
UNIT 11 ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING IN MULTILINGUAL INDIA

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11.1 INTRODUCTION

In most modern societies and economies in today's world, including India, English serves as a link language. By 'link language' we mean a language that is used by people from different language backgrounds to talk and communicate with each other.

Most Indians aspire to add English to the list of languages they know. The role of English is somewhat unique in our country. While it is a legacy of British rule and a foreign language, English has established itself as the dominant language in the occupational, business, and digital domains. For example, a person from Himachal Pradesh will probably converse in English with her colleagues from Assam or Kerala instead of using any regional language.

English is used in many situations in our daily lives, such as reading advertisements, using the internet, pursuing higher education, or in work situations. We cannot neglect the socio-economic benefits that fluency in English brings as well as the multiple cultural, educational, and professional opportunities that open up for those who have a working knowledge of English.

Owing to the importance that English holds, it has occupied an important place in Indian education at all stages, from early years to higher education. Most young Indian children have started learning English from the time they join a preschool at the age of 3+ or by class 1 when they are 6+. Depending on the child's context and the amount of exposure to the language, English is most commonly either their second language or a third language.

This Unit will familiarize you with the appeal and challenges of the English language with respect to the multilingual Indian context. It discusses the prevalent approaches used to teach English such as the Grammar Translation Method, Direct Method, and so on. We will also discuss some of the common practices prevalent in classrooms where these methods are followed and the challenges associated with them for teachers and learners.

Objectives

After reading this Unit, you will be able to:

- appreciate the multilingual reality of India and look at English learning during the early years through a multilingual lens;
- critically analyze the prevalent practices used to teach the English language in the early years;
- identify the challenges of teaching English to young children in Indian classrooms; and
- understand the need for teaching English as a second or third language in India, following developmentally appropriate processes.

Some Important Terms and Concepts

First Language (L1)	L1 is the language a child first learns, knows best, and is available in their immediate environment. It is commonly known as the ‘Mother Tongue’ or the ‘Home Language’.
Second Language (L2)	L2 is learned after acquiring L1, often learned and used in the environment around the child. Often, it is the language used for instruction in school. In the early years, a child has lesser familiarity with this language as compared to L1.
Teaching English to speakers of Other Languages (TESOL)	It refers to teaching English to non-native English speakers either abroad or in English-speaking countries. For many, it might be their second language (L2).
Target Language	Any new language that the child is learning – in this Unit, we are using this term to refer to the English language.

11.2 TEACHING ENGLISH TO YOUNG CHILDREN: SOME PREVALENT METHODS

11.2.1 The Variety of English Exposure in India

Due to its rising importance in this globalized era, there is an increasing demand from parents to teach English to their children from a very young age. The growing demands have led to the establishment of lakhs of private English-medium schools in India. Alongside, policy provisions have led to an introduction of English as a subject from Class 1. Many states have also set up government-funded English-medium schools. In each of these settings, children from multiple social and linguistic environments are present as discussed further.

- Some have exposure and access to English in their environment and their homes wherein parents and family members often speak to them in English.
- Some have limited exposure through television and books.
- Many get their first exposure to the English language be it orally or in written form only in their schools.

Adding to this variety, teachers themselves have different competencies and varying levels of English proficiency and they teach using different methods in these settings. However, you may ask – Why are we discussing this variety?

It is because this variety heavily influences the nature and quality of English learning that young learners receive in India – the school’s medium of instruction, a child’s linguistic and social situation, their teacher’s English proficiency and training level – all of this influences how proficient the children will become in learning to speak, read and write English.

Since India is a diverse multilingual country, it is important to understand and analyze the key challenges in English teaching. In the subsequent Sub-sections, we have discussed these, while the various strategies that can be used to teach English to young learners effectively are discussed in the next Unit of this Course (Unit 12).

