

## Script - Challenges in English language teaching (ELT)

Hi, I am Guru from IT for Change.

In this video, I will talking about English language teaching in the Indian context. We know that English is seen by everybody as a language for socio-economic mobility and as a key to power. At the same time, we are painfully aware that most children who complete ten years of schooling are not comfortable in speaking in English.

There are two main reasons for this problem. One is the home environment. In the Indian context, many of the children who go to government schools are first generation school goers, and this means that the home environment is not supportive for English learning. Parents and children do not speak with each other in English, and there is very little reading material available at home to support language learning. Parents' faith in their ability to support their children's learning can be very limited, so they may not consciously encourage children to express themselves in English.

The classroom context in India is also equally weak. Just like home, even the school environment is likely to be lacking support for English learning, because only the English teacher may use English. The other teachers, may prefer to teach in the regional language, even though it may be an English medium school. Even in teaching English, the translation approach is often used, where the English teacher will translate the entire chapter content into the regional language. So students may understand the lesson, but they will not understand or learn English as a language. Like at home, even in schools there may be limited language learning material, apart from the textbook. Libraries are usually not existent or even if they exist, they are often dysfunctional. A good library where the children borrow books and read books is a very important part of language learning, this is grossly underestimated in the Indian context.

Thirdly, there is always syllabus pressure. Teachers are busy completing the prescribed chapters in the textbook and have very limited time to engage children in other activities for language learning. The pressure of syllabus completion may also be stressful for teachers and for students, which in itself affects language learning.

An important reason why children don't learn English in school is that there are many myths about language learning which lead to incorrect pedagogies i.e. wrong teaching methods, on the part of the teacher. In the next video, I will talk about some of these

myths that teachers have, which make them teach in ways that are not conducive for language learning.

Lastly, the exam pressures pushes teachers to focus on wrong things. Such as making children practise writing to make sure children are able to write in the exams and memorize the texts to be reproduced in the exams. But these activities do not help children acquire the language.

Due to the under resourced home context and a non-supportive school context, what do we find? We find that children are reluctant to learn English, they are also not interested to learn English. They have limited vocabulary, they lack the confidence to express themselves and speak in English, they do not converse in English with their friends, they do not think in English.

The net result of all this is that children do not develop a love for English. They do not spend time reading or writing and improving their understanding of English. All this means that we have failed to help our children learn English language. And hence the possibility and potential for English to be a door for socio-economic mobility is lost.

The solution to address this challenge has two parts – providing adequate opportunities for children to be meaningfully immersed in English and secondly to make students to want to learn English. For meaningful immersion, the teachers has to provide lots of opportunities for children to listen to language- one way would be to have an audio story library in the school (on the teachers phone). Listening regularly to stories which the children can understand can provide meaningful language immersion and enable them to acquire English over a period of time. Listening is the first of the four language skills of Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing, and the initial focus of the teacher has to be to provide ample opportunities for the students to listen to English.

Listening to stories can also be enjoyable (provided it is comprehensible) and this can make the students interested in the language and in learning the language. This will initiate the child's journey in learning English.

Just like an audio story library can encourage children to develop their listening skills, a print library can encourage students to explore reading, provided the books are at a level that students can understand and enjoy.

A study conducted by the Regional Institute of English, South India and IT for Change found out that providing stories to listen to, and to read, enabled students in primary

schools, acquire LSRW competencies. This was the Kerala E Language Lab project and a similar approach can be adopted in all schools to ensure that students feel comfortable and confident to express themselves in English. For more information about language lab, write to us on [language@karnatakaeducation.org.in](mailto:language@karnatakaeducation.org.in)