

Difficulties in learning English as a Second Language

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Preamble

English is being treated as a world language because of its vast presence all over the world. At this juncture, learning English gains currency. Majority of Indian students, particularly from rural pockets consider this seven-letter word as a magical and a mystical word. The moment they hear something in English they start feel uneasiness. As a result of this, teachers who handle English classes face insurmountable difficulties. Students too find it difficult to listen and to understand the English language. What are the reasons for this? What are the remedial measures to be taken to alleviate these problems? This paper critically evaluates the problems faced by students in the language classroom when they enter into college environment. Appropriate and adequate remedial measures are cited for the successful rectification of these problems too.

Problems in learning:

Twelve years of school study do not make students mastery over English. Why this happen? While they are in schools English is not taught properly. As majority of the students are hailed from rural areas, bilingual

method is adopted in language classes. This method helps only to slow-learners to some extent. Moreover, this act reduces the real learning process as a whole. If a student does not understand anything in English, he/she asks for explanation in L1 i.e. in his/her mother tongue. Consequently, the English teacher is in a state to adopt bilingual method. ELT specialists view this as a wrong methodology.

In schools, students are being taught that English is an international language. To learn this language requires constant practice and patience. The kind of feeling that prevails among students is that it is not possible to achieve fluency or mastery over English language. This kind of tendency prevents students from learning new languages like English. Since most of the students are first generation learners, how can a student get acquainted with the foreign language with regard to English without any guidance from their parents and others? Even though students are studying English, they are not able to produce even a single sentence without any grammatical error in English. The reason stated for this is that they study subjects from the examination point of view only. This is true with English language too. Our examination system is such that it makes students' rote memorisation rather than testing their analytical and creative skills. In this process, they memorise lessons, reproduce them in exam halls and forget them in the same day itself.

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. Exposure too is far less to them. School study is an important phase in students' life. A student grows from a small child to a grown up when he/she completes higher secondary examinations. After this phase, a student enters into college life. This period is considered as a transition period. The system followed in colleges is different from that of schools. Moreover, students have their own whims and fancies about college life because of the tremendous influence of mass-medias like theatres and satellite channels on them. These medias project a false perception about colleges and students. On seeing such things in movies, students take it for granted. As a result of this, they have formed an image for a college and want to act upon those images.

During twelve years of school life students learn consistency, discipline, determination, order and obedience. The moment he/she enters into college life, he thinks as if he/she got freedom. He/she forgets good things, which he learnt through twelve years of rigorous training in school. The general thinking about college among student community is that college is very liberal in dealing with the students. No one cares for anything. They

do not have responsibilities at all. Whatever they think they can implement them. Attending class is not compulsory. Keeping these views in mind they find it difficult in sitting in classrooms and listening to the lessons being taught to them. All their views about a college are shattered into pieces the moment when a teacher enters in a classroom and begins to teach and imposes certain restrictions on them. At this juncture, severe problems start with the slow-learners. These students too passed in the higher secondary examinations. For them, sitting and listening a language class is something an uphill task, while others listen the class with rapt attention. There are two problems which a language teacher faces at this critical point of time. First, a teacher has to manage all the students in a classroom. If any of the students create problems it is an embarrassing situation for him/her. Second, the teacher identifies the students who create problems. It is not advisable to punish such boys in front of others. This is so because students will be affected psychologically. Sometimes students may turn against teachers. Simultaneously, they begin to see a teacher as his adversary. This is not a healthy trend. At the same time, to correct them inside the classroom will reduce the teaching time. There is also a danger of deviation from the teaching of subject too. The hyperbolic portrayal of students in colleges in movies which is contrary to what is actually going on in colleges. The very day a student enters in a college, he associates himself with a student of college as shown in movies. The problem arises at the initial stage itself with such students. So, the primary task of teachers is to guide them in proper way and make them realise the value of college life.

Remedial Measures:

Teachers' responsibility lies not only with the average and above average students but also with below average/slow learners. In short, a good teacher has to handle classes for all the students in a classroom. Individual attention will solve all kinds of problems which arise while taking classes. As a remedial measure, slow-learners should be given extra coaching and counselling. If a student errs in a class he/she should not be scolded or punished for his/her misbehaviour in the class itself. This will make them weaken psychologically. Instead, call such students individually after class hours are over and provide valuable advices and counsel them the significance of college life. This will create a congenial relationship between staff and students.

To ease problems from the day one itself, an English teacher has to encourage the students to talk in English only. This act makes them confident. By taking extra care, the English teacher will impart the nuances spoken aspects of a language once/twice in a week as a remedial measure. When such type of spoken English classes begins, student-friendly or learner-centric environment will certainly prevail, as more and more

students will participate in the session. Teachers should motivate students for participative learning. This will solve all the stumbling blocks in students. Teaching learning is not a one-way process. It is a multi-way process. As soon as the teaching is over, students should raise their doubts, clarification, etc. By doing so, students' communication skills in English will grow. To develop this, sufficient practice must be given to students in their preliminary stage. While maintaining classroom management concurrently learner-friendly atmosphere should also prevail there. This ensures students to learn more and participate more. Above all, a teacher is not only a teacher but also a friend, guide and a philosopher to students. He/she guides students not only to pass in the exam but also to face challenges and take right decisions during the time of crisis in life. This is, of course, a real and tough task ahead of a good teacher.