Do you remember the various examples of language teaching that we have described in Unit 4 of this Course? Many examples involved young children learning the alphabet right from the first day in preschool/school, low focus on developing children’s independent reading and writing skills, orally repeating in text after the teacher or memorizing a poem without fully understanding what it means, and so on. At present, English Language Teaching (ELT) takes place in most private or government schools in India in a similar manner. How do these teaching techniques affect the learning of the English language of children in the short and long term? Let us understand this with an example of a child in Class 2 and his father.

Example 1

Mukul is enrolled in Class 2 in a low-fee private school in Palghar, Maharashtra. The school boasts of its quality education since it is an English-medium school. Like many others, Mukul’s father enrolled him in a private school with the hope that he would learn English from the early years of his life and it would help him to be successful in the future. Mukul has been learning English since preschool. His teacher focuses extensively on teaching grammar topics, using correct spellings, remembering poems, and using dictation as a way to assess how much English has his child acquired. Mukul knows many rhymes and can spell 3-letter words. He can even write simple sentences. However, he is scared and shy to speak in English. Anytime, a guest comes to his home, Mukul’s father asks him to speak to them in English, but Mukul feels shy to do so. When his father encourages him more, he manages to speak a few words in broken English such as:

“Hello... me Mukul. I... 7 years old... study... class 3.”

*His father also brought him a few Panchatantra books in English to read. Mukul sees the pictures in the book with a lot of interest and asks his father to tell him the stories too. Despite his interest, he is unable to read simple sentences from the book. When asked about his favourite book, he says, “**Yeh kahani mein bahut hi acche pictures hai! Meri favourite kahani hai**” (This story has very good pictures! It is my favourite story.).*

His father is quite worried that he will not be able to cope and understand other subjects in higher grades due to his inability to pick up the English Language. Mukul faces difficulty in understanding the language of the textbooks of other subjects as well. His father is wondering if he should change Mukul’s school to Hindi medium or enroll him for private tuition in English as well.

Have you ever witnessed such a scenario? If Mukul and other children like him find it difficult to learn to use English, then it means that the appropriate teaching practices are not being used in the schools. What kind of teaching-learning practices are used in most English-medium schools? If you have observed some schools, then write about them.

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The Position Paper for Teaching of English, National Curricular Framework, 2005 (NCERT, 2005) mentions the excessive use of approaches related to grammar teaching and decoding in Indian classrooms. We have read many such examples in Unit 4 of this Course – such as early emphasis on learning letters, rote memorization, low focus on meaning-making or oral language development, etc. The most prevalent methods used in Indian classrooms to teach the English language are Grammar Translation and Direct Method. Let’s read more about these and understand why their continuous use proves ineffective for young learners trying to learn English.

11.2.2 Grammar Translation Method

Let us look at two examples that shows how English is usually taught to children in low-exposure settings (i.e., who do not have much opportunity to hear English in their home and community environment)

Example 2

Rashmi teaches English language to children in Grade 1 to 2 in a government primary school in a metro city. The children belong to Hindi speaking communities and do not have much exposure to English in their home and community. To teach English, she makes extensive use of the state English textbooks and aims to complete portions on time. At the beginning of each English class, she often tells the children to take out their English books

and turn to a specific page. Once she does this, she begins to read the English chapter to the children. She does not spend time giving a background to the text or engaging children in conversations around the text. While reading, she translates most sentences into Hindi and often asks children to read the English sentences along with her. Finally, she tells the children to take out their English notebooks, copy important words from the text, and memorize their meanings.

She largely focuses on introducing the English alphabet to Grade 1 children and spellings to Grade 2 children. She writes down the alphabet or the spellings on the board, sounds them out slowly, and then asks the children to copy them down in her notebook. She also believes that children should get a lot of practice in English since it is a new language for them. Hence, she gives them daily homework to write each letter or spelling five times in their notebooks, as well as, she takes regular dictation tests. She tries to provide them exposure in the class by speaking English sometimes. However, she mainly speaks Hindi during the class. The classroom does not have a display of books or a reading area where children can explore books or their own.

