ELT in Multi-cultural India: Challenges and Solutions

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Abstract

Globalization is a buzz word in the present socio-political-academic world. It has brought a lot of changes in all these aspects. It has not only changed the life style of the world population but also revolutionized the education system. Because of this globalization, the entire world has become a small living habitation. It has led to the movement of people from one place to another for business, education, etc. This Globalization has brought a new dimension to education i.e. Multiculturalism. A class room has been cosmopolitanized due to the involvement of students from different cultures, backgrounds and countries. So, teaching an International language like English in these classrooms should consider the background of all these students with different cultures. It has become a herculean task for the teachers of English language to improve the language proficiency among the students. They are facing many challenges in the teaching-learning process. This paper throws light on the challenges faced by the English language teachers and offers some possible solutions to this Multiculturalistic classroom setting.

Key Words: Globalization, Multiculturalism, Cosmopolitanism

Introduction:

First, English language has become lingua franca of the world. It can link any two individuals from any two countries, races, ethnicities or cultures. In India, we observe a lot of diversity as there are so many people from different cultures, races or ethnicities getting educated. Secondly, all these people are not aware of others cultures as well as languages. Because of Globalization, people from different countries are joining local schools and colleges. So, they bring not only their culture but also their language. Presently, Indian classrooms are occupied with students from local cultures and foreign cultures. Multiculturalism, which was started in the U.S.A, Mexico, China and Canada, is spreading to Indian classrooms. Indian universities and colleges have become alma maters to the students of Nepal, Bhutan, Afghanistan and other African nations. So, teaching all these students with a lot of cultural differences is a tough task which should be dealt very carefully by the language teachers. As English has attained the status of
Global language and International language, it is the only media through which education is provided in these multiculturalistic classrooms. But, teaching a local student is completely different from teaching a student from a different culture. We can find so many differences in them like their culture, family background, habits, language abilities etc. Finally, we should consider all these differences and have to find innovative solutions to teach them. Multiculturalism is an important idea/process which we cannot avoid in this globalised environment. We have to embrace this new shift in the Indian education system. It requires so many changes in the present education system like curriculum, material design, teaching methodologies, behavior of the teachers, government policies etc. But, we have to face some challenges to encourage multiculturalistic education in our Indian classrooms.

The Role of English in Multicultural India:

English has been dominating the entire world and all the nations have realized the importance of English language. China which rejected the domination of English, also now started teaching English in their schools as English has become a Global language and a Link language.

The Indian government at the time of Independence movement identified the potential of English language. After getting Independence, the former leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Raghupati Venkata Ratnam Naidu gave importance to English language. The Kothari commission also gave its nod to the teaching of English language at school level and proposed a three language formula in the Indian education system during 1964-66. Since then, English language has been accepted by all the states in India. All the official transactions of state governments and central governments are carried out in English language. So, English is embraced by one and all in our country. Now, Indians are known as the fluent speakers of English language after the native speakers. We have developed our own variety of language i.e Indian English.

As English language teaching is taking place in all types of courses like Engineering, Pharmacy, Polytechnic and Schools, it has received a lot of importance in job selection process. So, most of the students are exposed to this language at any point of their education. Now, Globalization led to the moment of foreign students to different countries. Developed countries like the U.S.A,
Canada have been known for their multiculturistic environment. Similarly, India which is a developing country is also known for its multiculturistic and cosmopolitan environment. Indian universities and colleges have become alma mater for different students from different cultures. All these students must be taught English language which enables them to study their core subjects as well as improves cultural cooperation among multicultural classrooms. We should learn culture and multicultural education before discussing its challenges and solutions of ELT in multicultural India.

Culture refers to a group/community which shares common experiences that shape the way they understand the world.

Multicultural Education is a process and an educational movement which is caused by globalization. Globalization has revolutionized many aspects of the world like business, lifestyle, education etc. The aim of Multicultural Education is to provide equal opportunities to the students of different cultures, ethnicities, racial and language groups. It requires a lot of changes in the present education system, curriculum, materials, teachers, teaching methodologies and government policies. According to James.A.Banks, “The major goal of Multicultural Education is to help students develop the knowledge, attitudes or skills needed to function within their own multicultures and other microcultures and the global community. “

**Importance of Multicultural Education in India**

- Provides a safe and better learning environment for all.
- Creates awareness among the students about global issues.
- Improves cultural consciousness
- Strengthens cultural bond among different individuals.
- Encourages universal citizenship.
- Eradicates cultural discrimination among the people.

**Challenges of Multiculturalism in India:**
As India is a multiculturalistic country, teaching English has become a herculean task. English language teachers are facing a lot of challenges in teaching English to the students with different cultural background. Every culture has its own language, customs and beliefs. These issues hinder the learning of English which is a second language or a foreign language to Indian students. So, Mastering English language is a challenging and new process as it requires an entry into a new or a foreign culture. Now, this paper throws some light on challenges faced by the English language teachers in multiculturalistic India. We will discuss the challenges faced by English teachers.

