

Issues and Challenges in Learning English as a Second Language and its Mitigation

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Abstract

English language has emerged as one of the most popular languages, with the power to elevate the standards of living, catering to the demands, ranging from the job requirement to social life connectivity. English is a language that dominates most of the aspects of the global scenario. This creates a strong need to learn this particular language. However, there exist certain issues and challenges, which stand significant to be addressed, in order to understand as to what actually obstructs the learning of English. The issues might arise at a teaching level or at any administrative level, causing challenges at the learners' end. The causes may also lie in the family perceptions towards learning English which may weaken the motivation of the learner to learn and further, built-up a poor attitude towards the language. But, at a very primary level it is the self-motivation, attitude of the individual and strong self-esteem that produces a desire to learn this language. The geographical location of the English institutes may also pose a pressure on the learners, in terms of travelling expense and time. Poor teaching technology and improper implementation of government policies are some of the major issues that back such challenges. The significance of this paper lies in the fact that it highlights the issues and challenges of learning English as a second language (ESL) in modern ages. This work also attempts to highlight the mitigating measures to face such challenges in a multilingual country like India.

Keywords: English language learners, issues, challenges, online learning

Introduction

Learning any language as a second language has never been an easy task, and English is one of the challenging languages with its high rising demand in the global scenario.–No doubt, the literacy of this language elevates the standard of living of the people; however, it does bring along with it many issues and challenges for its learners who learn it as a second language. There are certain factors hindering the smooth learning of this language, and thus the learner exhibits certain failure traits, for example, lack of vocab, grammatical/ sentence framing mistakes, lack of fluency in speaking, lack of variation, lack of confidence in speaking this language and many more. The online platform for learning English can induce motivation and a positive attitude towards English. Language anxiety can be reduced to a great extent. The stronger the learners' beliefs of self-efficacy and perceived value of English learning, the stronger will be the motivation and self-regulation in learning English (Wang & Ju, 2020)¹. The anxiety of test-evaluation is reduced and self-evaluation inculcates higher productivity in learning English. Online platform encourages self-efficacy and motivation to combat the issues and challenges of learning English language.

Literature review

The issues and challenges of learning as a second language can only be mitigated through the process of self-regulation. It is educational psychology that propounds the concept of self-regulation in language learning. This has also aroused interest in scholarly writings of second language acquisition (SLA). There are several elements that induce self-regulated learning (SRL) namely, self-generated thoughts, feelings, strategies and behaviors (Dornyei & Ryan, 2015). It is basically a cyclic process which has three major phases, namely planning, monitoring and evaluating. 'From one phase to the next, self-reflection is necessary because it links advanced learners' metacognitive knowledge (what learners know) and self-regulation (what they do and how they prepare for learning). This suggests that reflection is not a

fourth phase, separate from other phases in SRL cycle, but automatically happens throughout the SRL process' (Zimmerman B. , Investigating Self-Regulation and Motivation: Historical Background, Methodological, 2008) (Tseng, Liu, & Nix, 2017).

It is the self-directive process in self-regulation in the foreign language learning, as has been emphasized in the field of education psychology. This adopts the learner to trigger and in perseverance of their cognitive, emotional and behavioral activities in their foreign language learning goals. This further transforms the mental ability of the learners, dealing with innumerable micro-processes of skills related to language learning process to interrelate with each other.

A five-dimensional model put forward by Tseng (2017), to explain the strategies of self-regulatory activities of English language learners. In the previous works of self-regulatory language learning process, Tseng et al. proposed that the English language learning self-regulation process includes commitment control, metacognitive knowledge control, satisfaction control, thoughts and emotions control, and social environment control. This was later confirmed (Zimmerman B. , Investigating Self-Regulation and Motivation: Historical Background, Methodological, 2008).

Major empirical studies have suggested that self-regulation is multifaceted in nature. It also includes some socio-educational constructs such as socio-cultural, cognitive, metacognitive, behavioral and self-motivational aspects (Schunk & Ertmer, 2000).

According to Schunk and Ertmer (2000), self-regulation consists of six dimensions in relation to learners' belief factor which can also be interpreted in the stages of English language learning. These six dimensions were: goal setting, the use of effective learning strategies, the establishment of ideal learning environment, effective time management, seeking help when necessary, and, more importantly, preserving positive beliefs regarding one's capabilities, the anticipated learning difficulties, the values of learning, and the sense of pride, achievement and satisfaction with continuous efforts. In this sense, positive learner beliefs will influence self-regulated learning.

However, according to the social cognitive theory, as put forward by Bandura and Zimmerman (Bandura, 1991), the effective self-regulation depends upon the sense of self-efficacy in using various learning skills to achieve foreign language proficiency.