In this example, Rashmi adopts the traditional grammar-translation method and focuses on skill development through drill exercises. She relies heavily on the textbook, letter learning, and spelling; there is no scope for vocabulary advancement, expression, or comprehension. Children did not have much opportunity to hear spoken English since she largely speaks in Hindi. They may be able to recite sentences by memory since she repeats the story many times but they may not be able to read and narrate it with comprehension. This shows that meaning-making was not the focus of her teaching and so children in her class may struggle to acquire fluency in oral skills. Similarly, they will not have an expression in writing as they are only copying words and not expressing their own ideas. This is because the approaches used by Rashmi to teach focus excessively on the form of the language (grammar, spelling, letter knowledge) without providing enough opportunities for the children to experience the language.

Example 3

A class 2 English teacher is reading out a story from the textbook in his class. He begins by reading one line from the textbook.

“Once, there was a little girl named Tara. She lived with her mother. They were very poor.”

Then, he gives a word-by-word translation of the line and says:

“Ek choti si ladki thi, jiska naam tha Tara. Who apni mummy ke saath rehti thi. Woh log bahut gareeb thi.”

After translating the whole sentence, the teacher repeats the translation of a few words like ‘she’, ‘girl’, ‘mother’, ‘they’, etc. In this way the teacher reads and translates every line. In the half hour period he reads half the story in this way. Just before the period is about to end, he asks the children a few simple factual questions like – Who was Tara? Who did she live with? The names of a few children are called and they are asked to answer. In the end,

he explains to children the use of pronouns such as 'he', 'she', and 'they'. He explains that these are 'personal pronouns.' He writes the following sentences on the board and asks the children to copy and fill in the blanks.

Tara is a little girl.

_____ **lives with her mother.**

_____ **are poor.**

The teacher translates the sentences into Hindi and then the correct answers are discussed. The conversation goes as follows:

“Tara is a little girl. Tata ek choti ladki hai.”

“Ladki ke liye hum kaunse pronoun ka istemaal karenge? (What pronoun do we use for a girl?)”

‘She’ (a few children say in unison)

“Yes, she lives with her mother. Who uski mummy ke saath rehti hai.”

“Woh gareeb thi. Woh yaani ki bahuvaachan sarvnaam. Uske liye hum English me kya istemaal karenge? (They were poor. ‘They’ is a plural pronoun. What word do we use of ‘who’ in English?)”

(silence)

“Woh matlab ‘they’. They are poor.”

For homework, he asks them to write 5 sentences for each personal pronoun in Hindi and then translate them into English.

These short excerpts from an English class in two different schools showcase the use of the Grammar-Translation method. **This is a traditional method of teaching a foreign language, where grammatical rules are taught and then learners apply those rules by translating sentences between the language they are learning and the language they know** (like the use of Hindi to learn about sentence structures and personal pronouns in the English language as in the Example 3 above). While using this method, children are given many drill exercises such as solving translation and grammar exercises. Long lists of vocabulary and their meanings are meant to be learnt by heart by the children. The emphasis is primarily given to reading fluently (but not focusing much on comprehension i.e., whether children are understanding what they are reading) and writing the language correctly i.e., the use of correct sentence structures and spellings.

According to you, what are the strengths and challenges of using this method?

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We have discussed in Unit 4 of this Course the importance of meaning-making and oral language activities for young children when learning any language. When the focus is mainly placed on learning to first read and write correctly, without focusing much on oral expression or thinking in the language being learnt, the learning process can get boring and frustrating for young learners. Use of this method may help those children who have exposure to English in their homes or communities, to read fluently or write correctly. However, it does not prove to be effective for the majority of learners who are only dependent on English exposure provided during their English class to learn. Let us discuss some reasons why the use of the grammar-translation method is not effective during early learning years!

