opening doors to the different worlds. The paradoxical thing here is the students are well aware of the importance of speaking English and they would like to get that ability, but they want it without trying to speak English. It is like attempting to make an omelet without an egg. Then the thousand dollars’ question is what prevents them from speaking English? The answer is as simple as ABC, they have scare to speak it. Any language becomes tougher with the growing age. The miserable thing is the teachers, in many engineering colleges, teach their subjects in English, but when they interact with the students, they switch over to the vernacular language. Why….? ….because they seldom have any knowledge of functional or communicative English. It is like a situation where a person who knows nothing about something is getting advice and help from another person who knows almost nothing. The outcome is English remains ‘an unattainable haven.’

On account of the growing demand for English, there has been the mushroom growth of English Language Teaching Institutes, in the name of Spoken English Centers or Institutes. They are all run by private people in almost all the towns and there is no city without them. Majority of the Spoken English Centers in towns, plunder the hard earned money from the aspiring public and students. However, there is exception to some reputed Spoken English Institutes in cities; in the remaining institutes what the teaching faculty does is teaching pure English grammar as such. It is like a belt running on two pulleys; there is motion but there is no progression. The rules and regulations of English grammar further create more scare in the learners. It is like adding fuel to fire. Grammar of any language is to know the nature of that particular language. It has ingredients which can’t become food; they are to be used in certain quantities to make food. Meanwhile, colleges and universities often conduct fests, seminars and workshops thinking that the students can interchange their knowledge and improve their communication ability. Only a tiny part of the purpose is being served. But, there are a lot of books, both in hard and soft copies, and online videos are available to improve one’s spoken ability in English and they are all just a click away from the learners. Yet the problem continuous to exist because the simple principle is if one wants to speak English, one has to speak it. There is no other go. One can’t learn it by being a silent spectator. There is a saying, ‘If one doesn’t follow what one wants, one will never have it.’

The dissemination of English all over the world happened because of the British rule, centuries ago. That led to the linguistic imperialism or language imperialism. It means the imposition of a dominant language on other people. This imposition was considered to be a sign of power in those days. Thus English reached the nook and corner of the world. At last, the British left all the counties and they confine themselves to their own county now, however English language remained in all the countries and it has now become the global language. It is everyone’s language at present. English can be learnt as a language through practicing and it takes some time to get acquainted with it. Besides, reading stories and watching videos can enhance one’s ability in speaking English correctly and presentably. The key is to learn basics in English. Everyone makes mistakes while learning it. That is very common. If someone says, ‘I have never fallen from a bicycle,’ we can understand that he doesn’t know how to ride a bicycle. Once one knows the nature of English, one can understand that it is the easiest language in the world. Once there was an aversion towards English especially in the Northern India, but now everything is changed and the present generation has understood that English is not just a lingua franca, but a language of global necessity and it is a launching pad to reach better heights in life. Meanwhile, there are sea changes in the academic syllabus and in the education system. Education is linked to livelihood. Government at the centre and governments at the states adopted changes in the system of education including English Language Training. There is a proverb, ‘One teaches and many learn.’ This is one side of the coin, the other side is the attitudes of teachers and learners should be changed.

Students can hardly have English speaking environment in the rural and semi-urban areas in India. No one speaks to them in English. It is one of the major obstacles in making them speak English. The only ray of hope is the educational institutions. It is strongly felt that the need of the hour is the right kind of education, whether language learning or teaching demands elaborate and careful plan with utmost regularity, continuity, consistency, stability and above all, there should be high commitment in teachers and students with learning and practicing attitude. The teachers ought to realize that teaching is a complex activity and it is dynamic. It is said that a teacher is a lifelong student. They play major role in the lives of students. Now education is student centered and so it is their bounden duty to justify to their subjects in applied way. As the instruction being English, every teacher has to interact with students in English in the real-time situations. If teachers remain mere translators, for students, speaking English remains a Himalayan task. In such case, medium plays no role. Some students are excellent in technical, but they are very bad at communication in English despite the medium being English.

Of late, several technologies have been integrated into English teaching to make the classrooms more effective and impressive. During all these years, there has 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, English language continues to be elusive, especially in a country like India which is multilingual. For the benefit of the contemporary learners and the posterity as well, specific challenges are to be identified which in turn needs to be addressed through selective strategies by English teachers. In accordance with the demands of the current generation, through precise modes, teaching would be made the most interesting experience both for the teacher and the taught. Teaching should never become boring and routine, particularly English language teaching should be student centered. Every student should be given an opportunity to converse in English. Undoubtedly there is a sea of difference among the students who opt for different medium of instruction where it is possible. In such cases the teachers can’t employ the same methodology for all and at the same time, learning capabilities of students would be different. Therefore the teachers have to be attentive in observing all the students to understand how their language acquisition is.

It is necessary to take due cognizance of certain issues relevant to the prevailing and challenging situations in the classrooms and teachers need training and retraining. Language and literature should be connected; it means reading and telling stories. This can work very well at the primary and high school level. Teachers have to find out the students who are interested in learning English and make them participate in English learning activities. On seeing their peers performing, other students can get inspiration. The managements of the institutions should over see how English teaching is going on. All the institutes from KG to PG must have state-of-the-art English language laboratories with sophisticated gadgets and software applications and this can pave a way to technology based language learning. The English teachers should realize that the English language learners in India, unlike their counterparts in the Western countries, can’t have English speaking environment everywhere as people speak the local languages and the only place where they have an access to English is in their classrooms alone. Therefore the classes should be productive and effective. English language teaching can be taken to the meritorious level with the activities in the classrooms like situational conversation, questions and answers, picture description, reading aloud, writing on hearing voice, expansion of clues, storytelling etc. Teachers should never censure the learners showing for their mistakes. The learners should understand that the beginning of anything is a little difficult and fear of speaking English is the worst enemy.

**Conclusion:** Due to India being multilingual, the students from rural areas don’t feel the necessity of speaking English as they have their mother tongue for communication. Though the teachers take utmost care, majority of students pay less attention out of ignorance. Some students at school level don’t know the importance of English. Even the students in engineering colleges feel some miracle will happen and some company will hire them. But the fact is it is a mere illusion and the students realize the fact just before going into the interview rooms, by then most of the valuable learning time might have slipped through their fingers. Thus the fusion of committed teachers and students with learning attitude is not very common. It can be seen only in some places, at some times, not in every institute in India. By and large, all the teachers know that learning never ends and so they should remember the proverb, ‘What's sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander.’ So teachers ought to update their techniques of teaching. Let us remember **Charles Darwin**, ‘‘It is not the most intellectual of the species that survives; it is not the strongest that survives; but the species that survives is the one that is able best to adapt and adjust to the changing environment in which it finds itself.’’

\*\*\*\*