In the Indian context, not only learning but also teaching has been a challenge (Kalia, 2017). Recognizing the global demand of English language, there is a need to learn and teach English in India as well, but the paucity of untrained and unskilled English language teachers in India have added to the growing challenges of the learners (Bhoi, 2013). There are also a good number of difficulties faced by the Urdu and Hindi speaking Indians in India and abroad (Hashmi, 2016). There are several reasons of the slow growth among the students in the proficiency levels of English language in terms of listening, speaking, reading and writing (S.Edith, 2016). Moreover, there are a number of discrepant challenges faced by the students coming from different socio-economic backgrounds (Rachna, 2017).

Issues and challenges in learning ESL

There are many issues that cause such challenges among the English language learners. Basically, these issues have namely four sources, self, family, teachers and the government. The sources have been discussed as follows:

1. **Self:** A positive self-image is very crucial towards achieving anything in life. This positivity enhances motivation and inculcates a positive attitude towards learning English. Awareness of individual needs and aims in life is only possible when the person is independent and practical in life. The sources of hindrances towards learning English can be broadly classified into internal and external.
 - a) **Internal:** The factors that have the source of effect from within the individual can be classified as the internal sources of hindrances towards learning English. The following are the factors that adversely affect English language learning:

- i) *Lack of discipline in learning:* Discipline is the basic factor of achievement in the life of any person; lack of it can serve as a major drawback in learning the language. This may affect the time management of the learner and may result in poor efficiency of the language learnt.
- ii) *Lack of awareness:* Awareness of the productivity, need and efficiency of English language is significant to avail all the possible benefits of the language. However, the lack of such awareness can bar the learning of English language of benefiting from it. Such benefits may be classified as under:
 - a) *Economic:* The economic benefits include job opportunities, higher education and any other activity which helps learner of English to avail any economic benefit in terms of profiting from monetary gains.
 - b) *Socio-cultural:* The socio-cultural benefits include elevation in the status in society, cultural distinction, attention among the peer circle, expanding the friend circle, westernized standards of living and any such other socio-cultural benefits of the learner of English language.
 - c) *Personal:* The benefits at the personal level include self-satisfaction, fulfilling personal desires, enriching the knowledge of the globalized language i.e., English, improvisation in the command of the language and any such gains which benefits the individual at personal level.

- iii) *Lack of willingness*: Mere awareness may not help the learner if he/she lacks the willingness to continue the use of English language in any benefitting situation. Therefore, there is a need of a strong source of willingness for learning this language.
- iv) *Lack of patience*: Many individuals may have a strong will power, proper awareness and good discipline in their life, however, they may lack patience, and, this makes it difficult to learn the language. Patience is dire need after any failure, and learning of this language is not an exception.
- v) *Lack of seriousness*: This is another factor of an obstruction towards learning English language. By lack of seriousness it means trying to learn the language without any aim, and this may lead to lack of momentousness in learners.
- vi) *Lack of Independence*: Human mind has a tendency to opt for a self-restraint behavior. This may restrict the willingness to learn this language. This type of lack of freedom comes from within. Freedom restricted by self can be enhanced by modifications in self-perception.
- vii) *Lack of practice*: Practice makes perfect. Lack of practice of English language will lead to the lack of command over the language. This will in turn affect the fluency, vocab, pronunciation, colloquialism, grammar, variation, confidence and coordination in communication, low self-satisfaction and poor impression of the knowledge of the language. This can be improvised by regular reading, writing and speaking of the language. Listening to English audio-visual media can also benefit in the long run.

- viii) *Poor motivation*: Poor motivation in English language learning is not a good factor to benefit the language learners. Strong motivation can always be backed up by any economic, socio-cultural or personal favors of English language.
- ix) *Negative attitude*: Attitude is a settled way of thinking or feeling about something. Having a negative attitude towards learning English will obstruct the openness towards the language and will further affect the willingness of learning the language.
- x) *Low self-esteem*: A poor or low self-esteem will discourage the learner to initiate the learning of English language. Hence, a strong or a balanced self-esteem state of the individual is very important to encourage the progress the of English language learning.
- xi) *Lack of commitment*: All the above drawbacks may lead to a lack of commitment from the learners' side. A strong commitment towards learning English language may define learners' inclination towards English language. If the learner lacks commitment towards learning English there can be no progress in having the command over the language.

b) External:

- i) *Peer circle*: Choosing to belong to the peer circle that speaks native mother tongue, which is of course not the English language, will affect adversely in the process of English language learning.
- ii) *Geographical restraints*: Making a wrong choice of the geographical location of English language institutes, will not benefit English language learning. This choice

could be made considering the political favoritism towards English language, cultural outlook of the localities of that place of residence, social abrogation towards English language in the society the learner lives in and cost or/and distance of travel from the place of residence to the place of learning.

- iii) *Lack of management of the learning resources:* Every penny spent on the English language learning resources counts. An improper management of the resources highly cost the learner if he/she has a limited earning or sources of earning. A proper management of the learning resources may save a lot of time and money. For this a person can temporary employ external but informal sources of management, such as family members and friends.