a) **Form-focused Learning without Developing a Child's Communicative Skills**

You may have come across people who can write correct English sentences but cannot speak English fluently, just like Mukul in our first example in this Unit. This is probably because they may have been taught the English language by the Grammar-Translation Method. Since the primary focus for teaching the English language is on grammar (form-focused) and most of the activities are related to writing, opportunities to develop speaking and listening skills are limited. Due to this, they can think and write using the grammar structures they have learnt. However, it becomes difficult to speak English fluently. In such situations, oral skill development is limited, especially when the child has limited or no exposure to English apart from learning it in school. While grammar and vocabulary exercises are useful for practice, their use must not be limited to developing children's writing skills only. Such activities should be used but these should be planned well, and along with these, with other activities that support oral language and reading comprehension skills should be carried out as well.

b) **Lack of Meaningful Understanding of the Text**

It may seem surprising to you but when children are taught by grammar translation, they do not understand the holistic meaning of the text. You may say that they are being told the meaning of every line, then how can they not know the meaning of the text? When each line is translated then this makes it difficult for the child to see the meaning of the text as a whole. Since the translation of words/sentences happens line by line, in isolation from the whole text, the text as a whole does not get communicated to the child. This leads to the meaning of the text/story being reduced or lost for the child. In addition, since so much focus is given to translating the text in this method, children are also deprived of assigning or finding any meaning of the text through their own thinking other than the translated one. All these factors lead to a reduced interest in learning a new language.

c) Limited Opportunities to Think and Express Oneself

The focus of the method is to learn grammar rules, practice drill exercises until sentence formation is correct, and memorize meanings and spellings of words. With so much focus on these aspects, not much attention is paid to developing a child's communicative or expression skills. This provides very few opportunities for children to think and express themselves in the language they are learning.

11.2.3 Direct or Full Immersion Method

Example 4

Have a look at the example given below.

During lunch break Raju and Mairaj were talking about the different food items they ate during their summer vacations. They spoke in a mix of Hindi and English language.

Raju: *“Maine toh burfi khaai bahut saari (I ate a lot of Burfi.)”*

Mairaj: *“Burfi is my favourite. But maine is vacation mein bahut saare gulab jamun khaae (Burfi is my favourite. But this vacation, I ate a lot of Gulab Jamun.)”*

As both of them were listing their favourite dishes, their teacher overheard them and asked them to stop talking in Hindi immediately. She reminded them that they were studying in an English-medium school and that only speaking the English language was allowed. She said that if she found them speaking in Hindi again, they would be punished. The children remained silent after that.

If you went to an English-medium school, it is a likely possibility that you had the similar ‘Only English allowed’ rule applied in your school; speaking one’s mother tongue was considered a matter of shame.

The Direct or Full Immersion Method forbids the use of any language in the classroom, other than English. English is taught by only using the English language with the help of demonstration or audio-visual aids. For example, instead of telling a child ‘big’ means ‘bada’ and ‘small’ means ‘chota’ in the Hindi language, a teacher using the Direct Method may draw two apples, a bigger one and a smaller one on the board and then while pointing on each, she may say, “This is a big apple.” and “This is a small apple.” While doing so, she may also make use of hand gestures which will help the children to differentiate between the mentioned words and their respective meanings.

The direct method is also known as the full immersion method as the belief is that the learner should be fully immersed in the target language (in this case, English) in order to learn it successfully. This is a common method used to teach a second language, wherein ‘English-only’ classrooms are created to provide maximum exposure in the target language. This is widely used as a strategy to teach a foreign language in a new country, where people learning the language may be from different language communities

and have no option of using their mother tongues with each other. However, this may not be an effective approach for Indian classrooms, where children have common languages amongst themselves to talk in (this could be Hindi in North Indian states, or the state language, or any other mother tongue) as well as have limited exposure (from the teachers and the surroundings) to the English language. In the example given above, we can see how Raju and Mairaj turned silent when asked to speak only in English. Making it compulsory for young children to only express themselves in a language they have not learnt fully yet not only affects their confidence to express themselves but also reduces their interest in learning the target language.

Do you think the Direct Method is an effective strategy for teaching English to young learners in India? What are the benefits and disadvantages?