1. **A Common School/College System:**

In India, we have been following a common school system in all the schools across the country. India is known for its diversity with so many religions, castes and cultures. So, an Indian classroom is nothing but a microcosm of its society. A classroom houses students with different cultural backgrounds. The present school system can’t match its multiculturalistic nature. So, students from other cultures cannot adapt to this common education system. The English teaching is not in tandem with its multiculturalistic environment. It cannot facilitate a single methodology to be used in English language teaching for all the students with cultural differences.

2. **Language Objectives:**

In India, English language teaching has four objectives as Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing. These language objectives may not suit the metropolitan and multicultural atmosphere of the classroom. In some cultural settings, students possess these language objectives very well at earlier stage. These objectives cannot be the only target to teach in a multicultural setting.

3. **Language Materials:**

Another problem for English language teaching in multicultural background is the design of language materials. Material preparation and grading is not done based on the multicultural aspects of the classrooms. The language textbook, workbook or some supplementary materials are designed by considering the local or any one culture of the
students. Sometimes, the local culture is majorly exposed through the content of these books. In multicultural setting, students from other cultures anticipate something about their culture in the materials or classroom teaching. These materials cannot satisfy the language needs of multicultural India.

4. **The Teacher:**

The Teacher is the kingpin as he is the only source for the development of English language skills in these classrooms. He should try to bridge the gap of cultural differences for the students with diverse backgrounds. The English language teacher has a great responsibility to play in the smooth transition of multicultural environment. But, the language teacher is facing untold misery to satisfy the needs of different students. The teachers with limited language training cannot bridge the gap between differently cultured students. They face so many challenges with respect to curriculum, material, examination system and pronunciation system. For example, pronunciation varies depending on the culture and it will lead to miscommunication between the teacher and the taught. So, every culture has its own impact on English language. But, the teacher is not exposed to these language differences out of culture.

5. **Methodology:**

The Teaching Methodology is also a problem in ELT in a multicultural India. There are so many methodologies developed with the passage of time. No methodology is completely suitable for multiculturalistic classroom. Every methodology has its own drawbacks. The language teacher cannot identify which is comfortable to this environment. When one method suits one culture group, the same method is not suitable for other cultures. So, for English language teachers, it is very difficult to identify the adaptability of a particular methodology to a particular culture in a multicultured classroom.

6. **Cultural and Psychological Barriers:**

The Indian classrooms are infested with a good number of students with a variety of cultural backgrounds; the students cannot cope up with this multicultural setting in their
classrooms. They suffer from cultural shock and cannot adjust with other cultures. They feel either inferior or superior to other cultured students and do not mingle with them. So, they do not cooperate one another during their learning. They suffer from unknown psychological apprehensions which act as an obstacle to the concept of multicultural India.

**Solutions:**

We can arrive at some solutions for the above said problems and should be implemented properly by all the stakeholders in encouraging multicultural education.

1. First, the common school/college system to be avoided. They must be given some freedom to design their own curriculum, material, training programs, etc. The government, universities and teachers should design the English language syllabus which encourages inter-cultural understanding among the students.

2. The language objectives should not be simply LSRW skills but also understanding and respecting other cultures through language classes. Students should learn, discuss and appreciate other cultures by participating in a role-play, group discussion and presentations in regular classrooms.

3. The language objectives must be changed depending on the culture and capability of the students. For example, students from some cultural background may be good at either speaking/reading, and then they must be trained in other language objectives which are lacking in those particular cultured students.

4. The universities must be cautious in designing the curriculum. It should be universal in nature and every culture should be exposed in the language curriculum. No specific culture should be given importance in the curriculum. So, the content of the text book and activities designed should incorporate cultural diversity of our multicultural Indian classrooms.

5. The English language teachers must be given an excellent training to deal with all types of students with cultural variations. The language teacher must be very curious about learning different cultures and must be intelligent to incorporate all these cultural
variations in the teaching learning process. He must help the students understand and respect other cultures in regular classrooms.

6. The teachers should go for self-Introspection and update themselves with latest techniques or methods used in a multi-cultured environment. They should take feedback from the students and analyze in order to improve their teaching style. They can visit other states/countries/universities to know how multicultural classrooms are managed.

7. The new methodologies should be devised and applied in a multicultural environment. The language teacher should always aspire to be innovative in teaching and with the help of his colleagues must invent a new method/style/technique and try in the regular classroom setting and should discuss the pros and cons of that particular method for a particular language element.

Conclusion:

Multiculturalism is a new process/phenomena experienced by all the major countries as well as the minor countries in the world. So, India should welcome this kind of atmosphere in its classrooms to survive in the present world. In the present Globalised scenario, India is one of the fast economically emerging countries attracting students of different cultures and countries. So, the English language teachers play an important role in the universalization of English by teaching in a multicultural environment. As Cheech Marin says, “We are a multicultural country – always have been, and to our credit, always will be. It is something that we should be very proud of and embrace.”

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Managing a multicultural team can be challenging, there is no doubt about that. However, with a bit of care and common sense and with a lot of tact and preparation, you will soon discover that managing such a team can also be a fantastic experience. About the Author.

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