2. **Family of the aspirant of English language:** Self-determination in learning English language is important. However, the family of the learner, who aspires to learn English language, plays an important role in motivating and carving the attitude of the individual towards learning the language. There are certain factors that affect impression of English language on the minds of the aspirants. The factors where family behaves as the influencer of the English language learners have been discussed as below.

- i) *Use of native language:* If in the family of the English language aspirant, use of native language is encouraged the practice of fluency and focus of English communication and interaction diminishes and this also obstructs the learning and language speaking accuracy of English.
- ii) *Lack of motivation:* Family plays a very vital role in the process of motivation for any endeavor. This is also the

same for inculcating encouragement for English language leaning. However, lack of family motivation towards learning also diminishes the focus of the English language learner.

- iii) *Poor attitude*: Family reassurance towards English language learning is also central in developing the attitude of the learner. A strong positive attitude enhances the skills of commitment of the learner towards speaking and learning English. However, the lack of it may result in discouragement of learner towards English language learning, thus, developing a negative/neutral attitude towards the language.
- iv) *Economic disparity*: English is considered as the language of the elite sections of the society with economic affluence. Any pressure influenced by the disparity of economic status may lead to discrepancies in the process of English language development in the learner.
- v) *Cultural restraints*: The heterogeneity of the culture dejects the flourishing of English language if assimilation and acculturation is not practiced. This also hinders English language learning process of the learner.

3. **Teachers' role**: An efficient teacher is the person who has the effective capability of imparting knowledge of the subject with the possibility to result any change in the learners attitude or behavior. Lack of motivation and poor attitude of the English language instructor, practice of inappropriate methods and approaches in teaching and inefficient teachers with improper English teaching skills are some of the major factors that influences the learner in a negative way. This is another dimension of the English language learning issue among the aspirants due to ineffective activity of the teachers, educators and academicians.

4. **Government:** A strong administrative implementation of the education policies plays a significant role in the process of development in English language learning among the learners.

- i) Improper infrastructure
- ii) Inaccurate government policies
- iii) Shortage of appropriate Teaching (Audio-Visual) aids
- iv) Shortage of English language educators
- v) Inefficient education system

The above given issues give birth to following challenges in learning to speak and write in English, lack of Grammar/ Sentence Framing

- a) Lack of Vocabulary
- b) Lack of Colloquialism
- c) Improper Pronunciation
- d) Poor Variations in English
- e) Poor Fluency
- f) Deficiency in Confidence levels while speaking in English
- g) Poor Coordination while communicating in English
- h) Low level of Satiety in transmitting a message in English

Conclusion and suggestions

The paper promotes online English language learning process, as it mitigates the language learning deficiencies among the learners. Online language learning not only inculcates motivation but also intrigues a positive attitude by reducing the stress of evaluation process and increase the value of self-efficacy leading to a higher learning productivity level.

If we analyse, for instance, an interrelationship between anxiety and online learning, Pichette suggested that, since foreign language anxiety makes learners less active, and reluctant to discuss and communicate with their classmates in the classroom, one would naturally think those students would turn to online learning in order to avoid face-to-face interactions with their peers [(Pichette, 2009) (Wang & Ju, 2020)].

However, the fact is that there are still certain anxieties, as well as a lack of self-confidence, frequently reported by online language tutors and teachers. From research that investigated the role of tutoring conducted by Burge et al., almost one fifth of respondents expressed their willingness to obtain motivational support, such as positive feedback and encouragement from their tutors. These were even more important than the tutors' profession and knowledge of the course content (Burge, Howard, & Ironside, 1991). Oral interactions in class accounted for the majority of foreign language learning anxiety [(Pichette, 2009) (Wang & Ju, 2020)].

Foreign language courses, no matter whether online or offline, necessarily involve oral interactions among peers. Therefore, online foreign language learning anxiety did not present significant differences from its counterpart in the classroom [(Coryell & Clark, 2009), (Thompson & Lee, 2014), (Wang & Ju, 2020)]. In this respect, the *Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale* developed by Horwitz et al. provided us with a simple way to quantify online foreign language learning anxiety [(Bandura, 1991) (Wang & Ju, 2020)].

The major hypothesis of Wang and Ju (2020) were that; (a)online English learner belief positively predicted online self-regulated English learning; (b) online English learning anxiety negatively predicted online self-regulated English learning; (c) online English learning motivation mediated the associations between online English learner beliefs and online self-regulated English learning, and between online English learning anxiety and online self-regulated English learning (Wang & Ju, 2020).

Finally, in concluding remarks it can be said that, it is the online learning platform for English language learners that can induce motivation and a positive attitude towards English. Thus, language anxiety can be reduced to a great extent. This also attempts to state that the stronger the learners' beliefs of self-efficacy and perceived value of English learning, the stronger will be the motivation and self-regulation in learning English (Wang & Ju, 2020). The anxiety of test-evaluation is reduced and self-evaluation inculcates higher productivity in learning

English. Online platform encourages self-efficacy and motivation to combat the issues and challenges of learning English language.

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