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As we have understood so far, in the Direct Method, all classroom communication happens in the language we want children to learn and acquire i.e., the English language. In this method, children’s languages are not given any space in the classroom and they are compelled to use only English to communicate with each other and amongst themselves. If English exposure is only provided in this manner, children and teachers would face many challenges. Given below are some disadvantages of this method:

a) **No Space for Children’s Languages in the Classroom causes Stress and Anxiety**

Since the use of the mother tongue is strictly prohibited, and at times, even punishment is given to children for using the mother tongue, their communication and expression are restricted only to a single language – and that too the language they barely know and are attempting/trying to learn. This causes stress and anxiety to a lot of children, as well as hampers children’s opportunities to learn and use multiple languages around them.

b) **Not a Universally Applicable Method**

This method cannot be universally applicable in all schools. For instance, a large number of teachers in a country such as India themselves do not have the necessary oral language proficiency in the English language to communicate only in English. So, we cannot even expect teachers to provide a strong immersion experience to young children in the English language where all the classroom communication and lessons happen only in this particular language.

c) **Few Real-Life Opportunities to Use the English Language**

Children from disadvantaged rural and urban communities do not hear English in their day-to-day lives and neither do they need to use it in their present lives. When they are forced in the classroom to communicate only in English, they do not find enough motivation to use English because they do not find it to be connected with their real life. In such a scenario, it is important to provide them with familiar situations to use English for communicating with their friends or teachers, such as using English rhymes, introducing themselves in English, labelling common classroom objects in English, etc. Forced English speaking can lead to fear of the English language and a lack of desire to learn.

11.2.4 Audio-Lingual Method

The audio-lingual method is generally used to teach foreign languages. It emphasizes teaching speaking and listening before reading and writing. The activities focus on learning the grammatical structures when speaking and using correct pronunciations of words. When using this method, the teacher spends most of the time in the class drilling the learners on grammatical and phonological (sound) structures and corrects learners' errors immediately. This method was commonly used in India through English Learning Radio Programmes. However, there are some limitations of this method too:

- a) Adoption of this method is limited in India owing to low access to technology and lower levels of English fluency in India, as this method is heavily dependent on both.
- b) It focuses majorly on listening to the language and not providing enough opportunities to communicate – neither orally nor in written form.
- c) There is much emphasis on error correction and drilling exercises which are not connected to the natural ways in which a child encounters and uses a new language.
- d) Use of any other language is discouraged in this method of language learning.

In this Section, we have read about three prevalent English Language Teaching methods used in Indian Classrooms. We also discussed their specific disadvantages and why they are not very effective in introducing and teaching young children the English language. To further summarize, we can say that these methods have some commonalities that make them unsuitable to be used with young children for ELT as discussed as follows:

a) **Emphasis on Repetition and Rote Memorization**

The description of teaching strategies in Unit 4 brought out that repetition and rote memorization are chief teaching strategies in teaching a language. This is a common practice adopted to teach any script, including the Roman script used for the English language. Children are taught to recognize and write letters with excessive focus on remembering. For English, this practice is used for teaching the alphabet sequence, learning spellings of sight words as well as remembering different sentence structures through the use of drill exercises (I can..., I

am going to..., He is...). Apart from being a tedious exercise, this also causes stress to children in their early years and does not provide any opportunity to use the learnt language meaningfully.

b) Limited Opportunities to Communicate and Express

Most of the classroom time is spent on drill exercises related to writing and grammar such as repeating/reciting the alphabet or the answers. Other time is spent in the choral repetition of letters/poems/chapters – i.e., children recite or repeat these in chorus after the teacher. Due to this, children get limited opportunities to talk and express *their ideas* in the target language or express themselves through creative writing exercises. When the primary focus is on remembering and repeating in the English classroom, children are not given opportunities to talk or express *themselves* freely. Free expression would mean that children would make mistakes in speaking, as it is natural to learn anything new. We learn by doing – and errors are a way of learning. However, in most classrooms, the reverse is practiced – children are looked down upon if they make errors while learning, and teachers see errors as a waste of time. They believe that the best way to learn is to memorize error-free correct script and speech. However, such an approach to learning is artificial and does not help the children to connect with the stories/chapters being read out and taught because they do not experience any connection with the content being learnt.

Check Your Progress Exercise 1

- 1) Match the following methods of English language teaching with their respective features.

Method	Features
a) Direct Method	i) Use of gestures to explain the meaning
b) Audio-Lingual Method	ii) Direct translation from English to the native language
c) Grammar Translation Method	iii) Focus on the correct pronunciation iv) Learning grammatical rules v) Emphasis on error correction vi) Only use of the English language

- 2) Which of the following are NOT the limitations of prevalent methods of English language teaching?
- They cause stress and anxiety in the learners.
 - They emphasize rote memorization.
 - They emphasize meaning-making in reading and writing.
 - They do not focus on the child’s communicative skills.
 - They motivate children to learn the English language.

11.3 CHALLENGES OF TEACHING ENGLISH IN THE INDIAN CLASSROOM

In the previous Section, we analyzed various prevalent methods that are used for the teaching and learning of the English language in the pre-primary and early primary grades. However, by now you may have realized that a majority of children in Indian schools are unable to acquire a strong understanding of the English language through these methods; they face many challenges.

This Section will further help you understand various challenges that teachers and learners face while the teaching-learning of the English language in the context of an Indian classroom.

Some of the challenges of English teaching-learning are rooted in the pedagogy of the language itself. The **pedagogical aspect** involves how the English language is taught; beliefs and assumptions that inform the teaching methods; tools and practices that are undertaken to teach English, etc. Other factors are related to the **social context** in which English is being taught in. Let us discuss both of these factors and the implications of these for English pedagogy in Indian classrooms.

11.3.1 Challenges for Learners

a) Lack of Exposure to the Language

As we know, to read, write, or speak a language, we need to have enough exposure to that language. Exposure is the key to language acquisition. Children can speak their mother tongue fluently at the young age of 3 years because they continuously hear others speaking it around them. In contrast, for many children, opportunities to hear and use English in real life are low as most people around them do not use it for regular conversations. Exposure to English through media (TV/cartoon shows, radio programmes) and print (books, newspapers) is also low. Since the language is used in a limited manner around them, young children also do not see an actual use of learning the language and the motivation to use it is limited.

b) English as a Second-Language or a Foreign-Language in India

The **second language** for an individual is a language that one has access to in one's surroundings and has a need to use it in the same surroundings, to a certain extent. A **foreign language** is one where the need to interact in that language does not arise at all in one's surroundings and neither is the exposure to the same available. In urban metros and semi-urban settings in India, English can be seen in public spaces in the form of hoardings, newspapers, advertisements, films, and so on. Children who get the opportunity to engage actively with these forms of print and media receive some exposure to English. In such situations, English may be the second or the third language of the child, as per definitions discussed in the box given in the Introduction. However, there is an equally possible scenario in the same urban settings, where in a community the use of the English language is non-

existent or the need to communicate in English is also almost nil. Such a possibility is even higher in rural settings. It is completely possible that all the needs of communication can be met by using the mother tongue or any other Indian language common to all speakers in that community. In such situations, English is far removed from the context of the child and it will be considered a foreign language.

Depending on the context of the child and the exposure the child has to English, the pedagogy of teaching English should change accordingly. However, this does not happen. As we have read in the previous Section, most children are taught using Grammar Translation Method or Direct Method. These methods have their own limitations and these methods require high exposure to the English language in the surrounding in order to be successful. Since this is not the case, children do not learn effectively through these methods.

Based on your reading of this section, think whether English will be considered a second language or a foreign language for a child in your neighborhood? Provide a reason for your choice.

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c) Different Medium of Instruction (MoI)

There is a huge difference in the Medium of Instruction (MoI) in various types of schools. In many private schools across the country, all subjects are taught using English. However, in many Government schools across India, regional languages are used as the medium of instruction. Many curriculum frameworks and policies such as the New Education Policy (2020), and National Curriculum Framework for Foundational Stage (2022), have recommended that children should be taught in their home language during the early years, while English should be introduced gradually as a second language using appropriate teaching strategies. As a result, those using only English as the medium of instruction often adopt the Direct Method, while those who use regional language as the medium of instruction use the Grammar Translation Method. As we have discussed, each of these methods have their limitations.

d) Limited Understanding of Language Skills and Functions of Language

You may remember from Unit 1 of this Course that mastering a language involves developing listening, speaking, reading, writing, and most importantly, thinking in the concerned language. You may also remember from previous Units that most of the language instruction in

Indian classrooms give little or no importance to developing oral skills and competencies for young children. As far as introducing the English language is concerned, to many teachers, English teaching is only equivalent to English writing; hardly any other language skill is taken into consideration. The most evident goal of the majority of the teachers while conducting the English language lesson is to ‘finish the chapter’. The homework or classroom activities also consist of reproducing exactly what has been ‘taught’ in the chapter. The writing tasks are primarily focused on letter formation, spacing between words/lines, letter size, speed in writing, and so on. Expression of one’s own thoughts is not the goal of writing for most teachers. Therefore, the focus is on rote learning to pass exams and not on developing an interest, familiarity, understanding, and comfort in the English language for young children. As a result, they fail to understand and make use of the English language in their everyday life, like they easily do in their mother tongue. It happens because the way English is introduced or taught to them does not allow the English language to become a part of their everyday life, but it is rather restricted as a school subject that children are supposed to study and pass to be promoted to the next class.

Research studies also suggest that children who acquire English as a second language usually first think in their first language, then translate it word-to-word into the English language, and then use the same for speaking or writing. This makes the use of the English language for studying or professional use challenging.

Since most teachers have experienced similar teaching techniques when they were in school, so they reproduce these when they themselves become teachers. The task of supporting teachers to examine their own beliefs and practices and educating them with effective strategies for English language learning has to be taken up to overcome this challenge.

11.3.2 Challenges for Teachers

a) Teacher’s Limited Exposure and Proficiency in the Language

Ideally, English should be taught by native speakers of English – i.e., those who learnt/speak English as their mother tongue or first language. However, this is not the case in most schools. There is a wide variation in the competency of teachers who teach English to young children. While some teachers have good proficiency in the language, most of the teachers across Indian schools, primarily those teaching in rural or suburban areas themselves have limited exposure and competency in the English language – which is one of the prime reasons for poor teaching-learning of English. Teachers with different subject specializations, who may not even be strong in the English language, or those who did not get the opportunity to learn English during their own school years are given the task of teaching English to young children.

While some may not have had effective pre-service exposure and training in the English language content and pedagogy, many even do not get enough in-service training and assistance to improve their

English language teaching skills. Not many workshops and seminars are organized around English language pedagogy, and even if they are at all organized, a majority of teachers fail to attend these, and thus, are unable to familiarize themselves with new ways and methods. Therefore, to ensure that children develop an interest in and understanding of the English language, it is necessary that first the teacher's exposure and competence in English is addressed.

b) Lack of Preparation in Teaching English in Early Years

While knowing the English language is crucial to teach English, it is not the only skill that is necessary. Alongside English proficiency, teachers need to be equipped with the knowledge necessary to teach English. This includes understanding the aims of English language pedagogy, being aware of effective practices for English language teaching as well as acquiring the skill of taking an English class for second language and/or foreign language learners.

What kind of support should teachers receive in teaching English as a second language or a foreign language?

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While there are some training organized for teachers to understand aspects of English pedagogy, these are few and are not available to all teachers. Apart from training, opportunities to cross-learn from other teachers, attain certification in English Language Teaching, and refer to quality teacher guides or videos of quality classroom teaching are some ways that may support teachers in providing a better and more effective English learning environment.

c) Large Sized Classrooms

When you commonly picture a classroom, what do you see? It's probably a picture of a classroom with rows of benches and many children facing the blackboard. Most of these classrooms have a high teacher-child ratio where teachers are expected to teach children effectively and get all the children to actively participate as well. However, large classrooms and cramped spaces with no scope for movement make it hard for the teacher to organize activities that are engaging for the children. In such a situation, teachers often fall back on using the traditional methods of using memorization, drill, and use of blackboard for ease. Basically, language teaching-learning itself is quite a complex process, and as mentioned, English language teaching-learning is all the more challenging in the current Indian context. Such arrangements make it quite difficult for the teacher to ensure that meaningful language learning takes place.

In many government school classrooms while classrooms are large, however, due to teacher shortage, many different classes are clubbed either in one room, leading to a multi-grade classroom. It becomes challenging for the teachers to teach children of different language proficiency levels together in one class.

d) Lack of Appropriate Graded Teaching-Learning Materials and Textbooks

Considering that teachers are not well-equipped in English pedagogy and many do not have fluency in the language, they rely on textbooks for their teaching. However, the English textbook used in many schools, have long reading passages even for Grade 1. The vocabulary used in some of the chapters is difficult and alien for the children and they are unable to connect with the content. This situation provides yet another challenge for the teachers where they have to use difficult texts to teach a new language to the child.

It is heartening to note that after the National Curricular Framework for Foundational Stage Education, 2022 has been announced, the NCERT has reviewed its text books for English and Hindi for class 1 and 2. These text books have many features that are appropriate for teaching-learning of English in the Indian context. We strongly recommend the use of these text books in the classroom.

These challenges do not imply that the English language should not be introduced at all during the early years. Rather, the pedagogy needs to undergo a change keeping in mind the developmental and contextual considerations for young children in India and teachers have to be supported with adequate training and resources to teach effectively. The next Unit will help you to understand how you may support English language learning of children during their early years by adopting some relevant strategies and activities.

Further, the challenges of English language teaching discussed in this Unit does not mean that there are no schools with good English language pedagogy. There are, but the number of such schools are few.

You may also refer to the given link of a video to further understand the challenges of teaching English in the Indian context:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5GrX8fPLOBU>.

Check Your Progress Exercise 2

1) How does the limited exposure to the English language of the learners and the teachers affect a child's learning of the English language?

a) Learner

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b) Teacher

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2) What are some of the limitations of English textbooks and for early primary grade learners?

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11.4 SUMMING UP

In this Unit, we have understood the multilingual reality of India and discussed some of the major issues that determine English language teaching in Indian classrooms. We have also analyzed the various past and present practices that are used to teach English to young children in Indian classrooms.

Young children are capable of acquiring several languages (spoken form) at the same time. Therefore, if they are exposed to an environment of meaningful use of English through natural conversation, storytelling, reading aloud of simple and interesting storybooks, and interaction, they can pick up English gradually. However, this is not how the teaching of English begins in most of our primary schools.

At present, English Language Teaching (ELT) in our classrooms is largely adapted from approaches that have been created keeping Western contexts in mind that focus on providing maximum exposure to the target language. For example, in an English learning class in many Western contexts, the focus would be on immersing the child in English and restricting the use of other languages. However, such approaches are challenging to implement in low-exposure multilingual settings such as those found in many parts of India. Many Indian educational contexts require English language pedagogies that are sensitive to multilingualism and also aware of the low exposure settings to the target language outside of the classroom.

In the next Unit, we will be discussing second language learning and multilingual strategies that are effective in teaching-learning of English in Indian context. We will also discuss activities useful in developing oral, reading, and writing skills for young learners that can be used by any teacher when they plan their English classes for young children in India.

11.5 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress Exercise 1

- 1) a) – vi and i
b) – iii and v
c) – ii and iv
- 2) c and e

Check Your Progress Exercise 2

- 1) a) Since the language is used in a limited manner around them, young children also do not see an actual use of learning the language, and the motivation to use it is limited.
b) Since the teacher herself has limited exposure and competence in English, she finds it difficult to develop an interest in children to learn the language and give relevant support and instruction.
- 2) English textbooks used in most schools may have long reading passages, and vocabulary that is too alien and difficult to the child, hence, making the learner unable to connect with the content.